

# Questioning – A Magical Tool to Develop 21 Century Skill

Lalitha Murthy

## ABSTRACT

*Since ancient times, questioning has been an important tool for interaction and building interpersonal skills. Questions have led to discoveries, challenge existing beliefs, and have led to new discoveries and inventions. Questioning is important to clarify, understand, and reinforce learning. However, it is extremely important in developing other skills too. Today much is talked about 21 Century skills; Learning skills, literacy skills, and life skills. With access to social media, information is at the fingertips of all. However, discerning between fact and opinion, fake and real is the job of the reader and in this, Critical thinking skills help.*

*Learning skills are Collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity. All these are interconnected and the one tool which binds them is questioning.*

*Questioning helps students to develop their thinking from the lower-order concrete and factual recall type to the higher-order analytical and evaluative which promotes deeper understanding.*

*How can teachers use this tool to help develop students' learning skills? How can we motivate students to ask questions?*

*This paper attempts to answer these questions.*

**Keywords :** Types of questions, Critical thinking, Interpersonal communication, Reflection, Bloom's taxonomy

Questioning is the oldest method of interaction with others. Whether you are a teacher, a student, an employee, or a trainer, your best means of connecting with people is by asking questions. Without questions, interpersonal communication can fail. Questions bring context and specificity to communication.

The earliest method of questioning was formulated by the Greek philosopher, Socrates.

He listed six levels in questioning:

1. Clarifying concepts. ...
2. Probing assumptions. ... why do we believe

this?

3. Probing rationale, reasons, and evidence. ... How do I know? What don't I see?
4. Questioning viewpoints and perspectives. ... who is saying it? Have we considered all aspects?
5. Probing implications and consequences. ... What else? What if this were not correct?
6. Questioning the question. ... Is this question correct and based on facts?

Why do people ask questions? It could be for

many reasons.

My friend recently shared a story. She had gone to the grocery store to buy some bread. She asked the store attendant, and he placed a loaf of bread in front of her. He then asked her, “And, what else?”. Though she had not planned to buy many things, she came back with a bag of groceries.

All of us have had similar experiences when we visit small stores. The store attendant used a question as a sales pitch.

As teachers, what else do we use questions for?

You ask questions

1. To give and ask for information- Can you tell me more about this course?
2. To clarify or understand – Can you explain the process again?
3. To assess if your students/ participants have understood – How can we solve this problem?
4. To suggest alternatives – Wouldn't it better to buy a less expensive model?
5. To encourage reflection – Why do you think he did that?
6. To maintain control of a conversation – Who is going to speak after this?
7. As a greeting/ polite conversation - How have you been?
8. To continue conversation - What happened after that?

Questions have, since times immemorial, been used to develop **communication skills**.

Teachers often use questions to ensure that



We could use Bloom's Taxonomy to develop sub-skills which in turn develop critical thinking. students are attentive and engaged, and also to assess students' understanding.

However, questioning as a tool can be used effectively to develop other **21 Century skills**, too.

Questions can be used to develop **collaboration**. In addition to group and pair work, asking open-ended questions can create an environment of discussion and collaboration.

Asking open-ended questions motivate students to share their ideas, thereby allowing active, collaborative learning to take place.

For example, after a weekend or vacation if you ask your students, “How was your weekend?”. They may just shake their heads, answer in monosyllables.

If your purpose is to give them language practice, it is better to be clear why you are asking this question. Collaboration results when questions are posed as suggestions.

You could say, “Today's speaking practice is all about your weekend. Tell me, John, how was your weekend? What did you do?”.

Skill tested	Verb applicable
Remembering	Define, identify, describe, tell, explain, recognise
Understanding	Summarise, interpret, classify, cite, compare, contrast
Applying	Use, change, complete, articulate, transfer
Analysing	Contrast, connect, devise, relate, conclude
Evaluating	Critize, defend, reframe, appraise, judge, prioritize
Creating	Design, modify, role-play, develop, collaborate, write, rewrite

It is necessary to be clear on the purpose of questioning. Your question should be clear enough for the other person not to feel threatened.

