Facilitation Skills for Teacher Leaders

Presented by:
Frances Gipson, Ph.D.
francesedu@earthlink.net

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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.
Strategies
Strategies
Strategies
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.
1 - Academic Emphasis of Schools

Academic emphasis is the extent to which the school is driven by a quest for academic excellence—a press for academic achievement. High, but achievable academic goals are set for students; the learning environment is orderly and serious; students are motivated to work hard; and students respect academic achievement (Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991).

Hoy and his colleagues (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991) were first to demonstrate that the collective property academic emphasis of the school was positively and directly related to student achievement in high schools while controlling for SES. Whether school effectiveness was conceived as the commitment of teachers to the school, the teachers’ judgment of the effectiveness of the school, or actual student test scores, academic emphasis remained a potent force. At both middle school and high school, academic emphasis and achievement were positively related even controlling for socioeconomic factors (Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990; Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Hoy and Sabo, 1998).

The findings are the same for elementary schools. Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy (2000), controlling for SES, school size, student race, and gender, used hierarchical linear modeling to find academic emphasis an important element in explaining achievement in both math and reading. The authors concluded, “…elementary schools with strong academic emphases positively affect achievement for poor and minority students” (p. 698).

Alig-Mielcarek and Hoy (2005) considered the influence of the instructional leadership of the principal and the academic press of the school. They also found that academic emphasis was significant in explaining student achievement, even controlling for SES. Using structural equation modeling, they found that academic emphasis of the school, not instructional leadership, was the critical variable explaining achievement. In fact, instructional leadership worked indirectly, not directly, through academic press to influence student achievement.

Using different methodological approaches and school levels, the results are consistent. Whether the analysis was multiple regression, structural equation modeling, or hierarchical linear modeling, and whether the level was elementary, middle, or secondary, the findings are the same: academic emphasis is a key variable in explaining student achievement, even controlling for socioeconomic status, previous achievement, and other demographic variables.
The one goal that virtually everyone shares for schools is academic achievement of students. The reform and accountability movements have promoted a press toward the academic achievement of all students (No Child Left Behind). The focus of schooling is clear—it is an academic one. A push for academic achievement, however, in an environment where teachers do not feel efficacious is a recipe for frustration and stress. The challenge is to create school conditions in which teachers believe they are up to the task and so are their students. How might this be done? Principals move a school by example. They celebrate the achievements of students and faculty, especially the academic ones. An emphasis on the honor roll, national honor societies, and exemplary student work of all kinds are examples of behaviors that foster academics. To be sure, this is an old list, but in conjunction with building efficacy and trust, these activities take on new strength.
2- Collective Efficacy

Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977; 1997) is a general framework for understanding human learning and motivation. Self-efficacy, a critical component of the theory, is an individual's belief about her or his capacity to organize and execute the actions required to produce a given level of attainment (Bandura, 1997). Efficacy beliefs are central mechanisms in human agency, the intentional pursuit of a course of action. Individuals and groups are unlikely to initiate action without a positive sense of efficacy. The strength of efficacy beliefs affects the choices individuals and schools make about their future plans and actions.

Student achievement and sense of efficacy are related. Researchers have found positive associations between student achievement and three kinds of efficacy beliefs—self-efficacy beliefs of students (Pajares, 1994, 1997), self-efficacy beliefs of teachers (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998), and teachers' collective efficacy beliefs about the school (Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy, 2000). We focus on collective efficacy of schools and student achievement because collective efficacy is a school property amenable to change.

Within schools, perceived collective efficacy represents the judgments of the group about the performance capability of the social system as a whole (Bandura, 1997). Teachers have efficacy beliefs about themselves as well as the entire faculty. Simply put, perceived collective efficacy is the judgment of the teachers that the faculty as a whole can organize and execute actions required to have a positive effect on students (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004).

