Dialogue

Skills for Classrooms and Community

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Acknowledgements

We are so grateful to our friend and mentor, Richmond Mayo-Smith, for his commitment to the environment, education, dialogue, and peace. His wish for schools to practice dialogue is at the heart of this project. We hope our curriculum honors his vision of public dialogue as a path to a more sustainable and compassionate planet. His intentional and mindful life inspires us.

Dialogue: Skills for Classrooms and Community

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Overview & Instructions

Most of us have experienced, at various times in our lives, *elements* of a dialogue: someone listened to us with respect; someone helped us stay calm when our emotions were interfering with our ideas; we acknowledged learning something important from a person who has a very different perspective on an important issue; we found surprising common ground with a difficult person; we helped craft a strategy that unified a complex and divergent set of needs. What is less likely is that we have experienced all of those wonderful moments in one intentional conversation. This curriculum is designed to help teachers and students more often have that experience.

A dialogue is an emotionally and educationally rewarding exchange of ideas between two or more people. A dialogue differs from a debate, argument, or presentation because it is intentionally not about winning, not about proving yourself right, not about being wittier, not about overwhelming the other person with facts. It also differs from an interview because it involves mutual sharing. A dialogue is marked by the intention of learning from other people. A dialogue increases the likelihood that people will have a stronger relationship. A dialogue enables people to construct mutually satisfying solutions. A dialogue fosters community where previously there were only sides.

We believe that the skills of dialogue need to be used in various forms of our civic life, such as classroom discussions, staff meetings, neighborhood meetings, and within the institutions of government. We are considering these dialogues in two categories: small-d dialogues that happen spontaneously and informally throughout our lives; capital-D Dialogues that require conscious preparation and structure. We would love to see political discourse on television formatted for capital-D Dialogues, in addition to side-versus-side debates. We would love to see schools sponsoring Dialogue teams, which would meet with Dialogue teams from other schools. These Dialogues would explore challenging issues in an open and thorough manner, compared with the polarized treatment issues often get. Such dialogues would be important practice for future voters, community members, and leaders. For now, we will be thrilled for members of all of our communities to improve their individual skill sets to engage in small-d dialogues.

This curriculum teaches the skills of dialogue in the context of two people. We also offer formats for holding intentional Dialogues in groups of various sizes. Our intent with this skills curriculum is four-fold:

- Students learn the skills to expand their interpersonal and self-management skill set, for use in any part of their lives.
- Teachers develop classroom practices for enhancing the climate of discussion, collaboration, engagement, feedback, and inquiry.
- Students and teachers can hold a formal dialogue on an issue. (See appendix.)
- Students and teachers will have skills so needed for our democracy.

How to use this curriculum

Each section of the curriculum can be used as stand-alone skill—for instance, a class that struggles to listen to each other can work through the section called, "Listening to Understand and Learn." Another group of students may need help to manage their emotions in discussions; those skills are taught in "Managing Emotions." Specific sections of the dialogue curriculum, or the entire curriculum, can be taught in a unit on social skills in health classes and advisories. Dialogue can be integrated into studies of literature and history, and into the complex teamwork required in school sports. Over the course of a semester, or in a designated club, perhaps a diversity club, the entire curriculum can be investigated, which would allow those students the unique and rewarding experience of convening the complete, step-by-step formal dialogue. (See appendix.)

This curriculum includes seven skill-focused sections. Each section follows this format:

a) **Purpose of this skill.** This part describes the skill and why it is important. To support the reader in connecting to the skill, we also highlight moments in life when many of us have experienced the feeling that this skill would engender.

b) **What this skill looks like in use.** This part dives into the elements of the skill at hand. Many teachers will be familiar to varying degrees with most of the skills. The explanations and examples serve as a review, or offer new insights.

c) **Experiences for observing and using this skill around school.** Schools are rich social communities, with innumerable relationships and conversations. This part lists exercises for students to observe and practice dialogue skills.

d) **Putting this skill to use for a dialogue.** This part offers a distilled list of key steps, techniques, or reminders for using the sub-skills of the section.

e) **What if your best intentions…?** This part is in three of the skill sections. It offers suggestions for when one's best intentions to use a dialogue skill are not working.

f) **Applying the skill in class.** This part highlights a few of the many opportunities in the general curriculum to teach, observe, and practice the skills of dialogue.

The expanding field of dialogue outside of schools

Dialogue does not permeate Western society. It is particularly difficult to find examples in public discourse involving candidates or public officials, in the media, in movies, at public hearings and town meetings, or at many faculty meetings. You may have experienced debates – formal and informal – throughout your educational experiences. You may not be aware of any examples of an extended dialogue on an important issue.

Dialogue is, however, an expanding field. For the past few decades, many people and organizations have written books, held conferences, and crafted varying formats for holding dialogues. We greatly appreciate their efforts.[1] The skills we teach here are essential for participation in dialogues in all forms.

The Dialogue formats vary in many ways, such as the size of the group meant to be involved, how tightly or loosely the process is structured, even whether the medium is talk or art or movement. The formats vary because the purposes vary. Dialogues designed to build community can have a more simple structure, be open to anyone, take an hour, and need no facilitator. Dialogues designed to bridge a polarized divide are usually very tightly structured, involve specific people representing divergent views, have lots of preparation steps over several weeks, and are led by a skillful facilitator.

As you begin this curriculum, it may help to have a couple of images of Dialogues in mind.

A Dialogue does not have to start with a heated conflict. Imagine a community that's had an influx of new residents. Some residents realize that very few people know each other. Someone sees guidelines from Conversation Café[2] on the internet and follows their instructions. They post signs around the neighborhood inviting people to talk about an issue or question, such as, "How are we making life better for children?" Conversations take place at a neutral location – a coffee shop perhaps. The few basic guidelines and steps are on a business card. Every three or four people who arrive take a table, and follow the steps to talk. They find out they share some experiences or concerns. Maybe they get ideas; maybe they just get a few neighbors' phone numbers in case of an emergency, or to organize a block party. This Dialogue builds community.

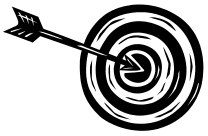
In contrast, there are very highly structured and carefully facilitated Dialogues that have helped communities, churches, and organizations deal with extremely divisive issues. For example, a community is faced with a planning issue: whether to protect marshland or build low-income housing. City officials, developers, housing advocates, job advocates, residents, and environmental scientists are polarized, all for compelling reasons. One organization that specializes in supporting Dialogues in such contentious contexts is Public Conversations Project.

Both of these examples are capital-D Dialogue conversations, involving learning rather than winning, deliberate use of effective communication skills, building understanding and community, and fostering openness toward new views or solutions. We offer this curriculum for capital-D Dialogues as well as small-d dialogues – all those conversations in daily life that can foster learning, appreciation of differences, collaboration, and progress.

[1] For example, see Public Conversations Project at Public Conversations.org and the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation at NCDD.org.

[2] Conversation Café, conversationcafe.org

Getting yourself ready for a dialogue



Purpose of this skill

Being engaged in a dialogue is as much an intention as it is a set of skills you will encounter in this curriculum. It is an intention to learn from your interaction, not an intention to win. It is an intention to know more about how the other people developed their understanding of the world, not an intention to prove that they are wrong and therefore you are right. It is an intention to be a wiser, not a more clever, person.

If you are lucky, the other person will also have the intention and skills for dialogue. Whether they do or do not, your intention, manifested in your tone of voice, physical stance, and choice of language can shift a competitive argument into an educational dialogue. Knowing your strong beliefs is another part of getting ready for a dialogue, as is acknowledging that the other person will likely have strong beliefs as well.

This section will help you be more aware of what you want from an interaction, and if you want a dialogue, how to shape the conditions that make dialogue possible.

What this skill looks like in use

There are many characteristics that show your intention, your curiosity, and your engagement, what many students would call your "attitude." What behaviors show that attitude? What are some helpful actions to get your dialogue started?

- **Consider what strong beliefs you have on the topic.**

  Participating in a dialogue doesn't mean that you don't have opinions and beliefs about a topic. In fact, it may be *because* you care so much about an issue that you want to solve it. When you are aware of those strong beliefs, and what experiences and evidence led you to them, you will more likely find the best ways to include your beliefs in the dialogue.

  Likewise, getting ready for a dialogue means realizing that the other person is likely to have strongly held ideas. You will probably turn a dialogue into a debate if you think that you'll share your beliefs and evidence to change the other person, as if she were a blank slate.

Getting yourself ready to listen to her doesn't necessarily mean you understand or agree with her views; it means you respect her enough to know she'll have them.

