

# Seven Norms of Collaborative Work

## 1. Pausing

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

- Listens attentively to others' ideas with mind and body
- Allows time for thought after asking a question or making a response
- Rewords in own mind what others are saying to further understand their communications
- Waits until others have finished before entering the conversation

## 2. Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing assists members of the group to hear and understand each other as they formulate decisions. Try 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.

- Uses paraphrases that acknowledge and clarify content and emotions
- Uses paraphrases that summarize and organize
- Uses paraphrases that shift a conversation to different levels of abstraction
- Uses non-verbal communication in paraphrasing

## 3. Putting inquiry at the center

Inquiry is the "default" position of adaptive groups and moves groups beyond acquisition of data and information toward the generation of applicable knowledge. Assumptions, perceptions, and reasoning of others are explored before advocating for one's own ideas.

- Follows a pattern of pausing, paraphrasing, and questioning
- Skilled inquirers lower perceived threat by using approachable voice, use exploratory language (e.g., words such as *might* and *seems*), and pose open-ended questions
- Inquires of others about their reasons for reaching and occupying a position

## 4. Probing for specificity

Using gentle open-ended probes or inquiries such as, "Please say more..." or "I'm curious about..." or "I'd like to hear more about..." or "Then are you saying..." increases the clarity and precision of the group's thinking.

- Seeks agreement on what words mean
- Asks questions to clarify facts, ideas, stories
- Asks questions to clarify explanations, implications, consequences
- Asks questions to surface assumptions, points of view, beliefs, values

## 5. **Placing ideas on the table and pulling them off**

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...”.

- States intention of communication
- Reveals all relevant information
- Considers intended communication for relevance and appropriateness before speaking
- Provides facts, inferences, ideas, opinions, suggestions
- Explains reasons behind statements, questions, and actions
- Removes or announces the modification of own ideas, opinions, points of view

## 6. **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 styles when planning for, facilitating, and participating in group meetings. Responding to others in their own language forms is one manifestation of this norm.

- Maintains awareness of own thoughts and feelings while having them
- Maintains awareness of others’ voice patterns, nonverbal communications, and use of physical space
- Maintains awareness of group’s tasks, mood, and relevance of own and other’s contributions

## 7. **Presuming positive intentions**

Assuming that others’ intentions are positive promotes and facilitates meaningful dialogue and eliminates unintentional put-downs. Using positive intentions in your speech is one manifestation of this norm.

- Acts as if others mean well
- Restrains impulsivity triggered by own emotional responses
- Uses positive presuppositions when responding to and inquiring of others

Adapted from Garmston and Wellman (2009)

# Characteristics of a Professional Learning Community

Professional learning communities create a collective sense of responsibility for student learning and form the cornerstone for sustainable curriculum reform. There are six characteristics of professional learning communities.

## Shared norms and values

Shared norms and values form the foundation for all aspects of developing a professional learning community. Teachers and administrators must reinforce their own understandings about children and learning, teaching and teachers' roles, and the nature of human needs, activities, and relationships.

## A focus on student learning

Most curricular programs in schools emphasize gaining new techniques, skills, and delivery strategies over monitoring the connections between the use of new practices and a focus on student learning. Professional learning communities place sustained attention on students, thereby emphasizing how pedagogy is linked to the process of student learning.

## Collaboration

Collegial relations are characterized by mutual learning that comes from joint planning of future teaching activities and ways to support improved learning. Collaboration is the most advanced form of collegiality. Genuine collaboration involves the co-development of skills related to new practice and the generation of knowledge, ideas, and programs that advance expertise and school performance.

“Community and leadership cannot occur if teachers remain isolated from each other. Developing this community requires the recognition that professional learning is a life-long process that is best nurtured within the norms and culture of the school.”

–Susan Loucks-Horsley

## Deprivatized practice

Deprivatized practice means that teachers practice their craft openly through sharing roles as mentors and advisors in order to provide help to their peers. Through the development of peer coaching relationships or “critical friends,” teachers resolve issues by bringing “real” teaching problems to a discussion and engaging in mutual classroom observations, thus promoting deprivatized practice in schools.

## Reflective dialogue

Reflective dialogue is key to professional learning communities because it encourages self-awareness about praxis. As teachers and administrators engage in reflective dialogue, they close the gap between theory and practice, reduce isolation, and become students of their craft.

## Trust

Relational trust in one another, in students, and in parents is the glue that holds a community together. Elements of trust include respect, personal regard for others, competence, and integrity. Respect leads to deep listening to one another. Extending ourselves to and for others demonstrates personal regard. Competence is a belief that each member can do their job and achieve desired results. Congruence between one's words and actions demonstrate integrity.

Loucks-Horsley, Harding, Arbuckle,, Murray, Dubea, & Williams (1987)

Louis, Kruse & Associates (1995)

Garmston and Wellman (2009)