

When the Answer Becomes the Question: Inquiry as *Obuchenie* in an International Baccalaureate Theory of Knowledge Classroom

Research Overview

This study examines how questioning functions as a dialogic dynamic in an International Baccalaureate (IB) Theory of Knowledge classroom. Drawing on Vygotsky's *obuchenie*—treating teaching and learning not as separate acts but as a mutual dynamic practice—it treats teaching and learning as one process.

Purpose of Study

The International Baccalaureate (IB)'s Approaches to Teaching and Learning framework calls for inquiry-based pedagogy in which questioning, rather than knowledge infusing learning. While previous studies have examined teacher questioning patterns or textbooks analysis in isolation, research exploring how teacher questions and student responses interact within the flow of classroom dialogue—specifically, how questions trigger students' thinking and how those responses in turn shape teachers' further questioning—remains, largely absent. This study addresses that gap by taking *obuchenie*—the Russian term drawn by L. Vygotsky *обучение*, which holds teaching and learning together in a single word—as its analysis lens. According to Lund and Hauge (2011), the concept of *obuchenie* implies that teaching and learning are not separate acts but a mutually shaping dynamic act. This two-way, dialogic quality is what *obuchenie* captures and what this study seeks to make visible in an IB Theory of Knowledge (TOK) classroom. TOK is a particularly productive site for such inquiry: as the IB's sole epistemological subject, every lesson centres on Knowledge Questions and the nature of knowing, making the interplay between teacher questioning and student thinking especially visible.

Research Methods

This qualitative study analysed four lesson transcripts (approximately 200 minutes total) from a TOK course by two teachers at an IB school in Indonesia, alongside semi-structured teachers interview (approximately 15 minutes respectively). Both teachers have over ten years of classroom experience and use English as their language of instruction. One is a native English speaker from South Africa; the other is Indonesian, whose first language is Bahasa Indonesia. All lessons analysed were conducted in English. Questions classified as social or classroom-management in function were identified and excluded from the analysis.

These were coded using two frameworks: revised thinking taxonomy by L. Anderson

and D.R. Krathwohl, and concept-based learning framework by L. Erickson (factual, conceptual, and debatable questions), and student responses were forced to categorised into on how each shaped the teacher's next move.

Results and Discussion

Findings reveal that questioning operated not as a one-way instructional tool but as a dialogic dynamic consistent with *obuchenie*: teaching and learning shaped each other through the exchange of questions and responses. Three findings mainly emerged as follows.

First, teacher questions were grouped into mainly seven functional types according to what each question does within the flow of dialogue: priming, gauging, bridging, challenging, deepening, provoking, and metacognitive questioning. In addition, student responses were categorised into mainly five types based on how each shaped the teacher's next move: (1) minimal responses—single words or short phrases leading the teacher to rephrase; (2) partial resistance—pushback that redirected the questioning angle; (3) personal knowledge contributions—responses drawing on lived experience to ground abstract concepts; (4) associative extensions—introducing an unprompted example; and (5) spontaneous conceptual leaps—responses exceeding the cognitive level of the question.

Second, question types shifted from factual through conceptual to debatable in direct response to student output rather than following a pre-planned sequence. Minimal responses regularly prompted the teacher to raise the cognitive level of the next question, while partial resistance changed the direction of questioning entirely, opening up new conceptual directions. This step-by-step progression moved student thinking from recall towards analysis and evaluation.

Third, each of the five response types shaped the teacher's next move across both lessons. Beyond the rephrasing triggered by minimal responses and the direction changes caused by partial resistance, mainly three further types produced more significant effects. Associative extensions led the teacher to bring in related ideas and expand the discussion. Spontaneous conceptual leaps went beyond the expected level of thinking: one student's claim—made without being asked—that failed experiments can generate new knowledge led the teacher to introduce the concept of the tentative nature of science, a topic not planned. In this moment, the learner's response became the teacher's next question. Personal knowledge contributions also worked as entry points into deeper thinking: a moment in which the teacher too became a learner, illustrating the two-way nature of *obuchenie*.

These findings are provisional. As an interim report based on two teachers and four

lessons, no claims of generalisability are made; the broader study involves more teachers and more hours of data, analysis of which is ongoing.

Keywords: *obuchenie*, dialogic inquiry, concept-based learning, questioning

References

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