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Socratic questions

From “Teaching Thinking” by Robert Fisher (2nd Ed 2003)

“Research suggests that teachers should in general ask fewer but better questions. What are these ‘better questions’? There are no fixed set of questions that are Socratic, but below is a summary list of questions that are open, Socratic and act as invitations to better thinking.”

Questions that seek clarification	
Can you explain that...?”	<i>Explaining</i>
“What do you mean by...”?	<i>Defining</i>
“Can you give me an example of...”?	<i>Giving examples</i>
“How does that help...”?	<i>Supporting</i>
“Does anyone have a question to ask...”?	<i>Enquiring</i>
Questions that probe reasons and evidence	
“Why do you think that...”?	<i>Forming an argument</i>
“How do we know that...”?	<i>Assumptions</i>
“What are your reasons...”?	<i>Reasons</i>
“Do you have evidence...”?	<i>Evidence</i>
“Can you give me an example/ counter-example...”?	<i>Counter examples</i>
Question that explore alternative views	
“Can you put it another way...”?	<i>Re-stating a view</i>
“Is there another point of view...”?	<i>Speculation</i>
“What if someone were to suggest that...”?	<i>Alternative views</i>
“What would someone who disagreed with you say”?	<i>Counter argument</i>
“What’s the difference between those views/ ideas”?	<i>Distinctions</i>
Questions that test implications and consequences	
“What follows from what you say...”?	<i>Implications</i>
“Does it agree with what was said earlier...”?	<i>Consistency</i>
“What would be the consequences of...”?	<i>Consequences</i>
“Is there a general rule for that..”?	<i>Generalising rules</i>
“How could you test to see if it was true...”?	<i>Testing for truth</i>
Questions about the question/ discussion	
“Do you have a question about that...”?	<i>Questioning</i>
“What kind of question is that...”?	<i>Analysing</i>
“How does what was said/ the question help us...”?	<i>Connecting</i>
“What have we got so far/ can we summarise..”?	<i>Summarising</i>
“Are we any closer to answering the question...”?	<i>Concluding</i>

Robert Fisher’s work is part of the Philosophy for Children movement, but it applies equally to adult learning.