Facilitation Skills for Group Effectiveness
PC111

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Michael Dolcemascolo is the former Executive Co-Director of Thinking Collaborative, the home of the Adaptive Schools Seminars and the Cognitive Coaching Seminars®. An independent consultant, Michael regularly presents workshops on Cognitive CoachingSM, Adaptive Schools, as well as presentation and facilitation skills to national and international audiences.

Michael is co-author with Robert Garmston of the Storytelling Study Companion (Corwin, 2019), Study Group Facilitation Guide for The Presenter's Fieldbook (Rowman Littlefield, 2018), The Focusing Four: A Consensus Seeking Activity DVD Viewers Guide and Dialogue DVD Viewers Guide (Center for Adaptive Schools, 2009). With Carolyn McKanders, Michael has co-authored the Developing Collaborative Groups Study Guide, and co-edited the Adaptive Schools Foundation Workshop Learning Guide (Thinking Collaborative, 2017). A former English teacher, Michael taught at all levels from Kindergarten through grade 12, and became a professional development specialist for 20 years. He served as Assistant Director of Staff Development, providing professional training and support to the 23 school districts surrounding the city of Syracuse in Central New York.

Michael holds BA degrees in Religious Studies and in English from Montclair State University, an MA in Cultural Symbol Systems from Syracuse University’s Department of Religion and a CAS in Educational Administration from the State University of New York, Cortland.

Jane Ellison

Jane Ellison has been an integral part of the Cognitive Coaching community since 1989. Entrusted with the leadership and perpetuation of the work by Art Costa and Bob Garmston, she has served as the Executive Co-Director of Thinking Collaborative with Michael Dolcemascolo and the Co-Director of the Center for Cognitive Coaching with Carolee Hayes. She provides training and consultation in the areas of Cognitive Coaching℠, Adaptive Schools, change and transition, quality professional and organizational development, curriculum development, effective instruction, supervision, and facilitation.

Jane has experience as a teacher at the elementary and graduate school levels, as a principal and a director of elementary education. She holds a B.A. in Elementary Education and Social Sciences from Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, an M.Ed. in Elementary Supervision from the University of North Texas, Denton, Texas, and an Ed.D. in Administration from VPI&SU, Blacksburg, Virginia. She is licensed as a teacher and supervisor in Texas and as an administrator in Colorado and Illinois.

Jane’s experiences include teaching graduate classes in South America, attending the Principals’ Institutes at Columbia Teachers’ College and Harvard University, and chairing the Board of Directors of the Principal’s Center at the University of Colorado, Denver. She is also a certified teacher and Principal Perceiver Specialist. She is the co-author of Cognitive Coaching: Weaving Threads of Learning and Change into the Culture of an Organization and Effective School Leadership: Developing Principals with Cognitive Coaching.
Strategies & Notes
FOUR HATS OF SHARED LEADERSHIP

In an adaptive organization, leadership is shared – all the players wear all the hats. All participants must have the knowledge and skills to manage themselves and to manage and lead others. Leadership is a shared function in meetings, staff development activities action research and projects. Recognizing the hats and knowing when and how to change them is shared knowledge within the organization, because when values, roles and work relationships are clear, decisions about appropriate behavior are easy.

We offer definitions to illustrate these functions of four leadership roles and the distinction among those roles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facilitate</strong></td>
<td>To facilitate means “make easier.” A facilitator is one who conducts a meeting in which the purpose may be dialogue, shared decision-making, planning or problem-solving. The facilitator directs the procedures to be used in the meeting, choreographs the energy within the group, and maintains a focus on meeting standards. The facilitator should rarely be the person in the group with the greatest role or knowledge authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present</strong></td>
<td>To present is to teach. A presenter’s goals are to extend and enrich knowledge, skills or attitudes and to have these applied in people’s work. A presenter may adopt many stances (e.g., expert, colleague, novice, friend) and use many strategies of presentation (e.g., lecture, cooperative learning, study groups). Premier presenters are guided by clarity of instructional outcomes and continuous assessment of goal achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coach</strong></td>
<td>To coach is to help other persons take action toward their goals while simultaneously helping them develop expertise in planning, reflecting, problem-solving and decision-making. The coach takes a nonjudgmental stance and uses tools of open-ended questions, pausing, paraphrasing, and probing for specificity. The skillful coach focuses on the perceptions, thinking and decision-making process of the group to mediate resources for self-directedness.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Consultant</strong></td>
<td>A consultant can be an information specialist or an advocate for content or process. As an information specialist, the consultant delivers technical knowledge to the group. As a content advocate, the consultant encourages the group to use a certain strategy, adopt a particular program or purchase a specific brand of equipment or material. As a process advocate, the consultant attempts to influence the group’s methodology (e.g., recommending an open meeting rather than a close one in order to increase trust in the system). To effectively consult, one must have trust, commonly defined goals and the group’s desired outcomes clearly in mind.</td>
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</table>
The word capable comes from the Latin, “capere” meaning to take in, hold or contain. To understand something at the level of a capability is to be “able” to hold onto the information. Metaphorically a capability can be viewed as a container for holding discrete pieces of knowledge and behaviors in ways they can be remembered and applied. Capabilities are different from knowledge and behavior. Capabilities are metacognitive maps, plans and strategies to guide behavioral choices; a behavior is simply taking action. With capabilities, we have conditional knowledge -- an understanding of how, when, where and why to apply behavioral actions.

