

## Using the QFT with Special Student Populations

Below, we've gathered tips, insights, and ideas from educators across the country who are using the QFT with special populations, including English language learners, early elementary students, and students who receive special education services. While we are continually amazed at what students can accomplish within the existing structure of the QFT, some educators have found it helpful to design additional supports in a couple key areas. Many thanks to the innovative educators who collaborated on this document.

<p><b>Before the QFT</b></p>	<p>Many educators find it helpful to do some pre-teaching ahead of the QFT to familiarize students with question words and structures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharon Emmi-Iovinelli (Elmhurst, IL) recommends <a href="http://Flocabulary.com">Flocabulary.com</a>, a site which makes short rap videos about educational topics. <a href="#">This one</a> on sentence punctuation is useful for question words.</li> <li>• Have students create their own anchor chart with question stems (what, why who...?) and keep adding new words that start questions as they discover them.</li> <li>• Nancy Cohen (Highland Park, IL) reviews question words by playing the “Carnac the Magnificent game” (based on the Johnny Carson character). Nancy gives an answer (to an unknown question) and students have to guess a question that would fit. So, if Nancy says, “it’s in my pocket” students might respond, “where is the piece of the paper?” or “Do you know where the pen is?”</li> <li>• Before planning scaffolds and modifications, consider doing the QFT cold as a pre-assessment to get a more accurate sense of what students can do already and what they struggle with.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Designing the Question Focus</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharon notes, “I’ve found that a statement isn’t enough for ELLs to go on—I often pair an image or video with a short phrase.”</li> <li>• Nancy frequently includes hashtags as a QFocus, for ex: #survival for a QFT on the book <i>Jaguar</i> by Roland Smith. Hashtags work well because students are already familiar with them as a format for organizing and distilling down a main idea or theme. They immediately capture attention.</li> <li>• Use QFoci that encourage students to investigate their own learning styles and support systems, so they can advocate for their needs. Mike Cerniglia (Ridgefield, CT) uses the QFocus “note taking.”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Producing Questions and Learning the 4 Rules</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don’t correct for grammar or spelling during the process of producing questions; if necessary, have students go back and edit the next day or as part of next steps.</li> <li>• Spend some extra time explicitly teaching and breaking down the 4 rules. For early learners, “do not judge or discuss” can be too vague. Brainstorm specific words or behaviors that are “judging.”</li> <li>• To teach the 4 rules, Ashley Melville (Cobb County, GA) and first grade teachers ran a model QFT that students observed. Students analyzed how teachers “followed the rules” and noticed language and behaviors that do or do not follow the rules. (For ex. one teacher kept criticizing spelling)</li> <li>• Give students time to generate questions individually before sharing with a small group. Telannia Norfar (Oklahoma City, OK) “noticed that even when I grouped some ELL students together...they tended not to speak with the group. So the second time, students spent a few minutes creating questions themselves without other people. It was a much better way to generate what ELL students were thinking.”</li> <li>• Explore online tools like Google docs; typing questions can be faster than writing for some students and saving work for later is easier and more organized.</li> </ul>