Questions encourage reflection thereby leading to **critical thinking** and **creativity**. In his book, *A more beautiful question*, Warren Berger talks of many inventions which are a result of searching for answers for questions raised. One such invention is the Polaroid camera. In the 1960s, Edwin Land's young daughter wondered why we had to wait for a picture; why we don't have it immediately. This made him wonder if it can be done at all, and how it could be done. This resulted in the invention of Polaroid camera. Warren Berger talks of many other inventions which began with a question. He says, "The initial curiosity about a particular situation/problem led to a much deeper dive into the problem in an endeavor to solve it."

Warren Berger talks of three questions which can help solve any problem. They are, WHY, WHAT IF and HOW. These three questions can help one to go through three critical stages of problem solving leading to creativity.

How can teachers benefit from/ introduce

questioning in the classroom? Most teachers after a lesson ask the students, "Any questions?". They rarely get responses to this question.

Teachers could use Bloom's Taxonomy to frame questions that develop critical thinking.

Finally, to understand questioning as a tool, we need to reflect on the following four situations. Reflective questions that we should delve upon are those which

- A teacher asks herself/himself – How can I make the lesson more interesting for the students?
- A teacher asks students - What if Shakespeare lived in modern times? What changes would he observe in society?
- A student asks himself/ herself – What have I learnt so far?
- A student asks his /her teacher – How can we conclude this from the premise given?

The last question is only possible if the first three have been addressed.

One tool I have found effective in getting students to interact in class is a technique called question storming. Instead of asking students to prepare answers for questions, the teacher could ask students to prepare, as homework, as many questions as possible on any topic covered in class. The next day these questions could be listed on the board and students asked to discuss them. The teacher could take up the questions which the students find difficult. This will help students open up.

In the words of Thomas Watson, the founder of IBM, “The ability to ask the right question is more than half the battle of finding the right answer.”

## References

- <https://www.teachthought.com/learning/what-is-blooms-taxonomy-a-definition-for-teachers/>
- <https://amorebeautifulquestion.com/>
- [https://ugs.utah.edu/learning-outcomes-assessment/\\_resources/videos/blooms-taxonomy.mp4](https://ugs.utah.edu/learning-outcomes-assessment/_resources/videos/blooms-taxonomy.mp4)
- <https://technologyforlearners.com/applying-blooms-taxonomy-to-the-classroom/>
- <https://learningcommons.ubc.ca/student-toolkits/thinking-critically/#>
- <https://globaldigitalcitizen.org/resources>
- <https://cdn.ncte.org/nctefiles/resources/books/sample/29633chap05.pdf>
- <http://www1.udel.edu/chem/white/U460/Devel-question-skills-UTx.pdf>
- [https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC\\_88.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_88.htm)

**Lalitha Murthy**, is a Business Communication consultant with over 20 years of experience. She provides customized solutions to the communication needs of employees in global organizations. She has presented at various national and international conferences. She is the co-founder of BCFAI (Business Communication facilitators association of India). Her detailed profile can be had at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/lalitha-murthy-502b6411/>

## ***Journal of Technology for ELT***

*The Journal of Technology for ELT* is an open-access research journal for teachers of English. It is published four times a year by the English Language Teachers' Association of India (**ELTAI**). It aims to promote serious discussion and sharing of experiences on the use of technological tools and resources for teaching and learning English effectively, either in an online mode or through blended learning modules. The emphasis is on application and judicious use of technology for the purpose rather than on mere descriptions of the tools and devices available for use globally.

Articles can be submitted throughout the year. They may be sent to: **indiaeltai@gmail.com** with a copy (Cc) to the editor Dr. Jaya Ramakrishnan at: **rjayaenglish@gmail.com**. For submission guidelines, visit the journal website: <https://sites.google.com/view/journal-of-technology-for-elt/home>. **There is no access or publication fee.**