Garmston (2005) asserts, “To elegantly perform an activity or behavior requires learning at the level of capability. It is at this level, I believe that we can teach for transfer” (p.15). It is more powerful to focus on capabilities than behaviors because the capability is represented internally. A capability serves to heighten one’s awareness in the moment – one has knowledge or awareness of the present, which includes what’s going on around and inside oneself. From those internal representations, behaviors can be applied in more than one setting. For example, a person who knows how to maneuver in a hometown airport, may gain the capability of comfortably navigating various airports.

To understand the many concepts, tools and strategies necessary to wear all Four Hats, it is useful to examine the capabilities common to all four and those particular to certain hats. With the following capabilities (Figure 2 below), self-directed leaders will have awareness of their intention, which will focus their attention, which in turn will allow them to choose action (e.g., how to listen, how to speak) when wearing each of the leadership hats.

1. Know One’s Intentions and Choose Congruent Behaviors

Clarity of intention directs our attention, which in turn directs action--the what, why and how of a leader’s choices. Intention is the foundation of flexible and effective behavior as it provides context for the other capabilities. As stated by Dolcemascolo and McKanders (2016), “It is the source of impulse control, patience, strategic listening and strategic speaking” (p. 39). Knowing one’s intention and choosing congruent behaviors supports achievement of clear outcomes when coaching, facilitating, presenting and consulting.

A facilitator’s intention to support a group in reaching its own decisions leads the facilitator to take a neutral stance on content, while structuring supportive processes.

2. Set Aside Unproductive Patterns of Listening, Responding and Inquiring

For every leader, there are two “audiences.” One audience is external, made up of the person or persons with whom one is communicating; and the other is internal, made up of personal feelings, images and self-talk. Leaders are challenged to continually decide which audience to serve, managing the tension between self and others.
There are certain patterns of listening, which in everyday life are natural to human beings. For example, sometimes we listen and share a similar experience with the intention of establishing our credibility. However, when listening with the intention to support others’ thinking, we set aside that way of listening in order to avoid hijacking the conversation and shifting the focus away from the speaker.

Facilitating and coaching set-asides. Common patterns of listening and responding that must be set-aside to maintain a non-judgmental stance while facilitating are:

- Autobiography
- Inquisitive/Curiosity
- Solution

*Autobiographical listening* happens when the ego intrudes, and a phrase like “me, too!” hijacks the narrative. The story should belong to the group/individual being coached or facilitated, not to the listener.

The ego again intrudes with *personal curiosity listening*, which one colleague described as “soap opera” listening. It can sound like “Tell me more!” The essential internal/metacognitive question while listening, and before offering a response should be “Who is this for?” If the question or comment is to mediate the thinking of the group/individual, offer it; if it is for the coach or facilitator’s personal interest, set it aside.

The third set-aside when coaching or facilitating is *solution listening*, in which the listener is busy rehearsing the answer s/he will give to solve the group’s/individual’s problem for them. Setting aside this expert or “fix-it” mind set, the goal instead is to mediate thinking and develop the self-directed problem-solving abilities of the group/individual you are supporting.

3. The Third Capability of a Facilitator is to Monitor the Group and Direct Appropriate Processes.

   Facilitators pay attention to task, processes and group development. Before a meeting the facilitator plans processes for maximum effectiveness and efficiency in reaching outcomes. During the meeting, the facilitator continually monitors the group and individuals in the group, as well as the tasks and outcomes, in order to adjust processes. After the meeting the facilitator, in collaboration with group leaders, may also support reflecting and planning.

   Some of the ways in which facilitators attend to the group during meetings are: managing attention, energy, information and logistics; operationalizing the meeting standards by focusing the group on one topic and one process at a time; directing and amplifying the group’s internal resources of consciousness, efficacy, flexibility, craftsmanship and interdependence; offering group processes and strategies to use data productively; navigating tensions that may arise; and managing the room arrangement and materials to support the group’s purposes, processes, topics, and development (see
4. The Fourth Capability of a Facilitator is to Select from a Repertoire of Maps, Moves, and Strategies to Make the Group’s Work Easier.

Facilitators have maps, which are mental models/frameworks/containers that guide them. *What-Why-How, Two Ways of Talking,* and *Energy Sources* are examples that serve as metacognitive templates for both design and delivery of the facilitation.

Facilitators also have a toolbox of verbal and nonverbal moves that do not live on an agenda, but are inside the facilitator for improvisational use whenever needed. *Choose Voice, Signal Role Change,* and *Decontaminate Problem Space* are among tools or moves a facilitator may call upon.

Strategies are methods the facilitator uses to invite the audience to construct meaning by connecting topics to their circumstances, practicing skills, deepening understanding, solving problems and making decisions. Strategies have four functions: focus, efficiency, psychology safety and modeling of social skills. *Criteria Matrix, Focusing Four,* and *Assumptions Wall* are part of an ever-expanding repertoire of interactive strategies the facilitator might offer (Garmston & Wellman, 2016, “Appendix A: Facilitation Strategies and Moves”).
THREE FOCUS AREAS

Productive group work is organized by three focus areas:

- Facilitating Groups
- Developing Groups
- Becoming a More Skillful Group Member

These three arenas are essential focus areas for all successful groups.

Facilitating Groups

Facilitation is an act of planned improvisation. Skilled and confident facilitators pay attention to several dimensions simultaneously: task focus, process skills development and relationships within the group. With appropriate maps and tools, knowledgeable facilitators are able to: anticipate what might happen during a session; monitor both in-the-moment activities and actions and monitor where such actions fit within the bigger picture for the group and for the organization; and recover when the group, group members or they themselves lose focus and direction.

