# Creating opportunities for sustained shared thinking

This scaffold will support you to guide and promote children’s learning through ‘sustained shared thinking’ and open-ended questioning.

‘Sustained shared thinking’ occurs when two or more individuals ‘work together’ in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate an activity, extend a narrative etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend the understanding.’ (Sylva et al. 2004:5)

Classroom talk is a powerful tool for both teaching and learning. Teachers and educators can intentionally scaffold children’s learning by engaging in conversation with them about their learning. These interactions are enhanced through open-ended questioning prompts. Open-ended questions require a detailed response, for example:

* Why do you think …?
* Why does this …?
* How can you …?
* How else could you …?
* What would happen if …?

By conversing with children using a series of open-ended questions and actively listening to their ideas, teachers and educators are engaging with children in sustained shared thinking, for example:

**Teacher:** Why did you decide to organise the food this way?

**Student:** So the people coming to the shop can find it.

**Teacher:** How else could you sort the food?

**Student:** Um, prices or boxes all here and things not in boxes here.

**Teacher:** Those are good ideas. How will you let people know what prices the foods are?

**Student:** Tell them or write the prices.

**Teacher:** How will you decide what the prices should be?

Sustained shared thinking assists children to:

* clarify and share their understandings and thinking
* justify and explain their ideas
* engage with conceptual ideas and in more complex tasks.

‘By engaging children in deep conversations about what they are doing; by asking open-ended questions to encourage their thinking; and by supporting them to reflect on and evaluate the success or otherwise of their efforts, we can help children to begin to think in more sophisticated and abstract ways.’ (Touhill 2012:1)

## Using Bloom’s taxonomy as a scaffold for asking questions

Bloom’s revised taxonomy is a hierarchical model that describes different levels of thinking, with each level increasing in complexity (Armstrong 2010). This table suggests open-ended question stems that can be used at each of these levels to support students to think at that level.

Table 1 – sample question stems at each level of the revised Bloom's Taxonomy

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Level | Sample question stems |
| Level 1 – remember | * What is …? * What happened after …? * Locate the … * List the … |
| Level 2 – understand | * What did you see …? * Who do you think …? * Discuss what would happen if … * Explain why … |
| Level 3 – apply | * How would you use …? * How does … work? * What approach would you use to …? * How would you solve …? |
| Level 4 – analyse | * How would you ...? * Why do you think …? * How can you sort …? * Can you identify …? |
| Level 5 – evaluate | * Rate the … * Would it be better if …? * What is your opinion of …? * How would you …? |
| Level 6 – create | * Find a way to … * What would happen if …? * How would you improve …? * What would happen if …? |

Adapted from: Illinois State University (2013) [*Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy – Question Starters* [PDF 139KB]](https://education.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/casei/5-02-Revised%20Blooms.pdf)

## References

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