

## Inquiry – Theory to Practice HANDOUT

# What's in a Question?

## Understanding the Types of Questions I'm Asking

### Asking Questions

The goal of inquiry is to have the questions reside with the learner (Marek & Cavallo, 1997).

"The ability to think—to be a lifelong seeker and integrator of new knowledge—is based on the ability to ask and consider important questions." (Richetti & Sheerin, 1999)

### Why Ask Questions?

Questions allow us to:

- ... access information
- ... analyze information
- ... draw sound conclusions

Good questions stimulate thinking and creativity

## Types of Questions

### *Closed Questions*

...have a limited number of acceptable responses or "right answers"

### *Open Questions*

... those that can be explored further

### **Closed Questions**

- Fact-based.
- Based on previously-learned or presumed information.
- Often require only a "yes" or "no" answer.

**Advantages:** Quick; require little time investment; knowledge/skills check.

**Disadvantages:** Incomplete responses; can inhibit learner participation; can result in misleading assumptions/ conclusions; discourages further exploration; discourages discussion/ interaction.



## Open Questions

- Do not have a single “right” answer.
- Designed to encourage a full, meaningful answer using the subject's own knowledge and/ or feelings.

**Advantages:** Stimulate and challenge learner thinking; encourage ideas; solicit additional information from the inquirer; less threatening to learners; help develop trust and reciprocity in learning process; promote discussion and interaction.

**Disadvantages:** Can be time-consuming; may result in unnecessary information.



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## How Do I Know if My Questions are Open or Closed?

### Check your vocabulary:

*Questions/Prompts* that begin with **who**, **what**, **when**, **where**, and **name**, and sometimes **how** and **why** tend to be closed questions.

*Questions/Prompts* that use the terms **discuss**, **interpret**, **explain**, **evaluate**, **compare**, **if**, or **what if**, are indicative of questions that can be explored further.

**“...and listen to the Sounds of Silence.”** - Paul Simon

**Misconception:** The more questions I ask, the more curious the learners will be.

**Truth:** The more questions an educator asks, the fewer learners ask.

**Misconception:** If learners don't respond immediately, ask another question. Avoid that uncomfortable silence.

**Truth:** Wait time is important. Learner confidence increases; the number of questions learners ask increases.

