

Questioning

A simple Overview of Questioning

Broadly speaking there seems to be three main categories of questions that we use in normal daily life.

They are Requests, Rhetorical, and Inquiry Questions.



Requests:

These are the questions used when a person seeks permission, or seeks assistance from someone.

- E.g. “Can you lend me \$20?”
“May I leave the room?”
“Am I able to take my holiday from Dec 12 to January 12?”

Rhetorical Questions:

The questioner knows the answer, is not seeking an answer, but has some alternative motive behind the question. For example they may be trying to make a point, demonstrate their own knowledge, or corner another person in an argument.

- E.g. “What time do you call this?”
“Why are you so stupid?”
“Are you kidding me?”

Rhetorical questions come in a number of forms, one of which is the **Disguised Imperative**. These are primarily a command disguised as a question. The question highlights the demand and usually requires an action rather than an answer.

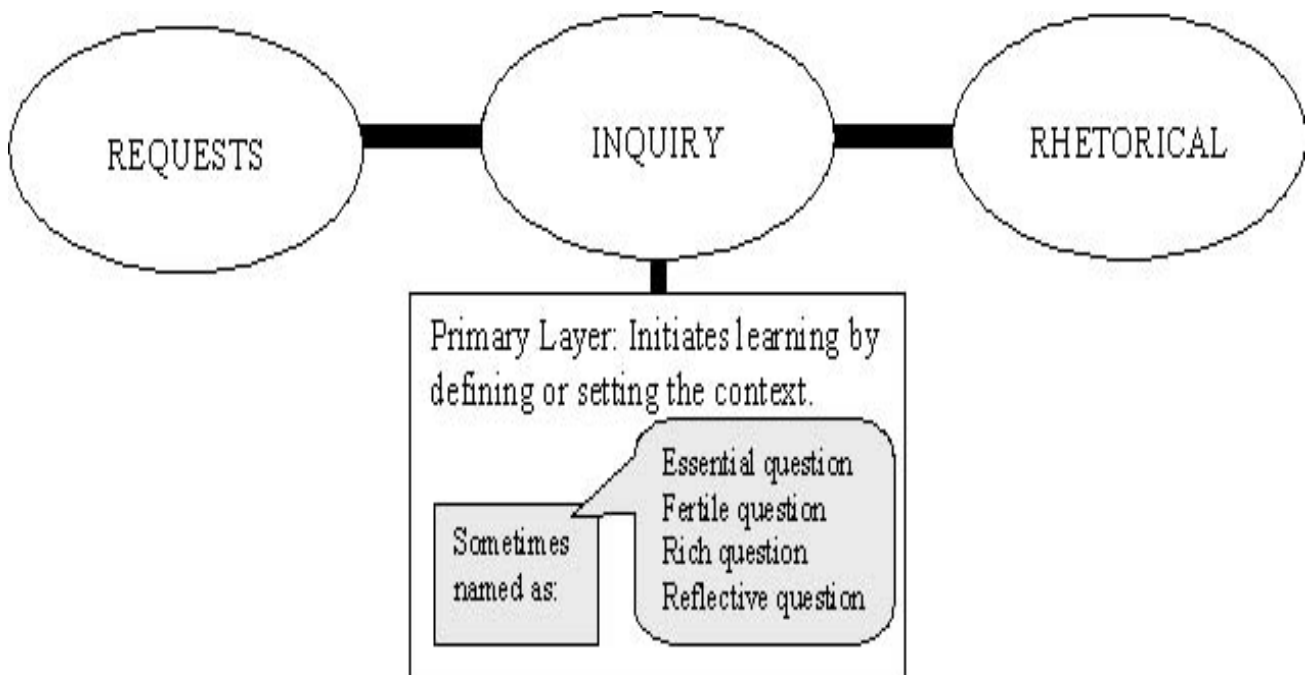
- E.g. “Do we wear our muddy shoes inside the classroom?”
“How do we act when we want to ask a question?”
“What do we take with us to the library to put our books in?”

Inquiry Questions: An ‘Inquiry’ or ‘Information Seeking’ question is one posed by the questioner to obtain needed information within a specific context, aspect, concept, issue, or problem. These are the questions that power learning.

In this simple overview there are two layers of Inquiry question.

The primary layer consists of a question that opens or defines the area of learning. It may pose a problem, identify a need, or establish a concern/issue for investigation. Basically it sets the scene and provides a specific context for learning. These primary questions have

been labelled by a variety of names including 'Rich Questions', 'Essential Questions', 'Fertile Questions', and Reflective Questions'.

