Q Tasks
How to empower students to ask questions and care about the answers

Carol Koechlin, Sandi Zwaan

2nd edition
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Preface to Revised Edition

We originally developed Q Tasks to help teachers empower students with questioning skills. The strategies we developed for the book were designed to build understanding of question types and purposes, and thus to enable learners to become critical and creative thinkers and questioners, working with any kind of information or ideas to build personal meaning. Questioning skills and smarts are even more important today for students.

Although the strategies in the original edition are as valuable today as they were at first publication, shifts we have observed in pedagogical approaches to learning prompted us to refresh this important book. What we would like our readers to consider now are changes in education driven by the unique opportunities for learning offered by advancements in information and communication technologies. Although the realities of the Internet, social networking, and mobile devices have presented new challenges to educators, the positive impact these technologies can have on learning potential far outweighs the transitional growth pains. The perceived distractions to learning and the adjustments to working and learning in digital spaces can put educators and students at odds. We hope that educators will find that the suggestions we make for almost every task in this edition will give them and their students many new ideas for harnessing the potential of easy and reliable technology tools to boost their experiences with developing questioning smarts.

There is so much information now available to students on any one topic, how can we help them make sense of it all? But information overload is no longer the main challenge, as David Weinberger points out in his book Too Big to Know. The depth, breadth, and boundary-less fluidity of information on the Net today means that we will never be able to process everything there is to know about a topic. This changes traditional ideas about knowledge, but networked environments also open up great potential for participatory learning, for knowledge-building and creation that was never before possible.

As knowledge becomes networked, the smartest person in the room isn’t the person in front lecturing us, and isn’t the collective wisdom of those in the room. The smartest person in the room is the room itself: the network that joins the people and the ideas in the room, and connects to those outside of it. (Weinberger, Too Big to Know)

This perspective opens new doors and possibilities for students not only to drive their own learning, but also to create and contribute their ideas to the room. Collaboration is a sought-after skill in future-oriented learning. Every study of 21st-century skills places collaboration high on the list of desired competencies; e.g., Shifting Minds, prepared by Canadians for 21st Century...
Learning and Innovation, charts desired competencies and provides Canadian-context rationale for shifts in learning.

Educators are making the shift to inquiry learning experiences that apply critical thinking, creativity and innovation, collaboration and communication, transliteracies, responsible digital behaviors, cultural and global citizenship, and character traits that will empower a growth mindset. These abilities are important to rounding out the desired skill sets for the future, and we advocate for continued efforts to engage learners through these approaches. For this revision of *Q Tasks*, we concentrate on additional strategies that enable learners to not only build their personal questioning skill set and attitudes, but also build their ability to work with others, especially in digital environments.

Naturally, this revision cannot stand as a full discussion of the many facets of learning with technology; however, it can provide teachers with some ideas of how to best apply technology tools in combination with the questioning approaches. It can support teachers in designing a learning experience for students that adds potential benefits that would not be possible without the technology.

Now with focused innovation we must invest in new practices that integrate pedagogy and technology, with the former as the driver. (Fullan, *Great to Excellent*)

Collaborative learning has always been a driving force in our work with teachers and students, so it is our pleasure to enhance each Q Task with additional ideas that combine opportunities to boost learning potential with best technologies and collaborative approaches. The results elevate questioning to a new dimension for learners—a place where they are in the driver’s seat, directing their learning journeys, while also taking the journey of participating and contributing to collaborative knowledge creation.