Developing Groups

Our basic premise is that groups develop from novice to more expert levels of performance. Expertise does not always result from time together or from basic levels of task completion. Expert groups consciously develop their capacities and toolkits for engaging in more complex work and more emotionally challenging tasks. One hallmark of emerging expertise is a group’s willingness to take the time to reflect on it processes, products and development as a group. Group development is a shared responsibility between group leaders, group facilitators and group members.

Becoming a more skillful group member

At a fundamental level there is no such thing as group behavior, there are only the choices that individuals make about what to say or do and what they choose not to say or do. Expert group members employ a well-crafted set of verbal and nonverbal tools to productively influence the thinking, decisions and choices of others in the group. They also monitor the effects of their choices on themselves and the impacts of their actions as other group members respond or choose not to respond to these actions. Skillful group members help the group and the facilitator maintain focus, momentum and outcome achievement.
PRINCIPLES OF PARAPHRASING

- Attend fully.
- Listen with the intention to understand.
- Capture the essence of the message.
- Reflect the essence of voice, tone, and gesture.
- Make the paraphrase shorter than the original statement.
- Paraphrase before asking a question.
- Use the pronoun “you” instead of “I”.

Three Types of Paraphrasing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledging</th>
<th>Organizing</th>
<th>Abstracting</th>
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<tr>
<td>a brief statement in the listener’s own words — metaphorically: a mirror.</td>
<td>a statement that offers themes or containers — metaphorically: basket/boxes</td>
<td>a statement that shifts the conversation to a higher or lower level of abstraction — metaphorically: ladder</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- You’re concerned about…
- You would like to see…
- You feel badly about…
- You have two goals here: one is about _____ and the other is about _____.
- We are struggling with three themes: where to _____, how to _____, and who should _____.
- On the one hand we _____ and on the other we _____.

To shift up
- It’s important to you/us that…
- A belief you/we hold is…
- A goal for you/us is…
- An assumption you/we are holding is…
- You/We are considering (Differentiated Instruction).
- You/We are (identity).
THE FOUR CURRENTS OF FACILITATION MANAGEMENT
# FACILITATOR NONVERBALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choose Voice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention First</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freeze Gesture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go Visual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Paragraph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decontaminate Problem Space</td>
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THE SEVEN NORMS OF COLLABORATIVE WORK
Garmston & Wellman, The Adaptive School

Pausing
Pausing before responding or asking a question allows time for thinking and enhances dialogue, discussion and decision-making.

Paraphrasing
Using a paraphrase starter that is comfortable for you “So . . .” or “You’re feeling . . .” or “You’re thinking . . .,” and following the starter with a paraphrase assists members of the group to hear and understand one another.

Posing questions
Two intentions of posing questions are to explore and specify thinking. Questions may be posed to explore perceptions, assumptions and interpretations and invite others to inquire into their own thinking. For example, “What might be some outcomes we are envisioning?” Use focusing questions such as, “Which students, specifically?” or “What might be an example of that?” to increase the clarity and precision of group members’ thinking. Inquire into the ideas of others before advocating for one’s own ideas.

Putting ideas on the table
Ideas are the heart of a meaningful dialogue. Label the intention of your comments. For example, you might say, “Here is one idea . . .” or “One thought I have is . . .” or “Here is a possible approach . . .”

Providing data
Providing data, both qualitative and quantitative, in a variety of forms supports group members in constructing shared understanding from their work. Data have no meaning beyond that which we make of them; shared meaning develops from collaboratively exploring, analyzing and interpreting data.

Paying attention to self and others
Meaningful dialogue is facilitated when each group member is conscious of self and of others, and is aware of not only what he or she is saying, but also how it is said and how others are responding. This includes paying attention to learning style when planning for, facilitating and participating in group meetings. Responding to others in their own language forms is one manifestation of this norm.

Presuming positive intentions
Assuming that others’ intentions are positive promotes and facilitates meaningful dialogue and eliminates unintentional putdowns. Using positive intentions in your speech is one manifestation of this norm.
NORMS OF COLLABORATION INVENTORY

1. Pausing to allow time for thought

A. I pause after posing questions.
   low /_____/_____/_____/_____/ high
   1 2 3 4 5

B. I pause after others speak to reflect before responding.
   low /_____/_____/_____/_____/ high
   1 2 3 4 5

C. I pause before asking questions to allow time for artful construction.
   low /_____/_____/_____/_____/ high
   1 2 3 4 5

Paraphrasing within a pattern of pause, paraphrase, pause, pose question to ensure deep listening

A. I listen and paraphrase to acknowledge.
   low /_____/_____/_____/_____/ high
   1 2 3 4 5

B. I listen and paraphrase to organize.
   low /_____/_____/_____/_____/ high
   1 2 3 4 5

C. I listen and paraphrase to shift levels of abstraction.
   low /_____/_____/_____/_____/ high
   1 2 3 4 5

2. Posing questions to reveal and extend thinking

A. I pose questions to explore perceptions, assumptions and interpretations.
   low /_____/_____/_____/_____/ high
   1 2 3 4 5

B. I inquire before putting ideas on the table and before I advocate.
   low /_____/_____/_____/_____/ high
   1 2 3 4 5

C. I seek specificity of data, assumptions, generalizations, and the meaning of words.
3. Putting ideas on the table and taking them off

