



SF-CESS, 2012, 2013

Essential Questions guide a larger, long-term inquiry, may have multiple answers and get to the heart of a matter. EQs tend to be about subject area of importance to an individual (which sometimes may also be about the individual). Originated as a means to guide students learning about a specific topic or unit, EQs, also can guide and focus one's own learning about their practice or focus work.

Example: *How should I educate students across difference to ensure equitable and excellent results?*

What Essential Question is guiding you and your work this year?

Framing Questions are developed from a long-term EQ and a current APT Dilemma and are used inform and guide feedback to a presenter within the constraints of a dilemma-based protocol such as a consultancy or classroom observations. Framing questions center on the presenter, her practice and her stance... in the skin she is in, and the work she must do for transformation.

Example: *What do I as a white female with positional power and authority within my classroom, need to do and know in order better educate my least reached students – my Latino males?*

Clarifying Questions are for the benefit of the “asker” and are answered with brief (less than a complex sentence), factual responses. They are asked to better prepare the “asker” to serve as a critical friend.

Examples: *Latino males represent what percentage of your classes? What is their passing rate as compared with other students? What have you heard from them about your class?*

Probing Questions are open questions for the benefit of the presenter and, based in positive suppositions, uncover passions & beliefs, and deepen & challenge current thinking. Presenters do not have to answer every PQ.

Example: *What was the best lesson you ever taught? What made it so?*

Discourse II Probing Questions (D2PQs) are Probing Questions (see above) that either are steeped in or invite language that tends to be about uncomfortable, unequal, ineffective, prejudicial conditions and relationships in schools. D2PQs open space for ambiguity and change.

Example: *If asked, what do you fear your least successful students would say about your class?*

What D2PQ do you most fear being asked?



SF-CESS, 2005

“How Do You Ask A Good Essential Question?”

Qualities of a Good Essential Question:

- EQs cannot be answered with a “Yes” or a “No”.
- EQs require that we check assumptions (our own as well as those general to a topic.)
- EQs require research.
- EQs are usually controversial and require consideration from different points of view and multiple sources.
- EQs lead to more and deeper questions.
- EQs do not have one right answer. Sometimes, EQs cannot be answered completely.
- Answers to EQs are developed over time and supported by careful consideration of the related research.
- Answering EQs requires judgment (Critical Thinking).

Word Clues That an Essential Question Might Be A Good Essential Question

Probably Not A Good Question	Possibly A Good Question	Probably A Good Question	Especially Good: Requires Judgment
“Should”	“What”	“Why”	“Why should...”
“Is”	“When”	“How”	“How should...”
“Are”	“Who”		“How could...”
	“Where”		