- **Be conscious that there are varied perspectives and multiple sources of information on the issue.**

Your view is not the only view. The combination of your view and your dialogue partner's view is also limited. If your goal is to learn more about the other person and his view, knowing more about the issue from different perspectives may help you ask questions and understand what you hear. If your goal is to solve a problem, be especially aware that more views and information are usually important for really understanding an issue and can lead to more possible solutions.

- **Approach the other person with body language that is receptive, engaged, and open.**

The right stance signals a willingness to work together. If you are taller than the other person, you'll step back to be more at eye level, or sit down to foster a sense of equality. When you are participating in a dialogue, you'll monitor your body language to stay relaxed while still very much attentive. You'll have your hands and eyes free from distractions; you'll close your computer and turn off your cell phone. In many situations, it is advisable to sit side by side, or at 45-degree angles, rather than facing each other head-on, which can carry connotations of being in opposition.

- **Find a time and place that is conducive to sharing thoughts.**

Dialogues happen best where you can talk without fear and without being rushed. When people speak in a hurry, they can often be more blunt and less clear than they could have been otherwise. Conversations meant for learning take time.

The setting is just as important. When you find an effective space, you might hear the other person say, "This is a good place to talk." In schools, there are many places to talk (hallways, stairways, offices, classrooms), but those places are not frequently relaxed enough to delve into your ideas. If you are supporting students to have a dialogue, work with them to set up the space so that the participants are in the best position to see and hear each other comfortably.

- **Voices will be no louder than necessary for the other person to hear.**

You need to be emotionally ready to talk, not shout. You are not trying to win points from by-standers, or trying to bring by-standers into the dialogue as a way of exerting pressure. You demonstrate through your volume a desire to talk, not overwhelm.

- **Prepare a few phrases or sentences that invite the other person into a dialogue.**

How you begin sets the tone and initiates the collaborative spirit. Thinking ahead about your opening comments is called "framing." There will be other moments during a dialogue that call for another aspect of this skill, called "reframing," which allows you to reset the tone or focus during the dialogue. But, it's important to try to get off on the right foot.

A few ways to frame that your intention is to learn and share are:

- Acknowledge that you both care about the issue and that you both have ideas. "I think you care as much about this issue as me; I respect that."
- State that you want to understand the other person's views and experiences with the topic. "I am not going into this conversation just wanting you to listen to me. I want to hear what you have to say."
- State that you believe that your knowledge of the issue has some gaps in it. That comment models and invites openness and curiosity. "I know I don't know everything about this."
- Humor might help to lighten the tone, but only if it is self-effacing or shared humor, not targeted or sarcastic. "Believe it or not, I've been wrong about some things at least two times before in my life…"

- **Make agreements about how you will interact.**

Making agreements is especially helpful if you've got a challenging topic to talk about. The more challenging the topic, the more helpful it will be to have agreements. If the other person in your dialogue is less familiar than you with dialogue skills, all the more reason to talk about *how you will talk*. Without talking about how to interact, people behave based on their own needs and assumptions, which are often not the same as the people they're talking with. Start by asking, "What agreements will help us talk about this issue?"

You can have agreements to use the skills in the following sections: listen openly, ask questions that call for explanation, speak from your own perspectives, surface interests, stay calm and help each other be calm. Some more specific agreements can help as well. Will you take turns speaking? For how long? In what order? All of these things matter, especially if your group gets bigger. A few people speaking in a row on one side of an issue can create momentum toward that side and prompt defensiveness from others.

You might need an agreement that relates to the specific issue. "There are a lot of people beyond the two of us with different views about our school mascot. Can we keep this conversation to our own views and not try to represent others who aren't here?"

Exercises for observing and using this skill around school

Getting ready for a dialogue, by definition, involves steps done *before* a conversation starts or just as it begins. Students may be able to witness such moments – the beginnings of conversations, friends talking about a conversation they intend to have.

Students may be able to reflect on their own recent conversations. Students can build skills for getting ready for a dialogue via journal reflections, role-plays, pair-share conversations, observations of oneself or others (with an observation log perhaps), and class or advisory group discussions. The following exercises could be used in those modes.

Identify the strong beliefs that surface

Think of a conversation in which you held strong beliefs. How did it impact how you spoke and how you listened? Were you ready to listen openly to other people's strongly held views? You might be able to observe the impact on other people's conversations as well as your own. If the discussion quickly gets polarized into two different views with each person repeating and reinforcing her own view, they are in debate mode, competing and arguing, rather then listening, exploring, and learning.

Identify multiple perspectives and sources of information

Thinking to yourself, "What views have I not heard yet?" or "What other information might sway my perspective?" can help you be ready for a dialogue. Think, as well, of times you did not consider perspectives beyond your own. How did that conversation go?

Look at the body language of the participants

Watch how people physically behave when they are in disagreement. Note when people stand too close or too far apart, cross their arms, wave their hands, roll their eyes, chuckle disdainfully, and point fingers. Watch people who are not really engaged with a conversation partner. How can you tell their focus is split? What is their body language telling you? These behaviors do not invite others to have a dialogue. Then look at the ways people behave physically when they are in a good conversation. What do you see? How are they standing/sitting? Where is their focus? What is their body language telling you?

Consider the effectiveness of the time and place

Reflect on some conversations you've had in locations that felt physically comfortable, private, and relaxed. Reflect on other conversations where you felt physically

uncomfortable, exposed, or rushed. How did the setting impact your conversations? Observe other people's conversations for the impacts of choosing an appropriate time and place.

Keep aware of the volume of people's voices

As people start conversations, how loud is their voice? What is the tone? What can you tell about their emotions and their intent from their voice? Would you feel invited into a conversation if someone spoke to you with a similar volume and tone? When people are beginning a good conversation, what voice characteristics do you hear?

Listen for and try framing statements

Can you think of a conversation that went awry shortly after it began? That occurrence sometimes means one or more people came to the conversation with assumptions, fears, or defensiveness. Can you think of opening statements you could have offered that might have made a difference? Listen to how other people start their conversations. Do they frame their intentions or do they launch right into their views?

Listen for and try using intentional agreements

Have you heard people start conversations with agreements? What were the agreements? Have you heard conversations where agreements might have helped? What agreements might have made a difference? When you are headed toward a challenging conversation, think about agreements you can offer.

Putting this skill to use for a dialogue

You will know you have the intention of creating a dialogue when you can answer "yes" to the following questions:

Are you ready for a dialogue?

- ❑ Are you willing to listen to the other person?
- ❑ Are you open to finding out that the other person might be right, or at least partly right?
- ❑ Are you calm enough to talk politely?
- ❑ Can you calmly ask the person, "Do you want to talk about this?"
- ❑ Can you find a place to meet away from an audience that would exert pressure on either of you?
- ❑ Are you free from distractions?
- ❑ Do you have time to really talk?
- ❑ Are you curious about the other person's views?
- ❑ Do you know what ideas and information you would like to add to the dialogue?
- ❑ Are you conscious of any strong beliefs that you are bringing to the dialogue?
- ❑ Are you aware that you don't have all possible perspectives or information on the issue?
- ❑ Are you aware of any sensitive trigger points that the other person might be bringing to the dialogue?
- ❑ Have you prepared opening statements that convey a collaborative and open intention?
- ❑ Are you willing to adjust your opinions and positions?
- ❑ Do you need a few agreements for the dialogue?

What if your intentions to have a dialogue are failing?

Just as it takes two people to have a conflict, it takes two people to have a dialogue. If the other person is too emotional to talk calmly, you can say without judgment, "I want to wait to have this conversation." If the setting is not good for a dialogue, you may ask the other person to walk with you to a more conducive place, perhaps away from the pressure of observers.

Despite your best intentions, the other person may not be a receptive partner. It may be that you can think of another way to get your interests met – talking with a different person, finding another format, even reflecting on your own views might help. You might need to politely say, "Can we stop for today? I want to think more about this issue," and excuse yourself.

Applying this skill in class

When analyzing character development and motivation in a novel, discuss how characters, in key points in the book, would answer the check-list above. What evidence is there to support those assumptions? How does a character's approach to conflict build the story?

In group-work situations (sports teams, projects, classroom discussions) identify with students the opportunities to learn from each other. Afterwards, have students identify what their peers did to enable them to learn.

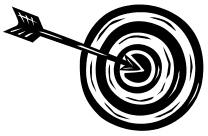
When examining historical conflicts, research the cultural and historical pressures that deterred or supported the establishment of a dialogue.

When studying political negotiations, research what communications were needed to set the stage for a good negotiation. In what ways, if any, did the preparation make an impact?

