
Preface

What Have We Learned From Our Work? Quality Questioning Is Not Just for the Classroom Anymore

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important for school leaders to embrace quality questioning?
2. What is meant by *quality questioning*?
3. Which leadership functions can quality questioning most effectively support?
4. What is the organization of this book?

Over the past two decades, we have been working with teachers and school leaders to improve classroom questioning practices to increase student learning. In *Quality Questioning: Research-Based Practice to Engage Every Learner* (Walsh & Sattes, 2005), we acknowledged an important learning from our work: *If classroom questioning practices are to improve and produce desired outcomes, both teachers and students must understand and use quality questioning.* This was a refinement of our earlier thinking, which focused primarily on improving teacher practice. We now propose a further refinement: *If quality questioning is to flourish in the classrooms of a school, it must be embraced by teachers, students, and school leaders.* When teachers and school staff operate within a professional community of inquiry, they are better able to support and sustain inquiry-oriented classrooms.

A diverse set of experiences brought us to this conclusion. First, conversations with leaders in schools that had adopted quality questioning as a focus for classroom improvement provided anecdotal evidence: In schools where leaders assumed an inquiry-oriented approach to planning and decision making, teachers were more successful in implementing and sustaining improved questioning practices with and for students. Second, Jackie's work with school improvement and instructional coaches demonstrated the value of questioning in the facilitation of adult learning and growth in schools. Third, our collaboration in the development of a statewide training and support system for the mentors of new teachers underscored the value of quality questions and questioning in supporting the development of neophytes to the profession. Finally, our training and consulting with school and district leaders about school culture affirmed our belief in the power of questioning and dialogue to nurture and sustain change. These experiences, and our reflection on them, served as inspiration and fodder for this book.

What Do We Mean by *Quality Questioning*?

Quality questioning is a process for engaging individuals in thinking together. It begins with the crafting of a focused, purposeful, engaging question and continues with the intentional use of strategies that facilitate and sustain thinking. This process can thrive only in a culture of inquiry that is supported by shared norms and habits of mind. Quality questioning is useful in classrooms, schools, and other venues where individuals come together to learn and create.

Which Leadership Functions Are Most Enhanced by Quality Questioning?

Quality questioning practices enhance the ongoing informal and formal communications in which leaders engage—regardless of the purpose or context for the communication. However, certain leadership functions are particularly supported by quality questioning. We spotlight four of these functions in this book: maximizing, mobilizing, mediating, and monitoring. When coupled with quality questioning, the execution of these functions takes a school leader beyond management and into the realm of true leadership. We define these functions as follows:

- *Maximizing* relates to the development of individual and organizational potential and capacity.
- *Mobilizing* is the process of getting folks on board, motivated, and committed to attaining an organization's vision or goals.

- *Mediating* refers to the means by which leaders help create common ground between and among members of their community.
- *Monitoring* engages individuals in assessing the extent to which they are progressing individually and collectively toward identified benchmarks.

We view leadership expansively, as a practice, not a position; hence, each of the above functions can be performed by leaders at all levels within the educational environment—from the school superintendent to the school principal to the classroom teacher to the student. The scenarios in this book, however, feature school and district leaders.

What Is the Organization of *Leading Through Quality Questioning*?

We designed this book as a hands-on manual of practice for education leaders at all levels. While readers need not proceed sequentially from Chapters 1 to 7, we suggest that you begin with Chapters 1 and 2. In Chapter 1, we present the Leading Through Quality Questioning Framework and a rationale for adopting this approach; in Chapter 2, we elaborate on the questioning skills and strategies associated with this practice.

Chapters 3 through 6 focus on the four leadership functions: maximizing, mobilizing, mediating, and monitoring. These chapters can be read in any order, depending upon the reader's interest. Each features one or more scenarios based on real cases or composites; the names of schools and individuals, however, are fictional. Throughout these chapters, we highlight various structured group processes that leaders have used to engage members of a school community in thinking and responding together. Detailed instructions for facilitating 20 of these processes are included in Resource B. The success of each process depends upon the formulation of quality questions to drive the conversation. We have used each of these processes countless times to engage educators in quality conversations. We invite you to experiment with them as you seek to expand and enrich inquiry across your community.

The scenario in Chapter 7 features a principal who is a composite of several principals with whom we have worked. This school leader is struggling with how to transform her school into an inquiry-centered school in which quality questioning characterizes adult and student interactions. While there is no single how-to or simple formula for building such a community, this scenario profiles one approach. The chapter references a self-assessment, the Quality Questioning Quotient, which is included as Resource C. We hope you will use this self-assessment individually and with your staff as a tool for reflection and professional growth.

Quality questioning is a dynamic that is best learned experientially. We were challenged to reduce this dynamic to words on a page. It is our hope that readers will try out strategies, experiment with sample questions, and reflect on their experiences. We hope, too, that you will share these experiences with us, and contact us when we can support your learning.