



# Building Learning Communities

## Participatory Learning *Methodologies* Guidebook



## Welcome

### **Welcome to the PowerPath's Participatory Learning....**

a training and practice session for PowerPath Users/Sites who aspire to help students by engaging in new practices and techniques that inspire collaboration and excitement by *facilitating* and hosting learning

### **Welcome those who want to help....**

Adults and youth become lifelong learners  
Persons who know and act instead of who are known and acted upon

### **PowerPath is ever evolving....**

Building on research and best practices (in education, employment, and beyond)  
Co-creating tools and improved processes *with* the practitioners

### **The Participatory Learning methodologies in this session are now....**

being offered as new ways of working and learning in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, the Far East, North America, and South America.

### **Using Participatory Learning is a key ingredient in building Learning Communities....**

Implementing the Participatory Learning methodologies trains the social capital skills needed to succeed in both education and the workplace.

### **We are a growing community of practitioners....**

Supporting each other to further our ability as practitioners/facilitators/hosts in co-creating learning and problem-solving along with stewarding improved ways to support intellectual development.

### **Using the research on persistence in adult learning programs....**

Students need to be actively engaged in learning.  
Students learn better from one another than they do from a teacher.  
Students need to practice leadership and collaborative work.  
Students need to learn the metacognitive skills to manage successful learning,  
Successful parenting and successful employment.

**Students who are part of a learning community are more likely to achieve their goals and become successful learners and workers!**

*We can make a difference in the lives of the students we serve.*

**You make the choice.....**

**Shift your role – become a host of learning!**

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## 4 Core Methodologies for Instructors to Create Learning Communities

- Circle [www.peerspirit.com](http://www.peerspirit.com)
- Appreciative Inquiry <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>
- World Café [www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)
- Open Space [www.openspaceworld.org](http://www.openspaceworld.org)

For additional information on the methodologies and how they are being used, please go to: [www.artofhosting.org](http://www.artofhosting.org)

### Definition and Basic Assumptions

*The world we have made as a result of the level of thinking  
we have done thus far  
creates problems we cannot solve  
with the same level of thinking which created them.*

-- Albert Einstein

### Participatory Learning (PL) Methodologies offer Instructors a New Way to *HOST* Learning and *CREATE* Learning Communities!

'Hosting Learning' ..... Using PL Methodologies *GO with the FLOW* of Natural Learning  
Using PL Methodologies Create Learning Communities  
Using PL Methodologies Build Social Capital Skills

PL IS an emerging group of methodologies for hosting learning by facilitating conversations between participants leading to opportunities for deeper and broader learning, building social capital skills that increase social, and emotional learning. PL is supported by principles that help maximize collective intelligence, integrate and utilize diversity, practice collaboration, build leadership, and train managing conflict and working with diverse thinking.

PL results in collective clarity and wise action – building sustainable learning strategies along with workable solutions for the most complex problems.

These methodologies create opportunities for participants to learn content-based knowledge and information while concurrently building the metacognitive skills needed to become productive members in our communities. These metacognitive skills can immediately transfer to the social and emotional skills needed for success in post-secondary education and work.

PL methodologies ensure that students buy into the process *because* students co-create the the process. By discussing the 'how to' participate for each methodology, students learn both the process and the practice. This makes the purpose and the process transparent.

## A Few Assumptions

### New Solutions are Needed

The Participatory Learning is built on the assumption and experience that we need to find new solutions for education and learning. *The time is now.*

### Conversation Matters

It is common sense to bring people together in conversation. It is the way we have done it in generations past, gathering round fires and sitting in circles. It is the way we build new relationships that invite real collaboration and partnerships.

### Meaningful Conversations RESULT in Greater and Deeper Learning... *Wise Action*

Human beings that are involved and invited to work together take ownership and responsibility when the ideas and solutions have been created in safety with peers.

*Instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all.*

*Pericles*

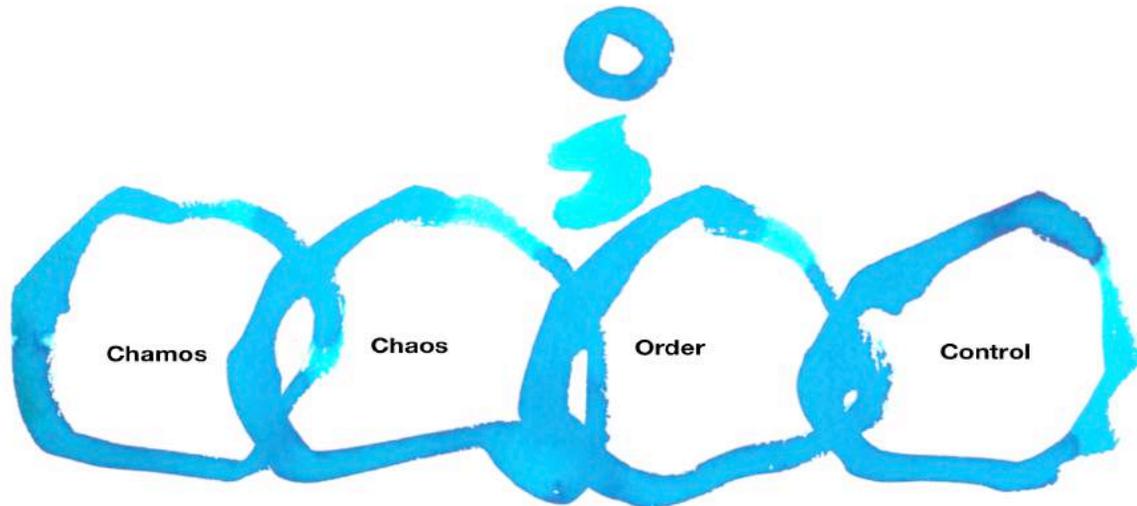
## Innovation - Moving Through Chaos into a NEW Order.....

There is a path to take between Chaos and Order that leads us to the new, collective learning, and allows each of us to be part of 'real time' innovation. Instead of relying on controlling every detail in our classes, instructors begin to see the need to access the collective intelligence and collective wisdom of all students.

We are beginning to understand and treat formal learning more like a living system than a static group of students. After all, the chaordic path is the story of how in our natural world form arises out of nonlinear, complex, diverse systems. New levels of order become possible out of chaos...new learning naturally takes place.

This "chaordic confidence" - the capacity we need to stay in the dance of balancing order and chaos - supports a generative emergence that allows the new, collective intelligence and wise action to occur. In this space of emergence, we leave our traditional ways of 'teaching' and give way to a higher, less controlling, more exciting way to help individuals acquire learning. This requires us to stay in a transformative shift even though we may want to veer back to the old way of being, back to the *sage on the stage* rather than the *guide by the side*.

***People are intelligent, creative, adaptive, self-organizing,  
and meaning-seeking. Organizations are living systems too.  
They are intelligent, creative, adaptive, self-organizing, meaning-seeking.  
Meg Wheatley***



As we move between chaos and order, individually and collectively, we move through confusion and conflict toward clarity. We are all called to walk this path without judgment - some will feel more comfortable with chaos, others with order. Both are needed as part of *how we learn*. We can then take new learnings to see the world differently. New learning generates more new learning. Continually growing something new and exciting. Learning by your self is good. *Learning together is exciting!*

On the far side of chaos is *chamos* - despair. On the far side of order is control. When we move toward either of these extremes, the result is apathy or rebellion. The very opposite of chaordic confidence, where the new learning cannot be born. Individuals who have struggled with traditionally-taught academics are often in apathy because nothing they could do in the traditional education setting worked for them. Despair was their initial feelings. Despair turned to self-anger and disappointment. Then came the rebellion, acting out or turning-off all educational efforts. The same sequence of events can occur in the workplace.

So, the question becomes -

*How much order do we need?  
How much chaos would be helpful here?*

We call it the *Chaordic experience or journey*....a path less travelled. The path to excitement and the pathway to co-creating innovation!

*Scientists have discovered that the small, brave act of cooperating with another person, of choosing trust over cynicism, generosity over selfishness, makes the brain light up with quiet joy.*

*Natalie Angier, Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times reporter, describing a recent study of the effects of behavior on brain chemistry*

## Living Systems – Being Human A Natural Approach to Organizing Life & Learning

- A living system – humans - only accepts its own solutions (we only support those things we are a part of creating)
- A living system – humans - only pay attention to that which is meaningful to it (here and now)
- In nature a living system – humans - participate in the development of its neighbor (an isolated system is doomed)
- Nature and all of nature, including ourselves is in constant change
- Nature seeks diversity – new relations open up to new possibilities
- A living system – humans - cannot be steered or controlled – they can only be teased, nudged, titillated
- A system – humans - change (identity) when our perception of ourselves changes
- All the answers do not exist ‘out there’ – we must (sometimes) experiment to find out what works
- Who we are together is always different and more than who we are alone (possibility of emergence)
- We - human - are capable of self-organizing – given the right conditions
- Self-organization shifts to a higher order

