



INQUIRY WORKSHOP 1 · RECORDED 3 AUGUST 2026

The Powers of Questions

Designing for agency. Rewrite one question you already ask, so the student holds the thinking.

Ioana Badicioiu & Brian Jackson · EDodo.app

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Why this exists

On 3 August 2026, a small group of teachers spent forty-five minutes on one habit they use every day without thinking: the questions they ask out loud. Brian Jackson, who teaches design and coaches ethical AI integration in Yaoundé, opened by admitting his own most frequent question. It is *“What are you doing?”* Ioana Badicioiu, who teaches English literature and last taught at UWC India, ran the thinking time. Chandrabhan Yadav (mathematics, UWC Dilijan), Molly Oduor (chemistry, UWC Waterford) and Rashmi Gera (English language training) brought the questions they really ask.

The idea is small enough to use on Monday. A compliance question seeks a specific answer, and the teacher holds the key. An inquiry question seeks a perspective, and the student holds the thinking. The difference is design, not talent.

This companion holds what the room produced. The five rewrites Brian walked through. The two questions Brian and Chandrabhan rewrote on themselves, out loud, in front of everyone. The five principles the teachers named, in their own subjects. And a card you can print and fill in.

The full recording is free at **edodo.app/workshops/workshop-powers-of-questions**. This document is the part you keep.

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The lens: compliance, or inquiry?

*A compliance question seeks a specific answer. The teacher holds the key.
An inquiry question seeks a perspective. The student holds the thinking.*

That is the whole theory, and the session gave it two minutes. Everything after it was practice.

Brian's warning is about autopilot, not ability. When you are moving fast and the question is not designed, you can accidentally stop a student from building their own answer and send them hunting for *the* answer instead. Nobody plans that. It happens in the phrasing.

Ioana added the assessment case. Questions are how you assess thinking while it is still forming. *“A question like ‘do you understand’ will not give us anything as teachers,”* she said. Ask something students can only answer by showing their reasoning, and you can see where they actually are. Then you can help.

Two checks you can run in your head, mid-lesson:

- Did that question ask the student to *think*, or to *remember*?
- Who is holding the thinking right now, me or them?



Five rewrites, as the session ran them

These are the five Brian worked through. The wording is his.

You probably ask	Ask this instead	What the shift does
"Does everyone understand?"	"What part of this is still confusing for you?"	Assumes confusion is normal, so admitting it costs nothing.
"Do you get it?"	"How would you explain this to someone who missed today's lesson?"	You hear whether they get it, instead of being told.
"What's the definition of a metaphor?"	"How would you use a metaphor to explain this concept to a five-year-old?"	Moves the task from recall to application.
"Who can tell me the answer?"	"What different approaches might we take to solve this?"	Opens the floor to more than one route.
"Is this correct?"	"What makes you think this is the right approach?"	Hands the checking back to the student.

The definite article does the damage. Brian stopped on question four. Put *the* in front of *answer*, and every student in the room now knows there is one right response and a wrong one. Any uncertainty freezes them. The point landed with the mathematicians, because in IB mathematics, as Brian put it and Chandrabhan confirmed, a question usually has more than one valid route through it. The plural in "*what different approaches*" is not decoration. It is permission.

Phrasing beats translation. Brian taught in China, where one formal way of asking "*do you understand?*" made it culturally impossible for a student to answer no. A more informal phrasing of the same question got honest answers straight away: no, I don't, I have a question. Same content. Different door.

The shortest version of all of these is four words: "*What makes you say that?*"

Then the room did the work. Ioana set a five-minute timer first — write down two or three subject-specific questions you ask on a daily basis — and Brian shared the curated reading after that, so everyone had something real to rewrite. Do that now, before you read on, and this document becomes a workshop instead of an article.



Two teachers rewrote their own questions

The credibility of the session came from the two people who went first on themselves.

Brian: the pre-reading question

Before. *"Have you completed the pre-reading for today's lesson?"*

After. *"How does the reading from last night apply to our task today?"*

Why he needed it. As AI became part of every student's day, Brian saw more students reading less and thinking less, and relying on the answer arriving ready-made. So he flipped his classroom: the reading happens before class, so class time can be spent on the work he actually wants them doing. Then he noticed the cost. He was asking more compliance questions than ever, because he was policing the reading. The rewrite keeps the check and buries it inside the thinking. You still learn who read it. You learn it from the quality of the answer.

He has a family phrase for this kind of work, borrowed from how he and his brother argue their way through a problem: *steel sharpens steel*. Not a fight. Ideas honed by being brought together.

Chandrabhan: "Why this method?"

Before. *"Why this method?"*

After. *"Why this method, and how would its application change if you altered the approach?"*

The detail that made it work. Ioana pushed for a real context, and Chandrabhan grounded it in modelling. A sinusoidal function describes anything periodic: temperature through a year, rainfall, growth and fall. So the classroom version becomes concrete. If this function is transformed like this, what would it look like if it were modelling temperature? Now the student is not reciting a transformation rule. They are applying it inside a situation and explaining the reasoning behind it.

Ioana named the rule of thumb underneath it: *"my questions get better once I add a bit more detail."*

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Five principles, named by the teachers in the room

Everyone read the curated research against one guided question, then said out loud what they were taking from it.

What makes a question powerful for student agency in an inquiry classroom?

These are their answers, in their own subjects.

1. The essential question — Ioana Badicioiu, English literature

An essential question should span multiple parts of the curriculum and be driven by real life. Ioana's example came from a unit that put philosophy and literature side by side, on transformative human experiences. One of those experiences was mortality: what it means to be human knowing you are on borrowed time. Her reasoning is that a student may never be passionate about literature, but every student is curious about what makes a person human. She tells her classes that all their subjects are *different lenses onto the same essential question* — where we come from, where the world came from, what it means to be human. Questions people have asked for thousands of years and are still asking.

