Essential Questions
Using an Essential Question to Provoke, Inspire, and Engage

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Some questions as we start...

Text 37607
Message: maurio
A question from your discipline

that would provoke, inspire, or engage
A BAKER'S DOZEN:

TO HELP DETERMINE IF YOURS ARE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS
1. Is the question meaningful and purposeful?
2. Is the question open-ended? Is it one that can be revisited over time?
3. Does the question require support, rationale or justification?
4. Does the question lead students to ask other questions?
5. Does the question appeal to or trigger emotional responses?
Does the question...

6. Encourage intellectual examination and responses?

7. Center on a topic that is relevant to students? Is it of particular interest to their generation?

8. Encourage discussion and/or collaboration?

9. Ask students to consider moral or ethical issues?
Does the question...

10. Encourage discourse, discussion, debate?
11. Ask the learner to take action after examining facts and issues?
12. Encourage higher levels of cognitive processing?
13. Lead the learner to transferable ideas that cross or unite varied disciplines?

Source: thesecondprinciple.com (L.O. Wilson, 2014)
Theory and Research

• George Kuh’s Research on Student Engagement

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*The older idea of a “core” curriculum has evolved into a variety of modern forms, such as a set of required common courses or a vertically organized general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community. These programs often combine broad themes—e.g., technology and society, global interdependence—with a variety of curricular and cocurricular options for students.
Essential Questions

- These open-ended, provocative questions are designed to guide student inquiry and focus instruction for “uncovering” the important ideas of the content.
- The goal is to foster inquiry, understanding, and transfer of learning.
- To what extent does your teaching focus on the “big ideas” framed by questions that spark meaningful connections, provoke genuine inquiry and deep thought, and encourage transfer?

-Jay McTighe
Essential Questions

1. Have no simple “right” answer - they are meant to be argued
   - They yield a variety of plausible (and arguable) responses, not straightforward facts.
   - They serve as doorways into focused yet lively inquiry and research.
   - They should uncover rather than cover (up) the subject’s controversies, puzzles, and perspectives.
   - They are intended to result in conclusions drawn by the learner, not recited facts.
Essential Questions

2. Are designed to provoke and sustain student inquiry, while also focusing learning and final performance(s)

- Such questions often involve the counter-intuitive, the visceral, the whimsical, the controversial, the provocative.
- Students develop and deepen their understanding of important ideas as they explore these questions.
Essential Questions

3. Often address the conceptual or philosophical foundations of a discipline
   – They reflect the most historically important issues, problems and debates in a field of study.
   – By examining such questions, students are engaged in thinking like an expert (i.e., “doing” the subject).
Essential Questions

4. Raise other important questions
   – Thought-provoking essential questions are naturally generative.
   – They lead to other important questions within, and sometimes across, subject boundaries.
Essential Questions

5. Naturally and appropriately recur
   - The same important questions get asked and re-asked throughout one’s learning and in the history of the field.
   - The same questions are meaningful for/at different ages.
   - Over time, student responses become more sophisticated, nuanced, well-reasoned and supported as their understandings deepen.

Source: images.schoolinsites.com (Jay McTighe & Grant Wiggins, 2008)
Enter to Learn

Carroll Community College, Westminster, Maryland
When do you feel invisible?
Practical Strategies: In The Classroom

A new method for posing questions

Extension of existing assignments

Creation of new assignments

Common experience in programs
We “C U”

• Write your response to “When do you feel invisible?” on a post-it note and place it on one of the boards in the shape of the letters C or U.
• Nursing faculty have signed this pledge to C U.
• We will discuss this question in future classes and consider what it feels like to be invisible from the patient’s perspective.
Frederick Douglass was born into slavery on Maryland's Eastern Shore. He escaped at age 20 and became a leading abolitionist. Douglass was a powerful orator and influenced America, Britain, and even England. He used his platform to raise the question of who was left behind on the plantation. Douglass raised the issue of purchased freedom, a double-edged sword. He performed speeches with the words, "I appear here to declare the rights of men and a robber's hold has been taken on these limbs, these words which came to my master and me."