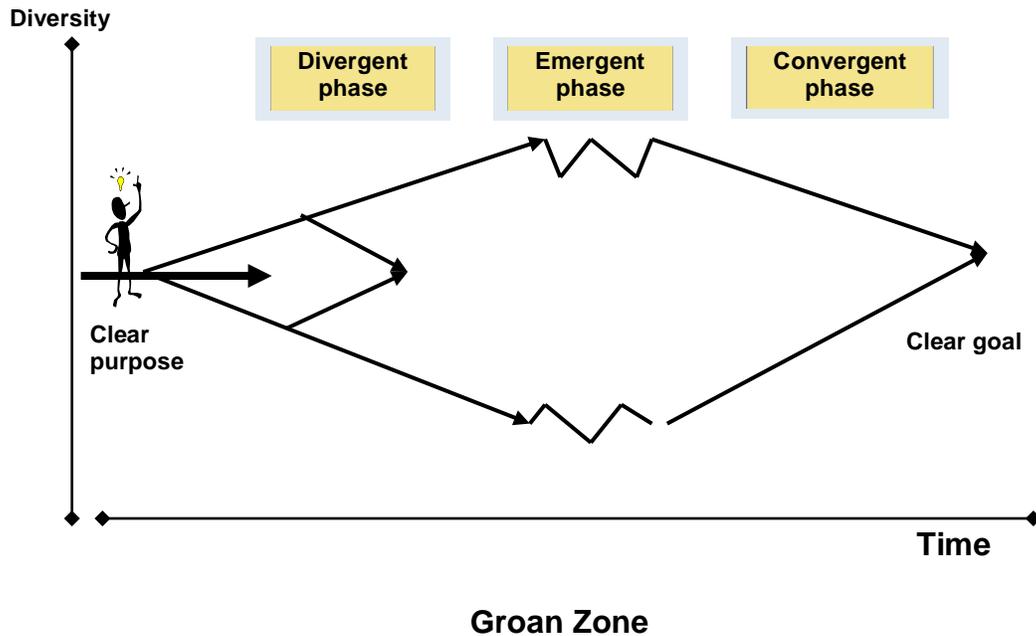


**How much order  
do we need? How  
much chaos would  
be helpful here?**

### Divergence and Convergence

In entering into an inquiry or multi stakeholder conversation we operate with three different phases in the process – divergent, emergent and convergent. Each of these phases are different and it is important for a host to know where we are in the process and what is needed in each phase.

Divergent and convergent ways of thinking and working are complimentary and different. The ‘breath’ of divergence and convergence – of breathing in and breathing out – is at the heart of our process design. Every process goes through several such breathing cycles.



In the divergent phase, or “Pre-ject”, there is as yet no clear goal. This is a “goal-seeking” phase where a clear, shared purpose gives the collective direction. Another driver in this phase is asking the right questions.

If you close the divergent phase too soon, the level of newness or innovation will be less.

Ideally a group will stay in inquiry in the divergent phase until a new shared and agreed solution or goal is seen by everyone.

**Divergent thinking** typically generates alternatives, has free-for-all open discussion, gathers diverse points of view and unpacks the problem.

**The divergent phase** is non-linear and needs “chaos time”. It is process-oriented and needs prolonged decision time.

**Convergent thinking** means evaluating alternatives, summarising key points, sorting ideas into categories and arriving at general conclusions.

**The convergent phase** is goal-oriented and focused, linear, structured and usually subject to time constraints. It is focused on getting results and may require quick decisions.

**The emergent phase**, between the divergent and convergent, is fondly known as the ‘groan zone’ – It is the phase where different ideas and needs are integrated. It may require us to stretch our own understanding to hold and include other points of view.

*We call it the groan zone because it may feel messy – an uncomfortable stretch – but it is also the phase where the new solution emerges.*



## The Four-Fold Practice – THIS IS ABOUT YOU!

There are four basic practices that are key to the Participatory Learning:

1. **Being Present** (Pre-sensing)
2. **Engaging in conversations** (Participating)
3. **Hosting conversations** (Contributing)
4. **Becoming a community of practice** (Co-Creating)

*Being truly present, engaging skilfully in conversations, being a good host of conversations and engaging with others in co-creation, are all practices or skills that are easily understood but it takes a continuous practice to hone these skills.*

### 1. Being Present (Pre-sensing)

*...host yourself first - be willing to endure chaos - keep the "space" or possibilities open - stay in the fire of the present...*

Being present means showing up, undistracted, prepared, clear about the need and what your personal contribution can be. It allows you to check in with yourself and develop the personal practice of curiosity about the outcomes of any gathering. Presence means making space to devote a dedicated time to working with others. If you are distracted, called out or otherwise located in many different places, you cannot be present in one. For meetings to have deep results, every person in the room should be fully present.

