



CREATING QUESTIONS FOR CHANGE

by Crystal Polski, Teach with Africa Fellow



The following resource details the framework presented by Crystal Polski, on the Creating Questions for Change seminar aimed at training teachers to encourage active questioning and critical thinking in the classroom. This exercise encourages learners to ask deep questions of texts. The Creating Questions for Change uses a process approach to teach critical thinking and collaboration among learners. The lesson is as follows:

At the beginning of a lesson the facilitator/ teacher divides the class into groups and within each group, learners are assigned specific roles as discussed below.

Facilitator - The facilitator ensures that the instructions are followed and adhered to by the group, and all discussions are kept on track and relevant to the task at hand.

Recorder - Writes down *verbatim* the suggestions of group members to ensure that everyone's ideas and thoughts regarding the topic are recorded.

Timekeeper - To manage the time allocated to the task so that the task is completed timelyously.

Community Builder - To ensure that everyone within the group could voice their views and opinions. The community builder ensures that all members have a chance for equal contribution to tasks, group discussions and written tasks.

Presenter - Reports in the plenary session on the discussions of the group.

Once these roles and been assigned and understood by the learners, the lesson begins. The aim of this is to generate questions based on an image and quotation (see below). This exercise encourages learners to ask as many questions as possible based on their own interpretation and reaction to the image.



Question
Formulation
Technique: Q-Focus

Source:

Ramsgate, Marcus. (26 June 2019). "Decolonise the curriculum for global relevance". *Mail and Guardian*.

"We must, if we hope to teach for global relevance, decolonise knowledge to enable students to progress from the known to the unknown".

Above image quotation: **We must if we hope to teach global relevance, decolonise knowledge to enable students to progress from the known to the unknown"**

Observations of the task

Pros and Cons

These following pros and cons were raised by the workshop participants:

- Participants may find it difficult to formulate questions because there isn't enough content provided and they are unsure of the answers they are looking for. When individuals know the answers, they can formulate meaningful questions and sieve out unnecessary information.
- This observation may seem like a con on the surface, this observation has the potential to be beneficial to a student as it will stretch their creative and critical thinking.
- It is far easier to generate questions on topics that groups are familiar with, hence text selection is crucial.
- Something that can up in all workshops is learning to work effectively within time constraints.

Reasons for doing this exercise:

This exercise is a great way to get students interested in different topics around any given subject and it works well, especially with topics they may not usually engage on. Content knowledge aids in asking relevant questions, the purpose of the task is to ask as many questions as possible to encourage critical thinking without providing too much facts or information.

This exercise generates good responses and catches the interest and attention of students and this is clearly something that works because the participants were immediately engaged.

Closed-ended vs. open-ended:

This activity demonstrates high interchangeability between open-ended and closed-ended questions. When students are first developing questions, they may be closed rather than open. But this practice is to enable them to develop open-ended questions.

Participants need to be able to answer or formulate closed-ended questions but the skill they desperately need is to develop the art of asking complex open-ended questions. The task requires students to generate complex open-ended questions which are a vital skill to acquire, especially in the era of 4IR.

Why is it important for them to prioritise questions?

Enabling students to think big and ask as many questions as possible, is a process that consolidates and narrows in essential questions that can be expanded on even further into different topics and even possible lessons.

Formulating groups removes the teacher as the information provider and gives the students a chance to think share, then present their findings, this still allows each individual voice to be heard.

Takeaways from the activity?

It encourages new ways of thinking about a subject.

One key aspect to remember with this is that the art of teaching the asking of questions is a process and that to teach children to ask deep, insightful questions will not occur overnight but will develop over time

Part of the technique as a teacher is to allow students to take ownership of the questions and become more invested in developing them.

