Mirrors & Models for *Advanced* Adaptive Schools Work

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Session Description

Have you been pondering how to yield increasingly powerful results for both professional adult and student learning? School-wide improvements in student learning accrue in schools whose work cultures are collaborative. The growing body of work on the power of collaborative adult professional cultures in schools offers a positive and productive means for organizing the work of on-going school improvement. In such cultures, professionals learn to talk about the hard-to-talk-about details of learning, teaching, assessment and the cumulative effects of their work with students.

In this interactive and hands-on seminar participants will experience models and tools for mirroring the work in classrooms across schools. Expect to practice your skills, increase your Adaptive Schools Toolbox, and reflect on your personal practice in leading collaborative classrooms and schools.

Engaged Participants will. . .

- engage in models of practice based on the collaborative learning cycle
- investigate and deeply apply the Norms of Collaboration
- deepen shared understanding for providing data in organizations
- enhance their skills for paraphrasing, inquiry, and providing data
- learn Advanced Adaptive Schools tools and resources for adult and classroom application.
A school-based leader, Dr. Frances Gipson is principal of a large urban middle school and magnet center in the first International Baccalaureate family of school’s in LAUSD. Most recently, Frances was the Administrator of Instruction in LAUSD LD5, and former Director of Professional Development & Partnerships at UCLA's Center X, supporting implementation and reform work for P-16 instruction. A highly regarded educator, Frances has published and designed quality curriculum at the district, state, and national level. With a passion for active learning she teaches Educational Leadership at California State University Los Angeles, UCLA Teacher Education Program and the Principals Leadership Institute. Committed to rigorous instruction, meeting the needs of diverse learners, and in pursuit of true professional learning communities, she led a successful coaching collaborative with UCLA's Subject Matter Projects, served as a district administrator for Secondary Literacy, and now continues the development of instructional leaders with a distributed leadership team.

With an amazing team, referred enthusiastically to as TEAM KID, she has supported leading for learning in 120+ schools in the East and South Los Angeles Community. In the past two and a half years the district has been recognized for their growth model that advances students who previously scored far below basic and basic on state accountability tests, reclassification rates for English learners, highest district attendance rates, lowest suspension rates, greatest numbers of National Boards Certification participants, first LAUSD International Baccalaureate school feeder pattern, and even the organizer of the first East LA Arts Festival. Recently, these efforts were recognized in the region with her receiving an Administrator of the Year Award from her local ACSA peers and the prestigious Tae Han Kim award from Claremont Graduate University for humanitarian and culture accomplishments. Overall, these multiple data points reflect the advocacy of professionals learning in community focused on TEAM KID.

Frances believes that “living in the system” and “disturbing the system” is critical to agency and advocacy for the youth and community of Los Angeles and ensures that our youth and families are at the center of all decisions in both her career and volunteer life.
## Foundation Seminar

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Clock Partners
Make an appointment with four different people, one for 12, 3, 6, and 9 o’clock. Start with someone not currently at your table.
Focusing Questions

1. Who are we?
2. Why are we doing this?
3. Why are we doing this, this way?

Who are you as an adaptive learner?
Identity
The Self-Directed Group

Groups that work at higher Levels of effectiveness cultivate certain habits of learning in group members. *Self Directed learners routinely:*

*Self-manage.* They are clear about the group’s expected outcomes, have a strategic plan, anticipate success indicators, and thoughtfully explore creative alternatives.

*Self-monitor.* They establish strategies for paying attention to whether the plan is working that also inform decisions about altering the plan.

*Self-modify.* They reflect on, evaluate, analyze, and construct meaning from their experiences. They apply what they learn to future activities, tasks, and problems (Costa & Garmston, 2002).

*Unlocking Group Potential,* Garmston 2012
Deep to Surface Structure
The Seven Norms of Collaborative Work

**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 “As you are...” or “You’re thinking...” and following the starter with a paraphrase assists members of the group to hear and understand one another as they formulate decisions.

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

**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.

**Placing 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...”.

**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 she/he 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.
Putting Inquiry at the Center

Thinking is a biochemical process that engages the molecules of emotion and the molecules of cognition. We are wired to detect threat in the communications of others. Reducing the potential for threat in our questions means that how we inquire is as important as the topic of our inquiry. To keep others open and thinking we need to pay attention to several important features in our communication.

Full Attention
The invitation to think begins with full attention to others in the group signaling that our full presence is available for this conversation and that we intend no harm. This physical message meshes with several important verbal elements that form an invitation to think together and think about the ideas being explored.

