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# 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.

**Figure 1.1** The Leading Through Quality Questioning (LQQ) Framework

Elements of Quality Questioning	Leadership Functions			
	<i>Maximizing</i>	<i>Mobilizing</i>	<i>Mediating</i>	<i>Monitoring</i>
<i>Crafting Quality Questions</i>				
<i>Presenting Questions to Engage All</i>				
<i>Extending Thinking</i>				
<i>Creating a Culture of Inquiry</i>				

The LQQ Framework is two dimensional. The first dimension is related to the four elements of quality questioning that inquiry-centered leaders understand and use.

1. *Crafting Quality Questions* refers to the formulation of questions that are purposeful, clearly focused, and understandable. This requires consideration of the kind of information being sought as well as the context in which it will be used.
2. *Presenting Questions to Encourage Engagement* underscores the importance of thinking about *how* individuals will be engaged in responding to questions. This element reminds us of the value of listening to a wide range of voices—not just the usual, more vocal members of our community. To achieve this, we need to know and use a wide range of processes and strategies that structure and facilitate involvement.

Chapter 1 established the value of a school leader's using questioning to engage members of the school community, but all questions are not created equal. *Quality questions* are authentic; they might be posed to gain specific information, to understand another's point of view, to help others make personal meaning, to stimulate reflection and self-awareness, and to solve problems. Most of the issues in education have no simple answers; leaders who are open to learning will be asking questions throughout their entire careers.

As used in this book, *quality questioning* means much more than "asking questions." Quality questioning is a dynamic process that consists of multiple skills to achieve specific outcomes. The essential elements of the process involve the following:

- Framing or crafting a question
- Presenting the question effectively
- Extending thinking through a variety of verbal and nonverbal prompts
- Encouraging a schoolwide culture of inquiry in which "not knowing" is valued and questions are welcomed

## How Do Leaders Craft Quality Questions?

There is, of course, no perfect question. Four guidelines, however, can help leaders frame quality questions: (1) identify the focus or topic of a question; (2) get clear about the purpose or desired outcome of the question (or question set); (3) decide on a process for engaging all appropriate parties, giving all an opportunity to voice their positions and to be heard respectfully; and (4) word the question so that it is simple and understandable.

Most quality questions require planning and intentionality. Yet, many questions must be formed spontaneously, as required by the situation. The more leaders practice creating questions using the four guidelines specified here, the easier it will be to pose quality questions, even without preparation time.

### Identify Focus

Questions are powerful. They focus thinking. When asked a question, listeners begin thinking about the topic. Because the topic of the question most often determines what listeners think about, it is essential to be clear in your own mind about what it is you want to ask. Resist the temptation to string many topics together, even if they are related. Choose one focus for a question; pose it, and let the individual or group wrestle with it. If the question is well worded and open ended, chances are that others will introduce topics that are connected and related.

**Table 2.3** Follow-Up Questions and Comments to Extend Thinking

<b>Purpose of Question or Comment</b>	<b>Examples and Stems</b>
<i>To expose and get behind thinking</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Help me understand what you were thinking when you said . . .</li> <li>2. How did you figure that out?</li> <li>3. Can you help me understand how you reached that conclusion?</li> <li>4. How did you know?</li> <li>5. What assumptions are you making when you say that?</li> <li>6. What experiences have you had that lead you to this conclusion?</li> <li>7. What data did you use to reach that inference?</li> <li>8. What do you mean by . . . ?</li> <li>9. What criteria did you use to make that assessment?</li> <li>10. How does your perspective compare to . . . ?</li> <li>11. Have we included all the perspectives that we need to include?</li> <li>12. Is there anyone who has a different perspective who has not yet spoken?</li> </ol>
<i>To confirm our own understanding of the speaker's statement</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Let's see if I've got this right. (<i>Then summarize your understanding of what the speaker said.</i>)</li> <li>2. I understood you to say . . . Am I interpreting your comments correctly?</li> <li>3. So you think that . . . ?</li> </ol>
<i>To elicit extension or expansion of thinking</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How else might we think about . . . ?</li> <li>2. What if . . . ?</li> <li>3. Can you give an example?</li> <li>4. Can you be more specific?</li> <li>5. How could we go about finding out?</li> <li>6. How are you planning to go about . . . ?</li> <li>7. I follow your logic. What's best to do at this point?</li> <li>8. I'd like to hear more of your thinking.</li> <li>9. Please say more.</li> <li>10. What can we infer from . . . ?</li> <li>11. What do you mean by the word . . . ?</li> <li>12. Keep going. I'd like to hear more.</li> <li>13. Let's take this a little further. Can you say more?</li> </ol>

## How Can Leaders Use Quality Questioning to Resolve Conflict?

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*James Howard, the principal at Watson High School, answered the phone and heard the irate voice of Mrs. Irene Johnson, the parent of a student leader. Mrs. Johnson was obviously in distress. "That new science teacher, Mrs. Sylvester, is ruining my child's life!" she said. "J. T. hates school because of her, and I want to know what you are going to do about it." James listened thoughtfully and respectfully. He took a deep breath and counted silently to three after Mrs. Johnson stopped speaking. He calmly told her he'd like to learn more about the situation and then have a conference. (See Resource B, Interview or Conference.) "We'll include Mrs. Sylvester in the conference; we want to understand your point of view, and we'll want to understand hers as well. Should we include J. T. since this is about him?" James asked. "Well, I'd rather not at this point; if we need to involve him later, I'm more than happy for that to happen," responded Mrs. Johnson. James scheduled the meeting for three days hence, giving himself adequate time to gather more information and develop a plan.*

*James wandered down to Mrs. Sylvester's classroom during her planning period. "I got a call from J. T.'s mother. She seems to think that he has developed a bad attitude toward school. What have you noticed about J. T. recently?" Mrs. Sylvester, a first-year teacher, seemed unsure of herself. "Well, he does all of his assignments and even some optional work assignments." James continued, "His mother thinks it may have something to do with your class. I've invited her in for a conference with you and me. What can you tell me about J. T.'s performance in your class?" Things had been going pretty well, she thought, and she couldn't remember anything negative about the young man in her class. "He seems very interested. He's always asking questions. Sometimes we don't have time for his questions, because in science there are so many state standards to cover." She paused, "Mr. Howard, I'm so sorry for causing a problem. I can't imagine what this might be about." James assured her they would work as a team—principal, parent, and teacher—to figure this out. "No apologies are needed. When you come to the conference, bring your grade book, some samples of his work, and recent assignments. Also, between now and then, you might want to do some reflection and see if anything comes to mind."*

*Clearly, thought James, this is a situation where there are different perceptions. This will be interesting; it will require some skillful listening and probing to better understand what's happening before we can get to the bottom of this one.*

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**M**ediating is an important leadership function in a school, as in any organization, especially if the leader is working to create a learning community with shared leadership and responsibility. In a culture where mediation is the norm, individuals work to resolve their misunderstandings with the assistance of another party. In this type of culture, leaders expect and support individuals in working through a process that leads to enhanced understanding of the other's point of view and to an eventual resolution of the issue. Leaders do not assume the authoritarian (and paternalistic) role of judging who is "right" or "wrong" in conflicts. Although there are certainly occasions when the principal or other key leader will have to