



Using Essential Questions to Guide a DFC Project

The International Baccalaureate's Primary Years Program (PYP) uses the following concepts to help guide students when considering what they know about what they know: *form, function causation, change, connection, perspective, responsibility, and reflection*. These concepts are also helpful anchors to use when constructing essential questions.

Constructing questions like these with the students can give them a framework from which to work and provide the context for purposeful action and reflection along the way.

Form:

- What are the qualities/characteristics of the problem we want to solve?

Function:

- What about the way it functions is useful and not useful? How will our action affect that functionality?

Causation:

- Why is it this way, how did it get this way? Who does it impact and how?

Change:

- How has it changed, is it still changing? From what to what?

Connection:

- How does it relate to other things we know- how is it the same or different than other issues/problems we know?

Perspective:

- What are other ways of looking at it? What are alternative perspectives on the issue?

Responsibility:

- What is our responsibility to the situation and the people impacted?

Reflection:

- What are the effects of the changes we make? What other steps can or should be taken?
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One 5th grade class began the school year with a unit called *Leader's and Change Makers- being Ambassadors of Action*. The Enduring understanding was presented by the teacher, as were the initial Essential Questions. These were used to guide the initial research of the unit that lead to the students' authoring essential questions for their service project:

Enduring Understanding: As Ambassadors of Action, we demonstrate appreciation and gratitude by reaching out to the greater community to impact positive change. We drive our own learning and model what it means to "Take Action" in our classroom.

Essential Questions:

- What makes a leader? (*Form*)
- How do leaders impact their community? (*Function*)
- What inspires leaders to take action? (*Causation, Connection*)
- How is our role in our community the same or different from those in other communities or people in the past? (*Change, Perspective*)
- What is our responsibility and our contribution to our greater community? (*Responsibility*)
- What information do we need to decide what action is important to take? (*Connection, Perspective*)
- How will we work together and cooperate to create, grow and implement effective change? (*Function, Responsibility*)
- How will we know we've succeeded? (*Reflection*)

Essential Questions for a 4th grade Animal Adoption project

Below are examples of Essential Questions from a 4th grade project with the follow up reflections, "Answers", that the students generated after the project was completed.

Form:

- Q. How are homeless animals cared for in our community?
- A. We learned that homeless shelters and adoption agencies keep animals for a limited time and when they euthanize them- we learned the older animals are the most at risk.

Function:

- Q. How do the agencies find homes for these animals?
- A. We learned that they post advertisements on their websites.

Causation:

- Q. How do the agencies find homes for these animals?
- A. Why is it this way, how did it get this way? Who does it impact and how?
They are understaffed and cannot get the word out like they would like.
Because the younger animals are the first to be adopted, it is the older animals that are scheduled to be euthanized most often.

Connection:

- Q. How does this relate to other things we know?
- A. We know that we love animal stories and connect when we understand a personal story. We decided to write individual bios on the oldest homeless animals at our community shelters to encourage people to choose an older animal to adopt.

Responsibility:

- Q. What is our responsibility to the animals who depend on our care?
- A. We realized that, just as we are responsible as members of our ecological community, our domestic animals depend on us to respect and be sure they are cared for.

Reflection:

- A. What are the effects of the changes we make? What other steps can or should be taken?
- Q. We tried to track our ads to see if we were successful. We realized that we had not but a follow up plan together that allowed us to keep track of the pets we had chosen to find homes for. We decided that a future project should have a communication plan in place to be sure that we can track our progress.