A. I state the intentions of my communications.

B. I provide relevant facts, ideas, opinions and inferences.

C. I remove or announce modification of ideas, opinions and points of view.

5. Providing data to structure conversations

A. I present specific, measurable, observable information.

B. I present data without judgments, opinions or inferences

C. I offer multiple types of data to broaden understanding.

6. Paying attention to self and others to monitor our ways of working

A. I balance participation and open opportunities for others to contribute and respond.

B. I restrain my impulses to react, respond or rebut at inappropriate times or in ineffective ways.

C. I maintain awareness of the group’s task, processes and development.
7. Presuming positive intentions to support a nonjudgmental atmosphere

A. I communicate respectfully whether I agree or disagree.
   low / _____/ _____/ _____/ _____/ high
   1     2     3     4     5

B. I embed positive presuppositions in my paraphrases, summaries and comments.
   low / _____/ _____/ _____/ _____/ high
   1     2     3     4     5

C. I embed positive presuppositions when I pose questions.
   low / _____/ _____/ _____/ _____/ high
   1     2     3     4     5
THE FOCUSING FOUR: BRAINSTORM, CLARIFY, ADVOCATE, CANVASS
(Directions for strategies at www.thinkingcollaborative.com)

Set Up

• Explain each of the four steps before starting the activity.
• Check for participants’ understanding.
• Explain that the hand count or vote at the canvass stage will not determine the decision about which options to recommend. The group will decide and be guided, not bound, by the data.
• Begin the process.

1. Brainstorm
   • Record brainstormed ideas on chart paper.
   • Elicit ideas only.
   • Discourage criticisms or questions.
   • Push for 8-18 ideas.

2. Clarify
   • Ask if any items should be clarified.
   • The author of the idea provides clarification.
   • The facilitator observes the questioner during the clarification and stops the clarification when the questioner indicates nonverbally or verbally that he or she understands.

3. Advocate
   • Participants may advocate for as many items as they wish and as many times as they wish.
   • Statements of advocacy must be phrased in the positive.
   • Statements of advocacy must be brief.

4. Canvass
   • Ask individuals in the group to identify which few ideas they feel are most important.
   • To determine what a few is, use the formula of one-third plus one. If 12 items are on the list, ask the group to identify 5 that are most important to them; if there are 15 items on the list, ask the group to identify 6. They do not have to be placed in rank order.
   • Take a hand count to determine which items are of greatest interest to the group.
# FOCUSING FOUR OBSERVATION GUIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitator</th>
<th>Recorder</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Verbals:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Verbals:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonverbals:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Nonverbals:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Other:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESOURCES & READING:

1. Planning For Facilitation—Thinking And Conversation Guide, by Carolyn McKanders

2. Giving Clear Directions Is Not As Simple As It Looks, by Robert Garmston and Carolyn McKanders

3. Ways of Talking, by Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman

4. Seminar Resources: Works Cited
1. Preparing to Facilitate
Consulting conversation before facilitating a group:

**Clarify**
- Task, Purpose, and Outcomes
- What makes this topic important?
- What are expected products? Assess feasibility.
- Length of meeting
- Who are the group members and their relationship to each other and the topic?
- Contextual opportunities and constraints
- Group dynamics and interaction patterns
- Group development goals
- Preferred or suggested processes
- What working agreements live within the group?
- Room arrangements; materials needed

2. Facilitating the Group

**Opening**
- Audience Connect—relationship/rapport and credibility
  Greeting and introduce self and your connection to the group and topic
- Role Clarification and Framing the Work (includes sharing and explaining the visual purpose and other pertinent information to support clarity and group efficacy)
- Example of an Opening
  
  Welcome.
  Thank you for coming. I am... and I’ll be facilitating your meeting. Today’s purpose/task is to... (...determine, generate, explore, resolve, approve, identify, create, etc.). My job is to support your thinking, help you stay on the agenda, and see that all voices are heard. I will focus on the process and stay out of the content.
- How we will work together
  - Share attention signal, working agreements, etc.
  - If appropriate, negotiate the range of facilitation group would appreciate, tight-to-loose

**Inclusion Strategy**

**Share Charted Outcomes**
Share Charted Public Agenda

Announce First Agenda Item
- Use What? Why?
- Use How? Strategies, Processes, and Structures
- Use How? Visually available if multiple-step directions
- Give an overview of lengthy or complex directions
- Use visual paragraph if appropriate

Repeat above for all agenda items

Throughout meeting attend to...
- Relationships, Group Dynamics, Engagement
- Focusing the Group’s Attention
- Giving Clear Directions
- Information Generated
  - Invite group awareness—lift pertinent information, data, and learning relevant to the outcomes verbally and/or in writing (as third point reference)
- Information to be displayed publicly and in what form
- Energy of the Group
- Use of Norms of Collaboration
- Model Approachability and Credibility congruent with intentions, verbally and nonverbally
- Asking Invitational questions
- Recovering if necessary
- Appropriate use of pronouns

Closing the Meeting
- Reflecting and Processing
  - Products, Information, Processes, Group Working Agreements, Norms, etc.
  - If appropriate, support the group in Goal Setting
- Next Steps
  - Clarify who does what by when
  - Test commitments
  - Arrange for communications
  - Assess the meeting
  - Arrange for next meeting (date and facilitator)
GIVING CLEAR DIRECTIONS
IS NOT AS SIMPLE AS IT LOOKS
By  Robert Garmston and Carolyn McKanders

We’ve trained hundreds of bright, competent people to make presentations on a range of topics and discovered that giving directions is more complex than we first thought. Here are some things we’ve learned by whispering in the ear of a novice just before they gave a direction and from interviewing them, and experts in the field about their thought processes.