In classes, advisory groups, clubs, bands, and teams develop group agreements. "When our class (group, club…) is working really well, how are we participating and interacting? What agreements would help our group be at its best more often?" This wording is likely to produce more useful and constructive responses than a vague, "What agreements do we want?" That wording could result in, "We should finish in ten minutes." How you frame the question matters. A few tips for making group agreements:

- Make positive agreements – what to do, rather than what not to do.
- Make just a few agreements, not a long list that will be hard to remember.
- Make the agreements specific. "What does it mean that we'll listen respectfully? Can we still ask questions?" "What does it mean that we'll all participate? Is 'passing' allowed?"
- Talk about whose responsibility it is to uphold the agreements – everyone's.

Positions and interests



Purpose of this skill

Your interests are what you really need addressed from a dialogue. Knowing your interests helps you be creative and open to a variety of solutions. Knowing your interests can turn adversaries into partners. Knowing how to ask someone about his interests helps you invite him into a dialogue. Being willing to offer your own interests fosters openness, depth, and collaboration.

So, what's often in the way of talking about interests? Positions. You've probably been in a conversation in which someone started by offering, or possibly insisting on, a solution. That's a position. It's her answer, her demand. You may have offered another possible solution. The two of you then likely went back and forth – you speaking of the pros of your position and the cons of her position, and she speaking of the cons of your position and the pros of her position. That's a contest. In the worst cases, neither of you were thinking about why you landed on your position, what your underlying reasons and needs were, or how to find common ground or alternatives. You were competing for whose position would win. The best you could hope for was either winning or splitting the difference – compromising.

Knowing the difference between a position and an interest is at the very core of a successful dialogue. Knowing the difference between a position and an interest can allow you to generate multiple solutions for a shared problem, allowing two people, who seem to be adversaries, to become partners in problem-solving. Interests are what we really need, our underlying priorities. A position is a strategy, one way to get what you really need. Once you have established the intention of being in a dialogue, you need to begin to separate positions from interests.

Here's an example of how positions get in the way of meeting our deeper interests:

You have plans to eat lunch with a friend. You want to eat a hamburger for lunch. You say to your friend, "Let's go to Max's Burgers." Your friend says, "I hate Max's Burgers. I'll see you after lunch." You go alone to Max's Burgers, and you miss your friend's company.

Your position was, "Let's go to Max's Burgers." A position is one way to take care of things, a strategy, at times a solution. We tell people our positions all the time: "Advisory period should not be first thing in the day;" "We can't let students wear hats in school;" "I want to go to Max's Burgers." If you are lucky, the other person has the same position in mind. When you and the other person have different positions, you are often stuck: one person is going to have to give in, or refuse to participate; i.e. you eat lunch at Max's Burgers alone.

Your interests are what you really need to get from your stated position. When you are aware of your interests and make them explicit, you tell your friend, "I want to have lunch with you and I want a hamburger." There may be many places where you can eat a hamburger and be with your friend; Max Burgers is just one solution/position to meet your interests. Being stuck on a single position undermines a dialogue and minimizes the possible shared solutions available. Working with interests pulls you into a bigger world of solutions — these are not compromises, but strategies that get everyone what they truly desire. Interests are where dialogues need to go.

What this skill looks like in use

How does it sound when you are offering your interests and seeking others' interests? How do you know when this skill is needed? What will you do to separate positions from interests?

- **Think ahead and lead with your interests.**

  One of the most common ways our intention to be in a dialogue ends up in an argument is when we start off with our position: "I want a no-hats rule." If the other person has an unfavorable response to that proposal, you are in opposition right away. Much more effective is to lead with your interests: "I am concerned about respect in the school. I'd like there to be more respect all around." Many people will share your interests, but not necessarily the solutions (positions) you have in mind.

- **Look past the other person's position to find the interests they carry.**

  You don't have to oppose any solution (position) right away. Shift the dialogue to interests: "There are lots of reasons for a no-hats rule. What are you hoping it will accomplish?" Most people carry many interests. In the case of a hat rule, the interests may be respect, or gangs, or cultural sensitivity, or health. Don't assume you know the other person's deeper interests. Work to bring those interests to the surface.

- **Notice repetitive demands and insistent tones, and use reframing skills.**

  When you or the other person repeats a demand a second or third time, that demand is probably a position. You can shift the conversation with, "I'm hearing your stand. Can you tell me your *reasons* for wanting a no-hats rule?"

- **Be creative and open to many solutions to meet your interests.**

Discussing interests is likely to result in a more lasting solution. If you and a friend discuss only positions, you are usually limited to three possible outcomes – your idea, her idea, or a compromise. It's possible that you're both happy with the compromise, but it's often the case that a compromise only partly meets either of your needs, so you're partly satisfied and partly dissatisfied. Such a solution may not last and may affect your friendship. Talking about interests opens up a bigger world of possible solutions. You can be creative about considering many alternatives, some of which may well meet both of your interests better than either starting position.

- **Avoid making things personal; stay focused on the problem or topic.**

Interest-based dialogues are a cornerstone of effective negotiations. In *Getting to Yes*, Fisher and Ury underscore these important guidelines: *Separate the person from the problem. Be soft on the person; be hard on the problem. Proceed independent of trust.* When things get personal, egos are involved and you're likely to be competing to win with very high stakes. For instance, "How can I trust you if you don't agree with me?" puts pressure on the relationship without addressing the interests. Instead, you can reassure the other person and still solve the problem: "Please don't agree with me just because we're friends. We'll be friends either way. I really want us to be creative and think of some ways to foster respect and individuality."

Exercises for observing and using this skill around school

Students can build skills for interest-based dialogue via journal reflections, role-plays, pair-share conversations, observations of oneself or others (with an observation log perhaps), and class or advisory group discussions. The following exercises could be used in those modes.

Identify the positions and interests in school rules and schedules. Rules are positions; student behavior is the interest. Schedules are positions also; giving time to priorities is the interest. How much time is given to science, advisory, or faculty meetings and when it falls in the schedule – those decisions are positions as well. School schedules are complex solutions to many interests.

- Think about a rule that is generating a lot of conversation. What interests are being addressed by the rule? In what ways is the rule effectively meeting those interests?
- Think about an aspect of the school schedule. What interests are best addressed by your school's schedule? Which interests seem to have a lower priority?

Identify the positions and interests in schools meetings, from assemblies to advisories to pep rallies.

- What are the interests, both stated and implicit, for convening one of these meetings?
- In what ways did the structure of the meeting (the positions) affect the successful development of the interests?

Review discussions or arguments you've had, or ones you've observed. Consider the following questions. You can rephrase the questions to apply to discussions or arguments you've observed as well.

- Did you think ahead and lead with interests? If so, how did you open the conversation? If not, what statements can you think of now that might have represented your interests?
- Did you ask the other person about what she really needed, her interests? If so, give some examples. If not, what questions can you think of now? What might the impact have been?
- Did you or the other person make repetitive demands? If so, what underlying interests do you think might have been beneath the demands?
- Did the conversation include some creative brainstorming? What was the impact of generating – or not generating – alternative ideas?
- Did the discussion get personal or stay focused on the issue? What were the impacts either way?
- Were you able to use the interests as criteria for agreeing on a solution?

Putting this skill to use for a dialogue

- Separate your own positions from your deeper interests.
- Share your interests. You may have many interests. You may need to say, "Eating lunch with you is my main interest; I'd also like to go somewhere I can get a burger."
- Learn the other person's interests. If the other person does not know the difference between positions and interests, you can ask, "I hear you saying you'd like to go to Max's Burgers. What is it about Max's Burgers that makes you suggest going there?"
- Save any pre-conceived positions/solutions until you and the other person have sorted through the interests. Your original position may turn out to be a poor way to take care of all of your interests. Use your interests as criteria, looking at them together.

- As the dialogue progresses, you may find that you are completely giving up a position you once held. You may find yourself rethinking the degree of importance of various interests. You may find yourself recommitting to the importance of a particular interest. These would be strong indicators that you are genuinely involved in a dialogue, because you are working at the deep level of interests.

Applying this skill in class

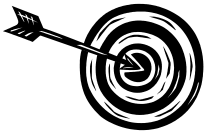
In the study of history, explore the many interests that provoked such events as the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima, the South's secession from the union in 1861, the decision to send manned flights to the moon.

In English classes, the characters in novels are motivated to action to resolve conflicts. Analyze the interests of each character at critical moments in the plot. Have any characters explicitly stated their interests, or are the interests all implied? What different outcomes emerge for characters who make their interests explicit?

