Examining Second Graders’ Construction and Interpretation of Questions Used During Interviews

Lynn Allyson Kelley  
*University of West Alabama*  
Lee Freeman  
*University of Alabama*

Although there is a lack of research on instruction that aims at facilitating students’ use of questioning with peers, many early childhood social studies textbooks and resources, include activities and lessons recommending students conduct interviews with an explicit assumption that young students are capable of formulating and using questions in the context of an interview. In these instances, no suggestions or ideas are given to teachers regarding instruction that will encourage and facilitate students’ questioning. The purpose of this study was to determine if the levels of social studies interview questions second graders formulate and use can be increased with questioning instruction in terms of quality, which is defined as depth of response, and in terms of quantity. This study generated research hypotheses that could be investigated in future research on instruction aimed at increasing young children’s questioning abilities as demonstrated in social studies.

*Key words: questions, interviews, early childhood, peer tutors, social studies, elementary*

As Lon Kellenberger (1971) scrutinized the questioning performance of sixth grade students, he found these students had a greater interest in their schoolwork when their own questions were used as a basis for investigative activities. In an examination of the questioning habits of 83 students in grades 3 through 5, Joseph Murphy (1991) found the questioning activities in which the sampled students were involved varied from classroom to classroom. In some classes, questioning by students was encouraged and given much recognition, while in others it was ignored. Greater numbers of questions, both informational and non-informational, were posed in classrooms that promoted questioning. Contrarily, in teacher-dominated classrooms where students’ questions were ignored or not encouraged, student questioning was stifled. Many teachers’ manuals for primary grades recommend the involvement of children in social studies interviewing activities centered on formulating and responding to questions. How well early grades teachers can facilitate children’s questioning in activities such as interviewing is uncertain.

In a review of research over the past 20 years on children’s questions, Mary Renck Jalongo (1999) reported the following in regard to questioning instruction by teachers: 1) make sure you as the teacher understand the question, 2) admit it when you don’t know, 3) encourage children to think about how they know something in order to develop self-questioning skills, and 4) help children understand that some of life’s most important questions do not have answers.

As an educator of early childhood teacher candidates, Jalongo found the inability of these novice teachers to answer children’s questions to be their greatest fear. Many times, teacher
candidates portray children—who are acknowledged as questioners—as being consciously problematic. Schools sometimes stifle the curious, questioning child (Dennis Rohman, 1967). Often, a child is considered difficult if he “stops asking questions and starts questioning answers” (p. 239). On the contrary, Jalongo noted that in comparison to teacher candidates, more experienced early childhood teachers expressed little concern about not being able to answer questions.

Mindful of the need to address developing children’s ability to ask appropriate and relevant questions, Frances Hunkins (1995) noted, “Students attain higher levels of thinking when encouraged to develop skill in asking their own questions and when provided with more opportunities for dialogue with classmates about the questions posed and conclusions derived from information”(p.3). There is limited research investigating the questions elementary students ask according to Peter Spargo and Gus Enderstein (1997), even though students’ questions, and the responses to those questions, comprise a major factor in the learning process. Studies indicate that children’s questioning performance evolve from the need to complete partial knowledge (Daniel Berlyyn & Frances Frommer, 1966; Charlotte Patterson, Christopher Massad, & Michael Cosgrove, 1978). Students ask questions to attain needed information in order to resolve what they recognize as a deficient knowledge state. Students’ questions, and how teachers respond to them, comprise a major factor in the learning process, as teachers not only learn about students from the answers they provide, but also from the questions students ask (Lowery, 1998).

Both Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky were interested in understanding how children master ideas and then translate them into speech. Piaget (1928, 1971, 1973) alleged that the most significant source of cognition is the child. Piaget indicated that education should support the child’s spontaneous research. Through interaction with real objects, peers, and teacher’s guiding questions, the child could construct both physical and logical-mathematical knowledge. In postulating the zone of proximal development, Vygotsky (1962) argued the social environment could assist the child’s cognitive development by aiding him in culturally adapting to new situations when required.

