

"Community isn't always synonymous with warmth & harmony. Politeness is often a veneer for understanding, when in reality it masks uncovered territory, the unspeakable pit that we turn from because we know the pain and anger that can dwell there. It is important to remind ourselves that real community is forged out of struggle. This is the crucible from which a real community grows."

-- Linda Christensen

Community Agreements

Real communities emerge when people share a common interest and come into alignment around how they want to be and work together. Co-constructing community agreements can help a group coalesce around a vision of community.

Agreements are very different from "rules" or "norms". *Rules* are explicitly mandated and enforced by an authority, and do not necessarily reflect the will or the buy-in of the group. *Norms* are more implicit—the ways people are actually in relationship to each other, whether consciously or not. *Community agreements* represent a consensus about how we want to be in relationship with each other. To be authentic, they must be explicitly developed and enforced by the group, not by an external authority.

Community agreements synthesize what every person in a group needs from each other and commits to in order to feel safe, supported, open, productive and trusting. They can be both *relational*—agreements about how we want to be in relationship to each other; as well as *operational*—the procedures we all agree to follow. Agreements can help quiet our S.C.A.R.F. by alleviating fears around certainty, relatedness, and fairness.

"To shape a socially intelligent culture, school leaders may need to change norms, starting with their own behavior."

-- Daniel Goldman



NATIONAL
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PROJECT

the courage of conversation

It's not easy to begin talking to one another again. We stay silent and apart for many reasons. Some of us never have been invited to share our ideas and opinions. From early school days and now as adults, we've been instructed to be quiet so others can tell us what to think. Others of us are accustomed to meetings to discuss ideas, but then these sessions degenerate into people shouting, or stomping out angrily, or taking over control of the agenda. These experiences have left us feeling hesitant to speak, and frightened of each other.

But good conversation is very different from those bad meetings. It is a much older and more reliable way for humans to think together. Before there were meetings, planning processes, or any other techniques, there was conversation—people sitting around interested in each other, talking together. When we think about beginning a conversation, we can take courage from the fact that this is a process we all know how to do. We are reawakening an ancient practice, a way of being together that all humans remember. A colleague in Denmark stated it perfectly: "It remembers me what it is to be human."

We can also take courage from the fact that many people are longing to be in conversation again. We are hungry for a chance to talk. People want to tell their story, and are willing to listen to yours. People want to talk about their concerns and struggles. Too many of us feel isolated, strange, or invisible. Conversation helps end that.

For conversation to take us into this deeper realm, I believe we have to practice several new behaviors. Here are the principles I've learned to emphasize before we begin a formal conversation process:

we acknowledge one another as equals

we try to stay curious about each other

we recognize that we need each other's help to become better listeners

we slow down so we have time to think and reflect

we remember that conversation is the natural way humans think together

we expect it to be messy at times



Constructivist Listening

Adapted from Becerra, A. & Weissglass, J. (2004). Take It Up: Leading for Educational Equity. Santa Barbara: The National Coalition for Equity and Education.

Constructivist listening is an effective strategy for engaging in conversations that are both intellectually demanding and emotionally challenging. It is distinct from most forms of listening in that its purpose is for the benefit of the speaker, not the listener.

Constructivist listening protocols ask that you give full attention to another person to hold space for them to:

- **Reflect**
- **Release emotion; and**
- **Construct new meaning about whatever challenges they face.**

The purpose is to allow new and clearer ways of thinking and acting to emerge. In constructivist listening processes, we put aside our own needs and “agendas” to offer the gift of deep listening to another human being, and the results can be profound. According to Weissglass, “these processes assist in the construction or reconstruction of the meaning of distressful experiences as well as in the recovery from the physiological and emotional tension they produce” (Weissglass 2004).