In any class on any day, consider the lesson plan as a position/strategy that is designed to meet the interests of learning particular skills and content. After the class, students can assess the effectiveness of the activities, and their own efforts, towards the given interests.

In any group project, you and your partners may have different ideas about who should do what, by what deadline, and in what style of presentation. Those decisions are all positions. You may have different styles of working, different out-of-school responsibilities, different pressures or anxieties, or even different goals that are important interests.

Managing Emotions



Purpose of this skill

If discussions were calm, they wouldn't be nearly so hard. Of course, discussions involving different ideas and perspectives are often fraught with emotions. It is easy to have strong emotions, to feel misunderstood and frustrated, to be triggered by another person's comment, or to be so insistent on your view that it triggers strong emotions in others.

It is important, therefore, to learn to be aware of your own emotional triggers, to be observant when other people are getting emotionally charged, and to have skills for diffusing and reframing both situations. Managing emotions in a productive manner does not mean not having feelings, but it does mean expressing them through words when possible, rather than through tone, facial expressions, body language, and actions.

Many of us have experienced being with a person who could manage strong emotions. Some people, such as counselors and therapists, develop their emotional skills as part of their professions. When we are with them, we trust that they will be able to understand our strong emotions and not get overly emotional themselves. There are many people who seem to naturally stay calm when emotions run high; they can say what they feel and still maintain a tone of respect.

What this skill looks like in use

Managing emotions isn't always observable to others. There may be a moment when a student feels exasperated and says so, as in, "What you just said was really unfair. I need to cool off for a minute." There may be other times when that student does not say anything aloud, and instead notes internally that she is clenching her jaw; she takes a deep breath to return to a calmer state, and continues to discuss the important topic at hand.

If students are skillful about managing emotions when in a dialogue, they will use the following skills, whether they are noticeable to others or only to themselves.

- **They will be aware of their own emotions.**

They will be aware of the physical cues, such as having a faster heart rate, shorter breaths, sweaty palms, or clenched fists, signs that let them know they're reacting emotionally. Further, they will name the feeling, whether, for example, they feel upset, frustrated, or impatient. Different feelings offer different insights and call for different responses, so awareness is a crucial step in emotional self-management. Further, being able to name specific feelings accurately and constructively is itself a self-calming skill. These techniques are in contrast to other common teenage forms of emotional expression, such as swearing, talking about actions without identifying the feelings ("I can't sit still" instead of "I am really nervous") or blaming others ("He can't teach" versus "I feel lost").

- **They will have identified a few techniques that help them stay calm and they will use those techniques.**

A student might become conscious that he is tapping his foot rapidly, and so takes a breath and slows the tapping. Another might open and close her fists a few times under the table, stretching her fingers. Another might use silent self-talk sentences, such as "This is just a discussion; I can be calm," or "Am I sure I understood that point? What did he really mean?" Another person might suggest that it's time for a 5-minute break. There are many techniques. Any of these techniques are more likely to be used in a heated moment if students have had a chance to think ahead, choose one to try, and practice it for a few days.

- **They will use a keen eye and ear to notice that other people may be getting upset.**

By high school, students have already had a lot of practice noticing teachers' emotional reactions, whether they show up in a raised voice or a raised eyebrow, in a cool tone or a cool stare. Having explicit conversations and observation activities can help hone this skill, make it more conscious, and use it widely. Becoming more observant of other people lets you choose another approach before the situation is highly charged and options are more limited.

- **They will use skills for identifying and avoiding triggers, and for reframing comments.**

Some of us are emotionally triggered when we hear unfair generalizations or stereotypes. Some of us are triggered when we hear language that conveys that someone is stubbornly not open to new ideas. Questions can also trigger reactions, especially when they polarize an issue, bait the other person, or denigrate a view.

In an effective dialogue, students won't use such emotionally charged tactics. If such comments do arise, a student will notice and choose non-escalating or reframing responses. Those responses will focus on interests, name any common ground that has emerged, and are voiced from one's own perspective.

For example, someone might say, “You’re saying the no-hats rule should be changed. I suppose next you’ll say there should be no dress code at all!” That language is polarizing and baiting. A non-escalating response might be, “I’m just talking about the no-hats rule; nothing else.”

After questioning if the school’s Spirit Day is spreading *positive* spirit among students, somebody says, “You never respect school traditions. We’ve always done it this way!” “Never” and “always” are generalizations; using such words envelops all school traditions forever, too large a topic to handle in a useful way. You could respond by focusing on the interests and common ground: “I agree with you that Spirit Day is important and so is having traditions. How about talking about what parts of Spirit Day help us feel like a community, and what parts end up with kids feeling embarrassed or isolated?”

- **They will use language that helps other people return to calmness.**

Techniques that often help to diffuse strong emotions include listening attentively and silently, letting the other person vent, staying calm, and showing that you’ve understood their message and the intensity of feeling. “It sounds like you felt really scared when you heard the police siren.” “So, you’re saying you felt humiliated. Did I hear that right?”

Exercises for observing and using this skill around school

Students can build skills for managing emotions via journal reflections, role-plays, pair-share conversations, observations of oneself or others (with an observation log perhaps), and class or advisory group discussions. The following exercises could be used in any of those modes.

Emotional self-awareness

- Think of some times when you’ve been angry in class. Where did you feel it in your body? What were the earliest signs? (These are called physical cues.)
- Think of times when you’ve felt other strong emotions in school. What were the physical cues that you were feeling scared / anxious / overwhelmed / _____?
- Think of the last day (or week) in detail (or observe for the next day or week). Name as many emotions as you can remember that you felt during the week.

Techniques to help calm yourself

- How do you stay calm in tense situations?
- How do you regain composure when you’re upset?

- What productive techniques do friends and family members have to stay calm or regain composure?

Noticing that other people are becoming more emotional

- As you observe others during the next day in school, what emotions are you noticing?
- What are the earliest signs of those emotions?

Skills for identifying and avoiding triggers

- Words like "everyone" and "always" are generalizations. What is the impact on a discussion when someone claims that "everyone" "always" does this or that? Why do people use such words in disagreements?
- Everyone has emotional triggers, things that prompt feelings of anger, fear, guilt, or other emotions. During the next day, note what triggers you. Second, note what seems to trigger others. Last, note what emotions seem to arise.
- What responses seem to help you and others deal with such situations? What responses seem to make things worse?

Helping to return to a calm state

- When you're upset in class, what can other people say that helps you calm down? What can they say that leads you to feel even more emotional?
- What kinds of statements do you make that seem to help other people versus make things worse?

Putting this skill to use in a dialogue

- Be aware of how you feel, naming your feelings (likely just to yourself).
- Use effective self-calming techniques.
- Observe others' emotional reactions.
- Use language that is specific, from your own perspective, and focuses on interests and common ground, avoiding using words and phrases that trigger your dialogue partners. If your partners use words or phrases that trigger you or others, try to reframe and redirect the conversation back to the important issues.
- When others are upset, stay calm, listen carefully, check your understanding, and show your partners that you heard them.

Applying this skill in class

When reading novels or watching films:

- Identify characters' feelings, whether they appear explicitly in the text or not (or in movies, are spoken explicitly or not), getting practice with emotional vocabulary.
- Note statements meant to trigger characters into arguments.
- Note self-management techniques.
- Note any reframing, redirecting, de-escalating statements.
- Note the role of silent listening and other diffusing techniques.

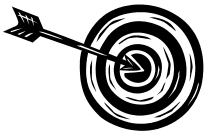
When researching historical events and eras:

- Speculate on the emotional triggers for people of a given time and place, and how those emotions could have been among the forces of historical change.

In any group project, a teacher or advisor can periodically ask students/advisees to note right then:

- how they are feeling
- how others seem to be feeling
- what kinds of statements and suggestions have improved the emotional tone, and
- what kinds of statements or suggestions added more emotional charge.

Speaking from your own perspective



Purpose of this skill

It is very difficult to have a constructive conversation when you claim to know what the other person thinks or feels. When you say, "You don't care about Spirit Day," it invites an argument: "I do too care about Spirit Day!" Since you cannot really know what thoughts are in another person's brain, it's an assumption to speak as if you do. It's no wonder that people often react negatively when we tell them what they think or feel.

Your own perspective, ideas, and experiences are what you can speak about with honesty. It can be very difficult to be clear about your own thoughts or feelings and represent them well, but it is your responsibility to try. It isn't fair to expect other people to read your mind, and it isn't constructive to assume you can read theirs.