Bandura (1993) was first to show the relationship between sense of collective efficacy and academic school performance, a relationship that existed in spite of low socioeconomic status. Schools in which the faculty had a strong sense of collective efficacy flourished, whereas those in which faculty had serious doubts about their collective efficacy withered, that is, declined or showed little academic progress. Continuing research has provided support for the importance of collective efficacy in explaining student achievement. Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy (2000) supported the role of collective efficacy in promoting school achievement in urban elementary schools. They hypothesized that perceived collective efficacy would enhance student achievement in mathematics and reading. After controlling for SES and using hierarchical linear modeling, they found that collective efficacy was significantly related to student achievement in urban elementary schools.

Hoy, Sweetland, and Smith (2002), continuing this line of inquiry, predicted school achievement in high schools using collective efficacy as the central variable. They found collective efficacy was the key variable in explaining student achievement; in fact, it was more important than either socioeconomic status or academic press. Hoy and his colleagues concluded that, "School norms that support academic achievement and collective efficacy are particularly important in motivating teachers and students to achieve...however, academic press is most potent when collective efficacy is strong" (p. 89). That is, academic press works through collective efficacy. They further theorized that when collective efficacy was strong, an emphasis on academic pursuits directed teacher behaviors, helped them persist, and reinforced social norms of collective efficacy. In a similar vein, Goddard, LoGerfo, and Hoy (2004) tested a more comprehensive model of perceived collective efficacy and student achievement. Using structural equation modeling, they also found that collective efficacy explained student achievement in reading, writing, and social studies regardless of minority student enrollment, urbanicity, SES, school size, and earlier
achievement. Research has consistently demonstrated the power of positive efficacy judgments in human learning, motivation, and achievement in such diverse areas as dieting, smoking cessation, sports performance, political participation, and academic achievement (Bandura, 1997; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004). Similarly, the results of the school studies reported above underscore the importance of collective efficacy. Collective efficacy is grounded in Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997); hence, we turn to his sources of efficacy for ideas about how to build collective efficacy in schools. The sources of self-efficacy are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective states, each of which conveys information that influences teacher perceptions about the school (Bandura, 1993, 1997; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004; Pajares, 1997). For example, let’s consider a school with a poor graduation rate. A neighboring district has implemented a successful program for at-risk students. The principal is in the position to orchestrate the transfer of the neighbor’s success to his or her school. In so doing, the school is engaged in a self-regulatory process informed by the vicarious learning of its members and, perhaps, the social persuasion of leaders. Modeling success and persuading teachers to believe in themselves and their capabilities is a reasonable route to improve collective efficacy and enhance academic optimism (Bandura, 1997; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004).
3-Faculty Trust in Parents and Students

Faculty trust in parents and students is the third school property that is related to student achievement. Faculty trust in parents and students is a collective school property in same fashion as collective efficacy and academic emphasis. Surprisingly, trust in parents and trust in students is a unitary concept. Although one might think that the two are separate concepts, several factor analyses have demonstrated they are not (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, and Hoy, 2001). Further, Bryk and Schneider (2002) make the theoretical argument that teacher-student trust in elementary schools operates primarily through teacher-parent trust.

Trust is one’s vulnerability to another in the belief that the other will act in one’s best interests. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000), after an extensive review of the literature, concluded that trust is a general concept with at least five facets: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. Although it is theoretically possible that these facets of trust may not vary together, the research on schools shows all five facets of trust in schools do indeed vary together to form an integrated construct of faculty trust in schools, whether the schools are elementary (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003) or secondary (Smith, Hoy, & Sweetland, 2001). Thus, we defined faculty trust as the group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

Cooperation and trust should set the stage for effective student learning, but only a few studies have examined this relationship. Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, and Hoy (2001) examined the role of faculty trust in promoting school achievement of urban elementary schools. Using a multi-level model, they demonstrated a significant direct, relationship between faculty trust in clients (students and parents) and higher student achievement, even controlling for socioeconomic status. Like collective efficacy, faculty trust was a key property that enabled school to overcome some of the disadvantages of low SES.

