

HANDOUT: CLARIFYING AND PROBING QUESTIONS

Name: _____

“Asking a good question can be valuable in and of itself, irrespective of the answer. It communicates your respect for the other person.”

- Adapted from the Iowa Peace Institute Message

Clarifying Questions are simple questions of fact. They clarify the dilemma and provide the nuts and bolts so that the participants can ask good probing questions and provide useful feedback.

Examples of Clarifying Questions:

- Is this what you said...?
- What resources were used for the project?
- Did I hear you say...?
- Did I understand you when you said...?
- What criteria did you use to...?
- What’s another way you might...?
- Did I hear you correctly when you said...?
- Did I paraphrase what you said correctly?

Probing Questions are intended to help the presenter think more deeply about the issue at hand.

Examples of Probing Questions:

- Why do you think this is the case?
- What do you think would happen if...?
- What sort of impact do you think...?
- How did you decide...?
- How did you determine...?
- How did you conclude...?
- What is the connection between... and...?
- What if the opposite were true? Then what?

Using both clarifying and probing questions facilitates effective deliberation. It is helpful for the teacher to model using these types of questions since students may not have experience with them.

Optional Practice Activity: Form two lines (A and B) of students facing each other so that everyone has another person standing directly across from her/him to partner with. Make a statement such as: *Cell phones are better than land phones*. Allow a short amount of time for the student pairs to “huddle” and come up with one related clarifying question and one related probing question. Pick one of the pairs to share their questions. If their questions were truly clarifying and probing in nature, congratulate them and allow them to return to their seats. If they were not, recognize that more practice is needed and have them remain in the line. Proceed in this way, offering additional statements to which clarifying and probing questions can be formed, until all (pairs of) students are successfully returned to their seats.