The opposite of speaking from one's own perspective is a "You Statement." Telling people what they think and feel will undermine a dialogue and most often create a struggle: "You think this…" leads to "No, you don't know what I'm thinking," and that struggle will get the two of you nowhere. It is critical to speak from one's own perspective, and to ask about the other person's perspective. This section focuses on the speaking part. Questioning is in another section.

You may have experienced being in a conversation with people who spoke only from their own perspectives and did not try to tell you what you thought or felt. If you said something that they didn't understand, they said, "I don't know what you mean," rather than "You're all mixed up." If you explained your unique experience on a topic, the person said, "I had a different experience," rather than "Let me tell you what really happened." When people speak from their own perspective, you can continue to explore the topic and build the relationship.

Speaking from your own perspective may be harder than it sounds. It's hard to avoid making statements about the other person's experiences, ideas, and perspectives. It's common to say: "You think…" "You are…" "You felt…"

Another difficulty in speaking from your own perspective is that you might feel vulnerable – you are sharing your thoughts, feelings, or experiences, and you don't yet know if your listener is hearing them with respect and interest.

What this skill looks like in use

Speaking from your own perspective can take many forms. Here are some examples.

- **Statements about your own beliefs or experiences**

  Speaking from your own perspective can be structured as a statement about beliefs or experiences. You could say: "Here's my understanding of how the no-hat rule is enforced;" or "I've been taught in my religion that it's important to cover my head." The You-statement alternative might have been, "You seem to think the no-hats rule isn't in use at baseball games," or "You don't understand my religion."

- **Statements that say what you need**

  Consider the impact of the following statements and their You-statement alternative.

  "I'd really like your help with this project," versus, "You have to help me."

  "I'm feeling upset about how often you borrow my class notes," versus, "You don't do any of your own work."

  In each case, the first statement asserts a need while the second statement makes a demand or blames.

  Some people may think they are speaking from their own perspective just because they start their sentence with the word, "I," as in "I know we're friends; that's why you have to give me the answers to the test." Speaking from your own perspective doesn't include trying to control the other person.

- **Statements that set limits or giving yourself an exit**

  It is honest, clear, and respectful to say, "I'm too confused and frustrated to continue to discuss things right now. I need time to think and cool off." This direct message doesn't insult or blame the other person, nor does it end the conversation forever. Without being conscious of speaking from your own perspective, you might instead have said, "You're driving me crazy. You're impossible to talk to!" That statement blames the other person for your feelings, is more dramatic than necessary, might harm the relationship, and makes it harder to come back to the conversation.

- **Formal "I-statements" to offer a reaction, a rationale, and a request**

  Speaking from one's own perspective can be structured as a formal "I-statement" as in, "I feel _____ when you _____ because _____ and I would like _____." An "I Statement" sounds like this: "I get angry when you interrupt me, because it feels like my ideas aren't worth listening to, so I'm asking if you can hold your thoughts till I'm done. Is that okay?"

  Each part of an "I Statement" is about one's own perspective – how *I* feel, what action is bothering *me*, why the action is bothering *me*, and what *I* would like to have happen. Using the *structure* of an I-statement, but putting blaming language in any of the phrases, shifts the message into a blaming You-statement, as in "I feel you are disrespectful, because you are rude when you interrupt, and I would like you to stop being so impatient."

  The message of an I-statement may seem challenging because it is direct and clear, but when carefully crafted, I-statements let you deliver the message with respect. With the I-statement, the other person might feel caught off guard, but he is more likely to stay in the conversation with you than had you said, "You're not listening to me! Stop being so disrespectful!"

- **Statements that disagree respectfully**

  Even when disagreeing, speaking from your own perspective is useful. "I don't see it that way" allows for more sharing of ideas, whereas "You're wrong" shuts down the conversation.

In all of these examples, making statements about what other people think or feel is asking for an argument. On the other hand, speaking from your own perspective, rather than telling other people what they think and feel, allows the dialogue to continue, and understanding to grow.

Exercises for observing and using this skill around school

Students can build skills for owning their own perspectives via journal reflections, role-plays, pair-share conversations, observations of oneself or others (with an observation log perhaps), in class or advisory group discussions. The following exercises could be used in any of those modes.

Think of someone who is a good model of speaking from his/her own perspective.

- Who is this person?
- What are some examples of how he/she offers ideas, asserts needs, or disagrees without drama or blame?
- How do you feel when you're discussing something important with this person?

Listen to discussions in class.

- What examples can you hear of people speaking from their own perspective?
- What examples can you hear of You-statements?
- What is the impact on the discussion?
- What is the impact on the relationships?

Listen to conversations among your friends.

- What examples can you hear of people speaking from their own perspective?
- What examples can you hear of You-statements?
- What is the impact on the conversation?
- What is the impact on the relationships?

Putting this skill to use in a dialogue

- Speak from your own perspective. Try starting your statements with:

  What I've been thinking is…

  My experience has been…

  Here's how I've been understanding…

  I'm feeling…

  What I really need now is…

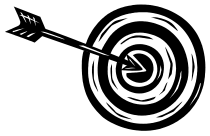
- If the other person seems to react defensively, review what you said. Was it fully from your own perspective? Was part of it actually about your conversation partner's thoughts, feelings, or experiences? If so, try again, starting with an apology. "I'm sorry. I was only trying to explain my view, not claim to understand yours. Let me try again."

Applying this skill in class

Monitor how characters in novels or movies speak to others and the reactions they get.

In any group project (science labs, advisories, sports teams), try to speak from your own perspective and note the impact. Similarly, note when you or others use "You-statements."

Listening to Understand and Learn



Purpose of this skill

When we are in an argument, we often listen to win the argument. We listen for inconsistencies in the other person's views, we listen for a fact that can be contradicted with another fact that we have ready, we listen for the moment the other person pauses to breathe so we can jump in with our counter argument. We may listen enough to hear the facts, but not necessarily the emotional impact of the story. We may walk away from that argument saying to ourselves that we have listened, but not that we have stretched to understand and learn.

Listening to understand and learn is an attitude as much as it is a set of skills. It is the attitude that the other person can teach you something from his or her experience. By listening to understand and learn, you convey respect. You also convey a humility, that you may not yet know everything there is to know on the topic. You also learn what the other person may need in order to solve the problem — you learn about her perspective and her deeper interests.

Listening to understand and learn does not mean that you will agree, or that you have given up your own beliefs; it is said, "The cheapest concession you can make is to listen." The time will come for you to speak and advocate, and for you to share what you have gained from your own life's experiences. Hopefully, you will speak to share and clarify your interests (more on that in the section, "Speaking from Your Own Perspective"). For now, you are listening for how the other person is exposing his or her positions and interests. By doing so, you will become wiser.

You may already know what good listening is like, because you may know someone who has listened to you. When people listened to you, they encouraged you to continue talking. You were able to finish all of your sentences. The other people asked you questions that encouraged you to fully explain your ideas and your feelings. Their body language (nods, eye contact) let you know you were being heard. They may have asked you questions to clarify their own understanding, to make sure they understood what you meant to say. Those questions may have been about your idea or story ("So, what you believe is important is…"), or about your emotions ("It sounds like this issue is really personal and upsetting. Am I hearing you correctly?"). They were able to summarize what you said, with a thoughtfulness that communicated that they were taking a moment to reflect on your positions and interests, how you arrived at them, and how you feel about them.

What this skill looks like in use

- **Do not multi-task.**

People are often checking messages, skimming papers, or looking at their computer when someone is trying to talk with them. Good listening means putting everything down and away. This signals to the other person that you are truly prepared to listen. Committing to listen, and do nothing else, allows you to fully integrate tone of voice, body language, facial expressions, and other subtle cues that are part of what people are trying to say to you.

- **Use body language and gestures to encourage others to share more.**

Show you're paying attention with eye contact. Be at a similar level; for example, sit with, rather than stand over, someone trying to tell you a story. Face the other person in a way that is comfortable for the two of you and allows you to stay focused. Sometimes leaning in toward the person or having a facial expression that matches her story helps as well.

- **Use simple words and phrases to encourage the other person to speak her thoughts fully.**

Say, "I'd like to hear more about that." Remember these three great words: "Tell me more." Also remember, you needn't say anything if the other person is eagerly telling her story. That's a sign she doesn't need encouragement. Your speaking up in that case can interrupt her.

- **Check for understanding.**

Some people you talk with use words you have never heard. Others may use a metaphor or an analogy that does not seem to fit. Or, people will quote a complicated set of data, and will think you have understood exactly what they meant. When there is a pause, say, "There is something you said that I am not sure I understood. Can you explain this part to me?"