Child-adult interaction and its effect on the development of questions also was studied by Lev Vygotsky (1978). He discussed the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1962), or the difference between what a child can do alone and what can be done with the guidance of a peer or an older individual. The teacher, for example, should initially model questions for the students and provide support. When the students become competent questioners, the support should be gradually reduced (Vygotsky, 1978). When children are trying to imitate an adult, they must be able to move between knowledge that they possess and new knowledge. By asking guiding questions, giving examples, and demonstrating, an adult “awakens and rouses to life functions which are in a stage of maturing, which lie in the zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1956 p.287). According to a theory similar to Vygotsky’s (1962), mentors play a vital role in assisting the child’s cognitive development by aiding them in understanding how the world works (Rogoff, 1990). These questions arise from epistemic curiosity such that when children require information to resolve a deficient knowledge state, questions are asked (Berlyne & Frommer, 1966; Marlene Scardamalia & Carl Bereiter, 1992). Many educators have strived to create an atmosphere conducive to questioning. John Dewey (1933) recommended the use of questions not merely to get answers, but also to develop inquiry and investigation. He suggested good student questions might be more prevalent in an invigorating classroom with observations,
comparisons, and exploring. A lack of student questions, on the other hand, may result in “dull, monotonous, poorly planned, inconsequential or unintelligible teaching” (Wilbur Harris, 1958, p. 343).

A child’s curiosity and the natural need to know stimulate the motivation to learn (Melissa Gross, 2006). In order to progress toward intellectual autonomy, a child has to satisfy the natural search for understanding. Such learning is in the Piagetian sense of developing and striving for equilibrium (Piaget, 1955). Learners begin with questions that are meaningful to them, which are a source of disequilibrium, and move toward learning with a need to know (Sandra Waite-Stupiansky, 1997). Being naturally inquisitive, children ask questions from an early age (Spargo & Enderstein, 1997). Educators, however, appear more interested in students providing the correct response to a question than in their ability to ask a good question. A student’s ability to question is essential for creating interest and gaining knowledge, as well as for producing autonomy. In the early grades, many students do not understand the request for a question and usually respond with a statement. The implementation of questioning activities throughout the curriculum may make these young learners aware of questions and enhance the questioning skills of these young learners (Lynn Kelley, 2006).

There are various types of questions. A good question, according to William Swann (2003) is one that requires a lengthy response. A stupid question, is one to which you already know the answer (Cris Tovani, 2000). Thick questions (Stephanie Harvey & Anne Goudvis, 2000) address broad, conceptual, universal concepts whose responses require time, research, and discussion to answer. Beginning with “Why?” “How come?” and “I wonder,” thick questions yield much information. Thin (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000) questions are clarifying questions about specific items with short, discrete, or definite answers. Thin questions may result in yes or no responses.

A vibrant school atmosphere (Charles Snyder, 1963), contains an abundance of why questions. Children have a natural inclination to ask questions, and this should be a foundation upon which to build our curriculum (Baker, 1945). The teacher’s role is to encourage students: a) to ask questions, b) to recognize the good questions, and c) to realize that not all questions will have immediate solutions and that some questions may never be answered (Marylou Dantonio & Paul Beisenherz, 2001). The questioning mind should not be changed, but should be an integral part of one’s thought processes throughout life (John Barell, 2003).

The child develops a higher level of curiosity when he encounters the social world (Dewey, 1933). He relies on others to clarify extraordinary events uses “whys” to enhance and develop his experiences. A child’s curiosity has arrived at a higher intellectual plane when he searches for answers to his own questions (Robert Audet, 2005). Kornei Chukovsky (1963) suggested that majority of a young child’s questions are stimulated by the need to understand his environment. According to Cynthia Sunal and Mary Haas (2011), all learning begins with questions that guide the social studies lesson to encourage student questioning. Students are inquiring by nature, consumed with a yearning to ask (Frank Estavan, 1969).

Despite extensive searches, presently, only one research study involving children as interviewers in the data-gathering process has been found, and no research studies with student generated interview questions have been identified. In a research study involving children as interviewers in the data-gathering process, Lay See Yeo and Christine Clark (2005) discussed the perspectives of 340 Primary One children (usually age 7) in Singapore who had just started school. Each Primary One child was assigned to, and interviewed by, a Primary Five (usually
age 11) buddy trained as an interviewer. The questions focused on the children’s family and preschool experiences and the responses indicated that these children viewed school as a positive experience. Even though the children in this research study conducted the interviews, they did not formulate the questions. The interview process in this study focuses on investigating student-to-student, or peer, interviewing using student formulated questions. Question review” is described by Jackie Walsh and Beth Sattes (2005, p.127) as a plan to aid students in learning to formulate exceptional research questions through peer review and reflection and could be used with interview questions.

