**The Case of a Revised Question**

Members of an 8th grade social studies team collaboratively drafted the following question for use in a discussion at the culmination of a unit on ancient Athens: *Based on your knowledge of Athenian democracy, would implementing a direct democracy in our local government improve the quality of life?* This question focused on the content standard and related to the students' community. Good start. Of course, most readers will immediately notice that this is a yes-or-no question and add the follow-up "Why?" or "Provide reasons for your response."

On second look, however, team members began to question the potential of their question to engage students emotionally or cognitively. They decided that even though the question asked students to relate ancient history to the 21st century, they were unlikely to connect to it personally or to vest much emotional energy in the proposed discussion. Further, they determined that the cognitive demand of the question was relatively weak; it was lacking in academic vocabulary, including a strong thinking verb. After considerable reflection, the team modified the question. They decided to give the question to students several days in advance of the discussion to provide time for research and thinking. They also informed students that they would end the discussion with a vote to determine what the majority of students thought after exploring the issue together. This is their revision:

*Imagine that our state legislature offered our local municipality the opportunity to operate as a direct democracy similar to that of ancient Athens.*

* *Speculate as to the relative benefits and disadvantages of such a political structure for your and your family's quality of life—and for that of the community at large.*
* *Suggest how you might modify the system to make it more just.*
* *Support your ideas with cause-and-effect reasoning, specific examples, historical evidence, and other relevant information.*

Team members believe that their revised question has much greater potential for engaging students in a vibrant and productive discussion than did the original. The teachers hope students will be more vested in thinking about the question, given its stipulation that they consider personal and community impacts. Further, the teachers believe that having time in advance to gather information and think critically will enable students to collect evidence for their points of view. Perhaps, most important, the team feels that their revised question represents a more demanding cognitive task that requires students to speculate and support those speculations with evidence and reasoning. In fact, they conclude that this question will afford students practice in the type of thinking associated with good citizenship in our "democratic" society.

Walsh, Jackie A., and Beth D. Sattes. *Questioning for Classroom Discussion: Purposeful Speaking, Engaged Listening, Deep Thinking*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print. – Page: 19-20