- **Check for emotional impact.**

Every story or explanation has at least two layers: the plot of the story, and how the person feels about the story. She may not explicitly mention how she's feeling; it may be in her tone of voice and body language. Whether or not she states how she's feeling, you can show that you're listening carefully by noting what you observe – "It sounds like you felt torn about this decision; that it was a tough moment."

- **Let the other person completely finish her sentences – and her whole thought.**

Don't jump to speak the moment you think the other person is finished. Ask if he is still thinking about what to say; many people need a long pause to organize their thoughts. Your goal is to leave room for him to tell you what he most wants you to hear, so he may need time and space to do so.

- **Refocus if you get distracted.**

If your eye is distracted by something passing in the background, just bring it back to focus on the other person. It is common for thoughts to wander away from the others person's train of ideas. Listening is a commitment to focus and re-focus as often as you need in order to understand.

- **Stretch your own perspective to understand.**

If you find yourself thinking, "Yeah…, but…," you're listening to disagree. You're sifting his statements through a lens you're holding, judging them as fitting or not fitting with what you want to hear. It's hard to suspend your own perspective and beliefs; you might feel as if you have no strong beliefs at all when you temporarily set them aside to listen. But, listening to understand and learn requires that you intentionally stretch and fully appreciate how the other person believes. Instead of thinking, "Yeah, I can see his point, but I can shoot down that idea!" you can practice asking yourself, "Okay, that idea surprised me. Where is it coming from? How do I have to stretch to understand it?" Or, try, "I need to lean in, not lean away, from his idea. What is this idea really about?"

- **Periodically summarize what you have heard.**

It is a wonder that people ever really comprehend another person. We use so many words and phrases that carry multiple meanings. We make references to events and people that are not necessarily common knowledge. We get emotional and do not speak in a logical fashion. A dialogue will be sustained when you say, "Let me see if I have heard you correctly. You're saying…"

Exercises for observing and using this skill around school

Students can build skills for managing emotions via journal reflections, role-plays, pair-share conversations, observations of oneself or others (with an observation log perhaps), and class or advisory group discussions. The following exercises could be used in any of those modes.

Look for good listeners. In your school there are likely to be people who are particularly good at listening. They may be students, teachers, counselors, coaches, custodians, administrators, or anybody. It's not the job that makes them a good listener; it's their skills. Watch them in action. What makes them effective? What listening skills are they demonstrating that others can use?

Identify classroom listening expectations. They're everywhere and they vary from teacher to teacher, and department to department. What rules and habits in your various classes encourage or discourage good listening?

Note the impact of effective listening in class discussions.

- Are listeners focused, not distracted? What did you see?
- Are listeners using facial expressions and body language that encourages the speaker? What did you see?
- Are listeners patient and minimal in their encouragements? What did you hear?
- When one person finishes speaking and the next begins, does the new speaker show that he has listened to the previous person, maybe by quoting a few words, reiterating a fact, summarizing the previous speaker's positions and interests?
- Are listeners asking questions to check their own understanding? What did you hear?
- Are listeners picking up on the emotional impacts on the speaker? What did you hear?
- Are listeners stretching their perspectives or using "Yeah…, but…" responses? What was the impact on the discussion?
- Was the speaker able to explain his whole idea? What signs told you that he was done?

Putting this skill to use for a dialogue

- Be very clear that you are in a listening mode. Put down papers you have been reading, and set aside your phone. If necessary, move to a place where you know you will be able to focus with minimal distractions.
- Face the person. Be at a comfortable distance.
- Encourage the person to speak by actively demonstrating that you are following their train of thoughts. The three simplest words you can say to convey that attitude are, "Tell me more."

- Check that you understand the words, phrases, analogies, and information that the other person is using. Asking people to give you more information is a sign that you are listening to learn and understand.
- Check that you understand the emotional impact of the story or explanation you are hearing. It can enrich your understanding of the other person and her explanation.
- Do not interrupt. Let the person finish her sentences completely.
- Notice if your attention has wandered and bring it back to the task of listening. It happens all the time. You need to expend effort to listen actively, and we all slip. You may need to say, "Excuse me, my mind wandered for a moment. Did you just say…?"
- If you find yourself thinking of counter-arguments ("yeah…, but…" thoughts), coach yourself, "I can stretch farther to understand him. How did he come to that belief?"
- Summarize what you have understood ("I hear your most important interests are these... Did I hear that right?"). You may be ready to take your turn to talk; summarizing the other person's most important positions and interests can set the stage for you to be listened to in the same manner.

What if your best intentions to listen are not reciprocated?

You are listening to understand and learn. In a dialogue, you are also expecting that the other person will want to listen to you just as carefully as you listened to him. However, the other person might need some help. Here are a few suggestions:

- If the other person seems to be going on and on, you may need to more explicitly let him know that you have been listening: "Okay, let me see if I got everything you want me to know. You want me to know…. Is that it?"
- If you are interrupted consistently when it's your turn to talk, the next chance you get to speak, say, "If I am hearing you correctly, you want me to know the following before you are going to let me have a turn: …" This display of having been a good listener can diffuse the other person's difficulty sharing the time to speak.
- You may have missed the other person's emotions, even though you understood the ideas. You can ask, "What am I missing? Is there something important I haven't heard? It sounds like you have some feelings about this issue."

The other person may not be able to have a dialogue, or may not be able to allow you your chance to speak. In the section on "Speaking from Your Own perspective" you will get instructions on how to effectively communicate your needs and take care of yourself.

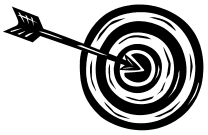
Applying this skill in class

When reading a novel, write a dialogue between two characters in which one listens to understand and learn. How does that dialogue impact the story?

When reading a novel or studying historical figures, analyze everyone's perspectives – not just the most sympathetic ones. What are the people's experiences, needs, feelings, goals, values, and beliefs? Stretch your perspective to really understand a character or figure you don't like.

Watch or listen to a news broadcast in which there is an interview. In what ways do the interviewers show that they are listening to understand? How do they get the person being interviewed to tell more?

Questions that Foster Dialogues



Purpose of this skill

In arguments or debates, in our effort to win, we narrow our focus, probing for the weaknesses in the other person's perspective. We are not in a learning mode; we are hunting for a competitive edge. It is unlikely that we are listening to understand and learn (see the section on "Listening to Understand and Learn"). Our questions, if we ask any, are designed to shut down the other person, to force them into a defense, to lead them into an area where we can prove that we are right. Our questions are often designed to reach a "Gotcha!" moment that puts the other person in a one-down position.

In a dialogue, our questions reveal that we seek to be wiser, not more clever. Our questions communicate to the other person that we are seeking a broader understanding of the issue at hand. Our questions reveal our intentions; our questions can create and recreate the context for a dialogue.

You've probably experienced the impact of really good questions. When you have been asked a question by someone who was not arguing with you, you did not feel under attack. You were able to explain yourself, instead of defending yourself. You might have been physically relaxed, breathing more slowly, shoulders dropping. You might have found yourself revealing more of what you knew. The questions you were asked followed your trains of thought. The questions might have helped you come to a better understanding of your own interests, and your own ways of making sense of the issue at hand. Perhaps you found that you did not have an answer to a question, and in that moment, not having an answer was okay.

What this skill looks like in use

When you are asking questions in a dialogue, the questions are tools to bring you in closer communication with the other person, not weapons to hone an attack. What will you do to ask effective questions?

- **Support the other person to explain, and not defend, ideas.**

People often expect to hear questions that put them on the defensive. For example, “What could possibly make you think that way?” or “Haven’t you ever heard of…?” When you ask questions that seek explanations, you are seeking to fill in gaps in your own knowledge: “What happened next?” “What options were you considering when you made that decision?” “Can you tell me what you thought of that issue?”

- **Reveal your own lack own knowledge.**

None of us can know everything. A dialogue is an opportunity to learn, not win, so you can use this opportunity to find out important information to understand the other person’s perspective and solve the problem. “What do you know about this hat rule history?” “When you were in that advisory group, what was working well?” “I’ve heard Max Burgers hires a lot of students in the summer. Do you know anything about that?” Be very wary of your own intentions when you ask questions — don’t ask one question in order to set up the person for a series of questions that will prove you are right.

- **Clarify words and ideas that puzzle you.**

Our diverse experiences, filtered through our individual senses, often make communication very difficult. When you are in dialogue mode, you will make sure you truly understand the other person. Your questions communicate a real interest in learning. “When you used the word ‘hat’ in that way, did you mean only caps, or did you mean anything on the head?”