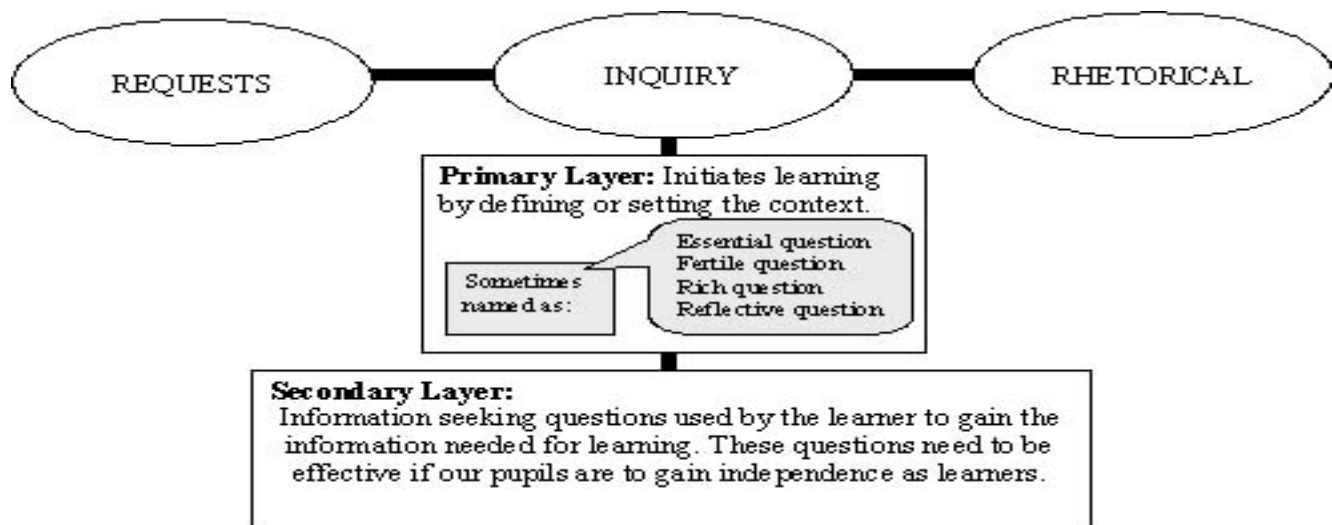


Within the field of Inquiry Learning these primary questions may be teacher generated, negotiated between teacher and pupil, or learner generated. There are a number of issues that need to be considered when creating these primary questions.

Firstly the questions obviously need to be carefully structured and it takes skill and practice to create good questions at this level.

Secondly it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that questions are supported by relevant and valid information sources that are suited to the reading and comprehension of the learners before the inquiry is embarked on. We know that risk taking and failure are integral parts of learning but it is important that learners experience success as they build their knowledge and learning skills. A major aspect of supporting learners is to ensure that whatever the context of learning is, relevant information is available, at appropriate reading levels for the learner/s. This is a major aspect of teacher preparation and teachers should do everything possible to ensure that pupil's inquiry learning is well supported by level and context relevant information.

There is a secondary layer of Inquiry questions that are the central core to learning. These are the information seeking questions a learner asks to obtain specific information that will be utilised to fuel their learning.



Independence in learning requires the learner to be an effective questioner, and to do this they need to be able to ask effective questions at this secondary layer of inquiry questioning.

There are a number of types of questions that learners will ask at this level and they include Fact finding, Evaluative, Diagnostic, and Hypothetical questions.

Questions from this level have also been identified as 'fat' or 'skinny' questions, 'open' and 'closed' questions.

There are further question types that could be identified here, with many of the definitions being contestable and debatable. What is important, is that these questions, however they are labelled, have one the primary goal which is to gain specific information that will be utilised for one or more of a range of purposes.

What is a ‘good’ or ‘effective’ question?

The word ‘good’ probably has too many value based associations to be beneficial. A better word would be ‘effective’. What is an ‘effective question’? There are three issues (Purpose, Vocabulary and Source Content) to be considered in defining and answering this question.

Question Purpose

The first issue relates directly to the purpose of the question. The immediate purpose of any ‘Inquiry’ question is to gain some specific information that is relevant to the context. Therefore an effective question is one that returns the needed relevant information.

Question Vocabulary

The second issue with defining whether a question is ‘effective’ concerns the relationship between the vocabulary contained in the question and the vocabulary of the context. An effective question needs to be constructed with the relevant vocabulary. The question needs to contain appropriate contextual key words and phrases relevant to the context, issue or problem. It is these key words and phrases that will locate the question within the appropriate context. If a question does not contain relevant contextual vocabulary it is most likely to be ineffective in returning the required information.

Source Content (Sources can vary hugely and may be printed text, digital text, images, audio visual, or human

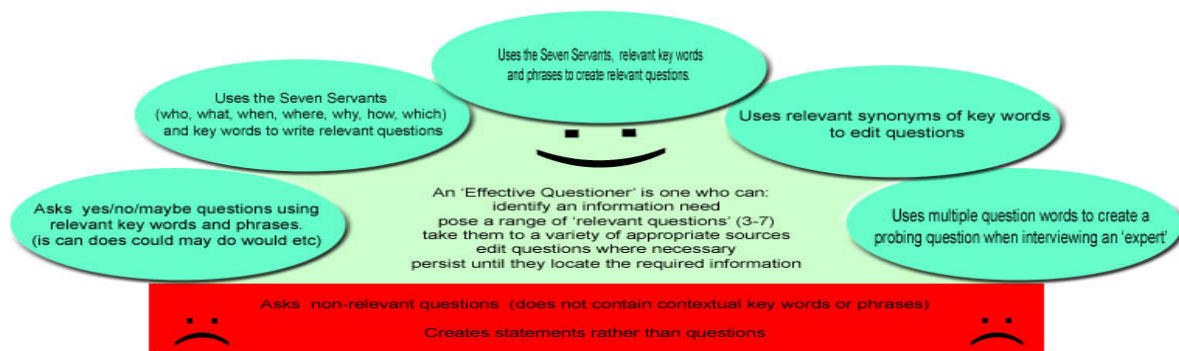
The third issue in defining an ‘effective question’ relates to the source being used. If an effective question is one that extracts the required information from the source being queried, the success of the question is also dependant on the chosen source actually containing the required information.