The Alabama Course of Study for Social Studies suggests using interviews of family members in the second grade. Other states also include the use of interviews by students within the curriculum areas. The Georgia Department of Education (2007) includes 131 activities for second grade students related to conducting interviews. As part of the second grade education standards of California, the state suggests students differentiate between things that happened long ago and things that happened yesterday and that students trace the history of a family using primary and secondary sources including artifacts, photographs, interviews, and documents (CDE, 2007).

Several textbook companies include recommendations for students’ involvement in questioning via interviewing in their books. In People and Places, published by Scott Foresman (2005, p. 242), the following recommendations are given: “have students interview a peer playing the role of a historic American, and later interview an older family member such as a grandparent to research family history” (p. 253). Horizons—About My Community (Harcourt, 2005), includes activities with which students can interview family members (pp. 181, 224), good citizens (p. 87A), neighbors (pp. 5, 40), and volunteers (p. 297A). Neighborhoods, published by Houghton Mifflin (2005), includes directions on how to conduct an interview (pp. 134-135). Having contacted these companies, the researcher found they all indicated little or no research was conducted before including these recommendations.

In a previous study, I (Lynn) examined the questioning habits of kindergartners, noting that even though young children ask many questions, the request for a question usually receives a story in response (Kelley, 2006). The purpose of that action research study was to determine if the implementation of questioning activities throughout the curriculum would make kindergartners aware of questions and enhance the questioning skills of these young learners. The kindergartners produced three types of questions: those requesting yes or no answers, those requesting one or two-word predictable answers, and open-ended questions with many possible answers. Of the 332 questions formulated upon request, 250 (75%) were yes or no questions, 72 (22%) requested one or two-word answers, and 10 (3%) were open-ended. These finding were consistent with previous research (Mary Courage, 1989; Nancy Denney & Gerard Connors, 1975; Judith Lindfors, 1999). These young children became more aware of questions and produced more questions upon request.

**Method**

The purpose of this study served to investigate whether the levels of social studies interview questions formulated and used by second graders can be increased with questioning instruction in terms of quality, which is defined as depth of response, and in terms of quantity. Given the limited research related to how children ask questions, their use of higher order questions requesting open-ended responses, and the types of questions and responses found in interviews, this research study was warranted. Does an intervention program foster the
development and use of questions among second graders during social studies interviews? What factors inhibit or foster questioning in second grade students?

The following research questions guided this study’s consideration of three overarching research questions: What types of interview questions do second grade students construct on a common social studies topic? To what extent do second grade students who are being interviewed by a peer on a common social studies topic meaningfully understand the questions asked of them as indicated by the appropriateness and accuracy of their responses? What is the quality, or depth of response, found in the statements of second grade student interviewees when questioned on a common social studies topic?

This was a mixed method study with a heavy quantitative emphasis in which the students in both an experimental and a control class were divided into five groups of four students each and engaged in a study of Abraham Lincoln. As an intervention, the students in Class A were exposed to various types of questions, each of which required a different level of response, and instructed on how to ask a higher order question that requests an open-ended answer. An example of each type of question follows:

1. yes or no—Do you like school?
2. simple one- or two-word—Where were you born?
3. open-ended—What plans do you have for the future?

No instruction on questioning was given to the control group, Class B. One of the co-authors served as researcher teaching both classes. The lessons and activities for the control group were designed to range in difficulty from easy with scaffolding to more involved and independent.

This study took place at a Kindergarten through second grade primary school of approximately 748 students. This school is in its sixth year of operation and located in a large school system surrounding a small city in the southeastern United States. This school touts its ability to concentrate on developmentally appropriate practices for young children who are still in the formative stages of their educational growth. The research study was conducted in the discovery laboratory attended for social studies and science instruction using the two most similar populations.

In the initial activities, the students learned to interview by viewing news clips and a teacher made video on interviewing, as well as through discussing and participating in the mock interview processes. Students were introduced to Abraham Lincoln, their interviewee, through photographs and the book *Abraham Lincoln* (Amy Cohn & Suzy Schmidt, 2002). Each student composed two interview questions (to be used as initial data) and recorded these both in writing and on the tape recorder. Group A (class 10) was selected as the experimental group (*N* = 20), and Group B (class 8) was chosen as the control group (*N* = 20).