Approachable Voice
Using an approachable voice is the first element of the invitation. This voice is well modulated and tends to rise at the end of a statement, summary or question (Grinder 1997). This tonal package wraps around our questions and comments indicating the intention to invite and explore thinking and not to interrogate or challenge.

Plural Forms
Two important syntactical choices invite colleagues to think with us and increase the options and possibilities for thinking. The first is to use plural forms; observations instead of observation, options instead of option. The use of plural forms sets aside the need for evaluation and the sorting of ideas. Often group members need to hear their ideas aloud before they know which are most central to the issues before the group.

Exploratory Language
The second syntactical element is the use of exploratory phrasing in statements, paraphrases and questions. Words like some, might, seems, possible, and hunches widen the potential range of responses and reduce the need of confidence and surety. Words like could and why may decrease the confidence of listeners by seeming to ask for premature commitment or a need to defend ideas and actions that are not yet fully developed.

Nondichotomous Questions
Invitational and mediational facilitators and group members frame their questions using the elements listed above. In addition, they frame their questions by using open-ended, nondichotomous forms. These are questions that cannot be answered yes or no. For example, instead of asking a group, “Did anyone notice anything unusual in this data set?” they ask, “What are some interesting or unusual things that you noticed in this data set?” By eliminating dichotomous stems such as, “Can you,” “Did you,” “Will you,” or “Have you,” facilitators and skilled group members invite productive thinking and promote a spirit of inquiry within the group.
Holonomy & Energy Sources

Groups with collective efficacy

- Learn from experiences and shape themselves accordingly
- Know what they don't know and what they need to know or do, and develop strategies to meet those needs
- Productively manage the tension between the vision of their desired state and the realities of the existing state
- Focus resources where the resources can make the biggest difference
- Are motivated by and committed to achieving shared goals

Flexible groups are able to

- Collectively shift perspectives
- Access a large repertoire of thinking and process skills
- Attend to rational and intuitive ways of working
- Generate and use multiple options for moving past obstacles
- Navigate internal tensions related to confusion and ambiguity
- Honor and make sure of diversity within and outside of the group

A group that exhibits craftsmanship

- Creates, holes, calibrates and refines performance and product standards
- Envisions and manages multiple time orientations
- Invests energy in honing and inventing process tools
- Honors the pathway from novice to expert performance
- Continuously refines inter-and intragroup communications
The group with consciousness

- Is aware of how its own assumptions and knowledge interfere with its learning
- Is aware of its core values, norms, and group identity
- Monitors congruence with its meeting standards
- Is explicit and aware of its criteria for decision making
- Is aware of and stands outside itself to reflect on its processes and products

The interdependent group

- Values its interactions and trust in dialogue
- Is aware of its relationships and how interconnections are sources of mutual influence
- Regards knowledge and knowing as fluid, provisional, and subject to improvement from outside information
- Regards disagreement and conflict as a source of group learning
- Envisions the group's potential
Both Things and Energy Matter

Examples of Focusing Questions for the Energy Sources
Garmston and Wellman, 2009

1. How did your sense of being a true professional guide your interactions today?

2. Reflect for a minute on your beliefs about the importance of collaboration. Keeping your beliefs in mind what did you notice about the group’s work today?

3. In what ways did your understanding of the processes of dialogue and discussion influence your productivity with today’s topic?

4. Given the emotional content of today’s topic, what were some of the ways that you managed the internal process of the way you listened to one another?

5. What were some of the ways that this seating arrangement supported you work today?

Crafting Questions:
Triple Track Reflection
Ways of Talking

Dialogue, in its formal purpose and practice--talking to understand--is becoming the organizing ingredient of shared learning. While discussion has long been a staple of educational practice, many systems are now adding dialogue. It is imperative that groups are given frameworks and tools for skilled interaction in both these ways of talking.

Goal Setting and Developmental Levels:
Ways of Talking

Conversation

Deliberation

Dialogue

Monitor
- self
- process
- whole

Outcome
- understanding

Discussion

Monitor
- self
- process
- details

Outcome
- decision

Behaviors
Seven Norms
of Collaboration

Professional Community
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 means 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.
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. (See Section 3 for details.) 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 to "fight or beat down." When meetings descend to the level of street debate, rather 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; and
- 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.

