Workshop Activities: Open-ended Questions

Activity #1: Participants view, discuss, and decide which questions are close-ended and which questions are open-ended. Divide participants into groups of 2-4. Provide each group with one base sheet and a zip-lock bag filled with 28 sentence strips.

Cut the following questions into individual sentence strips.

What is it?  
Tell me about what you see.

How many friends did you play with?  
Tell me about playing with your friends.

Do you have an idea?  
What’s your idea?

Who fell?  
What happened?

Are you feeling okay?  
How do you feel?

Did you have a nice weekend?  
Tell me about your weekend.

Does anyone have any questions?  
What are your questions?

Should you fall like that? Isn't it dangerous?  
What would happen if I didn’t catch you?

What do you think will happen next?  
What color is it?

Is it a car?  
What shape is this?

How did you make it?  
Are you done?

What else could you use?  
How are you going to use it?

Did you draw the same picture at home?  
What do you think?

What happens if you turn it upside down?  
Is this a circle?
Make copies of this base sheet for each group to work off of when dividing their sentence strips into close-ended questions and open-ended questions. Card stock paper works best.

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<th>Close-ended Questions</th>
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Activity #2: Provide each table group with a teddy bear counter and 3-4 additional objects that are found in a typical preschool classroom, such as a toy car, a fire engine, a doll, a cup, a plastic dinosaur, or a book. Participants select a recorder and then brainstorm at least five open-ended questions for each object.

Activity #3: Working in table groups, one participant volunteers to be a highly verbal four-year-old. Everyone else at the table will be a teacher who asks this child several open-ended questions. Provide the child with a bag of open-ended materials, such as a few plastic animals, 6-10 cube blocks, 6-10 craft sticks, and 20-25 buttons. Each participant is given one card and asks the child the type of open-ended question that is on her card. After everyone has asked their questions, shuffle and re-deal the cards. Each participant again asks the type of open-ended question printed on her card. Repeat several times.

Making predictions - What do you think will happen next?

Stretching thinking - What would happen if ...?

Considering consequences - What would happen if you ...?
Assessing feelings – How would you feel if ...? How did this make you feel?

Thinking about similarities and differences
How are these the same? How are they different? What makes these things go together?

Applying knowledge to solve a problem
What could you do to ...? How would you...?

Evaluating – How do you feel about what you did? What could you do differently? How would you do it next time?

Activity #4: Role Play:
Role Play 4A: Divide participants into pairs.

You are a teacher at Southside Head Start. You are totally confused around open-ended questions. You don’t understand what they are, and you think that we should be teaching children to answer questions that have a “right” answer. You are very good at asking questions such as:
- What color is this?
- Do you like to eat bread?
- How many blocks are on the table?
You are about to meet with your Director in her office.
You are the Education Program Manager, Director, or Coach [select one role] at Southside Head Start.  You are going to meet with one of your teachers.  She is a positive, friendly teacher who is well-liked by both children and parents.  However, you have noticed that she continuously asks children lots and lots of close-ended questions.  You are meeting with her to make sure that:

- She understands what an open-ended question is.
- She is able to generate on-the-spot open-ended questions, and
- She understands why open-ended questions are important.

Role Play 4B: Participants switch roles.

You are an assistant teacher at Southside Head Start.  You feel that the teacher you work with knows more than you, so you let her do all the teaching and most of the talking.  When you do talk with a child, you like to help that child by telling her what she is supposed to do and what the Head Teacher is asking for.  You are about to meet with your Director in her office.

You are the Education Program Manager, Director, or Coach [select one role] at Southside Head Start.  You are going to meet with one of your assistant teachers.  She is quiet teacher who is conscientious and tries hard at her job.  However, you have noticed that she doesn't talk much with the children.  You want her to initiate more open-ended questions with the highly verbal children in her classroom.  You are meeting with her to make sure that:

- She understands why it is important to talk with children,
- She understands why open-ended questions are important, and
- She is able to generate open-ended questions on her own.
Activity #5: Role Play:
Role Play 5A: Divide participants into triads. One participant is the teacher, another participant is the child, and the third participant is a coach. Provide the child with one piece of bond paper. In the first part of the role play, the child draws a picture and the teacher interacts with the child, talking with her, and asking open-ended questions. The coach observes. In the second part, the coach gives feedback to the teacher on her use of open-ended questions.

You are a highly verbal child. You like to talk about what you are doing. You are about to draw a self-portrait of yourself.

You are the teacher at Southside Head Start. During free play, you join children in the Art Area. One child is drawing a self-portrait. You make comments about what she is doing, and you ask her open-ended questions.

You are a coach at Southside Head Start. During free play, you observe a teacher in the Art Area interacting with a highly verbal child. Make some notes on what you observe. Next you will provide feedback to the teacher on your observation. Use the following format:

- Begin your feedback session with 2-3 positive observations on the teacher's interactions.
- Ask the teacher for her reflections. What did she think went well with her interactions? What does she think could be improved upon?
- Give feedback on 1-2 points of what you observed.
- Together plan next steps. How can the teacher further develop her use of open-ended questions?
Role Play 5B: Participants switch roles so that each of them now has a different role. One participant is the teacher, another participant is the child, and the third participant is a coach. Provide the child with one piece of bond paper. In the first part of the role play, the child tears or folds a piece of paper, and the teacher interacts with the child, talking with her, and asking open-ended questions. The coach observes. In the second part, the coach gives feedback to the teacher on her use of open-ended questions.

You are a highly verbal child. You like to talk about what you are doing. You are about to tear or fold a piece of paper, perhaps making it into a person, an airplane, a ball, or something else.

You are the teacher at Southside Head Start. During free play, you join children in the Art Area. One child is tearing or folding a piece of paper. You make comments about what she is doing, and you ask her open-ended questions.

You are a coach at Southside Head Start. During free play, you observe a teacher in the Art Area interacting with a highly verbal child. Make some notes on what you observe. Next you will provide feedback to the teacher on your observation. Use the following format:

- Begin your feedback session with 2-3 positive observations on the teacher's interactions.

- Ask the teacher for her reflections. What did she think went well with her interactions? What does she think could be improved upon?

- Give feedback on 1-2 points of what you observed.

- Together plan next steps. How can the teacher further develop her use of open-ended questions?
Role Play 5C: Participants again switch roles so that each of them now has a new role. One participant is the teacher, another participant is the child, and the third participant is a coach. Provide the child with a storybook to look at. In the first part of the role play, the child talks about what she sees on the pages of the storybook, and the teacher talks with her, asking open-ended questions. The coach observes. In the second part, the coach gives feedback to the teacher on her use of open-ended questions.

You are a highly verbal child. You like to talk about what you see. During free choice time you have chosen a storybook to look through. You talk about what you see on the pages.

You are the teacher at Southside Head Start. During free play, you join a child in the Book Area who is looking at a storybook. You make comments about what she says, and you ask her open-ended questions.

You are a coach at Southside Head Start. During free play, you observe a teacher in the Book Area interacting with a highly verbal child. Make some notes on what you observe. Next you will provide feedback to the teacher on your observation. Use the following format:

- Begin your feedback session, with 2-3 positive observations on the teacher's interactions.

- Ask the teacher for her reflections. What did she think went well with her interactions? What does she think could be improved upon?

- Give feedback on 1-2 points of what you observed.

- Together plan next steps. How can the teacher further develop her use of open-ended questions?

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