A fertile question

The pedagogical model of a Community of Thinking places the question at the centre of teaching and learning. It deflects teaching from its focus on a “correct answer” to a focus on “a fertile question.” The first stage of teaching and learning in a Community of Thinking is to find or to invent a fertile question. A fertile question has six basic characteristics:

(a) **An open question**: a question that in principle does not have one definite answer, but actually several answers different from and even contradictory to each other.

(b) **An undermining question**: A question that undermines the basic assumptions and fixed beliefs of the learners; one that casts doubt on the “self-evident,” on “common sense;” uncovers basic conflicts lacking a simple solution, and requires thinking about the roots of things.

(c) **A rich question**: A question that requires grappling with rich content indispensable to understanding man and the world; that is impossible to answer without careful and lengthy research; that tends to break up into sub-questions.

(d) **A connected question**: A question relevant to the life of the learners, to the society in which they live, and to the discipline and subject within which it was asked.

(e) **A charged question**: A question having an ethical dimension. Such questions have a strong emotional and ethical charge able to motivate learning and inquiry.

(f) **A practical question**: A question that can be developed into a research question; a question about which information is available to students.

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