Our first realization was that there are four domains for giving directions. First is the simple form that is used repeatedly with minor variations. “Turn to your neighbor and name the key points for you on this topic.” This pattern can be memorized after a few uses. Next is what a presenter says when introducing directions from a pre-prepared power point slide. Third is giving multi-step directions without a chart or power point. Fourth, and the most complex, is working from scratch designing directions for an activity when none exists.

Some aspects are common in the delivery of each of the types.

Getting Attention

Both Grinder (1993) and Zoller (2010) strongly advocate that attention should always be the first order of business. To gain the group’s attention, the leader combines these features as follows:

- She stands upright with head and body still in a posture of calm and centeredness with her feet aligned under the shoulders. Grinder and Zoller call this a credible stance.
- She may also use a gesture, frozen in space – which universally communicates “be silent – more is coming.” This might be a finger in the air, a palm directed at herself, or some other natural sign congruent with the message.
- She uses a credible voice to get attention, using a brief phrase like “Please look this way”. This voice form is one in which the tonal pattern is flat and tends to curl down at the end of sentences. This voice pattern universally is received as “This is important information, please attend.”
- She remains still, as in freezing the posture and holds the position until almost all members are silent and focused.
- When the group is attentive and still, she breaks eye contact, breathes, and steps into another space. Again, with a credible voice, she gives the next direction.

As groups tire, group members often respond less to verbal directions. During a working session we often use a hand signal to redirect attention from small group conversation to full group work. Once again assume a credible stance, stand still and now hold one hand in the air as a prearranged signal for silence. As group members notice the
gesture they copy it signaling to those who may not have noticed that you need their attention. The visual nature of this strategy gets attention from those who process visually, and their silence alerts auditory processors to pay attention (Garmston & Wellman, 2002).

**Using a Prepared Slide**

Give an oral overview before showing slides with several steps so people know where this is going. Most often, directions are digested best when one line of the slide is revealed at a time, giving the presenter time to elaborate. Occasionally the first item will call for members to locate materials, or arrange for a new partner. When this is the case, have members execute the first direction before showing the next steps. When the direction is to find a new partner, include a simple initial engagement to minimize waiting or wasted time. For example: Find a new partner and introduce yourself. The last step in direction giving should be a check for understanding. “What questions might you have about how to do this well?” is well phrased. “Do you have any questions?” is not. Leave the slide on the screen while the group begins its work. Remove the slide when no longer needed for guidance.

**Managing Multi-Step Directions**

If there are subsets to the directions, the presenter will use a visual paragraph for maximum congruence. In this pattern she gives the first direction, pauses, breaks eye contact by dropping her head, moves to a new spot, looks up and gives the next direction. This pattern can be used for up to 4 stages in direction giving. Imagine the following statements (with expanded information for each) delivered with the visual paragraph after each of the first three directions. Figure 1 shows what might be said giving multi-step directions in a meeting or a classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Directions in a Meeting</th>
<th>Directions in a Classroom</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• First you will brainstorm&lt;br&gt;• Next you will clarify&lt;br&gt;• Third you will advocate&lt;br&gt;• And finally you will rank what is most important to you.</td>
<td>• Take out your social studies book&lt;br&gt;• Turn to page 67&lt;br&gt;• Put an X next to the odd numbered questions&lt;br&gt;• Write your answers to these questions in complete sentences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1. Supporting Multi-Step Directions Visually*

A middle school teacher in Portland, Oregon stresses the combination of verbal and written instructions. He writes, “The general pattern for me is to write the instructions out on the board/overhead, instead of pre-writing (The process feels more organic and incorporates wait time into the overall process.). I then read the written instructions aloud and ask for questions. Subsequent questions that deal with instructions that have already been given (the inevitable, "what page?", "what are we supposed to write?", "what number are we doing?" litany) are dealt with non-verbally. I usually just point to the board, maybe holding up fingers to reference a step number. I find the second part is crucial to helping learners learn to be good instruction followers,
giving them the opportunity to practice "guided self-reliance" if there is such a phrase" (Ferguson 2013).

We were surprised to learn that the thinking processes that support direction giving are incredibly complex. At the simplest level, they include guidelines such as using declarative statements and a minimum number of words. Another level regards a direction giving map we learned when interviewing Bruce Wellman, a noted professional developer who seems to effortlessly give profoundly direct and effective directions. This is described in Garmston and Zimmerman (2014).

When introducing processes in which the group is to engage, the facilitator employs the what – why – how pattern. While each is important for the group to do its best work, the why – the rationale for the process is most important. When members understand the reasons for a process–how it will serve them--potential resistance is reduced and participation is more purposeful.

- **What** – “The next step is to brainstorm.”
- **Why** – “As you know, the purpose of brainstorming is to get as many ideas on the table as possible. Questions or comments derail the process leading to a more limited and less useful list.”
- **How** – “I will record the ideas on this chart paper. When you raise your hand, I will give you a number to place you in a queue so you know you will have a turn and not worry about being able to add your idea. If you have a question or comment, hang onto it. We will come back to it at the next step.”

The fourth, and most difficult task in direction giving regards composing directions where none exist.