Professional Community
Professional community is both a cause and an effect of the two ways of talking. As a cause, being in a community provides the motivation and vision of ways of interacting and working together. As an effect, a strong professional community results from both what is talked about and how people talk. Such talk requires courage, confidence in self and others and skillfulness in applying the maps and tools for developing shared understanding and strategic decision-making practices.
Group Member Capabilities

1. **To Know One’s Intentions and Choose Congruent Behaviors**
   Clarity of intention in the moment and over time drives attention, which in turn drives the what and how of a group member’s meeting participation. This clarity proceeds and influences the three other capabilities. It is the source of impulse control, patience, strategic listening and strategic speaking.

   To choose congruent behaviors means for example that participants paraphrase other’s ideas and opinions especially when they disagree. This is congruent when the intention is to understand. The first impulse might be to debate with the person expressing an opposing view. But to debate in this moment blocks the intention of first understanding.

2. **To Set Aside Unproductive Patterns of Listening, Responding and Inquiring**
   For each meeting participant there are two audiences. One is external, made up of the other group members. The other is internal, made up of the feelings, pictures and talk going on inside each individual. Group members need to continually decide which audience to serve.

   Three major set aside areas focus this choice and allow fuller and more nonjudgmental participation. They are:

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<th>LISTENING SET ASIDES</th>
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<td>To set aside <em>autobiographical</em> listening, responding and inquiring.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ME TOO!</td>
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<tr>
<td>To set aside <em>inquisitive</em> listening, responding and inquiring.</td>
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<tr>
<td>TELL ME MORE!</td>
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<tr>
<td>To set aside <em>solution</em> listening, responding and inquiring.</td>
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<td>I KNOW WHAT TO DO!</td>
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   The autobiographical frame leads to several problems in group work. The first is the filtering process that goes on when individuals try to hear another’s story through the lens of his or her own experience. While this can be a source of empathy, it also leads to distortion and miscommunication.

   This type of listening, responding and inquiring is a major source of wasted time in meetings. It leads to endless storytelling in which everyone around the table tells a version of the tale or shares a related anecdote. This is cocktail party conversation, not productive meeting talk. Each member of the eighth grade team does not need to relate a discipline horror story. The team needs to explore and develop a collective understanding of these students and their needs and develop appropriate response patterns that elicit desired behaviors.

   The inquisitive frame is sometimes triggered by the autobiographical. People inquire to see how others’ stories compare to their own. Pure curiosity also motivates inquisitive listening, responding and inquiring. A critical question at this juncture is, “How much detail do we need to move this item?” This is an example of what we call a “naive question”. The purpose is to focus attention on critical matters and avoid unnecessary specificity. Naïve questions can be asked by any group member.
The solution frame is deeply embedded in the psyche of educators. Status, rewards and identity are all tied up in being a good problem solver. The press of time in schools pushes people towards action and away from reflection. The down side of this pattern is that groups and group members get trapped in situations and action plans before they have time to fully understand each other’s perspectives and the perspectives of groups and individuals outside the meeting.

The solution frame also stifles the generation of new possibilities. It gets in the way of developing alternative ways of framing issues and problems and it pushes groups towards action before creating clear outcomes.

3. **To Know When to Self-Assert and When to Integrate**

Each group member has a responsibility to self and a responsibility to group. These responsibilities trigger critical choice points structured by the first and fourth capabilities. Self-assertion and integration are conscious choices only when group members have personal clarity about their own intentions and knowledge of and a willingness to support the group’s outcomes and methods.

Self-assertion does not always mean self-focus. It can mean asserting oneself into the flow of group interactions to refocus the group on a topic or on a process. It can mean reminding others of the purpose of the meeting when the conversation strays off course. It can also mean speaking up and advocating for topics and processes.

When individual group members integrate, they align their energy with the content and processes of the meeting. During dialogue they suspend judgments and counter arguments in an attempt to understand viewpoints different from their own. During discussions, they follow the flow of logic and reasoning as it emerges. In this way, solutions satisfying to the group as a whole are more likely to emerge.

4. **To Know and Support the Group’s Purposes, Topics, Processes and Development**

All ongoing groups need to balance three simultaneous agendas. The first is task focus. This is the ultimate expression of the group’s purpose. The second agenda is process skills development. Without continued attention to expanded repertoire and expanded skills, the group stagnates and does not expand its capacity for handling more complex work in the future. The third agenda is group development. All groups exist on a continuum from novice to expert performance. Experience alone is an insufficient teacher. Many long-standing groups operate at a novice level of performance.