"I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and flogging to me."

What impresses/surprises you the most about Frederick Douglass?

How did he challenge the social invisibility and/or hyper-visibility imposed upon him?
Practical Strategies: Around Campus

• Helping students see how the EQ is woven through their entire experience - curricular and co-curricular
  – Advising, Career and Transfer Center
  – Student Life Office
  – Common spaces- white boards
Invisible People in History

Advising Center posted displays highlighting people who have made important contributions in education, but have been largely “invisible.”

1. Ynes Mexia: A Mexican American botanist, Ynes Mexia identified two new plant species and she didn’t even get to enjoy the glory.

2. Terence Tao: Born in 1975, Tao was attending high school by age 8 and completed his PhD at 21. After him, the youngest person to be awarded the rank of full-time professor at UCLA, he began working to prove the Green-Tao Theorem alongside Ben J. Green from Oxford University. In 2006 they were awarded the Fields Medal, which is widely considered the Nobel Prize of Mathematics. Tao became the youngest recipient. In the following years, Tao and Green have solved several problems, including the Erdős discrepancy problem, Dirac-Motzkin conjecture, and Diophantine approximation. In 2011, Tao also contributed to the study of Erdős' discrepancy problem and later proved that every self-avoiding path on a grid of at most five points, his other awards include the Fields Medal, and the Mathematics prize in 2005.
Student Life Office

When Do You Feel Invisible?
Common Spaces

Promoted on Social Media

The essential question of the semester...
Some Student Responses

When do you feel invisible?
When I don't see images of people who I look like me, + when my history is ignored too!
Never
but sometimes!
When someone asks what my husband does for a living (I have a wife), I don't see time.
I want to be invisible
When students are on their phones during presentations in the classroom.
Every day 24-7
Practical Strategies: Professional Development

Humans are neuro-biologically hard-wired to make connections

Some learning and sharing was spontaneous; other activities were more structured
Making Connections

“Diversity is about creating magic—finding those who have disappeared and helping them re-appear.”

-Maura J. Cullen
Adopted Identity Activity

Visual representations
Syllabi - readings and viewpoints
Leadership and power structures
Places on campus
Welcomed or excluded?


I feel invisible when I'm with my family.
Lessons Learned/Next Steps

• Professional Development around how to incorporate the EQ
• Selection Process
• Semester-long or year-long?

“We make our world significant by the courage of our questions and the depth of our answers”
— Carl Sagan
Before I Die is a global art project that invites people to contemplate death and reflect on their lives. Originally created by the artist Candy Chang on an abandoned house in New Orleans after she lost someone she loved, today there are over 2,000 walls around the world.
What is your EQ?

What is an essential question you are considering?

- Text MAURIO to 37607 once to join, then text your message

- “What is it about small business ownership that appeals to you and your lifestyle choices?”
  1 day ago

- “What motivates you to Lawson something?”
  1 day ago

- “What is the value of realizing that you are wrong?”
  1 day ago

- “To what degree is effective advising relational vs. transactional?”
  1 day ago

- “What are the legal challenges owning/operating a gun store in your state?”
  1 day ago

- “What could keep you from being successful at TCC today?”
  1 day ago

- “What is the value of good rapport with a client. Focus on VALUE.”
  1 day ago

- “How can we inspire each other to care more about the whole student?”

- “What makes you who you are?”
  1 day ago

- “What did I learn today?”
  1 day ago

- “A”
  About 21 hours ago
What is your EQ?

What is an essential question you are considering?

- Text MAURIO to 37607 once to join, then text your message

- “What could keep you from being successful at TCC today?”
  1 day ago

- “What is the value of good rapport with a client. Focus on VALUE.”
  1 day ago

- “How can we inspire each other to care more about the whole student?”
  1 day ago

- “What makes you who you are?”
  1 day ago

- “What is the value of understanding unintended words that can cause harm to others?”
  1 day ago

- “What does hunger look like to you?”
  1 day ago

- “What would you do if you were not afraid?”
  1 day ago

- “To what extent may I be of value to you today?”
  1 day ago
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