**A Model for Designing Directions from Scratch**

Some readers might like to think about how they would go about composing a direction to participants to explain their reasoning about the importance of consulting and coaching in supporting new teachers. When you think about how you do this you probably notice that you’ve gone allocentric – attempting to hear the instructions as your participants might hear them. Let’s assume that the group is familiar with the definitions as Wikipedia offers them:

- **Consultation** - to assist an individual or group of individuals to clarify and address immediate concerns by following a systematic problem-solving process.
- **Coaching** - to enhance a person’s competencies in a specific skill area by providing a process of observation, reflection, and action.

What we noticed when we examined our thinking was that we had to define *reasoning*. If we wanted participants to dialogue, engage and learn from one another we might use the word *explore* in the directions. *Pairs: Explore the benefits of consulting and coaching for new teachers.* We might wonder what difference the word “for” or “to” new teachers might make. If on the other hand, we desired a conversation that activated prior knowledge with greater specificity, we might develop a scaffold that begins with what we meant by reasoning. Such a scaffold might look like the following. We would reword the
directions to *compare and contrast* the importance of consulting and coaching.

Pairs:
1. Compare and contrast the benefits of consulting and coaching for new teachers
2. List the benefits of consulting
3. List the benefits of coaching
4. List the limitations of each
5. Compare and contrast your findings
6. Given the above, summarize your thinking about the relative importance of each.

Now, with this first draft, we would seek to reduce the number of words while maintaining clarity.

Pairs: Compare and contrast consulting and coaching benefits for new teachers
1. Make two lists. Record the benefits of each
2. Record the limitations of each
3. Identify what is same and different
4. Write a matchbook statement summarizing your conclusions.

**The Potentially Pernicious Pronoun**

What separates the good presenter or facilitator from the expert, is the use of pronouns. For some, it is difficult to replace the habit of saying, “I want you to look this direction”, with phrases like “Please turn and look at me for next steps.” The difference? In the first the leader is asking members to respond out of relationship serving the presenter; appropriate in the lexicon for a primary teacher, but not a person working with adults. Since we presume an overarching goal of professional development is fostering a sense of equality in a training or meeting room, and supporting norms of autonomy, self-directedness and self-monitoring, we advise careful scripting of pronouns in giving directions.

Who you are in relationship to the group should inform your use of pronouns. If you are a member of a group who has stepped up to facilitate the work may well be “ours’. If you are external to the group, referring to the work as “ours” may carry inferences interfering with the clarity of the group’s work and its development. Compare these two statements. “Here is what I want you to do next.” –or- “Listen carefully as I describe this process.” Again, the former tends to infantilize the group, the latter acknowledges them as responsible adults. Begin a list of phrases you want to incorporate when you give directions. You can start with these: “Your next steps are.”; “This process has three phases.”; “Take a moment to complete your thoughts and prepare to share your ideas with the group.”

**The Final Step**

Finally, attend to the presentation of the direction itself. We’ve learned to mentally rehearse just before we give the direction. Sometimes we have scripted what we will say. Other times we simply stand in the space in which we are about to speak and put the words in our head, before we talk. If during the directions we notice we have slipped and used an unintended pronoun, we stop, correct ourselves, and tell the group why.
transparency is valued not only because it equalizes the relationship – we are all learners here – but also because it teaches principles of leadership.

Conclusion

Giving clear directions is a fundamental task for teachers, presenters, meeting facilitators and anyone who works with groups. Complexities still exist, even when working with pre-developed directions on power points. The leader must still get the group’s attention, and orient participants regarding the task ahead. What-Why-How is a fundamental part of this. So much of this is contextual, that giving directions, even for the most experienced of us, will always be a challenge.

References

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WAYS OF TALKING

In order to have a conversation with someone you must reveal yourself.
James Baldwin

Professional communities are born and nurtured in webs of conversation. What we talk about in our schools and how we talk about those things says much about who we are, who we think we are and who we wish to be, both in the moment and in the collective future that we are creating for ourselves as colleagues and for the students we serve.

To develop shared understanding and be ready to take collective action, working groups need knowledge and skill in two ways of talking. One way of talking, dialogue, leads to collective meaning making and the development of shared understanding. The other way of talking, discussion, leads to decisions that stay made.

Dialogue honors the social/emotional brain, building a sense of connection, belonging and safety. As a shape for conversations, it connects us to our underlying motivations and mental models. This way of talking forms a foundation for coherent sustained effort and community building. In dialogue we hear phases like “An assumption I have is….” and, “I’d be curious to hear what other people are thinking about this issue.”

Discussion in its more skillful form requires conversations that are infused with sustained critical thinking, careful consideration of options and respect for conflicting points of view. This way of talking leads to decision making that serves the group’s and the school’s vision, values and goals. In a discussion we hear phrases like “We need to define the problem we are solving before jumping to solutions.” and, “I’d like to see the data that these assumptions are based on before we go much further.”

Conversation and Deliberation

When groups come together they “converge” and “converse”. These words’ respective Latin roots mean that group members “turn together” and “associate with one another.” Conversation is informal talking in which participants share information, anecdotes and opinions to learn from one another or simply to enjoy one another’s company. When the conversation takes on an organized purpose to either deepen understanding or make a decision, a group that understands that there are two ways of talking acknowledges this point of deliberation and consciously chooses to engage in either dialogue or discussion.

