Abstract

The ability and the motivation for question asking are, or should be, some of the most important aims of education. Unfortunately, students neither ask many questions, nor good ones. The present paper is about the capacity of secondary school pupils for asking questions and how this activity depends on prior knowledge. To examine this, we use texts containing different levels of information about a specific topic: biodiversity. We found a positive relationship between the amount of information provided and the number of questions asked about the texts, supporting the idea that more knowledgeable people ask more questions. Some students were warned that there would be an exam after the reading, and this led to a diminishing number of questions asked, and yet this still did not significantly improve their exam scores. In such a case, it seems that reading was more concerned with immediacy, hindering critical thinking and the dialog between their previous ideas and the new information. Thus, question asking seems to be influenced not only by the amount of knowledge, but also by the reader’s attitude towards the information.