

Foreword to the Third Edition

*It you don't have a hammer,
A shoe will do.*

The brief comment, above, initiated the Foreword to the first edition (1996) of Edie Holcomb's book, *Asking the Right Questions*. In the Foreword to the second edition (2000), this myth was dispelled. In this third iteration of *Asking the Right Questions*, it is timely to bury (deeply) the above-stated idea. As Holcomb points out, the standards movement and the requirements of No Child Left Behind legislation make it abundantly necessary to gain clarity about our goals for school improvement, and thus, increased successful learning outcomes for students. Any old shoe *won't* do. Fortunately, Holcomb provides us with a broad array of tools and techniques, and a wide range of tactics and strategies to support and guide our efforts at increasing the effectiveness of our schools.

An additional expansion in this third edition is the attention given to the confluence of classroom, school, and district office. In this book, these three entities are treated as collaborators who work in tandem in the pursuit of school change and improvement. No longer is there the we–they separation of the school and district staff; instead there are sense-making suggestions for the roles that each plays and the tools required for effectively enacting those roles.

A quick review of the table of contents reveals the richness of what is found between the covers of this book. Would-be school improvers, as well as experienced change agents, will delight in even a quick scan of possibilities, for each will find excellent ideas and actions to employ in his or her work. Holcomb has enhanced her prior volumes, to the benefit of all school change leaders, whether they are internal to the school or district or externally situated. Of special note is her reference to or framing of the book's tools for the adoption and implementation processes upon which true change will occur. Six strategies identified consistently in the school improvement and reform literature undergird the implementation process and are given attention (Hall & Hord, 2006):

1. Create and articulate a shared vision of the change
2. Plan for adopting and implementing the change, and provide resources

3. Invest in training and professional development
4. Check progress
5. Provide continual assistance
6. Create a context conducive to change

Four of these six strategies are given life through the tool of Innovation Configuration (IC) Maps. The IC Map, described and carefully explained by Holcomb (see Chapter 5), is actually the written-down vision of the change as it is imagined when the change is implemented in a high-quality way in classrooms or the school, or whatever its intended context. The IC Map tool is further used as a guide for developing a plan for implementation and for identifying resources needed. The map provides the professional developer with information needed for the design and delivery of training and professional learning of those who will be implementing the change. In turn, the IC Map may be used to monitor or assess progress of individuals (and through aggregation, groups) as they develop the knowledge and skills to use the change effectively. The utility of this tool cannot be overestimated, for it provides clarity to both the leaders of a change/school improvement effort and the individual implementers of it. The IC Map is but one example of the practical and quality tools, strategies, and approaches the reader can expect from this volume.

Holcomb herself has been a campus leader of school reform and has experienced the process at the personal and practical levels. These experiences encompass a wide range of roles and responsibilities. For example, she has supported the development of others, preparing them for the leadership role. In these efforts, she has developed professional development materials and activities and has shared her expertise in a variety of formats and venues, nationally and internationally.

She has been in the vineyard as a school practitioner leading change. She has also been a school change trainer, supporting the process from a managerial perspective. Always a student of the research literature, she enhances her experiential knowledge base with the study results of researchers' rigor and precision. Her experiences and perspectives of the world have contributed to her thoughtful advice and counsel. As an insider and an outsider—she has been in both places—Holcomb offers us this rich manuscript, contributing to our resources and to the measurable probability of successful school change.

At their work table, all persons who have responsibility for guiding schools to increased effectiveness, from both the campus and district levels, should have this volume dog-eared and sticky noted. They will find much of value to “mark” in this book.

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