Deliberation in its Latin root, deliberare, means to weigh, as in to evaluate, assess or ponder. Group members have this choice point available to them only when they have roadmaps for ways of talking and consciousness about group processes and group purposes. A significant part of this awareness is recognizing that culturally embedded patterns shape
behaviors. Patterns from the larger surrounding culture and patterns from organizational and group culture.

Many groups default into the Western cultural habit of polarized discussion and debate. Our media-saturated world bombards us with arguments framed by commentators as point-counterpoint, pro and con, left versus right, and other polarities. These models transfer to conversations in working groups; they then frame how participants listen to others and how and when participants speak. If group members are not careful, they end up listening not to understand but to hear gaps in the logic of other speakers, or they interrupt to make a point even before the current speaker is finished. Conversations then break down into verbal combat with winners and losers.

All too often, valued colleagues become conscientious objectors, choosing not to participate in the fray. The group then loses perspective and potential alternative viewpoints. The loudest and most persistent voices become the policy makers, and in the worst cases, the process sows the seeds of passive noncompliance or sabotage in those who feel excluded or devalued.

When groups understand that they have more than one way of talking available to them, they can then choose to pursue the path of dialogue or to follow the path of discussion. Most important issues require explorations along both pathways. Many sensitive issues, especially those with high stakes for the participants, call for separate sessions in which the dialogue and discussion are separated in time and sometimes space. One useful facilitation technique is to explicitly label agenda items as either dialogue or discussion and offer language models to further mark the distinctions between the two forms of discourse.

As group members become more sophisticated with the ways of talking, the pathways become more malleable. For example, during a dialogue, a group member senses an emerging consensus on an issue. He or she then inquires if this is so and frames a proposal to move the item to a decision. In another case, during a discussion, emotions rise and the details become muddled. Someone then proposes that the group switch to a dialogue format for a set time to explore the feelings and underlying issues that are present.

**The Path of Dialogue**

Dialogue is a reflective learning process in which group members seek to understand one another’s viewpoints and deeply held assumptions. The word dialogue comes from the Greek *dialogos*. *Dia* means “through” and *logos* means “word”. In this meaning-making through words, group members inquire into their own and others’ beliefs, values, and mental models to better understand how things work in their world. In dialogue, listening is as important as speaking. For skilled group members, much of the work is done internally.

Physicist and philosopher David Bohm described dialogue as a process of surfacing and altering the “tacit infrastructure of thought.” As a quantum physicist, Bohm draws an analogy between dialogue and superconductivity. Electrons that are cooled to
extremely low temperatures dramatically change their behavior, operating more as a coherent whole and less as separate parts. In supercool environments, electrons flow around barriers and one another without resistance, creating very high energy. The same electrons radically change behavior in a new environment. At higher temperatures they operate as separate entities with random movement and loss of momentum.

Dialogue creates an emotional and cognitive safety zone in which ideas flow for examination without judgment. Although many of the capabilities and tools of dialogue and skilled discussion are the same, their core intentions are quite different and require different personal and collective monitoring processes.

Monitoring Dialogue

Mindful group members pay attention to three essential elements during productive dialogue. They monitor themselves, the process of the dialogue and the new whole that is emerging within the group.

Self

Dialogue is first and foremost a listening practice. When we “listen to our listening” we notice whether we are internally debating with the speaker, reviewing our mental catalogue of related information and personal anecdotes, or composing a response. Noticing these common internal processes allows us to switch them off so that we can hear others without judging.

Dialogue requires choice making. Typical choices include how and when to talk: Do we paraphrase prior comments to check for understanding and or synthesize? Do we inquire into the ideas and assumptions of others? Or, do we put a new idea or perspective on the table to widen the frame?

Suspension is an essential internal skill in dialogue. To suspend judgment, group members temporarily set aside their own perceptions, feelings, and impulses and carefully monitor their internal experience. Points of personal conflict can easily emerge when we believe that others are not hearing us or that they are distorting our point of view. Points of conflict also surface when our own values conflict with those of a speaker. These areas of discomfort influence our listening and our responses, which in turn influence the thoughts and behaviors of other group members.

Peter Senge (1994) notes that suspension also involves developing an awareness of our own assumptions and purposely “hanging them from the ceiling,” that is suspending them in front of the group so that all can examine them. These assumptions are beliefs, often unexamined, about why we think things work as they do. Our assumptions drive our perceptions, simultaneously opening and blinding us to possibilities in the world around us.
Process

Dialogue as a process requires focusing on the goal of developing shared understanding. In our action-oriented work environments, this is often countercultural. Yet, in every group with which we’ve worked, all the participants could recite examples of decisions that were poorly conceived, poorly communicated, simply ignored or in the worst cases violated by many organizational members without consequence. At the root of all these stories were group processes that were not thought out, but rather often hurried and inappropriately facilitated. The rush to action pushed unclear decision-making processes and timelines onto the group without sufficient attention to developing a shared understanding of both problems and solutions.

By going slow and honoring the flow of dialogue, groups can often go fast when they get to the choice points in decision-making. When the assumptions and the implications of those assumptions have been explored during dialogue, group members don’t second-guess the motives of others during discussions.

Meetings should be safe but not necessarily comfortable. When a group confuses safety with comfort, it sacrifices productive tension for the ease of conviviality. Humor and banter can be avoidance strategies as much as they can be social lubricants. A lack of comfort with discomfort weakens dialogue and undermines the learning possibilities in that moment.