- **Get at the root of your differing perspectives.**

Being in a dialogue does not mean that you agree with what the other person is saying. You may think the other person has incorrect information, or has developed a conclusion that is not accurate. Your questions can bring to light the root of your differences; the questions may lead to an acknowledgment that you have found a fundamental difference. “Right now I don’t see how hats are disrespectful. Can you tell me again how hats are disrespectful?” Or, “You’ve said you believe gender-separate advisories are harmful. Can you explain what makes you so strongly about that?”

Exercises for observing and using this skill around school

Students can build skills for asking questions that foster dialogue via journal reflections, role-plays, pair-share conversations, observations of oneself or others (with an observation log perhaps), and class or advisory group discussions. The following exercises could be used in those modes.

Note the types of questions that teachers ask. Often teachers are seeking a single answer. "What is the length of the hypotenuse in this triangle?" "What year did the United States invade Mexico?" "What is the atomic symbol for antimony?" Look for when teachers ask questions that are primarily designed to reveal the thinking of their students, not to judge or score those answers; for example, "Can you tell us the choices you made to get to that answer?"

Find someone you know has a different view on an issue. Ask them if they'd be willing to talk with you about the issue. Treat it like an interview, not a contest.

- Ask questions that invite an explanation, not a defense. "Can you tell me about your stand on…?"
- Mention what you don't understand, what you know you don't know. "Can you say more about how … would work?" "I've never understood…. Could you explain more about it to me?"
- Ask for clarification and further detail. "What did you mean by…?"
- Ask the other person about differences in your perspectives. "What experiences led you to believe…?" "What parts of this stand do you disagree with?"

Keep a log for a few days of the kinds of questions people ask you. Which questions feel like an attack on you or your idea? Which questions are interesting or helpful?

Consider the difference between open-ended questions and single-answer questions. You see them in textbooks and on tests. How are they structured? What do they start with?

Listen for the questions asked on school teams. Athletes on teams are often making split-second decisions with a lot of pressure in the situation. If you're on a team, look for times your teammates and coaches sincerely ask you to reveal your decision-making, not to defend it, for example, "What were you hoping would happen when you made that move?" (asked without sarcasm).

Putting this skill to use for a dialogue

- Ask questions that help reveal more of the other person's interests, perspectives, and experiences.
- Ask questions that teach you facts and ideas about the issue you don't yet know.
- Ask questions that clarify words and perspectives that are not clear to you.
- Ask questions that help you and the other person identify areas of agreement and disagreement.

What if the questions you are asking are not fostering a dialogue?

Be careful about the following:

Don't ask questions for which you think you already know the answer. If you want to make a point, make it, and be sure it's from your own perspective (see the section on "Speaking from Your Own Perspective"). If you ask a question when you're actually trying to get your own point across, it can sound like a sneak attack. "So you're saying... Isn't that view hypocritical about…?"

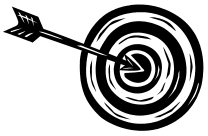
Be prepared to help others ask you more dialogue-type questions. People may well ask you questions as a form of attack. Notice, for example, if you feel you are *defending* rather than *explaining* yourself. Resist making the dialogue into a contest of who can answer questions more cleverly. Try to reframe their approach by saying, "It sounds like you want me to defend my ideas, rather than explain them. If you are interested in understanding me, I will be glad to answer."

Applying this skill in class

In math class, ask others how they got their answers, whether the answers are right or wrong. Your interest is in understanding the other person.

In classes that are exploring ideas, such as a discussion of a character's motivation in a novel or the reasons the United States used atomic weapons against Japan, when a person expresses an opinion, consider what you really don't understand regarding the other person's perspective, and ask questions that help you understand that person.

Crafting Collaborative Solutions



Purpose of this skill

Some dialogues are designed to build community and enhance relationships. Others are designed to explore options and get input, as in public hearings. Still others are designed to solve a problem and make decisions. This section focuses on this third type, dialogues for crafting solutions to problems.

When you're ready to craft collaborative solutions, you've shared perspectives, listened deeply, identified interests, and stayed reasonably calm. You still need to reach a decision, and you should do so in a way that uses all the previous skills. For these dialogues, a few more skills will help as well.

You may have worked with someone who knows how to craft collaborative solutions. They've accounted for the things you were most concerned about, as well as others' concerns. They've identified common ground and pushed for new ideas. The solutions they helped craft didn't feel like compromises; instead they fostered a sense of shared ownership of the solutions. In the end, you had more community than you did going into the conversation, as well as a mutually agreed upon plan.

What this skill looks like in use

Let's say your school has had a mascot for generations. Some people now find it offensive. Maybe it depicts Native Americans as aggressive; maybe it seems to exclude girls. You can imagine a large public conversation in the school auditorium, or just a conversation between you and your grandfather, who was a football player at the school. Implicitly or explicitly, everyone is searching for solutions to both the mascot issue and the community tensions. Members of committees, advisories, faculties, and even families, and citizens in a healthy democracy frequently engage in sorting out how they think about problems. They also frequently have the opportunity and responsibility to take actions on the solutions they have crafted.

- **Review your agreements as you move into the phase for building collaborative solutions.**

All of the skills you've been using so far – making agreements about how you'll interact, listening to understand, questioning to explore, focusing on interests, speaking from your own perspective, staying calm – are essential for reaching a satisfactory conclusion to the dialogue. This phase brings some new pressures. It will help to review and recommit to using your agreements. When you observe that someone is not following an agreement, you can bring it up, and do so without blaming. "I think our voices got really loud in these last couple minutes. Let's try to bring it back down."

- **Separate deliberation from decision-making.**

In dialogues designed for decision-making, deliberation is the intentional process that allows you to explore the issue fully before the pressure of coming to solutions.

Don't move to decision-making too quickly. If people state a solution early in the dialogue, it's likely to be a position, and they're likely to defend it. If you can stay in deliberation mode – exploring, sharing, listening, brainstorming – without the pressure of deciding quickly, you'll surface more important information, perspectives, and interests. Also, stating that you're in deliberation helps people stay calm, knowing that they are only discussing, not yet deciding. It helps to say explicitly, "Let's really explore this issue. Once we feel like we have a handle on it, then we can decide." "Are we sure we've talked about all the aspects? Are we ready to move toward a decision?" At that moment, taking a break can help everyone change modes.

- **Use energizers and breaks.**

Do you or the other person need to stretch? Are either of you thirsty? You're more likely to build community if you're taking care of basic human needs while talking about any issue.

- **Recognize and name common ground.**

When you hear commonalities, say so. "It sounds like we both care about honoring the past." In decision-making processes, make a list of common interests, concerns, limitations, resources, or other aspects.

Reiterating the common ground can give you a running start if you get stuck. "We agree on our budget and our timeline, so let's keep brainstorming."

- **Speak in the first person plural – "we," "our."**

Once you've got some common ground, word it that way: "our school," "our mascot," "our interests." If you both agree on a timeline, it's "our timeline," even if you're the one who proposed it.

- **Get beyond being stuck.**

When you find yourselves stalled or repeating something, saying so can free you up again. "We stalled out on this one idea. What angles haven't we thought of yet?"

- **Brainstorm a solution; brainstorm more solutions.**

The first possible solution is often not the best, but it's easy to stop looking once one solution has surfaced. Try to identify two or more workable solutions before selecting one. Encourage all ideas and partial ideas; don't evaluate or criticize; feel free to piggyback on others' ideas. Even unusual ideas can spark further creative thinking. Don't worry yet about whether any of the ideas are realistic or complete solutions. In the next step, you will mix, match, sort, and combine the ideas according to how they serve the high priority interests.

- **Review the most important interests before and after brainstorming. Use them to assess options.**

By keeping the key interests front and center, you can keep the discussion moving in a positive direction and avoid getting personal or competitive. You're both looking at the same interests, rather than looking at and competing with each other. This process includes the following steps:

  - Work with one brainstormed option at a time. Ask, "What's useful about this option? If we don't like the entire option, what parts might be useful to consider? How does this option meet some or all of our interests? Is it the only way to meet the interests? Is it the best way?" All of the dialogue skills may be needed for this step – listening, questioning, perspective-stretching – so that each option is considered seriously. Eliminate the options that are the least useful or most unrealistic in meeting your interests.
  - With the remaining options, develop some combinations, mixes, and matches to craft solutions to address all of your interests.
  - Make a plan to implement your solution.
  - Appreciate everyone for working together in this collaborative process.

On the mascot issue, you and your grandfather (who is proud that you, a girl, are an accomplished soccer player) might agree that the ideas you brainstormed that best serve your mutual interests are: the mascot has to relate to girls as well as boys, you won't take down the banner and trophies from the past, and the colors won't change. This process

might lead you and your grandfather to go together to the next town meeting, where you will add your ideas to the conversation.

