

ALPHABET SOUP WORTH DECYPHERING: THE INTERSECTION OF RQI, QFT, & CFG

This story in the November 2014 issue of Connections, written by NSRF National Facilitator Dave Nelson, focused on probing questions, and featured the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) from the Right Question Institute (RQI). In this issue, Connections Executive Editor Dave Lehman offers his review of Make Just One Change, written by the founders of the RQI, and Dave Nelson returns with a brief story about leading a workshop within the RQI conference last summer.

Introducing NSRF protocols and CFG work within the RQI conference

Two years ago I was introduced to the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) while reading Warren Berger's, *A More Beautiful Question: The Power of Inquiry to Spark Breakthrough Ideas*. At the time, the [Right Question Institute \(RQI\)](#) had just begun to widen its reach into education, openly providing their materials through their website to hundreds of inquiring teachers. I, too, took the invitation, predicting numerous uses of the QFT not only in my high school history classes, but also within our school's CFG communities. After seeing the process work in both contexts, I knew that the Right Question Institute and its grassroots organization would find traction in schools around the world—especially in the USA where many teachers have become seemingly stuck in a system that demands only answers from students through high stakes testing, rather than offering possibilities through, or in, “a generation” of inquiry. Yes, the pun is intended!

Last summer, I sought out RQI's first conference for educators, which took place over two days in Boston. I was eager to meet other educators who were discovering ways to apply the techniques in their classrooms and also to share how I've used the technique within the context of Critical Friends Group work and in my training workshops for new CFG Coaches. What I found at the event were Directors Luz Santana & Dan Rothstein, enthusiastic supporters, and dozens of early adopters, all professionals who share a very similar vibe with the communities of our CFG work: collaborative, reflective, generative, and committed to inquiry.

During the RQI Conference I had the opportunity to facilitate an “unconference” (similar to Open Space Technology) with a wide group of educators who were also interested in finding ways to utilize the QFT process within their schools' professional development initiatives. For those unfamiliar with the term, an ‘unconference’ is essentially a time for participants to propose and offer their own make-shift workshops. I teamed up with two other interested professionals, one administrator and one consultant, and we literally put together the process for the workshop in fifteen minutes, after quickly agreeing on the common focus for

the break-out session: How might the Question Formulation Technique, as well as other collaborative processes, be applied in the realm of professional development in our schools?

Guiding the group of over thirty participants through three simultaneous Chalk Talks, we not only distilled the group's ideas but also demonstrated the complimentary nature of NSRF protocols, CFG work, and the Question Formulation Technique. We followed the chalk talk with small group observations and analysis, after which time each group reported its conclusions from one of the group's chalk talks. Ideas were shared of ways that schools have used or could use the QFT as well as the numerous processes offered by NSRF.

I came away with the feeling that these two organizations share many common goals, and that those attending the conference craved the discovery of new ways to encourage deeper collaboration and inquiry. I was inspired by the story of the Right Question Institute, which in many ways shares a history with NSRF; both are rooted in improving communication, promoting constructivism, empowering participants, increasing equity, and touching people by helping everyone to be heard.

Although the Right Question Institute is still finding its place in the field of education, based on what I witnessed, they are definitely focusing on “next steps” and looking to find more ways to work with educators. There's little doubt in my mind that we as Critical Friends Group coaches and NSRF National Facilitators can draw a great deal from the practices of Right Question Institute, and that those who use the Question Formulation Technique will be thrilled with the ever-expanding and versatile protocols offered by NSRF and featured in our CFG trainings for new coaches.



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