Being present also means being aware of ones environment, other people and what impacts you and how you impact others.

Collectively, it is good practice to become present together as a meeting begins, be it through a welcome, a good framing, through "checking-in" to the subject matter or task at hand by hearing everyones voice in the matter or as simple as taking a moment of silence.

Invite a collective slowing down so that all participants in a meeting can be present together.

### 2. Participate and practice conversations

*...be willing to listen fully, respectfully, without judgment and thinking you already know all the answer – practice conversation mindfully...*

**Conversation is an art, it is not just talk.** It demands that we listen carefully to one another and that we offer what we can in the service of the whole. Curiosity and

judgment cannot live together in the same space. If we are judging what we are hearing, we cannot be curious about the outcome, and if we have called a meeting because we are uncertain of the way forward, being open is a key skill and capacity. Only by practicing skilful conversation can we find our best practice together.

If we practice conversation mindfully we might slow down meetings so that wisdom and clarity can work quickly. When we talk mindlessly, we neither hear each other nor do we allow space for the clarity to arise. The art of conversation is the art of slowing down to speed up.

### **3. Hosting conversations**

*...be courageous, inviting and willing to initiate conversations that matter - find and host powerful questions with the stakeholders - and then make sure you harvest the insights, the patterns, learnings and wise actions...*

Hosting conversations is both more and less than facilitating. It is an act of leadership and means taking responsibility for creating and holding the “container” in which a group of people can do their best work together.

You can create this container using the seven helpers (page ....) as starting points, and although you can also do this in the moment, the better prepared you are the better. - The best preparation is being fully present.

The bare minimum to do is to discern the need, get clear on the purpose of the meeting, prepare a good, powerful question to initiate the conversation and know how you will harvest and what will be done with that harvest, to ensure that results are sustainable and the effort was worth it.

Hosting conversations takes courage and it takes a bit of certainty and faith in your people. We sometimes give short shrift to conversational spaces because of the fear we experience in stepping up to host. It is, however, a gift to host a group and it is a gift to be hosted well.

### **4. Co-creating with others - becoming a community of practice**

*...be willing to co create and co-host with others, blending your knowing, experience and practices with theirs, working partnership..*

The fourth practice is about showing up in a conversation without being a spectator, and contributing to the collective effort to sustain results. The best conversations arise when we listen for what is in the middle, what is arising out of the centre of our collaboration. It is not about the balancing of individual agendas, it is about finding out what is new. And when that is discovered work unfolds beautifully when everyone is clear about what they can contribute to the work.

In a truly co-creative process it becomes irrelevant who said or contributed what - the gift is in the synergy and inspiration when we each build on each others knowledge and the whole becomes much bigger than the sum of the parts.

This is how results become sustainable over time – they fall into the network of relationships that arise from a good conversation, from friends working together.

*The collaborative field can produce unexpected and surprising results.*

## From a Learner to a Community that Learns

As we learn to be truly present and engage in conversations that really matter – we become learners. As learners many doors are open to us.

As we begin to host conversation and connect with students with other students or hosts with other practitioners – we become a community of learners or practitioners. As a community we own a much bigger capacity than as individual learners or hosts.

As a community of individual practitioners or learners – truly becomes “a community that learns”, that is where we really enter the collective intelligence. – We multiply our capacity and enter the field of emergence.

*“You can have a group of individually intelligent people – but until that group knows what it knows together – the group as a group is not intelligent”  
(inspired by Peter Senge)*



## Social Capital Skills

Developing social capital skills were referred to as a critical outcome of education in John Dewey's 1899 book, *The School and Society*. There are lots of definitions of social capital skills including *the expected collective or economic benefits derived from the preferred treatment and cooperation between individuals and groups*. Although different social sciences emphasize different aspects of social capital, they tend to share the core idea "that social networks have value."

In education, social capital skills *are* the key to success. Stephen Black, a professor and researcher in Sydney, Australia in his presentation on Social Capital Skills in Education, states, "It's the relationships people have, the groups they belong to, the networks they link into, the contacts they've got. It's about the trust they have in others. It's also how they interact with these other people – how they present themselves. This may be related to their confidence and to their skills."

### Why discuss social capital skills in reference to Participatory Learning?

Dewey was on target in believing that an outcome of education should be the development of social capital skills. Sadly, education has mostly forgotten the importance of learning how to work with others and the social skills needed to be a successful and responsible student, citizen, and worker.

When brain and social science research identified that students learn best from their peers, it became more important to help participants learn and practice these critical skills in a way that did not take away from, but added to, their learning outcomes.