Both class A, the experimental group, and class B, the control group, consisted of 20 second grade students divided into five groups of four students. Each group of four students participated in the lessons over a two-week period, which was the average length for a unit of study in second grade. The students researched and reported on Abraham Lincoln using the materials below identified. All students in both groups had access to the same materials. After completing their research, all students were asked to compose two interview questions for Abraham Lincoln.

Table 1 presents an outline of the 10 lessons used in the study and identifies which group(s) of students was involved in each of the lessons.

Table 1
### Lessons

| Lesson One  
(One 40-minute class) | Used with: Both Groups A and B  
The students learned to interview by viewing news clips and a teacher made video on interviewing, as well as through discussing and participating in the mock interview processes. |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lesson Two  
(One 40-minute class) | Used with: Both Groups A and B  
Students were introduced to Abraham Lincoln through photographs and the book *Abraham Lincoln* (Cohn & Schmidt, 2002). Students also learned to use a tape recorder and practiced interviewing. Each student composed two interview questions (to be used as initial data) and recorded these both in writing and on the tape recorder. |
| Lesson Three  
(One 40-minute class) | Used with: Group A  
Students explored Abraham Lincoln through the book *Abraham Lincoln* (Schott, 2002) and developed a timeline book of Lincoln’s life.  
Students composed and categorically sorted questions using a graphic organizer.  
Used with: Group B  
Students explored Abraham Lincoln through the book *Abraham Lincoln* (Schott, 2002) and developed a timeline book of Lincoln’s life. |
| Lesson Four  
(One 40-minute class) | Used with: Group A  
Through the books *Stand Tall, Abe Lincoln* (St. George, 2008) and *If you grew up with Abraham Lincoln* (McGovern, 1966) students explored the events in Abraham Lincoln’s life. Using a Venn Diagram they compared and contrasted their lives to Abraham Lincoln’s life.  
Students investigated open-ended questions, as well as reviewed other types of questions. Students created step books with questions to compare their lives with Abraham Lincoln’s life.  
Used with: Group B  
Through the books *Stand Tall, Abe Lincoln* (St. George, 2008) and *If you grew up with Abraham Lincoln* (McGovern, 1966) students explored the events in Abraham Lincoln’s life. Using a Venn Diagram they compared and contrasted their lives to Abraham Lincoln’s life.  
Students created step books to compare their lives with Abraham Lincoln’s life. |
| Lesson Five  
(Three 40-minute classes) | Used with: Group A  
Students researched Abraham Lincoln, created open-ended questions, as well as a poster presentation using the leveled trade books *Abraham Lincoln* (Scott Foresman, 2005) and viewed web-based materials for young children on Lincoln.  
Used with: Group B  
Students researched Abraham Lincoln and created a poster presentation using the leveled trade books *Abraham Lincoln* (Scott Foresman, 2005) and websites for young children on Lincoln. |
A three-step process was used to identify the individual who would serve as the topic about whom the students would study and about whom questions would be developed. Abraham Lincoln was selected as the topic of study following reasons: students exhibited fewer misconceptions about Lincoln, he was included in most second grade textbooks, and more states included in their second grade courses of \(N = 47\), with all states suggesting books about Abraham Lincoln be read in Grades Kindergarten-2. Having identified Lincoln as the topic of the study, the following criteria were established to select the materials for this research study: is documentable as having accurate factual descriptive knowledge about Lincoln focuses on major events and activities in Lincoln’s life, and is appropriate for second graders’ level of understanding. The materials to be used in the study that met the established criteria fell into the following categories: a) books to be read aloud by me to students, b) a video to be shown in class by me to the students, c) leveled readers on Abraham Lincoln to be used in class, and d) Internet sites.

A graduate student, who served as a substitute teacher for the Discovery Lab classes and was familiar to all the students, recorded interviews on video or audiotape. A tape recorder with a hand-held microphone was used to audiotape the interviews. The microphone was placed on a tripod between the interviewers and interviewees in order to record the conversations. The recordings were studied to identify instances of questions being asked and answered. A spreadsheet was used to code each child’s answers. Each child’s questions and types of questions were recorded using the rubric below.