<b>Open vs. Closed Questions</b>	<p>We talked to many educators who found this step challenging for their students. Many spent extra time teaching open vs. closed structures and analyzing real world examples.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers in Elmhurst, IL modeled a conversation about their weekend plans using many open and closed questions; students then named the difference between the types of questions and the response that each elicited.</li> <li>Sharon shows students real world “artifacts” in order to analyze closed vs open sentence structures and discuss the purpose of each type. (For ex. a survey form parents fill out to enroll students in school)</li> <li>Have students create a list of strategies and word stems for how to transform questions from one type to another. (For ex, ‘to make an open question, add ‘how’ or ‘why’ to the start of a closed question”) Post their list on the wall for reference.</li> <li>Ask students to write their new question right underneath the original question, to help with easy reading, spelling, and understanding <i>how</i> they made the change.</li> </ul>
<b>Prioritizing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mike found that students needed follow up questions to push their thinking about why one question is more important than another; prioritizing and organizing information can be a challenge for students.</li> <li>Voting via post-it notes or online platforms like padlet.com or dotstorming.com can be a fun, effective way to prioritize questions.</li> </ul>
<b>Working in Groups</b>	<p>Most educators recommended being thoughtful and intentional about group dynamics and the relative cost/benefits of working in pairs or small groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assign roles to hold each member of the group accountable to ease social interactions. Visit <a href="http://bit.ly/2yxKIPy">http://bit.ly/2yxKIPy</a> to access two teachers’ different visions for QFT group roles.</li> <li>Elementary educators often do the QFT as a whole class the first time, rather than splitting into groups, with the teacher acting as the scribe.</li> <li>Strategically assign the “note-taker” role to a student who has a tendency to dominate conversation. They will still volunteer questions, but they may listen to others more actively.</li> <li>Michele Rewold (Grand Junction, CO) notes, “you have to be really thoughtful about who is the scribe. Sometimes the cognitive load is so much that students can’t formulate their own questions while they’re writing. We have the scribe role switch to a new person after one minute so every person has a turn.”</li> <li>Whatever scaffolds or modifications you plan to make with QFT, Telannia’s advice is to “Try to make the scaffold apply to anybody; allow everyone to use it so no one gets singled out.”</li> </ul>
<b>Time</b>	<p>Many teachers find it helpful to introduce the QFT over the course of a few days or class periods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some early elementary teachers have budgeted roughly 1 day (1 block during the day) per step in the QFT process the first time through the QFT. Students eventually do the whole process all at once, after practicing each step.</li> <li>Sharon notes though that “you can’t belabor every step in the process every time, because the kids will tune out; they want to answer their questions!”</li> <li>Jonathan Bisson (Amenia, NY) gives students about 50% more time than the suggested time from the book, in order to give students time to think, process, spell, and structure sentences.</li> </ul>
<b>Language Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow students to write questions in their native language; if necessary, students can work with peers to translate when the group is done producing questions. This helps the whole group in oral practice. Michele notes that in this practice “all students do a lot of translating, which helps develop language skills.”</li> <li>Create question stem starters or anchor charts in multiple languages.</li> </ul>

## Testimonials from QFT Educators

*“QFT ignites that sense of purpose in students and they get so excited when they read something that answers their question... We’ve noticed that this serves us even in our lives, like when we go to the doctor. I find that I now have more questions. My colleagues and I keep asking ourselves, ‘why didn’t we learn this a long time ago?’”*

**-Michele Rewold, Dual Immersion Academy K-8 Dual Language Program Facilitator, Grand Junction, CO**

*“What I love the most is the ownership in learning. When I’m starting the unit with my learning objective or my essential question, then yes, the kids are obediently engaged. They are listening and learning. But it’s not a true interest. When I did the QFT, I switched to not having an essential question, but rather their questions. It changed their interest...the kids were much more invested in learning because it was a genuine question by them.”*

**-Telannia Norfar, Northwest Classen High School Mathematics Teacher, Oklahoma City, OK**

*“Some of the students were proud of how many questions they contributed. One student was normally less inclined to participate, yet her contributions to the brainstorm created pride that I hadn’t yet seen from her... Social peer interactions improved, especially for mixed grades classrooms, where students discovered commonality in thought process when doing the QFT together.”*

**-Mike Cerniglia, Ridgefield High School Special Education Teacher, Ridgefield, CT**

*“A lot of books say that they are ‘learn today, use tomorrow’ but this literally is something you can do the very next day, without any extra trainings or materials. By starting class units with a low risk, interdisciplinary activity, not diving right into literature, which can bring up bad feelings for my students who have a history of academic trauma, it is a very powerful entry point for students into a year of project-based learning and curiosity.”*

**-Jonathan Bisson, The Kildonan School High School English and Special Education Teacher, Amenia, NY**

## Additional Opportunities to Learn More

Please consider contributing your own ideas and experiences and collaborating with others online at our [dedicated forum page](#) for educators working with special student populations. Note: Please be logged in to the Educator Network in order to view all the available forums. (<http://rightquestion.org/forums/>)

[Read more](#) about a special education teacher in New York City used the QFT to engage her students in civic action. ([www.rightquestion.org/blog/student-engagement-special-education-classroom/](http://www.rightquestion.org/blog/student-engagement-special-education-classroom/))