Hoy (2002) examined the trust-achievement hypothesis in high schools and again found that faculty trust in parents and students was positively related to student achievement while controlling for socioeconomic factors. He theorized that trusting others is a fundamental aspect of human learning because learning is typically a cooperative process, and distrust makes cooperation virtually impossible. When students, teachers, and parents have common learning goals, then trust and cooperation are likely ingredients that improve teaching and learning.

Finally, Bryk and Schneider (2002) performed a three-year longitudinal study in 12 Chicago elementary schools. Using HLM models, survey and achievement data, and in-depth interviews, they concluded that relational trust was a prime resource for school improvement. Trust and cooperation among students, teachers, and parents influenced regular student attendance, persistent learning, and faculty experimentation with new practices. In brief, trust among teachers, parents, and students produced schools that showed marked gains in student learning, whereas schools with weak trust relationships saw virtually no improvement. The research of Bryk and Schneider and that of Hoy and his colleagues reinforce each other in the common conclusion that faculty trust of students and parents enhances student achievement.
There is some research on family and community involvement in schools (cf., Epstein, 1989); however, there is little systematic research on how to build authentic trust. Faculty trust in students and parents can be promoted through useful interchanges, both formal and informal, between parents and teachers. Making the most of vicarious learning, for example, a school can respond to a lack of trust and community participation in school activities by emulating the practices and procedures magnets schools known for their parental cooperation and involvement. But much more research is needed about what programs and factors support the development of teachers’ trust in parents and students. Such examples demonstrate how changes in social perceptions influence what actions organizations choose to pursue. Collective perceptions about efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust shape the school’s normative environment and can be developed through experiences that convey their value.
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. This seminar offers concepts, tips and tools for extending and refining skills in each of these territories.

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 make 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.
The Confident and Skilled Facilitator

A facilitator manages processes so that a group can plan, problem-solve, share information, evaluate, and make decisions efficiently and effectively. A facilitator also works to improve group members’ ability to work together effectively and helps groups to improve their processes.

Because facilitators are nondirective regarding meeting content, some misconstrue this to mean that the role is a passive one. Nothing could be further from the truth. The facilitator is the group’s instrument for sound process choices that will lead to the full expression and understanding of relevant ideas and information. The facilitator supports access to the diversity of group resources, sound decision making, and problem-solving efforts.

A highly skilled facilitator is much like an accomplished dancer. One notices the dance but not the dancer. She directs process yet is supremely flexible. She follows principles, not rules. She improvises. She knows her own cognitive styles and stretches beyond them when it serves the group. She is comfortable with who she is and sets aside judgments about others. She is clear in the moment about her intentions. She thinks beyond activities to outcomes. She is reflective and learns from experience. She can direct or request, be firm or soft, serious or light, focus on task or on relationships. She has abundant knowledge about processes and groups. She is effortlessly competent with many facilitation moves.

Above all, the facilitator is an observer who helps groups to mediate tensions. Every system is influenced by demands that present mixed messages. The principal who responds to the demands of the central office can create the conditions for parents to demand a charter school. Teachers who are driven by student learning needs might work in opposition to the demands of the state assessment system. Parents and teachers look at a system through different eyes. Each day, there are different interpretations of the same data, and the stakeholders are responding from different perspectives. A facilitator serves the system by bringing the different perspectives to consciousness.

This chapter of The Adaptive Schools Sourcebook addresses the requirements for facilitators, the tasks during the various stages of facilitation, and ways to develop confidence. A special section is included on how a “citizen facilitator” solves the problem of maintaining facilitation services even in very small work groups.

Facilitation Compared to Other Leadership Roles

Facilitation is similar to but significantly different from three other leadership roles: presenting, consulting, and coaching. Groups need clear role definitions because what a role is called influences people’s expectations. The most common error we’ve noticed is for the presenter and facilitator titles to be used interchangeably. A facilitator is not a presenter and a presenter is not a facilitator, just as a Ford is not a Honda and vice versa. In the latter case, both are vehicles. In the former, both are leadership functions with important differences.