1. A statement with no question scores 0. Example: “I like your yellow shirt!”
2. A question requesting a yes or no answer scores 1. Example: “Is your shirt yellow?”
3. A question requesting a one or two word answer scores 2. Example: “What color is your shirt?”
4. A question that requests more than a one or two word answer, but is directive, scores Example: “What can you tell me about the color of your shirt?”
5. A question requesting an open-ended answer scores 4. Example: “Why do you wear a lot of yellow?”

The responses to the questions were rated using the following rubric, which strove to address meaningful understanding:

1. No response to a question scores 0.
2. A response exhibiting a deficient understanding of the question scores 1.
3. A response incorporating accuracy and appropriateness exhibiting an understanding of the question scores 2.
4. A slightly enhanced response incorporating accuracy and appropriateness exhibiting an understanding of the question scores 3.
5. An elaborate response incorporating accuracy and appropriateness exhibiting an understanding of the question scores 4.
Data Analysis

The non-parametric Mann-Whitney test was used for analysis because the sample sizes ($N = 20$) in the experimental and control groups were not large enough to utilize analysis of variance. The qualitative data analysis in this research study involved the following steps: organization of details, categorization of data, interpretation of single instances, identification of patterns, synthesis, and generalization. An outside evaluator examined the data and interpretations to determine if the process followed was appropriate.

When considering the validity of this research study, the following two questions were asked (Paul Leedy & Jeanne Ormrod, 2005): Does this study have sufficient controls to ensure that the conclusions drawn are truly warranted by the data? Can one use what has been observed in this research situation to establish credibility about the world beyond that specific situation? To ensure the internal credibility of this research study, collaborative reviews were conducted daily at school to discuss and agree upon data collection and findings throughout this research project (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; John Creswell, 1998). The interview process in this study was described in such sufficient detail that readers can draw their own conclusions from the data presented. Rich, thick description, or detailed accounts of the participants and the settings, allows the reader to make decisions regarding transferability (David Erlandson, 1993; Yvonna Lincoln & Egon Guba, 1985; Sharan Merriam, 1988). Triangulation established the trustworthiness of the findings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The different sources used to shed light on the theme of this research project were video and audio recordings, spreadsheets, and rubrics.

Results

The students’ existing level of questioning was determined by comparing the levels of initial questions asked by both the experimental and control groups. Initially, the control group formulated 9 questions requesting a yes or no answer, 29 questions requesting a one or two word answer, 1 directive question requesting more than a one or two word answer, 1 question requesting an open-ended answer, and 0 statements that were not a question. Originally, the experimental group composed 7 questions requesting a yes or no answer, 31 questions requesting a one or two word answer, 1 directive question requesting more than a one or two word answer, 1 question requesting an open-ended answer, and 0 statements that were not a question. An example of a question requesting a yes or no answer was, “Is it cool to be tall?” An example of a question requesting a 1 or 2 word answer was “What is your name?” An example of a directive question was “What was the most important thing you did being president?” Finally, an example of a question requesting an open-ended answer was “What is it like to be president?”

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Statement but no question</th>
<th>Question requesting yes/no answer</th>
<th>Question requesting 1 or 2 word answer</th>
<th>Directive question requesting more than 1 or 2 word answer</th>
<th>Question requesting open-ended answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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After ranking the questions by counting those falling within each part of the rubric, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to evaluate the initial questions of both groups, as indicated in Table 3. The control group had a mean rank of 39.55 and a sum of ranks of 1582.00. The experimental group had a mean rank of 41.45 and a sum of ranks of 1658.00. There was no significant difference \((p < .628)\) between the two groups so their initial ability at formulating levels of questions was similar.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Initial A</th>
<th>Initial B</th>
<th>Final A</th>
<th>Final B</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score: 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score: 1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score: 2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score: 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score: 4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Rank</td>
<td>41.45</td>
<td>39.55</td>
<td>58.21</td>
<td>22.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum of Ranks</td>
<td>1658.00</td>
<td>1582.00</td>
<td>2328.50</td>
<td>911.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The initial questions from the experimental and control groups also were coded to identify the themes found within those questions. The control group’s initial questions centered on these main categories: favorite things, physical characteristics, environment, and life experiences. The questions in the favorite things category could have been asked of anyone and were not specifically addressed to Abraham Lincoln, for example, “What is your favorite color?” The questions in the physical characteristics section revealed that students knew that Lincoln was tall and had a long nose and a beard. The environmental questions could have been asked of anyone: for example, “Where do you live?” In the life experiences category, the questions in the professional section were Lincoln specific, for example, “What is it like to be president?” The family question was applicable to any person, for example, “Who is your wife?” All of the control group’s initial questions indicated little or no knowledge of Abraham Lincoln. From the experimental group’s initial questions, the same categories emerged. All of the themes listed under favorite things could have been asked of anyone, so were not specific to Abraham Lincoln. An example of such a question was “What is your favorite sport?” The physical characteristics category indicated students were inferring from prior knowledge that Lincoln was tall and wore a tall hat. In the environment category, the questions exhibited no real knowledge of Lincoln, for example, “Where do you live?” Under life experiences, the questions
addressed the presidency, slavery, and death, demonstrating the students realized Abraham Lincoln was a president, had something to do with slavery, and had been shot.

