

ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF CLASSROOM QUESTIONS

Practice Composing Questions

Think of a question you asked or were asked in the past few days. Write it down. Edit the question with the addition of each criterion for designing powerful questions. Be prepared to share your edited question with the entire group.

SOME QUESTIONS TO AVOID

1. Verification questions: The answers to which are already known by you or by the student:

"What is the name of.....?"

"How many times did you"?

2. Closed questions that can be answered "yes", "no" , or "I can".

"Can you recite the poem?"

"Can you tell us the name of"?"

"Who can remember.....?"

"Who can state the formula for.....?"

3. Rhetorical questions in which the answer is given within the question:

"In what year was the War of 1812?"

"Since when has Mikhail Gorbachev had his birthmark?"

"What was the duration of the 7 years war?"

4. Defensive questions which cause justification, resistance and self-protection:

"Why didn't you complete your homework?"

"Why would you do a thing like that?"

"Are you misbehaving again?"

5. Agreement questions the intent of which is to invite others to agree with our opinion or answer:

"This is really the best solution, isn't it?"

"We really should get started now, shouldn't we?"

"So how much is 3×4 : twelve. OK?"

"Who can name the three basic parts of a plant? Root, stems and leaves, right?"

Composing Powerful Questions
to Engage the Habits of Mind:

Three Linguistic Components

1. *They are invitational.*

An approachable voice is used. There is a lilt and melody in the questioner's voice rather than a flat, even tenor.

Plurals are used to invite multiples rather than singular concepts:

- "What are some of your goals?",
- "What ideas do you have?"
- "What outcomes do you seek?"
- "What alternatives are you considering?"

Words are selected to express tentativeness:

- "What conclusions might you draw?",
- "What may indicate his acceptance?"
- "What hunches do you have to explain this situation?"

Invitational stems are used to enable the behavior to be performed:

- "As you think about....."
- "As you consider....."
- "As you reflect on....."

Positive Presuppositions assume capability and empowerment:

- "What are some of the benefits you will derive from engaging in this activity?"
- "As you anticipate your project, what are some indicators that you are progressing and succeeding?"

THE LANGUAGE OF POSITIVE PRESUPPOSITIONS

EXAMPLE I	EXAMPLE II
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did you forget to do your assignment again? 2. Why don't you like to paint? 3. Did you forget again? 4. When will you grow up? 5. Here, I'll give you an easier puzzle, then you'll be successful. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. As you plan for your assignment, what materials will you need? 2. We need you to add your painting to our gallery of outstanding artists. 3. Tell us what you do to help you remember. 4. How might you use this experience to learn even more effective ways to solve such problems? 5. As the puzzles get more difficult, how will you use planning like this again?
<p>What do these examples have in common?</p>	<p>What do these examples have in common?</p>
<p>How are these two examples different?</p>	

PRESUPPOSITIONS

Our language contains overt and covert messages. The deeper meanings we interpret from the language of others is not always communicated by the surface structure of the words and syntax. The subtle and, at times, not so subtle ways in which the embedded presuppositions in our language can be hurtful to others,

For instance, the statement, "Even Bill could pass that class", means that (a) Bill is not a great student and (b) the class is not difficult. Neither of those pieces of information is present in the surface structure of the sentence. The sentence could read, "Even Bill (who is not a good student) could pass that class (which is not difficult)". Nevertheless, that is what the sentence communicates. The two unstated pieces are inferred by the listener as presuppositions or assumptions underlying the sentence (Elgin, 1980).

By paying attention to the presuppositions that we use and choosing our words with care, we can more positively influence the thinking and feelings of others with whom we are communicating.

ANALYZING QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FOR PRESUPPOSITIONS

Identify the presupposition(s) in each question. Describe the possible impact on the person's feelings and cognition. Modify the question to communicate a more positive presupposition.

1. Have you been able to come up with a goal?
2. Why did you do that?
3. How can you possibly solve such a difficult problem?
4. What could you have done to make it more successful?
5. Why don't you try.....?
6. How can I help you improve?

Elgin, S. H. (1980) *The Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defense*. New York, NY: Prentice Hall Inc.

LIMITING PRESUPPOSITIONS

"Do you have an objective?"

"Why were you unsuccessful?"

"What two things went well?"

"If only you had listened!"

EMPOWERING PRESUPPOSITIONS

"What are some of the goals that you have in mind for this meeting?"

"As you consider your alternatives, what seems most promising?"

"How will you know that the meeting is successful?"

"What personal learnings or insights will you carry forward to future situations?"

THE THREE STORY INTELLECT

There are one-story intellects,
two-story intellects, and three-
story intellects with skylights.