In a professional community—an adaptive organization—leadership is shared; that is, all the participants play all the roles. All the participants must have the knowledge and skills to manage themselves and to manage others. Leadership is a shared function in
meetings, in staff development activities, in research, and in projects. Recognizing what we have called the four hats of leadership (see chapter 2) and knowing when and how to change them becomes shared knowledge within the organization. When values, roles, and work relationships are clear, decisions about appropriate behavior are easy.

The following definitions illustrate the four leadership functions and the distinctions among those roles:

• **To facilitate** means to “make easier.” A facilitator conducts meetings whose purpose is dialogue, shared decision-making, planning, or problem solving. The facilitator directs the procedures used in the meeting, choreographs the energy within the group, and maintains a focus on one content and one process at a time. The facilitator should rarely be the person in the group with the greatest role or knowledge authority.

• **To present** is to teach. A presenter’s goals are to extend and enrich knowledge, skills, or attitudes and to help these to be applied in people’s work. A presenter may adopt many stances (expert, colleague, novice, or friend) and use many strategies of presentation (lecture, cooperative learning, or study groups). Premier presenters are guided by clarity of instructional outcomes and the continual assessment of goal achievement.

• **To coach** is to help a group take action toward its goals while simultaneously helping it 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 of group members and their thinking and decision-making processes to develop the resources for self-directed learning.

• **To consult** means to be an information specialist or an advocate for content or process. As an information specialist, the consultant delivers technical knowledge to a group. As a content advocate, the consultant encourages group members 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 closed one in order to increase trust in the system). To consult effectively, one must have trust, commonly defined goals, and the group’s desired outcomes clearly in mind.

Facilitators are substantially neutral to content. We periodically witness meetings in which colleagues ask the group member who is facilitating to add to the conversation. Wanting to know this person’s ideas is certainly understandable, but it is a disservice to the group to lose a content-neutral facilitator. The strategy Signal Role Change (see Appendix A) permits the facilitator to step out of the role to comment and yet protect the integrity of the role.
Leadership Hats

Four Hats of Shared Leadership

- Presenting
- Facilitating
- Consulting
- Coaching
“The Four Currents of Facilitation Management”
The Five C’s: The Qualities of a Good Facilitator

Facilitating a meeting is improvisational work, requiring a foundation of knowledge and skills, a clear sense of purpose, a juggler’s gift of attending to everything at once, and knowing what to do when you don’t know what to do. You don’t have to be flashy to be a good facilitator, but you do need to be developing the five Cs: clarity, consciousness, competence, confidence, and credibility.

Clarity

Facilitators must be clear about their role, its boundaries, and its responsibilities, and they must be able to communicate this unambiguously to the groups with whom they work. They need to know to whom they are ultimately responsible. See Appendix F for the distinctions among a contact, intermediate, or primary client. Facilitators know the importance of language and strive for precision. The following list shows some examples of facilitator language:

• To get attention. “Look this direction.”
• To clarify purpose. “Today’s task is to _____ [approve, generate, select, identify, explore, resolve].”
• To give directions. “Identify some ideas you would like to explore as a team. Prepare to share your two most important ideas.”
• To encourage participation. “Here are some suggestions for how to get the most value out of today’s meeting. Be responsible for your comfort and learning. Don’t wait for a break to make yourself comfortable. Be responsible as well for your learning. If you can’t hear someone, say ‘Louder, please!’ If someone is speaking too abstractly and you need a concrete example, please ask for it.”
• To enlarge perspective. “Who is not in this room and can’t speak for themselves on the topic? What do you imagine their concerns might be?”
• To invite group awareness. “How is the group doing on its norm of listening to one another? Tell your partner.”
• To foster understanding. “Who might offer a summary paraphrase?”
• To encourage agreements. “Are you ready for a decision?”