No questions in either group were scored as a 0 or as not being a question. The questions requesting a yes or no answer scored 1. An example of a yes or no question was, “Did you begin the Civil War?” A question requesting a one or two word answer scored 2. An example of such a question was “How tall is your hat?” A question that requested more than a one or two word answer, but is directive, scored 3. An example of such a question was “What are the names of the people in your family?” A question requesting an open-ended answer scored 4. An example of an open-ended question was; “Why did you write the Gettysburg Address?” After ranking the questions by counting those falling within each part of the rubric, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to evaluate the final interview questions of both groups as indicated in Table 4. The control group had a mean rank of 22.79 and a sum of ranks of 911.50. The experimental group had a mean rank of 58.21 and a sum of ranks of 2328.50. There was a significant difference ($p < .000$) between the two groups.

The final questions asked by the control group were placed in the categories of physical characteristics, environment, and life experiences. The following are examples of interview questions requesting a response related to Lincoln’s physical characteristics: “How tall are you?” and “Is your hat over two feet?” Examples of interview questions requesting information about the environment in which Lincoln lived were “Why did you move to Indiana?” and “Mr. President, what do you plan to do about our environment?” Examples of interview questions requesting a response related to Lincoln’s life experiences were “Were you in the Civil War?” and “Are you President of the United States?” Of the final 40 questions asked by the control group, 30 were Lincoln specific and indicated a much broader understanding of Lincoln’s life than exhibited by the initial questions. The experimental group asked the same types of final questions. The following are examples of experimental group interview questions requesting information about the environment in which Lincoln lived: “What was it like living in the three-walled log cabin?” and “What kind of bed did you have in the White House?” Examples of interview questions requesting a response related to Lincoln’s life experiences were as follows: “What was your family like?” “What did you want your life to be like?” and “Why did you do whatever job you could find?” Only 8 of the 40 final questions asked by the experimental group were not principally questions addressed to Abraham Lincoln. The questions showed the depth of understanding that these students had acquired about Lincoln’s life.

The level of the control group’s initial and final questions was compared (see Table 4) using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test (score = 589.000) yielding an initial mean rank of 45.78 and initial sum of ranks of 1831.00 and a final mean rank of 35.22 and final sum of ranks of 1409.00. A significance difference of $p > .021$ was found, indicating that the control group’s level of questioning decreased from their performance on the initial question task to their performance on the interview questions task.

