



INQUIRY WORKSHOP 1 · THE CURATED READING

# What Makes a Question **Powerful**?

The curated research behind student agency in an inquiry classroom.

# Why this exists

On 3 August 2026, teachers from UWC Dilijan, UWC Waterford and beyond met online for a 45-minute workshop called *The Power of Questions: Designing for Agency*. Ten minutes in, Brian Jackson dropped a PDF of curated reading into the chat and set a timer. Twenty minutes. One guided question. Every teacher came back with a rewritten question of their own. This document is that reading, tidied and kept.

The session ran on one distinction. 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. Both belong in a classroom. Only one shows you what a student is actually thinking, and that has become the harder thing to see. Brian, who coaches ethical AI integration at his school in Yaoundé, said it in the session: as AI has become part of daily student life, he sees students reading less, thinking less on their own, and relying on the answer being handed to them.

So a finished answer proves less than it used to. The question you ask decides whether a student retrieves or reasons.

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

That is the question the room worked on. The full version asked each teacher to name one or two principles from the reading, then rewrite one of their own questions using them, paying *special attention to questions that extend student thinking after a student has answered*.

Everything that follows is the evidence base: three perspectives, curated separately, one per breakout room. Socratic questioning. Classroom discourse. Inquiry-based learning. Read together they agree more than they differ, and the section *Where the three perspectives converge* pulls out what they share. A printable question bank sits at the back.

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## Perspective 1 · **Socratic** questioning

Socrates believed that disciplined, thoughtful questioning let a student examine and validate ideas. Using his approach, the instructor feigns ignorance of the topic in order to enter into dialogue with students. The move puts the student's reasoning, not the teacher's knowledge, at the centre of the room. Instructors who question this way promote independent, higher-level thinking, and give students ownership of what they are learning through discussion, debate, evaluation, and analysis of the material.

### Five tips for using Socratic questioning

- Plan significant questions that give the discussion meaning and direction.
- Draw as many students as possible into the discussion.
- Allow at least **thirty seconds** for students to respond.
- Follow up on students' responses.
- Periodically summarise in writing the key points that have been discussed.

Two of those five govern what happens *after* a student speaks. Thirty seconds of silence, then one follow-up. That is the method in miniature.

### The three types, with the source's own examples

| Type          | Ask it like this                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Clarification | "Why do you say that?" · "What do you mean by...?" · "How does this relate to our discussion?" · "What do you think is the main issue?" · "Could you expand upon that point further?"                                           |
| Assumption    | "Why would someone make this assumption?" · "What could we assume instead?" · "How can you verify or disprove that assumption?"                                                                                                 |
| Probing       | "What would be an example?" · "What do you think causes this to happen..." · "Why..." · "What other information do we need?" · "By what reasoning did you come to that conclusion?" · "Is there reason to doubt that evidence?" |

Source: UConn Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, *Socratic Questions*.

**What one teacher did with it.** Brian teaches design and coaches ethical AI integration in Yaoundé. His most frequent compliance question was *"Have you completed the pre-reading?"* He rewrote it toward the Socratic: *"How does the reading from last night apply to our task today?"* He gets the same information. The student has to think to give it.

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## Perspective 2 · The seven **talk moves**

Student discourse is the academic conversation students use to explain their thinking, ask questions, respond to classmates, and build understanding together. Productive discussion asks students to communicate ideas, use academic language, agree or disagree respectfully, and learn from more than one perspective. Educators put it bluntly: *"Those who do the talking do the learning."*

**In one classroom.** Rashmi Gera, who trains candidates for English proficiency tests, writes a statement on the board and lets the room question her before she teaches anything. *"My talking time is reduced, their question time is increased,"* she said.

When students take part in productive classroom conversation, they:

- strengthen reasoning and problem-solving skills
- develop academic language
- increase engagement and participation
- learn to respectfully consider different perspectives
- build confidence explaining their thinking

These strategies open participation to every student, not only the quickest volunteers. The seven moves below are the usable part. Keep the sentence stems — they are what you say out loud.

**1. Revoicing student ideas.** Clarifies the thinking and lets the student confirm or revise what they meant. It validates the idea while making it clearer for the class. *"So you are saying that..." · "So let me clarify..." · "Do I have this right?" · "I think I heard you say..." · "Is this what you are saying?"*

**2. Repeating ideas in students' own words.** Students listen to each other instead of waiting for their own turn, and practise restating an idea. *"Can you repeat what (name) said in your own words?" · "What is another way we could say what (name) shared?" · "Is what (name) said what you meant, or does it need clarification?"*

**3. Asking students to reason and respond.** Explaining why you agree or disagree builds stronger reasoning, and it compares approaches instead of hunting one correct answer. *"Do you agree or have a different idea? Why?" · "Were you thinking the same thing, or did you have another idea?" · "Thumbs up if you agree with (name)'s strategy." · "Thumbs sideways if you respectfully have a different strategy."*

