

#Q.1.b Essential Questions, clarified

Essential Question

1. **Asked to be explored, argued, continually rethought**
2. **There are various plausible answers; all answers raise new questions**
3. **Crafted to provoke thought, to cause students to dig deeper and engaged in sustain inquiry**
4. **A genuine, not a “teacherly” question - a question that real people seriously ask, either in their work or in their lives**
 - What’s the pattern here?
 - Why write?
 - How healthy are we? By what criteria?

Leading Question

1. Asked to point to a specific, unproblematic answer - more rhetorical than genuine
2. Is meant more to prompt recall or point to a fact than to begin a sustained inquiry
3. A question more likely to be asked by a teacher framing a lesson than a curious student or person out in the world
 - What is a linear equation?
 - What is the writing process?
 - Which foods are part of a healthy diet?

NOTES:

1. Many essential questions are open-ended, but not all open-ended questions are essential. The question: What is your opinion about the war in Iraq? is open-ended, but does not meet most of the criteria for “essential questions.”
2. Some essential questions are phrased as if they were yes/no but in effect meet the criteria of “essential questions” - e.g. Is biology destiny? Is there a God? **THE FORMAT OF THE QUESTION IS NOT AN INFALLIBLE INDICATOR** of the question’s purpose!
3. It is the *purpose* of the question that matters, not its phrasing. The intent is revealed by how the question is pursued (or not) in the activities and assessments that determines what kind of question it is.
4. Some essential questions are “guiding” – initially “open” to many plausible interpretations and answers, but they *eventually* end in an understanding. Many essential questions in the sciences fit this description: What are things made of? Where does the water go?, What’s the pattern here? etc.)