**Table 4**

*Comparison of the Level of Initial and Final Interview Questions on the Mann-Whitney U Test*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Sum of Ranks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial A</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22.32</td>
<td>893.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The control group’s demonstrated level of questioning decreased from the initial questions to the final interview questions. Even though the data indicate that the level of the control group’s questions, as scored with the rubric, declined from the initial questions to the final questions, those final questions were related more often, when a count was made, to the topic and more specifically to Abraham Lincoln than were the initial questions. When using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test (score = 73.000) to compare the initial questions to the final interview questions of the experimental group, a significant difference ($p > .000$) was found. The initial questions had a mean rank of 22.32 and a sum of ranks of 893.00, while the final interview questions of mean rank of 58.68 and a sum of ranks of 2347.00. Most of the students in the experimental group were able to ask open-ended questions at the end of the study. The questions asked by these students were not only ranked at a higher level, but most of the questions also were related to the topic, specifically addressing Abraham Lincoln. In both the control and experimental groups the students ($N = 20$) were divided into five groups of four students. Each group of four consisted of two interviewers and two interviewees. The interviewers ($N = 10$) in the control group formulated 11 questions requesting a yes or no answer. The interviewees ($N= 10$) responded with 22 answers (two per question), exhibiting an understanding of the yes or no questions. An example of a yes or no question was, “Have you been president before?” The responses to this question were, “Yes, I was” and “Yes.” Of the eight interview questions requesting a one or two word answer, the control group composed seven and one was composed by the experimental group. An example of such a question was, “Where do you live?” The answers to this question were, “White House” and “In a cabin in Indiana.” All 16 responses demonstrated an understanding of the questions requesting one or two word answers, including both an appropriate response to the question and an accurate one. An interviewer in the experimental group composed the only question that requested more than a one or two word answer, but was directive. This question was “How much fun did you have being president?” The two responses to this question exhibited an understanding of the question: “It was hard trying to free the slaves, but it was fun to be president” and “It was not fun being president, it was stressful.” These two responses expressed different views, “fun” and “not fun,” while presenting a rationale for the response that contained elements of appropriateness and accuracy. The experimental group asked 18 open-ended questions while two were formulated by the control group. An example of an open-ended question was, “Why did slavery begin?” The responses to this question were, “Slavery has been going on for a long time. I don’t know who began it.” Another response was, “I saw slavery for the first time on my flatboat trip.” All of the responses indicated an understanding of the questions. Both responses for this question were attempting to respond to the question. The first interviewee (role-playing Abraham Lincoln) gave an appropriate response, indicating a lack of knowledge related to the question (“I don’t know who began it”). This interviewee’s response could be considered as lacking in accuracy; however, the historical evidence that documents why slavery began in this country is complex.
and historical evidence documenting why slavery began long ago in human society would have to predate the invention of writing. Children of the age of those involved in this study, therefore, were considered to be indicating a meaningful understanding of the question, although the response may have somewhat tangentially addressed the question. The responses indicated all of the students, both control and experimental, exhibited an understanding of the question regardless of the question type. The apparent differences shown between the experimental and control groups were more in the type of question asked and responded to, than in the level of response to the question.

Most of the students’ answers, whether they were in the experimental or the control group, only gave what was asked for in the question. Of the 80 responses recorded, 40 were open-ended responses (50%), 22 yes or no responses (27.5%), 16 (2%) one or two word responses, and 2 (2.5%) were more than one word responses. Of these responses 75 (94%) answered only what was requested and the other five responses, or 6%, of the responses were yes or no answers that went slightly above what was requested. In the control group’s yes or no responses 77% (17) gave only what was asked for in the question. The other five responses (23%) went slightly beyond what was asked for in the question. An example of a question with a corresponding response that went slightly above what was requested, but not enough for me to consider elaborate was “Did you cry when you got shot in the head?” The replies to this question requesting a yes or no response were: “Not really, because I am a strong person”, and “No, I was dead!”

When comparing the final interview questions from the control and experimental groups with their corresponding responses, the answers to the questions were concise with very little or no elaboration. The students in both groups answered the questions with an appropriate and accurate response. In the control group of the 40 responses to the 20 questions asked by the interviewers (N = 10), 35 were basic responses exhibiting an understanding of the question (giving only the information requested). The other 5 responses were slightly enhanced responses going just beyond answering the question without going into detail, exhibiting an understanding of the question. In response to the yes or no question, “Did you fight in the Civil War?” the enhanced response was “No, I was in the war with the chief.” Of the 11 questions requesting a yes or no answer, 8.5% (N =17) received a response that only answered the question with no extra information given. All 14 responses to questions requesting a one or two word answer were basic exhibiting an understanding of the question in terms of accuracy and appropriateness. The other 4 responses were open-ended and exhibited an accurate but simple response. For example, in response to “How did you become president?” the interviewee responded: “I was elected.” Of the 20 questions asked by the interviewers (N = 10), all 40 responses were basic responses exhibiting an understanding of the question, giving only the information requested. None of responses were slightly enhanced responses or elaborated responses. The data show basic responses containing generally appropriate and accurate information. These responses have a quality or depth that was determined to be basic rather than elaborate.

Discussion
This study built upon Piaget’s (1955) and Vygotsky’s (1978) theoretical propositions investigating whether second graders have the developmental skills to ask open-ended questions when instructed to do so. The students in the experimental group were exposed to the same lessons as were the students in the control group with added questioning activities embedded in the lessons. The results displayed a significant difference in the questioning abilities of the two groups in terms of the levels of questions formulated. In comparing the experimental group’s initial questions to their final questions, the findings indicated that their final questions were much more in-depth than the initial questions, showing a much greater understanding of Abraham Lincoln and his life. Of the 20 final questions asked by students, 15 were open-ended, as opposed to only one open-ended initial question. This finding indicated that an intervention program can foster the development and use of questions between second graders during social studies interviews.