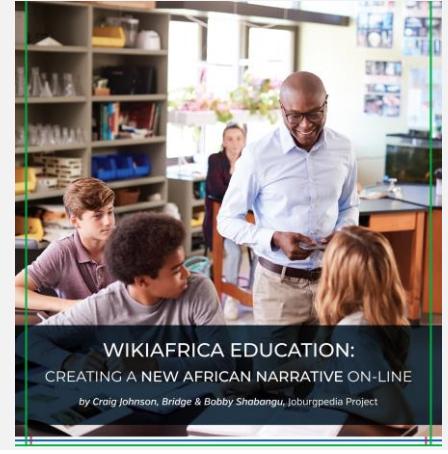
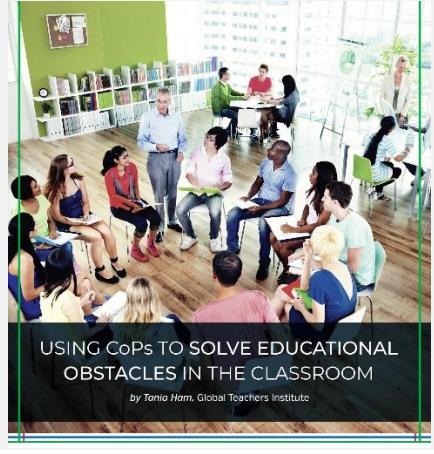
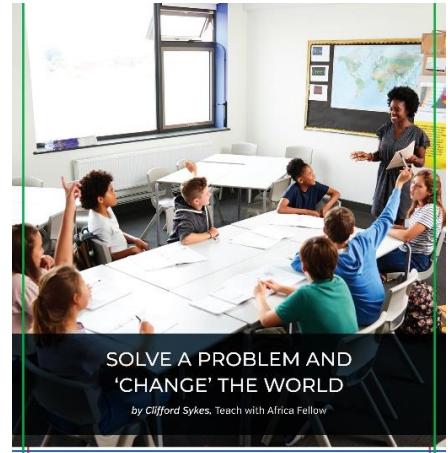
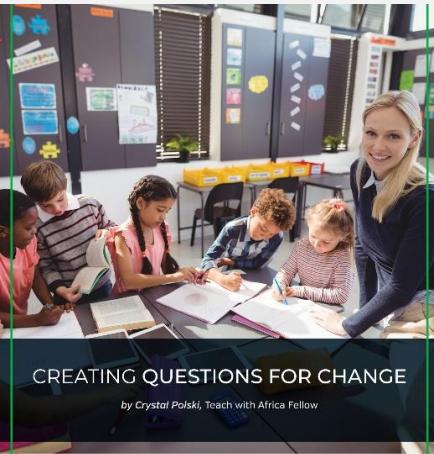
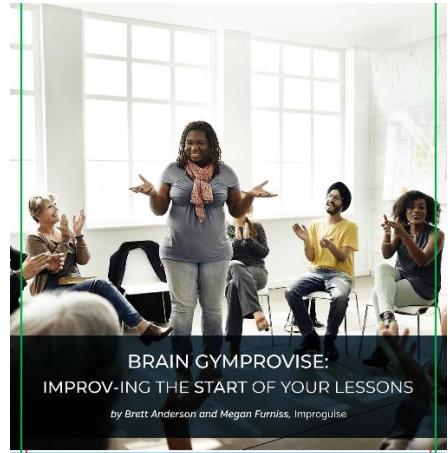
You can use this technique in all subject areas

One of the benefits of Creating Questions for Change is that the activity is highly transferable across all subject areas and this makes this a great option for teaching students the benefits of collaboration and knowledge generation through asking deep open-ended questions.

How can you use this in your own classroom context?

In order to make this effective you need to create and sustain a learning environment/atmosphere that students feel it is safe to ask questions.

Allocation of duties within your groups allows students to participate and have a voice and will greatly benefit the confidence in their own abilities.



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PRESENTER



Crystal Polski

Crystal Polski is an award-winning social studies teacher and instructional coach with a passion for cultivating collective efficacy in teachers.

She loves supporting teachers to engage students in new ways. In her 14 year career she has taught in Minnesota, Massachusetts, Japan, and Finland. She is 2019's TWA Fellow.

PRODUCER



Gino Garach

'I have an undergraduate degree in neuropsychology and international relations, an honours in International Relations and I am currently completing my Masters in

International Political Science from the University of the Witwatersrand. Even though we're still in the training phase of this experience, I'm being exposed to many learning processes. I cannot wait to be a social change agent and change the streams of South African education.'

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