



## The TLT Group

Teaching, Learning, and Technology  
A Non-Profit Corporation

### **WORKSHEET: *Fundamental Questions***

*Laying the Foundation for Improving Teaching and Learning with Technology;  
Setting Priorities and Selecting "Dangerous Discussions" Issues  
[Revised 10/27/98, 6/19/2005 – Steven W. Gilbert, President, The TLT Group]*

*For Web version of this worksheet and related resources, see:*

**[www.tltgroup.org/fundamentalquestions.htm](http://www.tltgroup.org/fundamentalquestions.htm)**

### **Introduction and Background**

Since 1994, the Fundamental Questions have been providing the most frequently used and powerful activity within the TLT Roundtable Program.

#### **Shared Goals and Significant Differences**

These questions help members of a group to identify their most important shared goals and any significant differences in their hopes and fears. The activity usually demonstrates a reassuring convergence of underlying values. That convergence can provide a good foundation for further discussion and the work of a TLT Roundtable or other group. Alternatively, the results may indicate significant disagreement on fundamental issues; if so, it is important for the group members to know about these differences sooner rather than later.

#### **Transform vs. Preserve**

One of the greatest challenges in any discussion of important change is to distinguish between those elements that need to be transformed and those that need to be preserved. The Fundamental Questions activity reminds participants that information technology can be used appropriately and effectively both for transformation of what needs to be changed and for preservation of what is most cherished in teaching and learning.

#### **Diverse Groups - Dangerous Discussions**

The questions can easily be adapted for many purposes. They have proven especially effective as the basis for focusing discussion among people from many different parts of the same institution. Consequently, a diverse group that is beginning to work on a "Dangerous Discussion" topic together should consider adapting the Fundamental Questions for their own use. Also see the Dangerous Discussions home page at:

**[www.tltgroup.org/dangerousdiscussions.htm](http://www.tltgroup.org/dangerousdiscussions.htm)**

#### **Annual, Frequent Use**

The most general form of these questions can and should be asked and discussed by each local TLT Roundtable - or similar group - at least once each year.

## **Pre-Requisites**

Time and space suitable for reflective thinking and candid exchange of ideas.

## **Directions**

- If necessary, revise the wording of the warm-up and main questions to fit your purpose - to match the topic, issue, or focus of your work.
- Select and work on one or more of the warm-up questions.
- Work individually and silently (2 to 4 minutes), and in then in small groups (5-15 minutes). Suggest that some people will find making some notes useful. No one will be asked to show those notes to anyone else.
- Select and work on two or more of the main questions.  
Always include the first two!  
Work on questions individually (10 to 30 minutes), in small groups (15-30 minutes), and then try as a full group to reach consensus on them (15 to 90 minutes).
- Consider first working through the entire process with questions 1 to 4 only. Then begin work on questions 5 and beyond.

Set a stopping time for this task (and for each subsection that you work on separately):

\_\_\_\_\_

Identify a recorder/reporter for group discussion: \_\_\_\_\_

## Warm-up Exercises

### Warm-up Questions for "Fundamental Questions"

[Revised 10/27/98; Compiled & Updated 5/30/2005]

### Learning and Teaching

i. Recall one of your own most valuable *learning* experiences. Describe it *briefly*.  
[It might have happened in a classroom -- or not. It might have involved the use of technology -- or not.]

ii. Recall one of your own most satisfying *teaching* experiences. Describe it *briefly*.  
[It might have happened in a classroom -- or not. It might have involved the use of technology -- or not.]

**Warm-up Exercises (cont.)**

**Past and Present**

Most likely, important changes have already resulted from educational uses of information technology at your institution.

iii. What are 1 or 2 important gains that have already resulted from educational uses of information technology at your institution?

For your students?

For your colleagues?

For your institution?

For yourself?

**Warm-up Exercises – Past and Present (cont.)**

iv. What are 1 or 2 important losses that have already resulted from educational uses of information technology at your institution?

For your students?

For your colleagues?

For your institution?

For yourself?

## Fundamental Questions

[Revised 10/27/98; Compiled & Updated 6/13/2005]

### First four are most essential!

**Information technology can be the excuse and the means to make almost any kinds of change in education and elsewhere.** As you think about the kinds of change that *might* happen, try to answer each of these questions for your students, your colleagues, your institution, and yourself.

#### 1. What do you most want to gain? [Regain?]

What, who do you care about? What are 1 or 2 important results that you most want to gain in the future from educational uses of information technology?

[If it is easier, ask yourself “What do I most want to *regain*?]

a. For your students?

b. For your colleagues?

c. For your institution?

d. For yourself?

**2. What do you most cherish and want not to lose?**

a. For your students?

b. For your colleagues?

c. For your institution?

d. For yourself?

**3. What do you most want to avoid?**

Which aspects of the more *likely* futures do you fear?

**4. What are you willing (eager?) to give up or cut back?**

What are you willing to *sacrifice* in order to gain or keep something you identified in questions 1 or 2 above?]

**5. What “Dangerous Discussion” issues do you most want to address civilly and constructively within your college/university?**

**These issues should have the following characteristics:**

- There is a realistic possibility that holding some respectful, inclusive, constructive discussions might influence decisions about this issue that will have a significant impact on many people.
- There are several different categories of stakeholders who believe this issue is important to them, but some of them avoid talking with others about this issue - except those likely to agree with them.
- There are ways in which some applications of information technology and communications media could help this process, and some applications may already be getting in the way.

This issue is important to **you**, and fits well with your answers to 1-4 above!

**6. What do you have to offer? How can you help?**

What have you already accomplished or mastered? What are you proud of and willing to share?

[What skills, knowledge, and insights can you share with others?

Your success in teaching in a traditional environment – or with whatever your professional role might be -- surely reflects some lessons you could pass along to others. If you have already begun to use some technology – as simple as word-processing and email or as complex as interactive multimedia – you have probably learned some lessons from your own mistakes and found some nuggets of advice in your own moments of success worth passing along.]

**7. What are 2 or 3 of the most important remaining obstacles?**

**What do you need?**

[What is missing? What are the barriers impeding your progress toward your goals?

Toward the goals suggested in your answers to questions 1, and 2 above?

What is likely to stop you? Slow you down?]

**8. Whom could you help?**

Is there at least one person whom you would be comfortable helping to make progress in an area of shared interest, concern, or need?

[Not necessarily the most needy or challenging person – perhaps the easiest and most comfortable for you to work with.]

**9. Who could help you?**

Is there at least one person whom you would be comfortable asking for help with an effort in an area of shared interest, concern, or need?

[Not necessarily the most adept or universally recognized expert – rather, the person from whom you would be most comfortable accepting advice or assistance. Is there a person you could list in your answers to both #8 and #9? Perhaps you and this person could form an ongoing “TLT Coaching Partnership.”]

**10. Whom can you thank?**

Who has been providing help to you or to some of your colleagues – above and beyond what would be expected solely based on that person’s professional responsibilities?

[Who has been a “*compassionate pioneer*” at least once? Whom would you like to thank publicly for being helpful or simply for trying hard to surpass his/her own previous achievements? Whom would you like to thank for their contributions as teachers, helpers, or learners?] See:

**<http://www.tltgroup.org/CommunityConnectedness.htm>**

**11. Obstacles and Next Steps**

What obstacles, if any, have prevented you from satisfactorily completing this worksheet and task?

What steps can be taken to eliminate or work around those obstacles?

What steps should be taken to continue to move forward?