The lack of instruction in questioning techniques and the absence of modeling of higher order questions resulted in lower level questions among the control group. The control group asked questions that might be considered better questions because they were directly related to the topic. This may have occurred due to the quality of instruction on Abraham Lincoln that this group received.

When looking at the initial questions asked by students in the control group, it was evident that many of the questions asked were not related to the topic. In comparing the control group’s initial questions to their final questions it must be noted that the students showed a much greater understanding of Abraham Lincoln’s life in the final questions. The rationale for the control group’s lower scores on the question level rubric seemed to be attributed to the greater number of yes or no questions as opposed to one word answer questions composed by students in their final attempt. The results indicated that the level of questions formulated elevates when students are given more information. Initially, a student in the control group asked, “Do you live at your house?” After participating in lessons through which students gathered more information from their experiences, the same student asked the following final question, “Why did you move to Indiana?” Although the control group formulated better questions related to the topic, they did not create more open-ended questions. Both Piaget (1955) and Vygotsky (1963) regarded children’s questions as vital for intellectual growth and indicated students should be taught to compose broad questions or thick questions, as well as narrow questions. This study suggests that students, through training, can be taught to question effectively to acquire knowledge and to understand.

The responses to the final interview questions from the control and experimental groups were brief with little or no explanation. All of the students in both groups supplied a reasonable response to the interview questions asked of them, indicating that they understood the questions. This was indicative of Piaget’s (1928) theories on the abilities of students at this stage understanding another person’s point of view. The accuracy of their responses was limited by their knowledge of the topic. After completing the lessons on Abraham Lincoln, the students in both groups were able to ask questions that were specifically addressed to Lincoln (as the interviewee) rather than generic questions that could have been asked of anyone.

The adequate statements of the second grade student interviewees had little depth in their responses to the questions asked of them. Their simple, short answers may have been due to their lack of experience with the interview situation, not being able to talk freely in a regular classroom situation, or not being encouraged to elaborate on ideas. With appropriate experience
and training in responding to questions, as well as opportunities to participate in classroom experiences that build their informational background, students’ responses may be more in-depth.

In future studies the rubric for levels of questions asked should be revised. As indicated by comparison of the control group’s initial and final questions, the rubric used in this study should be modified to include related to the topic. Such a change would have revealed that more of the control group’s final questions were better questions than were the initial questions, because they showed an understanding of the topic even though this was not reflected in the level at which they were scored. The situation differed with the experimental group where change in level toward higher level questions was found; however, the revision of the rubric in this manner would have enhanced the experimental group’s results. Future studies might include exposing students to the interview process suggested in a social studies textbook series to test the effects of the process recommended. Such investigation is needed because textbooks routinely suggest young children participate in interviews. These textbooks should be revised to include instructions on modeling and conducting interviews in the classroom.

In summary, this research is in concurrence with Yeo and Clark (2005), who reported that students were capable of conducting interviews and that student interviewees responded well to student interviewers. All students were able to ask questions and give reasonable responses to questions. Given useful and relevant information in class, students were able to create questions and responses related to the topic. When given imbedded instruction in questioning, the experimental groups’ ability to ask higher order questions increased notably, while the control groups’ ability to ask higher order questions remained unchanged. Similar themes in questions emerged in both groups. The level of the response seemed to be directly related to the level of the questions asked.

References


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Author Bios

**Lynn Kelley** is an Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction, specializing in Early Childhood, Elementary and Social Studies Education at The University of West Alabama. She taught grades Preschool-2 for over 33 years before teaching graduate and undergraduate classes. Her research interests include parent involvement, questioning in early childhood, and social studies methods. E-mail: lkelley@uwa.edu

**Lee Freeman** is an Associate Clinical Professor of Curriculum and Instruction, specializing in Elementary and Literacy Education at The University of Alabama. He taught grades 1-7 for 24 years before teaching graduate and undergraduate classes for the last 12 years. His research interests include early literacy, effects and methods of reading aloud to children, and pre-service teacher education and evaluation.