

## **Inquiry Method**

In collaborative learning groups, the method of instruction used by the teacher/tutor is inquiry. Compared to didactic instruction and coaching, inquiry differs from its counterparts in one unique and very critical way: it immediately engages students with their own thinking processes.

In other words, it teaches students to think for themselves instead of chasing the Right Answer. What then results from such a precarious modus operandi, especially with students as young as eleven or twelve years old? Student ownership for enlarged understanding of concepts and values. So when Socrates in the Platonic dialogue says,

Let us examine this question together,  
my friend, and if you can contradict  
anything that I say, do so, and I shall  
be persuaded.

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He captures the essence of inquiry as an instructional method. Specifically illustrated by Socrates' statement are several points:

1. Participants begin the learning group with questions.
2. Participants engage in all levels of critical thinking, from recall of knowledge to evaluation.
3. Participants pursue understanding with mutual respect and civility, mindful of each other's dignity.
4. Participants are willing to be persuaded by arguments/evidence more powerful than their own and to change their minds in light of fresh insights.

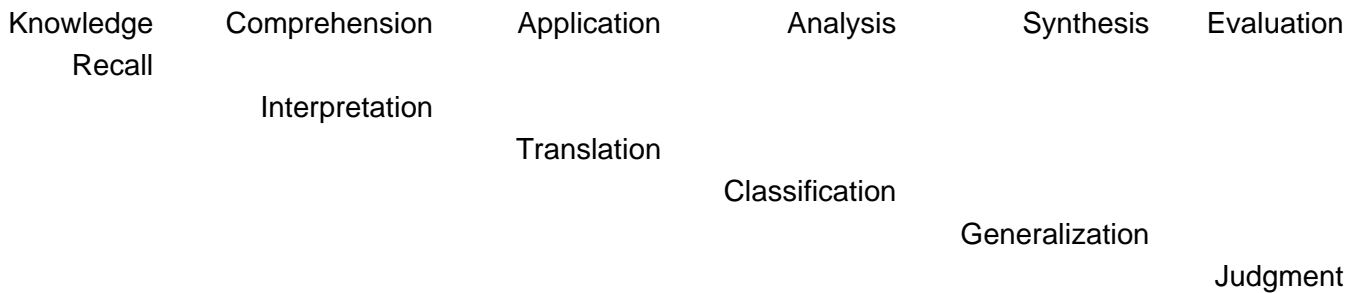
### Description

For students in collaborative learning groups, the text for inquiry may come from ideas/notes in their learning logs or materials from their subject area classes. Thus, students should be encouraged to come to the group with questions already formulated. Guided by the teacher/tutor, students

exchange responses and collaborate in a search for understanding. Verification of the questions raised and responses given comes by returning to the text. The success of the group rests on the belief that the group can arrive together at some understanding that would not be arrived at independently.

Process

Once the group session begins, the ensuing interaction should sound like conversations moved along by a series of, "How can...", "What do you mean by...", "Why does...", "I don't see the connection between...", and so on. There are several questioning strategies teachers/tutors can use to lead their groups. Two highly recommended methods outlined below are based on work in cognitive functions by Benjamin Bloom and Arthur Costa, respectively. Using Bloom's hierarchy of cognitive skills, teacher/tutors can ask questions that follow along a continuum.<sup>1</sup>



A second way to craft questions applies Costa's model of intellectual functioning in three levels.<sup>2</sup> Level one questions focus on gathering and recalling information; level two, on making sense of gathered information; and level three, on applying and evaluating information. Examples of the types of behaviors that solicit questions using Costa's levels appear below.

Level One:

<p><b>Defining</b>  <b>Describing</b>  <b>Identifying</b>  <b>Listing</b>  <b>Naming</b>  <b>Observing</b>  <b>Reciting</b>  <b>Scanning</b></p>	<p>What is the definition of "lunar eclipse?" (definition)</p> <p>Which states seceded from the Union to form the Confederacy? (identifying)</p> <p>How can we express the equation <math>2x(4 - 5y) = 3y = 26</math> in three ways? (list)</p> <p>How does "The Road Not Taken" (Frost) begin? (recitation)</p>
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Level Two

<p><b>Analyzing</b>  <b>Comparing</b>  <b>Contrasting</b>  <b>Grouping</b></p>	<p>In <u>Native Son</u>, how does the Bigger Thomas' violence against his gang members reveal a deeply rooted insecurity and fear of people? (analysis)</p> <p>In "The Bet" (Chekov), how do the lawyer and the banker differ in the attitudes towards capital punishment? (contrast)</p>
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<b><u>Level Three</u></b>	<b>Inferring Sequencing Synthesizing</b>	If the moon is full Aug 17, July 18, and June 19, when will it be full in April? (inference)  How does the term “manifest destiny” capture the essence of western expansion in the United States? (synthesis)
	<b>Applying a principle Evaluating Hypothesizing Imagining Judging Predicting Speculating</b>	Using the principle of communication property, how can we find out the number of apple trees in an orchard having 15 rows, 5 trees each? (applications)  Which of the characters in <u>Great Expectations</u> suffered the most? (judgment)  In <u>Catcher in the Rye</u> , how might Phoebe, years later, describe Holden to her children? (speculation)

The importance of inquiry method cannot be overstated. Skillful questioning by teachers and tutors empowers students to have mastery of their own learning. The converse, giving answers, breeds dependence on the teacher or tutor and is, therefore, detrimental to the students.

<sup>1</sup>Benjamin S. Bloom, Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Handbook I: Cognitive Domain (New York: David McKay, Inc., 1956)

<sup>2</sup>Arthur L. Costa, Developing Minds: A Resource Book for Teaching Thinking (Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1985), 125-137.