**4. Adding on to classmates' thinking.** Learning turns collaborative when students build on each other rather than deliver isolated answers. *"Who can say something more about this?" · "Can you add more to this idea?" · "Who can explain why this strategy works?" · "What is our group considering about this idea?"*

**5. Giving wait time and think time.** Extra processing time lets more learners form an idea and prepare a reasoned response before anyone speaks. *"Take your time to think..." · "We will wait..." · "Think silently about this..." · "Hands down — time to think privately..." · "Let's ponder that thought..."*

**6. Passing the conversation to students.** Instead of teacher, student, teacher, student, ask students to respond directly to one another. Responsibility for the discussion moves across the room. *"Does anyone have something to add to my idea?" · "I wonder what others think about this strategy." · "Our group is curious whether other groups solved the problem differently."*

**7. Modelling think-alouds.** Think-alouds make invisible thinking visible, and they model academic language and reasoning before students try it alone. *"As I read this problem, I am thinking..." · "This reminds me of another problem we solved. Which one?" · "I remember (name) using a helpful strategy here. What strategy was it?"*

Source: Teacher Created Materials, *Student Discourse in the Classroom: 7 Teacher Moves That Get Kids Talking*.

**What one teacher did with it.** Chandrabhan Yadav teaches mathematics at UWC Dilijan. Move seven is the one he took. He works a problem at the board, reaches a point where he is stuck, says where his thinking has arrived, and asks the class for the next step. *"Thinking aloud makes them consciously reflect on their thinking process,"* he said. His students hear reasoning being built, not a finished formula.

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## Perspective 3 · Inquiry and the **driving question**

Inquiry-based teaching asks for a shift. The teacher stops being the deliverer of content and becomes the designer of learning experiences. The job is to hook student interest, present a compelling question, provide background or context, and help students examine sources. Once the question is on the table, students generate their own hypotheses, conduct research, and explore through hands-on work.

Student questions then lead the way, and those questions are also evidence. Educators can use them to assess where students are in their thinking and how well they understand the material. For example:

- **Maths.** "Melanie has 48 cents. What coin combinations could she have? Are there multiple solutions?"
- **Science.** "What are the potential benefits and risks of using renewable energy sources?"
- **Social studies.** "How do political cartoons reflect public opinions about immigration?"

Each one pushes past a simple answer, toward multiple sources and perspectives. Students gather evidence with all five senses, through observation, discussion and research. Younger students may need teacher-modified sources; older ones can work with complex material. All of them need time to reflect.

### The driving question

A driving question is open-ended and thought-provoking, and it gives the learning a purpose. It has no straightforward answer. It sends students out to investigate, research, and develop solutions:

- "How can we design a city that produces zero waste?" (*environmental science*)

- "How can we help our community understand why some economies grow faster than others?" (*economics*)
- "How can we create a plan to survive on Mars?" (*STEM / space science*)

When the question carries an authentic purpose and a real audience, students become active participants in the learning rather than recipients of it.

*The remarkable feature of the evidence is that the biggest effects on student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching, and when students become their own teachers.*

John Hattie (2009), quoted in the curated reading.

## The essential question

Inquiry-based learning is a student-led process that begins with students' own questions and wonderings. It is an approach built on questions, ideas, and the natural curiosity of children, and it puts student questions at the centre of the learning journey. Examples of essential questions:

- "How can we protect our oceans?"
- "What makes a great leader?"
- "How do our senses help us understand the world?"

An essential question should cover multiple curriculum outcomes and allow multiple learning paths. It should stay flexible, and it should make students curious enough to ask further questions of their own and explore them in depth.

**What two teachers did with it.** Ioana Badicioiu teaches English literature and last taught at UWC India. The essential question was what she was most glad to rediscover: one unit of hers ran on how philosophy and literature both open up transformative human experiences, including mortality. Molly Oduor teaches chemistry at UWC Waterford and took relevance. Her students ask why they are learning stoichiometry; she described a colleague who teaches the layers of the skin by starting with how a tattoo stays.

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## Where the three perspectives converge

Three source sets, written by different people for different reasons, went to three different breakout rooms. Side by side they keep landing on the same five things. These are the principles the guided question was asking for.

## 1. A question that invites a perspective beats one that retrieves an answer

Socratic questioning is built for discussion, debate, evaluation and analysis, not recall. The discourse research asks students to compare multiple approaches rather than focus on a single correct answer. A driving question is defined by not having a straightforward answer. Three sources, one requirement: leave room for more than one good response.

## 2. Silence is a working condition, not a failure

The Socratic tips say to allow at least thirty seconds for students to respond. The discourse research names wait time, or think time, as one of the most valuable strategies there is: extra time lets more learners form an idea before anyone speaks. Both treat the pause as part of the method. *"We will wait"* is a teaching move, not dead air.