Whole

Thought is both a personal and a collective process. We influence and are influenced in turn by others. During dialogue, the line between self and others blurs when we open ourselves to the possibilities within the communal thought space. This created whole is in itself a goal of dialogue. Communities move forward together. Collective understanding leads to shared goals and shared practices that tap the power of cumulative effect for student learning and for the adult learning community.

The whole is always greater than the sum of the individual parts. In many ways it is both process and product simultaneously. By learning to observe the processes, patterns and results that emerge from our dialogues, we can more consciously participate and more consciously contribute to the whole of which we are the parts.

Understanding as the Outcome

Well-crafted dialogue leads to understanding. This is the foundation for conflict resolution, consensus and professional community. Decisions that don’t stay made are often the result of group members feeling left out and or having their ideas discounted by the group. Dialogue gives voice to all parties and all viewpoints.

Misunderstanding lies beneath most intragroup and intergroup conflict. Dialogue illuminates and clarifies misunderstandings when the underlying values and beliefs are brought to the surface for examination. There is often alignment at this level; it is at the solution level that opinions differ. Working from a foundation of shared understanding,
group members can more easily and rationally resolve differences, generate options, and make wise choices when they move to the discussion side of the journey.

The Path of Discussion

Discussion, in its Latin root *discutere*, means “to shake apart.” It focuses on the parts and their relationships to one another – the causes, the effects and the ripple effects of proposed actions and solutions. In its most ineffective forms, discussion consists of serial sharing and serial advocacy without much group-member inquiry into the thinking and proposals of others. Participants attempt to reach decisions through a variety of voting and consensus techniques. When discussion is unskilled and dialogue is absent, decisions are often low quality, represent the opinions of the most vocal members or leader, lack group commitment, and do not stay made.

Three elements shape skilled discussions: (a) clarity about decision-making processes and authority, (b) knowledge of the boundaries surrounding the topics open to the group’s decision-making authority, and (c) standards for orderly decision-making meetings. Most meetings are, in fact, structured discussions.

Monitoring Discussion

Mindful group members pay attention to three essential elements during productive discussion. They monitor themselves, the processes of skilled discussion and the details of the problem-solving, planning and decision-making processes in which they are engaged.

Self

Productive discussions require group members to have emotional and mental flexibility. When our goal is to influence the thinking of others and we give up the model of “winning and losing”, we are more able to notice our thoughts and actions and the effects of those thoughts and actions on others.

Mentally, this requires taking a balcony view. This perceptual position is neither *egocentric* (I am intensely aware of my thoughts, feelings, and intentions and know my own boundaries) nor *allocentric* (I am aware of how something looks, feels, and sounds from the point of view of another). The balcony view is a third perceptual position, a *macrocentric* perspective, in which with compassion and detachment we try to understand the nature of the situation the group is in at the moment. It is with this view, looking down upon the group, that we gain the most knowledge about our group, the group’s interactions, and ourselves.

From the balcony we can make the most strategic choices about how and when to participate. Should I advocate or should I inquire? At what points should I press? When should I probe for detail or let go? How might I phrase an idea for greatest influence? These are the same internal skills that teachers employ when they monitor and adjust in their classrooms.
Process

Skilled discussion as a process requires mindfulness about focusing on one topic and applying one process tool at a time. When topics and processes blur group members lose focus. To maintain focus requires clear structure, purposeful facilitation, impulse control on the part of individual group members and recovery strategies if the group strays off course. Effective group members share responsibility with the facilitator for maintaining the flow of the discussion, for encouraging other group members to share knowledge, and ideas, for hearing and exposing points of confusion or murkiness. When working groups stray from skilled discussion, they often move to an unskilled form of debate. This occurs when group members overlook the useful advocacy of ideas and proposals and start listening for and challenging the fallacies in the arguments of others.

Battuere, the Latin origin of the word debate, means “fight or beat down.” When meetings descend to the level of street debate, rather than academic debate, we focus on beating down the ideas of others. Scoring points becomes the goal and winning comes from intimidation and intonation as much as from--or more than--logic or reason.

Details

Whereas successful dialogue requires attention to the whole, successful discussion focuses on the details, both in isolation and in their interactions. The path of discussion is also the path of decision. As such, groups need to identify any constraints under which they might be working such as, timelines, deadlines, budgets, product standards, the negotiable items, the nonnegotiable items, task assignments and, most important who they are in the decision-making process.

Groups skilled in discussion employ many intentional cognitive skills. There is no set sequence for these efforts. The task before the group determines the necessary intellectual toolkit. Groups need tools for the following:

- generating ideas, including a repertoire of brainstorming and creative thinking strategies and protocols;
- organizing ideas, including both conceptual and graphic tools;
- analyzing ideas, including a variety of tools for exposing assumptions and clarifying particulars;
- deciding among alternatives, including the clarification of decision-making roles and processes.

Decision as the Outcome

Decision, in its Latin root decidere means “to cut off or determine.” In practice this means to cut off some choices. The purpose of discussion is to eliminate some ideas from a field of possibilities and allow the stronger ideas to prevail. Groups must learn to separate people from ideas in order for this to work effectively. If ideas are “owned” by individuals, then to cut the idea away is the same as cutting the person away. Ideas once
stated should belong to the group, not to individuals. In this way they can be shaped, modified, and discarded to serve the group's greater purposes.
SEMINAR RESOURCES


LEARNING PARTNERS

Make an appointment with four different people—one for each Leadership Hat. Be sure that you both record the appointment on your page. Only make the appointment if you both have an open slot for that hat on your page.

Facilitating

Consulting

Presenting

Coaching