Distress and hurt contribute to unintelligent and uncaring behaviors and decision-making. Constructivist listening allows for the safe release and processing of thoughts and feelings, no matter how painful or repressed. Since most adults have been conditioned to temper or repress their feelings in the workplace, many of us are reluctant or even scared to express our feelings or show vulnerability. These protocols provide a safe, formal structure that both allows and encourages self-expression and emotional release.

Constructivist Listening Structures

Structure	# Participants	Basic Premise
Dyad	2	Each talker responds to a prompt with equal time given.
Support Group	3-6	
Personal Experience Panel	3-5	Panelists are given equal time to respond to a prompt with a larger group listening.

Constructivist Listening Guidelines

- **Equal time.** Each person is given equal time to talk and to listen. Because everyone deserves attention.
- **No interruption.** The listener doesn't paraphrase or interpret the talker's thoughts or feelings; analyze, give advice or break in with a personal story. Because people are capable of solving their own problems.
- **Confidentiality.** The listener doesn't talk about what the talker has said to anyone else, or even bring it up to the talker afterwards. Because one needs to be assured of confidentiality in order to be authentic.
- **No criticism.** The talker doesn't criticize or complain about the listener or about mutual colleagues during their time to talk. Those challenges can be addressed in a different structure, based in dialogue. Because one cannot listen well when he/she is feeling attacked or defensive.
- **Undivided attention.** Don't eat or drink, glance at your cell phone or email. Remove any other distractions.

The practice of constructivist listening acknowledges that our feelings at any given moment do not necessarily represent our rational thinking (or even our own feelings) five minutes later. By offering a safe, confidential space for release and reflection, constructivist listening allows us the gift of space and time to heal so that we continue to grow as powerful leaders.

The simple act of sharing our story with another person, be it a colleague or a stranger, creates an opportunity for relationship. While the constructivist listening guidelines stipulate confidentiality, the act of listening and being listened to encourages trust, caring, and authenticity.

Constructivist listening strengthens your ability to address challenges by offering you insight into another person's unique lens and experience. It is particularly powerful in creating alliances across racial or other social difference, which form the basis for a thriving community.

Two Visions of Teaching

~ Professional Capital
(Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012)

Business Capital	Professional Capital
Good teaching may be emotionally demanding but it's technically simple.	Good teaching is technically sophisticated & difficult.
Good teaching is a quick study requiring only moderate intellectual ability.	Good teaching requires high levels of education & long periods of training.
Good teaching is hard at first, but with dedication can be mastered readily.	Good teaching is perfected through continuous improvement.
Good teaching should be driven by hard performance data about what works & where best to target one's efforts.	Good teaching involves wise judgement informed by evidence & experience.
Good teaching comes down to enthusiasm, hard work, raw talent & measurable results.	Good teaching is a collective accomplishment & responsibility.
Good teaching is often replaceable by online instruction.	Good teaching maximizes, mediates & moderates online instruction.



3 Levels of Text Protocol

Adapted from the National School Reform Faculty, nsrfharmony.org.

Purpose: To deepen understanding of a text and explore implications for participants' work.

Facilitation: Stick to the time limits. Each round takes up to 5 minutes per person in a group. Emphasize the need to watch air time during the brief "group response" segment. Do 1 - 3 rounds. Can be used as a prelude to a Text-based Discussion or by itself.

Roles: Facilitator/timekeeper (who also participates); participants

Process:

1. Sit in a circle and identify a facilitator/timekeeper
2. If participants have not done so ahead of time, have them read the text and identify passages (and a couple of back-ups) that they feel may have important implications for their work.
3. A Round consists of:
 - One person using up to 3 minutes to:
 - o LEVEL 1: Read aloud the passage she/he has selected
 - o LEVEL 2: Say what she/he thinks about the passage (interpretation, connection to past experiences, etc.)
 - o LEVEL 3: Say what she/he sees as the implications for his/her work.
 - The group responding (for a TOTAL of up to 2 minutes) to what has been said.
4. After all rounds have been completed, debrief the process.