**Suggested Exercise**

Invite members to select one of the capabilities to work on. Join a trio and talk about reasons for selecting that capability and ideas for remaining aware of when to use it.
Dialogue: Four Developmental Levels

“Dialogue is a conversation with a center, not sides. It is a way of taking the energy of our differences and channeling it toward something that has never been created before. It lifts us out of polarization and into a greater common sense, and is thereby a means for accessing the intelligence and coordinated power of groups of people.”

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<th>Developing</th>
<th>Maturing</th>
<th>Generating</th>
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In dialogue one listens to the coherence seen in the relationship among the parts. William Isaacs, founder of the Dialogue Project at MIT, observes that perceiving coherence within conversations is challenging because most of us listen to select pieces of a conversation, aspects that particularly catch our attention, or aspects that irritate us. But we can listen to the whole, and participate within the whole. This requires, he says, that we step back from the details and soften our focus, and hear what is going on in the overall space of the conversation.

“[Dialogue] involves joining our thinking and feeling into a shared pool of meaning which continually flows and evolves, carrying us all into new, deeper levels of understanding none of us could have foreseen.”

Quantum physicist, David Bohm suggested that both quantum physics and mystical traditions support the idea that reality is shaped by beliefs and that thought is largely a collective phenomenon constructed and carried by our culture and communication vehicles. This could well be a description of what can happen at the maturing and generating stages of dialogue.

The following descriptions represent our best efforts to sequence the development of skills, knowledge and valuing throughout four levels, each advancing over the preceding one, and carrying the attributes of the preceding level with it. We have labeled the first stage as beginning and the second stage as developing. The third stage we have named maturing rather than advanced, in our belief that there is no end to refining the capacity to participate in a common pool of meaning. A final stage is labeled generating; not that early stages do not release creativity and fresh ideas, but that this stage generates new levels of communication and deeper levels of understanding. Among these are synchronicities, a term Carl Jung gave to the phenomena of an external event corresponding with an internal one. One person will think something and another person will say it. Participants become more aware that there are no lines that separate us, that somehow we are one. It is also at the generating stage that consciousness, efficacy, flexibility, craftsmanship and interdependence are significantly enhanced.

Exploring
Politeness is a norm that is not unusual for groups at this and the developing stage. You may expect that people will begin dialogue using whatever social norms are intact. At this level, a facilitator’s task—beyond setting expectations for the work—may simply be to start and end the meeting and see that everyone has a chance to talk. If a work group has a social norm of attack, this too will show in early dialogue attempts and must be mediated by facilitator interventions.
For boards of education that set aside Roberts Rules of Order to dialogue, formality may mark their initial interactions. A social norm that appears at beginning stages is reluctance to explore differences. The fact that late in the DVD conversation Tracy begins to fish for differences of opinion and several members begin exploring what they are uncertain or “wondering” about, suggests this group is beginning to operate at the developing stage.

**What To Have, Do and Learn**

**The group...**
- Understands purposes of dialogue and distinctions from discussion
- Has experienced scaffolds for dialogue like First Turn/Last Turn (*Garmston and Wellman Appendix A 2009*)
- Has a conceptual understanding of suspension
- Becomes intrigued with the idea of dialogue, wants to know more and become more skillful
- Has conducted a personal and group inventory of the seven norms of collaboration (See [www.adaptiveschools.com](http://www.adaptiveschools.com) for free downloads)
- Has selected one of the seven norms of collaboration to develop
- Is open to working on a norm the group selects to develop collectively
- Develops commitment to practice skills in isolation – perhaps in exercises:
  1. Pausing
  2. Paraphrasing
  3. Inquiring
  4. Probing
  5. Putting ideas on the table
  6. Approachable voice.

**Developing**

Almost as a new social norm, pausing and paraphrasing become more frequent. Assumptions begin to be revealed. People demonstrate listening to others although often the listening may be self-confirming. People start saying what they think in increasing ratio over what is thought to be conventional thinking. Instability in the group can begin to emerge as people wrestle over what meaning is more accurate. Leadership is invaluable at this point, and suspension is encouraged.

**What To Have, Do and Learn**

**The group...**
- Practices downstream suspension, i.e., locate, name and display for others what you are aware of in your experience
- Realizes that dialogue is most useful for hard-to-talk-about topics
- Sees the beneficial effects of dialogue and seeks opportunities to practice
- Requests dialogue or dialogue scaffolds for certain topics
- Pays attention to self and others
- Acquires skill in assuming positive intentions
- Practices suspension by setting aside autobiographical, inquisitive and solution listening
- Values and works to develop four group member capabilities
• Internalizes a pattern of pause, paraphrase, inquire or probe
• Is open to the ideas of others
• Honors individuals at various stages of dialogue development
• Explores assumptions and interpretations of others.

