

Questioning – Fundamental Competence for the 21st Century

With the advent of the 21st Century, scholars, politicians, scientists, educators, entrepreneurs, religious leaders, and parents have looked at the increasing rapidity of change and the complexity of the modern world, and wondered what capabilities are necessary to embrace the challenges that face us. The P21 Partnership cites four basic “C” skills: creativity and innovation; critical thinking and problem-solving; communication; and, collaboration (P21, 2017). But what does it mean to be creative and to think critically? How can one best communicate and collaborate? Developing the “4 Cs” relies on another attribute – curiosity. And the hallmark of curiosity is the ability to formulate good questions (Minigan, 2017). As Jonas Salk commented: “What people think of as the moment of discovery is really discovery of the question”(Salk, 2012).

“Socrates was the first, in the western culture, to bring to prominence “the question” as the central device to use in our quest for knowledge” (Benson, 2011: 184). He sought to stimulate critical thinking by drawing out ideas and underlying assumptions. In an equally ancient tradition in eastern philosophies, questioning is a core principle that survives to this day. Here Buddhist monks engage in both asking and answering questions to investigate complex issues (Vale, R.D, 2015).

As noted by Joichi Ito, Director of the MIT Media Lab, in a world where things change all the time an individual must be curious and ask questions. Ito advocates a shift in education from the teacher asking the questions to the learner doing the questioning (Ito, J., 2017). This idea is transformative in an educational system that is generally based on content knowledge standards and observable objectives, where knowledge is transmitted from teacher to learner, and outcomes are pre-determined. Finding solutions to 21st Century challenges requires the ability to articulate the questions that may have complicated and varied answers.

This workshop proposes to engage participants in a lively exercise of *asking* questions. A brief introduction reviews various question type taxonomies from the Socratic tradition, education, law, and business, and looks at strategies employed for stimulating the generation of questions. Participants will then choose an issue from among the Conference themes and work in small, diverse groups to generate questions aimed at initiating creative proposals. A comparison of the sets of questions created by each group rounds out the workshop.

References

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