Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) Focus

June 2009

Generic Question Prompts/Stems

[Effective in small and large classes and easily adapted to online teaching]

Purpose: Isadore Rabbi, a Nobel-prize winning physicist, tells a story of his childhood in the Jewish ghetto of New York. When the children came home from school, their mothers would ask them, "What did you learn in school today?" But Isadore's mother would ask him, "What good questions did you ask today?" Dr. Rabbi suggests he became a physicist and won the Nobel Prize because he was valued more for the questions he was asking than the answers he was giving (Barell, 1988). Instructors will find these question prompts useful for promoting students' critical thinking and for framing their own discussion questions. Developed and researched by King (1992; 1990; 1995), these question prompts or stems are based on Bloom's Taxonomy, a hierarchical way of analyzing levels of thinking. The nature of the prompt requires students to design questions that go well beyond the usual "What is?" "What is?" "What is?" Requiring students to email you discussion questions or to post them to WebCT prior to a class session can encourage students to read assigned materials.

Process: To initiate this activity, instructors assign outside reading or conduct a short lecture on a course-related topic. Students use the generic question stems or prompts as a guide for formulating their own specific questions about the content. I email the following list to students (or post to WebCT), telling them how many questions—all using different prompts or stems—I expect them to submit for discussion. They fill in the blanks with appropriate content from the reading/lecture material. I encourage them to make the questions authentic, ones they truly want to discuss rather than ones they already have a pat answer for.

Generic Question Prompts/Stems:

- Explain why ____. (Explain how ____.)
- What would happen if ____?
- What is the nature of ____?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of ____?
- What is the difference between ___ and ___?
- Why is ____ happening?
- What is a new example of ____?
- How could ____ be used to ____?
- What are the implications of ____?
- What is ____ analogous to?
- How does ___ affect ____?
- How does ___ tie in with what we learned before?
- Why is ____ important?
- How are ____ and ____ similar?
- How does ____ apply to everyday life?
- What is a counter-argument for ____?
- What is the best ____, and why?
- What is the solution to the problem of ____?

Compare ____ and ____ with regard to ____?

Do you agree or disagree with this statement: ____? What evidence is there to support your answer?

What is another way to look at ____?

What does ____ mean?

Describe ____ in your own words.

Summarize ____ in your own words.

Variations: Virtually every discipline can benefit from well-structured questions that promote higher order thinking.

Sources:

Barell, J. 1988, cited (p. 59) in Costa & O'Leary, Co-cognition: The cooperative development of the intellect. In Davidson, J. and Worsham, T (Ed.) Enhancing Thinking through Cooperative Learning. (Ed.) (1988, April). Cogitare: A Newsletter of the ASCD Network on Teaching Thinking, 3(1).

King, A. (1990). Enhancing peer interaction and learning in the classroom through reciprocal questioning. American Educational Research Journal, 27(4), 664-687.

King, A. (1992). Promoting active learning and collaborative learning in business administration classes. In T. J. Frecka (Ed.), Critical thinking, interactive learning and technology: Reaching for excellence in business education (pp. 158-173). Arthur Andersen Foundation.

King, A. (1995, Winter). Guided peer questioning: A cooperative learning approach to critical thinking. Cooperative learning and college teaching, 5(2), pp. 15-19.

Professional Development Opportunities:

August 6-10, 2009
SENCER Summer Institute 2009
Harold Washington College
Chicago, Illinois
http://www.sencer.net/Institutes/summerinst09.cfm

September 24-27, 2009
Evidence-Based Learning and Teaching
Annual Lilly Conference
Traverse City, Michigan
http://lillyconferences.com/tc/default.shtml

October 16, 2009
7th Ohio First Year Summit
University of Cincinnati
Cincinnati, Ohio
http://www.uc.edu/conferencing/Details.asp?ConferenceID=319

October 22-25,
The International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
Bloomington Campus, Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana
http://www.issotl09.indiana.edu/index1.html

June in the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL)

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) was full of activity in May. Thanks to those faculty and staff who presented sessions. LindaLee Massoud (Technology Division) presented the Brown Bag Professional Development Session detailing how to manage mountains of email. The rest of the CTL's May sessions included Chuck Iwanusa (Fine Arts Division) offered a discussion of how to listen to jazz with his Mott Scholar Session, during which he also offered a taste of live jazz. Frank Sobie (Social Science Division) provided the Fantastic Faculty Feature titled, "Web Resources for Personal Navigation and Travel," which demonstrated how to use the Internet to relieve the stress of traveling. The CTL also hosted a webinar from the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), "Teaching with Technology: Adobe Acrobat 9." The CTL's new monthly reading circle book choice, Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*, attracted several faculty for discussions. We also continued to schedule gmail training.

June's schedule begins with Clark Harris (Technology Division) presenting this month's Fantastic Faculty Feature, "Low Maintenance Landscaping" that will present strategies for minimizing yard work in landscape design. Candice Pickens (Health Sciences Division) will present the Brown Bag Professional Development Session, "Concept Mapping," which will explain how this technique has the power to promote critical thinking in students. The CTL will also host two webinars. The first is from the Emphasis on Excellence , "Be Smart, Sensible, and Savvy with Social Media: LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter for Grown-ups." The second is produced by Innovative Educators, "Designing a Successful Service-Learning Course: A Practical Approach." The CTL reading circles will continue their discussion of *Jonathan Kozol's Savage Inequalities* in a session later in the month. If you are interested in joining the reading circle, let me know, and I'll get you a book. If anyone still needs gmail training, contact the CTL, and we will try to schedule a session for you.

~ June 2009 ~

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8 Emphasis on Excellence , "Be Smart, Sensible, and Savvy with Social Media: LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter for Grown-ups." 4:00 - 5:30 p.m., CTL (CM1120)	9 Clark Harris, (Technology Division), Fantastic Faculty Feature, “Low Maintenance Landscaping," 1:30-2:30 pm, CTL (CM1120)	10	11	12	13
14	15	16 Candice Pickens (Health Sciences Division) will present the Brown Bag Professional Development Session, "Concept Mapping,” 1:00-2:00 pm, CTL (CM1120)	17 CTL Reading Circle, *Jonathan Kozol’s Savage Inequalities*, 3:00-4:00 pm, CTL (CM1120)	18	19	20
21	22	23	24 Innovative Educators, “Designing a Successful Service-Learning Course: A Practical Approach,” 1:00-2:00 pm, CTL (CM1120)	25	26	27
28	29	30				