

Phrasing **Productive** Questions that Promote Inquiry

Not all the questions we ask as parents, teachers and educators, help children learn equally well. The following handout contains information from:

Elstgeest, J. (1985). The right question at the right time. In W. Harlen (Ed.), Primary Science: Taking the Plunge Oxford: Heinemann Educational.

Jelly, S. (1985). Helping children raise questions - and answering them. In W. Harlen (Ed.), Primary science: Taking the plunge Oxford: Heinemann Educational.

Unproductive Questions

Promote science as information

Answers derived from secondary sources by talking/reading

Tend to emphasize answering as the achievement of a correct end product (the right answer)

Successful answering is most readily achieved by verbally fluent children who have confidence and facility with words

Productive Questions

Promote science as a way of working

Answers derived from first-hand experience involving practical action with materials

Encourage awareness that varied answers may each be "correct" in its own terms and view achievement as what is learnt in the process of arriving at an answer

Successful answering is achievable by all children

PRODUCTIVE QUESTION STARTERS

attention-focusing questions

Have you seen....?

Did you notice....?

What are they doing...?

How does it feel/sound/look?

measuring and counting questions

How many...?

How often...?

How long...?

How much...?

comparison questions

How do ... fit together?

How are ... and ...alike?

What is similar about __?

What do you notice about __& __?

action questions

What happens if...?

What would happen if you ...?

problem-posing questions

Can you find a way to...?

Can you figure out how to...?

reasoning questions

How would you explain...?