Language can obscure or clarify. Precise language is a gift to the facilitator and the group. It saves time and frustration, eliminates ambiguity, conveys respect for the group, and fosters facilitator credibility. Attaining language precision can be a useful lifetime goal regardless of one’s role. Strive to be organized, brief, and specific. Use words and phrases that have one meaning. Use nouns more than pronouns. Tell the group what it is to do, why or how that relates to the bigger context of its work, and the specific intention to be achieved at each stage. Use advanced organizers like “There are three steps. Number 1 is . . . ”
Consciousness

Facilitators are simultaneously aware of multiple events in the external environment and in their internal world. They work to hone their sensory acuity. Of the 11 million bits of data bombarding a person every second, 10 million come through the eyes. Facilitators pick up cues that group members are engaged, socializing, fatigued, impatient, apathetic, curious, excited, or just going through the motions. Facilitators can detect nuances in voice tone and hear even when they are turned away from the group. They pay attention to breathing, room temperature, and sight lines. They shuttle from looking outward to looking inward. Facilitators maintain their own resourcefulness, take stock of their energy, notice when they might be making poor judgments, remind themselves of context, and assess their relationship with the group. The facilitator’s internal focus must complement, not dominate, the external awareness.

Facilitators stay aware of multiple outcomes and contexts. Most meetings are nested inside other circumstances or initiatives. Perhaps most important, facilitators are aware of their point of view at any given time, and they press themselves to understand interactions from various perspectives. Facilitators know that success often depends on their ability to see things in new ways, gain new understandings, and produce new patterns of group interactions.

Competence

Competence is the third C. It develops with continuous learning, experience, and reflection on experience. Facilitators’ competencies are grounded in a basic knowledge of effective meetings. This includes the distinction between discussion and dialogue (see chapter 4), a set of facilitation strategies (see Appendix A), and four meeting success structures (see chapter 5). Skills competencies include designing an agenda, reading a group, speaking with precision, paraphrasing, asking mediational questions, being comfortable with silence, and using a host of nonverbal strategies and skills. Competence also means realizing that a plan is only a map of the territory and having the wisdom to know when the plan is not working.

Confidence

Confidence is the fourth C. Extensive literature supports the idea that beliefs about oneself translate into actions and results. Facilitator self-confidence is a dimension of efficacy applied to the specific work of conducting meetings. As previously noted, efficacious persons believe that they have knowledge and skills that, when applied to a goal, will overcome any obstacles. Such self-confidence derives from reflection on experiences, conversations with colleagues, and support from coaches or leaders. This chapter closes with the topic of ways to develop confidence. No one who is beginning to facilitate is a blank slate. Each person begins the journey to increasingly effective facilitation with unique strengths and unique things to learn.
Credibility

Credibility, the fifth C, is a by-product of the other four; like permission, it is assigned to the facilitator by the group. Credibility does not live inside the facilitator; rather, it is a perception the group forms about the person. When a group believes that a facilitator is competent, confident, neutral, trustworthy, and fair, the group can say that this person is credible.

Credibility, like trust, can temporarily be lost. Being less than honest, not owning mistakes, or speaking disrespectfully about those who are not in the room will drive a wedge of discomfort between you and the group. One essential facilitator capacity is learning how to recover from mistakes. As a friend of ours says, if you step in it, know how to step out of it.

The strongest element of a recovery move is to step away from the place you made the error. This strategy is called Visual Paragraph (see Appendix A). Acknowledge whatever you did that evoked discomfort. Take responsibility (“I’m sorry, I was supposed to bring that to you today, and I forgot”), apologize (“That was insensitive, please accept my apology”), self-disclose (“Did I say that?”—pointing to the space you just left), or direct some humor at yourself (“I always wanted to be skillful, now I realize I should have specified at what”). These are some unassuming ways to recover focus and direction.
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

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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 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 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. (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.
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 “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.