## 3. The second question is where agency lives

*"Follow up on students' responses"* is a Socratic tip. Probing questions exist for exactly that moment: *"By what reasoning did you come to that conclusion?"* Four of the seven talk moves — reason and respond, add on, pass the conversation, revoice — only work once a student has spoken. The first question opens the door. The second one decides whether the student walks through it.

## 4. Visible thinking is what makes formative assessment possible

Revoicing and think-alouds exist to make invisible thinking visible. In inquiry, the questions students ask tell you where their thinking is. Ioana said it in the session: *"A question like 'do you understand' will not give us anything as teachers. We need to ask questions through which students reflect their thinking."* One question that shows you the reasoning is worth a dozen that show you the answer.

## 5. Relevance is a design decision, not a personality trait

The teacher's role in inquiry is to design experiences, hook interest, and supply context. A driving question is defined by its authentic purpose and audience. An essential question has to cover multiple outcomes and stay flexible enough for multiple paths. None of that is charisma; all of it is planning done before the lesson starts.

***"Pay special attention to questions that extend student thinking after they have given an answer — this is where agency lives."***

THE GUIDED QUESTION · EDODO INQUIRY WORKSHOP 1

# A question bank you can use tomorrow

Print this page and the next. The left column is what a question sounds like on autopilot. The right column is the same question, rebuilt so the student holds the thinking. Every pair below came out of the workshop itself.

| Compliance question                     | Inquiry rewrite                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "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's lesson?"      |
| "What is the definition of a metaphor?" | "How would you use a metaphor to explain this idea to a five-year-old?" |
| "Who can tell me the right answer?"     | "What different approaches might we take to solve this?"                |
| "Is this correct?"                      | "What makes you think this is the right approach?"                      |
| "Have you completed the pre-reading?"   | "How does the reading from last night apply to our task today?"         |

**After the answer.** Six moves, drawn from the sources above, for the thirty seconds that decide whether the thinking stops or keeps going.

| The move                 | Say this                                              |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Ask for the reasoning    | "What makes you say that?"                            |
| Ask for more             | "Can you say more about that?"                        |
| Pass it to the class     | "Who can add to this?"                                |
| Invite disagreement      | "Do you agree, or do you have a different idea? Why?" |
| Check you heard it right | "So you are saying...? Do I have this right?"         |
| Protect the silence      | "Hands down — time to think."                         |

NOW DO THE EXERCISE: ONE QUESTION, ONE REWRITE, ONE FOLLOW-UP.

ONE QUESTION I ASK EVERY DAY

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REWRITTEN SO THE STUDENT HOLDS THE THINKING

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THE FOLLOW-UP I WILL ASK AFTER THEY ANSWER

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## The sources, in full

**The workshop.** *The Power of Questions: Designing for Agency*, EDodo Inquiry Workshop 1, 3 August 2026. Facilitated by Ioana Badicioiu and Brian Jackson, with Chandrabhan Yadav, Molly Oduor and Rashmi Gera. These are the readings they worked from, cited as they appear in the pack.

### Inquiry-based learning and open-ended questioning

- American College of Education. "What is Inquiry-Based Learning?" ACE Blog. Accessed 2 Aug. 2026. <https://ace.edu/blog/what-is-inquiry-based-learning/>
- Watanabe-Crockett, Lee. "Inquiry-Based Learning, PBL, and Direct Instruction: How They Work Together." *We Grow Teachers*. Source of the John Hattie (2009) line quoted above. Accessed 2 Aug. 2026. <https://wegrowteachers.com/inquiry-based-learning-pbl-direct-instruction/>
- Learning by Inquiry. "What the Heck is the Difference Between IBL and PBL?" Accessed 2 Aug. 2026. <https://www.learningbyinquiry.com/what-the-heck-is-the-difference-between-ibl-and-pbl/>

### Socratic method and dialogic questioning

- UConn Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. "Socratic Questions." *Leading Effective Discussions*. Accessed 2 Aug. 2026. <https://cetl.uconn.edu/resources/teaching-your-course/leading-effective-discussions/socratic-questions/>

### Classroom discourse and teacher talk moves

- Teacher Created Materials. "Student Discourse in the Classroom: 7 Teacher Moves That Get Kids Talking." TCM Blog. Accessed 2 Aug. 2026. <https://www.teachercreatedmaterials.com/blog/student-discourse-in-the-classroom-7-teacher-moves-that-get-kids-talking/>

# Three places to keep going

[edodo.app/workshops/workshop-powers-of-questions](https://edodo.app/workshops/workshop-powers-of-questions)

[edodo.app/download/inquiry-starter-kit](https://edodo.app/download/inquiry-starter-kit)

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