Summary

An effective question is one that returns the required information, to do this it needs to contain the relevant contextual vocabulary and the query needs to be applied to a source that contains the required information. These factors also need to be supported by a range of questioner skills.

Questioning Rubric For creating and evaluating 'Effective Questions'	
Stage	Question type
7	Used multiple Question words to create a probing question when interviewing an 'expert'
6	Used relevant synonyms to edit questions
5	Used the Seven Servants and relevant key words and phrases to create questions.
4	Used the Seven Servants to write questions (who, what, when, where, why, how, which)
3	Asked a relevant yes/no/maybe question (is can does could may etc)
2	Any non-relevant question (does not contain contextual key words or phrases)
1	Created statements rather than questions

An alternative layout



Evidence of success in raising pupils' questioning skills

We are now 18 months on from the first introduction of this rubric into a school and there are now at least 18 schools through the country using this rubric. A fairly standardised approach is used where schools: Carry out a baseline assessment collecting up to five questions, related to a specific scenario, from every pupil in the school.

- These questions are assessed, moderated and the results recorded in a specially constructed spreadsheet, which allows for easy analysis of school wide data for a wide range of gender, age, ethnic and time at school cohorts of pupils. The spreadsheet examines the range of questions asked by each child identifying the highest and lowest level of question asked by each child.
- A large copy of the rubric in each classroom along with sample questions.
- Teachers model questions from across the rubric during all curriculum activities.
- Teachers also model making changes to questions to lift them to higher levels of the rubric.
- Pupils are encouraged to identify where their own questions fit on the rubric and to modify their questions to meet the criteria for a higher stage of questioning.
- Most of these schools are also implementing an Inquiry Learning approach so pupils are continuously put into learning situations where they have to collaboratively and individually create questions and seek information for problem solving and inquiry purposes.
- Teachers work with individual pupils as well as groups of pupils in terms of improving questioning skills in all curriculum areas.
- Follow up assessment is carried out each year with the spreadsheets used for school wide tracking and analysis.

What are the results? The following tables are drawn from the first school to complete a full year of work with this emphasis on questioning skills. A baseline assessment was carried out in April of 2006 with a follow up assessment carried out in April of 2007. These tables cover all pupils at school on the assessment day, so it must be realised that the 2007 data includes children who have come into the school during the year and haven't had the same exposure as some other pupils. We realise that data can be glitched by any number of factors, so it is the general trend illustrated by these tables that are exciting. (Figures do not add to 100% due to absences)

	2005	2006
	yr 1B	yr 2 B
stage 7		
stage 6		
stage 5		
stage 4		21%
stage 3		62%
stage 2	12%	6%
stage 1	71%	3%

	2005	2006
	yr 1G	yr 2 G
stage 7		
stage 6		
stage 5		
stage 4		18%
stage 3		59%
stage 2	17%	5%
stage 1	44%	9%

2005 Year 1 pupils show a major gain when tested again as year 2 pupils in 2006.

	2005 yr 1	2006 yr 2
stage 7		
stage 6		
stage 5		3%
stage 4		31%
stage 3		11%
stage 2	20%	54%
stage 1	80%	3%

This data demonstrates the achievement of yr 1 pupils in April 2006 who had experienced no specific teaching on questioning compared with the yr 1 children in 2006 who had experienced 3 months of facilitation with questioning skills.

A few other random tables show consistent gains right across the school.

	2005	2006
	yr 2B	yr 3 B
stage 7		
stage 6		
stage 5		
stage 4		31%
stage 3	12%	38%
stage 2	48%	3%
stage 1	32%	10%

	2005	2006
	yr 2 G	yr 3 G
stage 7		
stage 6		
stage 5		
stage 4		54%
stage 3		38%
stage 2	63%	4%
stage 1	21%	



	2005	2006
	yr 5 B	yr 6 B
stage 7		
stage 6		
stage 5		13%
stage 4		33%
stage 3	63%	33%
stage 2	31%	13%
stage 1		

	2005	2006
	yr 5 G	yr 6 G
stage 7		
stage 6		13%
stage 5	5%	13%
stage 4	16%	31%
stage 3	21%	25%
stage 2	47%	
stage 1		

To summarise:

The evidence is clear: If we recognise questioning skills as central to independence as learners, it is possible to format a construct around the concept of effective questioning, and introduce learning and teaching strategies that can make an identifiable difference to pupils' questioning skills. The evidence from this school is being supported by further evidence now coming from other schools as they reach the end of their first year of seriously working at questioning skills.