Exercises for observing and using this skill around school

Students can build skills for building community, collaboration, and solutions via journal reflections, role-plays, pair-share conversations, observations of oneself or others (with an observation log perhaps), and class or advisory group discussions. The following exercises could be used in those modes.

Think, talk, or journal about discussions or arguments you've had.

- How did you and the other person participate in the discussion?
- Did you have agreements about how to participate? Can you think of any that would have helped?
- What common ground did you hear? Was it noted aloud?
- What differences did you hear? How were they framed or reframed?
- How did you arrive at a solution?

Observe how Student Government arrives at decisions.

- What impact did the group's procedures have on how people participated?
- To want extent did everyone participate?
- What common ground did you hear? Was it noted aloud?
- What differences did you hear? How were they framed or reframed?
- How did the group arrive at a solution?

Refer to group agreements in class, advisory, clubs, or teams when needed.

- "Hey guys. We don't seem to be listening all that well right now, do we?"

Putting this skill to use for a dialogue

- Review your agreements as needed.
- Listen for and note common ground, using inclusive pronouns, “we” and “our.”
- Take breaks and get snacks when needed. Get unstuck.
- Focus on exploring, discussing, deliberating, and afterwards, decision-making.
- Brainstorm a few workable solutions.
- Use your interests as criteria for a good decision.

What if your best intentions to build community, collaboration, and solutions aren’t working?

Despite your best interests and preparation, it doesn’t always work to talk about tough topics. You might need to thank your grandfather for sharing a few more memories of his high school days, remind him of your next soccer game, and see if he’s interested in a game of chess.

The more stuck, repetitive, competitive, or combative a discussion is, the more it could use another person or even a facilitator or mediator. Sometimes a friend or family member can add a third perspective that re-opens the conversation. When groups are entrenched and the issue is polarized, it might be time to get a facilitator.

There are times when you cannot find enough common ground to build a solution. There are issues that expose fundamental differences in beliefs, religions, and values. At that point, it may be time to recognize that the dialogue has taken you as far as you can go. It is, however, an opportunity to appreciate the other person’s participation in the dialogue, and to underscore common interests you hadn’t known about. This acknowledgement will help you build and maintain your community.

Applying this skill in class

In class or advisory, hold a dialogue, using one of the formats in the appendix. Select a school issue, such as the mascot, uniforms, or a controversial rule.

In any group project, explicitly work on your collaboration skills. What common ground can you identify in your work styles? How can you best use your differing skills?

Appendix

Viewer's Guide for Dialogues, Debates, and Public Conversations

When you see evidence of:	Check here	When you see evidence of:	Check here
Getting ready for a dialogue • engaged stance • appropriate privacy • opening statements invite exchange • agreements set tone Notes:		**Getting ready to win** • oppositional stance • audience adds pressure • opening statements attack • competitive rules Notes:	
Offers positions and interests • all participants' underlying interests identified • respect shown for all participants' interests Notes:		**Offers only positions and demands** • ignores similar interests • positions repeated • distorts others' positions and interests Notes:	
Managing emotions • keeps calm • no triggering language • reframes emotionally charged moments Notes:		**Using emotions to win** • uses anger to overwhelm others • uses taunts, sarcasm, innuendo • gains from others' discomfort Notes:	
Listening to understand • open body language/expression • stretches perspective • encouragement • summarizes fairly Notes:		**Listening to win** • hostile body language/expression • interruptions • closed to new perspectives • summarizes unfairly Notes:	
Questions for a dialogue • asks for clarification • shows curiosity, admits lack of info • supports the other person to explain Notes:		**Questions to win** • statements disguised as questions • prompts defensiveness • no acknowledgment of learning Notes	
Speaks from one's own perspective • explains one's own needs, experiences, beliefs • disagrees respectfully Notes		**Speaks about the other people** • speaks as if representing others' needs, beliefs, experiences • blames and demeans others Notes	
Building community & solutions • names common ground • explores many options • strives for mutual decision-making Notes		**Solutions for one perspective** • polarizes issues • options limited to starting positions • strives to have one's own idea win Notes	

Holding a Dialogue

We offer two formats. It may help to try the simpler format on this page prior to Format B.

Dialogue Format A. Conversation Café style Dialogue

Student Government or student club, such as a Gay-Straight Alliance or Diversity Club hosts a Dialogue to foster common understanding among students using a simplified Conversation Café format and questions such as:

- What's great about being different? What's hard about it?
- What helps you feel safe in school? What makes it hard to feel safe?
- What difference will our generation make?

The process:

1. Introduce yourselves.
2. Note the Conversation Café agreements and steps:

   Open-mindedness: Listen to all points of view; suspend judgment as much as possible.

   Curiosity & discovery: Look for new ideas, insights, and understandings.

   Brevity: Go for honesty and depth, in direct and pithy ways.
3. Do a go-round with each person saying what drew you to this dialogue.
4. Do a 2nd go-round offering a thought or two on the prompting question(s).
5. Chat and brainstorm. Jot notes; add more in each round.
6. Closing words – share a couple of words that express a reaction, an appreciation, or an aha!

(Note Conversation Café's motto*: drop-in conversations with a minimal set of agreements and a simple process, fostering the shift from small talk to BIG talk, making sense of our world.*)

Dialogue Format B: Issue-focused Dialogues for crafting solutions

Students should first be introduced to all of the skill sections in this curriculum.

The teacher or designated host helps the participants move through the steps.

1. Choose a topic that the students care about deeply. This could be a ballot issue for a local or state election, a school specific issue (uniforms or dress codes; user fees for clubs and athletics; the role of arts in education; standardized testing), a national issue, or even which baseball team is most likely to win the World Series.

2. Students organize into groups that will present their particular perspectives on the issue. There may be more than 2 perspectives on many issues. For instance, if the issue is school uniforms, there may be a group absolutely opposed to uniforms of any kind, a group that wants to keep the dress code policy as it exists, and a group that is aligned with a modified policy.

3. The groups are given time to discuss among themselves the information they want to share, the non-negotiable elements of their current perspectives, their deepest interests as well as their current position, the questions they have about the other groups' perspectives, and the feelings that come with their perspective. (Worksheet A)

4. A representative from each team works with the teacher to set up the classroom space so that it is conducive to a dialogue. (Worksheet B)

5. Each team chooses one person who will be the speaker for the group and these people take the prominent seats for the dialogue. The rest of the class uses the "Viewer's Guide" to keep track of the dialogue, and to debrief later.

6. Each person gives an opening statement, highlighting their perspectives and affirming their commitment to the dialogue process.

7. Each speaker is given a chance to ask questions of the other speakers. Speakers respond, focused on explaining their own perspectives and experiences.

8. Each speaker is then given an opportunity to summarize what he has heard from the other speakers, identify new insights and questions, and appreciate others' contributions.

9. Speakers get another round of questioning and listening, and summarizing.

10. The speakers return to their groups to craft potential solutions (Worksheet C).

11. The speakers re-meet in private to craft solutions while the rest of the class de-briefs the dialogue using the "Viewer's Guide."

12. The speakers present their solutions to the class, and the class assesses the solutions using the last row on the "Viewer's Guide."

Dialogue Worksheet A: **Group Reflection & Preparation**

Group: _____

Current position on the issue (solutions; what you want to see happen; demands):

Interests (what you want your solutions and demands to address):

List any non-negotiable beliefs or needs:

Identify the feelings that come from holding your positions and interests:

What questions do you have about the other groups' perspectives?

What will you say first? Craft your opening lines to introduce your positions and interests to the other group(s), and affirm your group's desire to begin and maintain the dialogue.

Dialogue Worksheet B: **Setting Up the Space**

Where will each group sit when they need privacy to confer?

How can the seats be arranged to help all the participants effectively engage in the Dialogue?

Where will the host/teacher sit?

Where will the rest of the class sit so that they can best see and hear the speakers?

Worksheet C: **Crafting Collaborative Solutions**

1) List interests that have emerged; put a star next to the most important interests

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

2) Brainstorm options for addressing interests — treat all options equally at this stage

Brainstorm of options	Interests this option addresses

3) Cross out options above that are unrealistic or least useful

4) Combine remaining options from the list above; check that important interests are addressed

Most Important Interests	Which Options Address These Interests
Other Interests That Can Be Addressed	Which Option Addresses These Interests

5) Implementation plan (optional)

Steps to Take	Who Takes Steps

6) Appreciate everyone for working together in this collaborative process.