2. Relevance — Brian Jackson, design

Brian shows students a song called *Don't Stay in School*, written and performed by an American student. It lists everything he was made to learn that has no use in his life, and everything useful he was never taught. He can explain the quadratic equation but not how a vaccine works. He knows medieval doctors used leeches, but not how to help a friend who is depressed. Brian's position is direct. If the content does not connect to the student's real world, it should be available, not compulsory.

3. Plan the lesson, do not deliver it — Molly Oduor, chemistry

The line Molly took from the reading was that the teacher's job is not to deliver the lesson but to plan the lesson. In chemistry, her students ask why they are learning stoichiometry, why the mole concept matters, where it will ever help them. She is honest about it: for the one or two heading into research it is essential, because it is how you calculate quantities of a substance down to parts per million. For the future entrepreneurs it is not. So the design job is to give every child something worth taking home. Her example is a colleague teaching the layers of the skin. He does not open with layers. He opens with why a tattoo stays in your skin, and why it fades as you get older. The white blood cells and the layers arrive after the child wants to know.

4. The sword, the bamboo and the watermelon — Chandrabhan Yadav, mathematics

Mathematics is a touchy subject, Chandrabhan says, and the expectation comes from parents as well as students. His answer to *"will I ever use this?"* is a warrior cutting bamboo and watermelons with a sword. Nobody fights a battle against a watermelon. You cut it to sharpen for the battle that comes later. The reasoning and critical thinking a student sharpens on an abstract problem is the edge they carry into the real one.

His second practice is the modelled think-aloud. He solves a problem in front of the class, gets genuinely stuck, and says so. *"I have reached here thinking this, and this is where we need to go. What do you think we should do from here?"* Brian named what that does. The teacher stops

standing at the front as the expert with all the answers, and the class stops sitting there soaking it up.

It shows that it is not magic. We do not have a magic wand that produces the thinking spontaneously and effortlessly.

Ioana's addition matters for anyone who finds this uncomfortable. Plan the lesson, then leave space to step outside the plan. When you get stuck for real, stay there and make the students part of it.

5. Let them ask first — Rashmi Gera, English language training

Rashmi trains candidates for writing, speaking and English proficiency tests. She opens a session by putting a statement on the board with no context and no brief, and saying: ask me as much as you can. The freedom to interrogate something before it has been explained is what gives learners their footing. Her measure of a good session is a ratio. Her talking time goes down, their question time goes up. She rewards the sharpest questions with sweets, and the competition for them does the rest.

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“You’ve just done trigonometry”

The strongest story in the session was Brian's, and it is an argument for relevance that no research summary can make.

He struggled with school mathematics in the United States, and lost it the moment the alphabet entered the problems. One of the last things he remembers understanding is the order for multiplying two bracketed expressions: first, inside, outside, last. It was taught as a formula to learn and use. In his experience of that school, nothing was ever applied, and nothing was explained into the real world.

He left high school and went straight into the army. Early on he was given three hours to learn one skill: take a compass, be dropped somewhere unknown, use a topographical map to identify the features around him, and use the angle on the compass to place himself on that map. He could do it, repeatedly, to about a metre of where GPS would later say he was standing. This was before any of that existed. The drill sergeant told him: *you’ve just done trigonometry*. Brian was baffled. Then the sergeant showed him the formula, and he still could not connect the two things.

Chandrabhan offered the honest counterweight, and it belongs in any staffroom conversation about relevance. Not every step ties to an application at the moment you teach it. Algebra has a rigour you cannot shortcut. Some skills must be mastered before the application is even

reachable, and some students simply love the beauty of working with unknowns. The point is not that every lesson must be justified by a use. It is that the student should be able to find out where the road goes.

The Question Transformation Card

This is the concrete takeaway from the session. Print it. Fill one row a week.

THE QUESTION TRANSFORMATION CARD

Name Wk

WORKED ROW (Brian's own rewrite, from the session)

Old question Have you completed the pre-reading for today's lesson?

New question How does the reading from last night apply to our task today?

The principle ... The check survives, but the student answers it by thinking, not by reporting.

1 Old question
 New question

 The principle

2 Old question
 New question

 The principle

3 Old question
 New question

 The principle

4 Old question
 New question

 The principle

Ask the new question this week. Write down one thing a student said that the old question would never have got out of them.



Pin this above your desk

Instead of	Ask
"Does everyone understand?"	"What part of this is still confusing for you?"
"Do you get it?"	"How would you explain this to someone who missed today?"
"What's the definition of this?"	"How would you explain this to a five-year-old?"
"Who can tell me the answer?"	"What different approaches might we take?"
"Is this correct?"	"What makes you say that?"
"Why this method?"	"How would the application change if you altered the approach?"
"Have you done the reading?"	"How does last night's reading apply to today's task?"

Three checks for a question worth asking. Run them before the question leaves your mouth.

1. Does it invite a *perspective*, or retrieve an *answer*?
2. Does it make the thinking *visible*, so you can assess where the student actually is?
3. Does it connect to something *real* the student already cares about?

This week's move

Take one question you ask every single day. Write it down exactly as you say it. Then rewrite it once, so the student holds the thinking, and use the new version on Monday. That is the whole assignment. Ioana closed the session on why it is worth doing: inquiry runs both ways, and designing a better question keeps the teacher curious too.

Inquiry is a design choice, not a talent. Rewrite one question, and the thinking moves across the room.



Three places to keep going

edodo.app/workshops/workshop-powers-of-questions

edodo.app/download/inquiry-starter-kit

edodo.app/courses

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