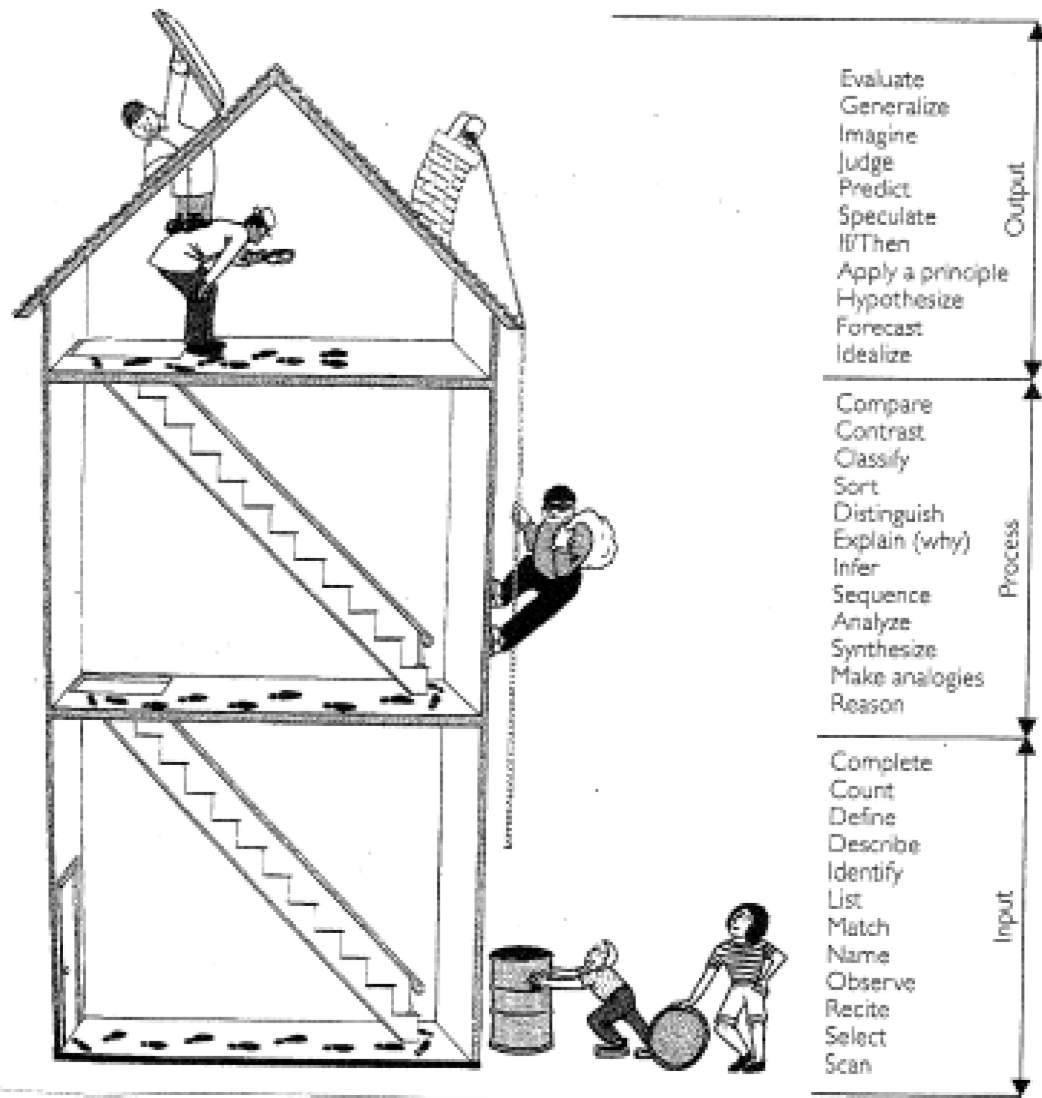
All fact collectors, who have no aim
beyond their facts, are one-story
men.

Two-story men compare, reason,
generalize, using the labors of the
fact collectors as well as their own.

Three-story men idealize, imagine,
predict--their best illumination
comes
from above, through the skylight.

Oliver Wendell Holmes

The Three-Story Intellect Model



2. They engage specific, complex cognitive operations

Input

- Recall
- Define
- Describe
- Identify
- Name
- List

Process

- Compare/Contrast
- Infer
- Analyze
- Sequence
- Synthesize
- Summarize

Output

- Predict
- Evaluate
- Speculate
- Imagine
- Envision
- Hypothesize

**Composing Powerful Questions:
Three Linguistic Components**

INVITATIONAL STEMS	COGNITIVE OPERATIONS	CONTENT
<p>As you.....</p> <p>What are some of....</p> <p>How might you.....</p> <p>What led to....</p> <p>What possible....</p> <p>What might.....</p> <p>How might.....</p> <p>How should.....</p>	<p><u>Input</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recall • Define • Describe • Identify • Name • List <p><u>Process</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare • Contrast • Infer • Analyze • Sequence • Synthesize • Summarize <p><u>Output</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predict • Evaluate • Speculate • Imagine • Envision • Hypothesize 	<p><u>Internal</u></p> <p>Reaction</p> <p>Feelings</p> <p>Thoughts</p> <p>Emotions</p> <p><u>External</u></p> <p>Project</p> <p>Other Students</p> <p>Group</p> <p>Event</p> <p>Goals</p> <p>Lesson</p>

For example:

"As you compare this project with others you have done....."

"How might you sequence these events in such a way as to?"

"What led you to these inferences about your performance's success?"

"In what ways might your emotions have influenced your decisions about...?"