

## Types of Questions and Teachers' Role

For facilitating meaningful learning, a lesson should never be transacted in a didactic manner or delivered in a highly academic, uninterrupted and authoritarian mode. Interpretations must be open and fluid and experiences of the students must be taken into cognizance. Probing questions serve as one of the most useful strategies in inspiring critical inquiry and reflection, necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the lesson. The students also feel motivated and can fight boredom if they get actively engaged by seeking responses to the questions framed by the teacher. Questions asked at crucial stages of a lesson can focus students' attention on the critical aspects of the object of learning, create the context that will help students to make sense of the object of learning, and open up the space for exploration of an answer. Through successful and effective questioning, the lesson becomes stimulating and a process of continuous discovery and enlightenment. As a number of scholars have pointed out, effectiveness of a lesson largely depends on the skill of questioning (**Christensen**, 1991; **Jacobson**, 1984; **Welty**, 1989). The skill of questioning takes the most practice and skill as professed by **Freire** (1993) and **Bateman** (1990). **Palmer** (1998) has noted that how a teacher asks questions can make the difference between an ineffective lesson and one that turns into a complex and meaningful dialogue bouncing all around the room. **Heritage** (1998) identifies three basic dimensions of question form or design that are relevant to his discussion of questioning: (1) Questions set agendas in terms of the kind of action required of an answerer and the relevant topical domain of such an action; (2) Questions embody presuppositions; and (3) Questions can "prefer" certain responses, that is, questions can be designed to favor a certain kind of response over another.

Different types of questions that are framed during transaction of a lesson are briefly discussed below:

- i. **Evidence seeking Questions** : Questions that prompt a student to furnish evidence or facts and justify his points with valid examples.
- ii. **Clarification seeking questions**: Questions that compel a student to think critically and logically in order to provide clarification of his points or his stand on any given issue.
- iii. **Open questions**. Questions to which there is a range of possible answers, or a range of possible ways of *presenting* the answer.

- iv. **Closed Questions:** Questions framed and used to check retention or to focus thinking on a particular point. There is only one acceptable answer.
- v. **Reversed Polarity Question:** Questions that are meant to help students self-correct and also reveal the role of interactional context in the interpretation of question function. The “reversed polarity question” (RPQ), is a yes/no interrogative that is produced after a teacher characterizes a portion of a student’s written text as problematic. For instance, if, after indicating that a student’s thesis statement is problematic, a teacher says “Is that what your essay is about?,” what is conveyed by this yes/no interrogative is the negative assertion “That is not what your essay is about” and, by implication, “It should be changed.” Thus, while the RPQ is a grammatically affirmative interrogative (i.e., not a negative interrogative), it communicates a negative assertion, that is, an assertion that has the reverse polarity to that of the RPQ. The fact that a grammatically affirmative interrogative conveys a negative assertion can be explained, in part, by its interactional environment: It is produced after a portion of a student’s text has already been identified as problematic.
- vi. **Extension questions:** Used for exploring the issues. For example, What else? Can you take us farther down that path or find new tributaries? Keep going?
- vii. **Alternative Questions:** Framed primarily to lead the students to the desired response. May be used for prompting as well. For instance, on being asked a information seeking question if a student answers in negative, the teacher may rephrase the question at a much later stage while teaching the chapter when he thinks that the lesson so far has provided sufficient data / information for the student to reconsider his earlier answer and to think and provide the correct explanation now.
- viii. **Hypothetical questions:** These questions construct hypothetical scenarios compelling students to think critically and ponder over various possibilities of a given topic. Teachers may use such questions to query the pupil as to how they would “feel, behave, or cope,” given such a scenario. According to **Speer**, these kinds of Hypothetical Questions force pupils to consider in an explicit way what they are prepared to sacrifice, what they will settle for, and what they will risk in a given situation. It is not form alone, however, that provides a clue to

what these Hypothetical Questions are meant to accomplish. They also occur in an interactional environment that is suggestive of their function.

- ix. **Cause and effect questions:** Framed and used in the class to encourage students to reflect critically and logically upon cause and effect of any given phenomenon. Subsequent questions are framed on the basis on preceding ones.
- x. **Synthesis questions:** Questions that help to use old ideas to create new ones , and relate knowledge from several areas, generalize from given facts. For example, What could be done to minimize (maximize)...?[a given phenomenon]
- xi. **Experiential questions:** Questions that compel students to find answers from their experiences. They are good for relating the text to the real life experiences of the pupils.
- xii. **Epistemological questions:** Questions based on truth, belief and justification. Such questions compel a student to justify his claim or answers to a problem and reconsider his /her existing beliefs.
- xiii. **Rhetorical Questions:** Questions framed and used to emphasize a point or to reinforce an idea or statement. Rhetorical questions are often humorous and don't require an answer. Rhetorical questions are often used to promote thought.
- xiv. **Managerial Questions:** Questions framed and used to keep the classroom operations moving. They are beneficial for classroom management.
- xv. **Probing questions:** A series of questions that ideally require the students to go beyond the initial response and subsequent questions framed by the teacher are based upon the students' response to the previous questions. They can be of two principal types, namely,
  - **Convergent Questions:** Questions, answers to which are usually within a finite range of accuracy. This is to say that layers of questions are framed and used to enable the students to justify their successive responses in the light of the inferences made in the answers given to

previous questions. These bunch of questions lead to a central topic or concept.

- **Divergent Questions:** Questions that direct the students' thought to exploration of possibilities, and calls for both concrete and abstract thinking. Taking off from an initial question, which may be considered the starting point, a bunch of related subsequent questions are framed and used to inspire further exploration. These include types that are known as **Prediction Questions**.

- xvi. **Communicative questions:** Helps to propagate a conversation for communication.
- xvii. **Higher Order Questions:** Questions that call for responses that are based on generalizations related to textual information in a meaningful manner.
- xviii. **Evaluative Questions:** Questions that call for answers combining various cognitive and affective levels , mostly in comparative frameworks. Such questions are aimed at development of decisions and testing knowledge.
- xix. **Inferential Questions:** Calls for inductive or deductive reasoning
- xx. **Filter or Contingency question:** Sometimes we have to ask the students one question in order to determine if they are qualified or experienced enough to answer a subsequent one. This requires using a **filter or contingency question**. For instance, a teacher may want to ask one question if the respondent has ever been to any hill station and a different question if they have not. in this case, you would have to construct a filter question to determine whether they've ever been to a hill station.
- xxi. **Priority Questions:** Popularized by Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, Harvard University. Such questions help the students in refocusing on and reorganizing the priorities in analyzing a given text and think critically. For instance, questions like “Which issues do you consider most important and

why? Where would you start?” channelize a student’s priorities and mode of thinking.

xxii. **Affective Questions** : Questions that elicit expressions of emotions, feelings and values related to the text.

[Managerial, Open , Closed and Rhetorical Question types are mentioned by P.E. Blosser (1975). *How to Ask the Right Questions*, National Science Teachers’ Association.]