

Facilitator Facilitatee: 45 Questions to Push Pair Thinking Deeper

"Facilitator Facilitatee" hands over to the children the job of pushing past opinions and initial reasons to make their partner think more deeply. There are two versions of the activity: a Powerpoint for use by groups sitting down, or a PDF of printable cards for use in a "Cocktail Party" activity if you have space to mill about. The PDF is attached, and the PPT can be viewed at:

www.thephilosophyman.com/facilitator-facilitatee

Each slide or card features one of 39 different red questions for the "facilitatee" in each pair to answer. The black questions, which are the same every time, are for use by the facilitator in each pair to push the thinking deeper. The facilitator can only use the black questions and cannot put in his or her own ideas.

Can a tune (no words) mean something?

Can you tell me more?

Can you say why?

So... [repeat the question]?

Can you give me an example?

How do you mean?

Why is that important?

In the Powerpoint version, all the pairs in the class can work from the same slide, and you can then advance to the next slide so that facilitator and facilitatee can swap roles.

If you chop up the cards in the PDF to run a cocktail party, everyone picks up a card and then mills around the empty space to find a partner. One in each pair asks their partner the red question, and then facilitates their thinking using the black questions.

Then they swap roles and use the other red question in their pair. Once each has had a turn as facilitator, they swap cards and find new partners. That way, people will tend to get to experience the same question twice, once as facilitator and once as facilitatee.

Tom ran the powerpoint version of this with Year 5, and we have run the Cocktail Party version with teachers, and it has been very successful.

Inflexive Facilitation

The black "contentless" questions were culled/developed from a recent training exchange Tom and I had with www.philosophy-foundation.org They train and place philosophy graduates in schools for regular visits, rather like the residencies Tom does. They also provide excellent free resources, and the books, especially "The If Machine" and "The If Odyssey" are good investments.

These questions got me thinking about how similar good facilitation is to other practices, such as coaching and counselling, in which the aim is to draw thinking out through skilful, non-leading questions, rather than for the facilitator to impose a view. I'm using the term "inflexive" for this sort of facilitation, which turns the thinking back in upon itself. It is closely connected to good listening and a shift in power from teacher to pupils, and fits with the "Take A Back Seat" principle of Philosophy Circles.

The tricky thing in a classroom situation is that this sort of probing keeps the focus on one child, which has a cost in terms of how many people get to talk, and so getting the children to do more of the facilitation themselves in pairs may be a way to get maximise depth and participation at the same time.

Facilitator **Facilitatee**



Are you more free if you are locked in a room, or if you never want to leave it?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

If you were charged by the last rhino on earth, would it be OK to shoot it?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Is it better to spend money on jailing criminals, or on compensating victims?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Why do we do the right thing when nobody is watching?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Do tigers have a right not to go extinct?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Is it ever wrong to forgive someone?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Can a bad person be a good leader?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

How do you know what to believe?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

How much is it fair to expect the rich to help the poor?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Is meaning what I meant to say, or what you understood?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

What would a computer have to be able to do to deserve to a vote in elections?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Is maths invented or discovered?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

When should ideas belong to everybody?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

When is copying a good thing?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Is art useful?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Can a tune (no words) mean something?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Should teachers ever lie?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Should the families of people who have done bad things be loyal to them?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Is it worse to kick a ball at a window twice and break it, or four times and not break it?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Is there anything that cannot be communicated by text message?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Can an adult now be blamed for things they did twenty years ago?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

When is a risk worth taking?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Can everything in one language be translated to another?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Can you be poor but deserve to be rich, or vice versa?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

What do children owe to their parents?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

When do you stop being a child?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

When are you old?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

How would a perfectly reasonable person make decisions?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

When should everyone say thank you? When is it nice to say thank you, but OK not to?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

If you change the rules, is it still the same game?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Could you have a language that only had one speaker?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

What makes something beautiful?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Should victims of crime be allowed to choose the punishment?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Does everything have a cause?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Is the future longer than the past?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

When should you refuse to follow orders?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

What makes a painting valuable?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

How important are appearances?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

Should there be a limit on what someone can own?

Can you tell me more?
Can you say why?
So... [repeat the question]?
Can you give me an example?
How do you mean?
Why is that important?

This resource aims to promote deeper discussion and develop facilitation skills in paired work.

One person in each pair, the "facilitatee" tries to answer the red question; the other, the facilitator, limits what they say to using the black questions to push the facilitatee's thinking deeper.

You can either display a single slide to the whole class, or run a Philosophers' Cocktail Party. Print them off card-sized, mill about, pair up, one person asks the other a red question and uses the black questions to push their partner's thinking deeper. Then they change roles, and finally they swap cards and head off to start a new discussion with a new partner, so that each person gets to facilitate and be facilitated on a question.

Resource by Jason Buckley and Tom Bigglestone of www.thephilosophyman.com

with thanks to Peter Worley of www.philosophy-foundation.org
for provoking thinking about
"contentless questions" facilitation