Maturing

This is a phase where curiosity becomes a norm. People identify and publicly explore their assumptions as if removing a veil from themselves and the group rules that have unconsciously governed their beliefs and behaviors. Isaacs notes that at this stage people lose the need for people to agree with them or reply in response to their statements. They learn, in a sense, that they are not their point of view, but rather they have points of view that can be offered to the group for examination.

At this stage of development people stop speaking for others, stop using third person data about other persons and situations and speak more about how things are from personal uncertainties, confusions, and curiosities. Isaacs refers to this developmental stage as reflective. It is characterized as an opening up of intrapersonal data to the groups and withdrawing from consideration ideas they had previously offered to the group.

Also at this stage members become capable of what Isaacs calls “upstream suspension,” that is, recognizing the sources of thoughts and reactions. This is a transformational stage in dialogue because no longer can one maintain the illusion that others are “causing” certain reactions in you, but that you are the source and creator of your reactions. A friend of ours says, “I understand you are angry. Of all the possible emotions to select, what led you to select that one?”

What To Have, Do and Learn

The group:
• Practices upstream suspension: being aware of the origins of one’s thoughts and feelings
• Sets personal goals to refine skills of dialogue for their enhanced effects
• Inquires for meaning and probes for clarity
• Remains on topic and speaks to the center of conversation
• Values silence and practices quiet without self-consciousness
• Supports an atmosphere in which different points of view can be expressed without need to change the other
• Honors and utilizes diversity within the group
• Stands outside self to reflect on processes and products
• Monitors the spirit and form of dialogue and reminds others to return to dialogue should they slip into discussion patterns of attempting to sell, convince, argue or demonstrate non-listening.

Generating

All dialogue can be generative and conversations become more so as developmental levels increase. William Isaacs uses the word *generative* to describe this highest state, we believe, because it generates a new level of consciousness in which people would say not that they are interacting—as in responding to individual comments—but rather, as he describes it, they are participating in an oceanic ebb and flow.
of ideas and feelings. Individually and collectively consciousness, interdependence and craftsmanship are present at high levels.

This level of dialogue is rare and more than at the other levels, “involves joining our thinking and feeling into a shared pool of meaning which continually flows and evolves, carrying us all into new, deeper levels of understanding none of us could have foreseen.” vi David Bohm, to whom we owe so much of our understanding of dialogue, felt that a new kind of mind begins to form based on the construction of common meaning. “People are no longer primarily in opposition, nor can they be said to be interacting, rather they are participating in this pool of common meaning, which is capable of constant development and change.” vii At this level, one person might think something and another person might say it. Language might shift from the noun-based orientation of western languages to a more being-based orientation in which an experiential interchange occurs. People exchange experiences more than stories, and live in earth time more than clock time. Hours can elapse and seem like minutes.

Participants report that this level of conversation passes the boundaries of ordinary experience. This is what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi called flow, encompassing a feeling of discovery, and a creative feeling of transporting into higher levels of performance and consciousness. Participants feel that there is an “…invisible patterned reality waiting to unfold into present visible form.” viii Bohm gave an example of this when he described the ordinary notion people have that a seed causes a tree to grow. But from another perspective, an invisible pattern is at work with the tree, soil, water--the total environment contributing to the growth of the tree. People become advocates for dialogue on an even more global and panoramic level, in policy matters, settling international conflicts, and addressing challenges to the earth.

All the tools and skills learned at earlier levels of development contribute to participation here. Yet at this level, observational, linguistic and meta-cognitive skills live as internalized and the major gift members bring is full presence in the moment. Members learn to access parts of themselves that do not have a voice, and as Isaacs says, we move from reporting our memory to speaking our hearts.

What To Have, Do and Learn

The group:

- Sees the transcendental effects of dialogue in the bonding of humans and as a mechanism for unity
- Learns from experiences and shapes oneself accordingly
- Navigates internal tensions related to confusion and ambiguity
- Collectively shifts perspective
- Becomes aware of how the group’s own assumptions and knowledge interfere with its learning
- Envisions and manages multiple time perspectives, values and norms
- Values its interactions and trusts the process of dialogue
- Regards knowledge and knowing as fluid, provisional and subject to improvement from information outside itself.
Seminar Resources: