BELS Barnet Education & Learning Service

NHS Whittington Health NHS Trust

How to develop:

Your child's understanding of Blanks Level Questions

What are Blanks Level Questions?

The Blank Levels of Questioning was developed by Blank, Rose, and Berlin in 1978. The aim of the model is to develop children's ability to answer different types of questions, to build their verbal reasoning skills, and their abstract language skills.

The model reflects 4 'types' or 'levels' of questions children hear in the classroom. Questions are categorised according to levels of complexity from concrete to abstract. The closer the language is to the present situation; the easier the question is to understand.

A child is considered 'competent' at a level when they can answer questions at a specific level with 80% accuracy. It is important that questions are pitched to children at the correct level, to support their understanding.

More difficult questions can be simplified and brought down a level, or cueing techniques and strategies can be used to help the child respond. By Year 1, children whose language skills are following a typically pattern of development, should understand questions at all four levels to appropriately access all activities and meet curriculum expectations.

Blanks Level	Description	Example	Age expected to be achieved by
1	Matching perception. The answer is in front of you.	Labelling. Simple questions e.g. 'who's this?' 'what's this?'	3 years
2	Selective analysis of perception. The answer is in front of you, but you need to look for it.	Questions which require more evaluation of information e.g. 'what's happening in the picture?'	4 years
3	Reordering perception. The answer is not in front of you, use clues and form your own answer.	Questions which require making a prediction e.g. 'what will happen next?'	5 years

4	Reasoning about perception. The answer is not in front of you – it is your own opinion	Questions which require to inferring and explaining information e.g. 'why do cats have claws?'	6 years

Strategies

- Give processing **time**.
- Gain the child's **attention** before providing a question.
- **Repeat** the question.
- **Simplify** the question by breaking it down into parts.
- **Focus on the feature** – draw the child's attention to the specific part of the picture you are referring to.
- **Choices or forced alternatives** – if the child has difficulty answering the question, offer two choices e.g. "is he running or jumping?".
- **Sound cues** – give the first sound of the answer.
- **Gesture** – use gesture to help the child understand or to cue them.
- **Sentence completion** – give the start of the answer for the child to complete the sentence e.g. "the boy is…"
- Specific programmes are available to work on "Blanks Levels Questions", with pre-made questions and resources, e.g. the "*Language for Thinking*" programme. This programme categorises questions into Level A, B and C. However, they are linked to the types of questions outlined in the Blank Framework. This activity can be conducted in both individual and group situations.
- There is also a wealth of resources available on the internet. Websites such as Twinkl (www.twinkl.co.uk) have resources tailor-made to specific levels and also have activities and questions linked to specific stories.

Activity ideas

Books

Use books/well known stories. Stop at crucial points and get the child to predict what may happen next.

Pictures

Look at a picture or scene and ask the child what they think will happen next. Ask "why" questions about the picture e.g. ask why something happened.

Story cards

Use story sequencing cards and leave the last picture off. Get the child to predict what might happen next.

Think of different endings
When reading a book/story, ask the child to think of different ways the story could end. Ask the child to pick the ending they think is best and why.

Ask "what if?" questions
Read short stories together and ask the child "what would happen if…" at the end of each page/scene. Ask "what if" questions related to everyday life e.g. "what would happen if the paint fell on the floor?"

Ask "how would you feel if…" questions
Give the child a variety of different scenarios that may or may not relate to their daily lives and ask the child how each scenario would make them feel.

Simple solutions
Give the child a simple problem and ask them what they would do to solve the problem and ask them to explain why e.g. "what would you do if you couldn't find your coat?", "what would you do if you fell?" etc.