In the graph below, each of the Participatory Learning methodologies have been viewed from the social skills are imbedded in their process:

Participatory Learning Methodologies	Social Capital Skills Practiced
Circle	Speaking & Setting Intention, Speaking in a Group, Active Listening, Taking Turns, Getting/Giving Support
Café	Collaboration, Working in a team, Listening to and discussing diverse ideas & opinions, Building a collective model, Managing time, Taking a leadership role, Self advocacy, Putting abstract ideas into a visual model, Active listening, Peer learning and coaching
Open Space	Leadership, Asking questions, Offering something of interest to others, Active listening, Asking for help and offering help, Diagramming / summarizing a conversation.
Appreciative Inquiry	Looking for the positive, Managing negative situations from a strengths-based, positive view, Viewing life, people, & daily situations from a positive vantage point

## Methodologies and Practices An Overview

<p><b>Circle</b></p> 	<p>Adaptable to a variety of groups, issues, and timeframes.</p> <p>Circle can be used as a means for “checking in” and “checking out”. Classes or meetings can begin and end in circle. In this way, personal intentions can be stated upfront and reflections shared at closing.</p> <p>Circle can be the process used for the duration of a gathering, particularly if the group is relatively small and time for deep discussions and/or reflection is a primary aim.</p> <p><b>Circle offers practice in the following Social Capital skills including: speaking in front of a group, speaking with intention, taking turns, knowing when to pass, listening with attention, talking from the heart, holding judgement, offering support to peers.</b></p>
<p><b>Appreciative Inquiry</b></p> 	<p>Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is useful when a different perspective is needed, or when we wish to begin a new process from a fresh, positive vantage point.</p> <p>AI can help move a group that is stuck in “what is” toward “what could be”.</p> <p>AI looks to the glass as always half full, seeks the positive, and looks at what is working or what is right. Always starts from the positive.</p> <p>An example would be always looking at what is completed, what is correct in all education or workplace situations.</p> <p>AI can be used with individuals, partners, small groups, or in large classes.</p> <p><b>Social Capital skills built include looking for the positive, managing differently negative situations, looking at life, people, daily situations from a positive vantage point, approach challenges or problems from a strengths-based, positive view.</b></p>

<p><b>World Café</b></p> 	<p>Process used to foster interaction, dialogue, and collaborative learning/knowledge sharing with both large and small groups.</p> <p>Particularly effective in surfacing the collective wisdom of groups of diverse people.</p> <p>Very flexible and adapts to many different purposes – great for information sharing, relationship building, deep reflection exploration and action planning.</p> <p>Cafes can be used in subject areas (math, writing, reading, career pathways, etc.) or for planning and highly engaging learning conversations about current events, values, life events, etc.</p> <p><b>Social Capital skills practiced in café include collaboration, working in a team, listening and discussing diverse ideas or opinions, building a collective diagram or model, managing time, taking a leadership role, self advocacy, putting abstract ideas into a visual representations and symbols, active listening, peer learning and coaching, etc.</b></p>
<p><b>Open Space</b></p> 	<p>Useful in many contexts, including sharing information about a subject or an interest, reviewing content or specific curriculum prior assessment, or for planning,</p> <p><b>Social Capital skills practiced in Open Space include leadership, asking questions, offering something of interest to others, active listening, asking for help and offering help, diagramming and/or summarizing a conversation.</b></p>

# What are the Methodologies to Create a Learning Community?

## 1. The Circle

The Circle, or council, is an ancient form of meeting that has gathered human beings into respectful conversations for thousands of years. In some areas of the world this tradition remains intact, but in some societies it has been nearly forgotten. Circling is a modern methodology that calls on this tradition and helps people gather in conversations that fulfil their potential and desire for learning via conversations - dialogues that replenish, engage, excite, and therefore create wisdom-based change....which of course is real and sustaining learning

### Social Capital Skills (Social and Emotional Learning) Practiced with Circle

Circle offers practice in the following Social Capital skills including:

- Speaking in front of a group
- Speaking with and setting intention
- Taking turns
- Knowing when to stop talking and pass
- Listening with attention
- Talking from the heart
- Holding judgment
- Offering support to peers

*“In circle we create a safe place where we can share what is in our hearts. We have a motto, ‘Whatever is said in circle stays in the circle. Circle time is our beginning and our ending. In circle we are a family’”*  
TANF Literacy Student  
OIC, OK City

### Principles of Circle

- Rotate leadership
- Take responsibility
- Have a higher purpose that you gather around

### Practices of Circle

- *Speak with Intention:* Noting what has relevance to the conversation in the moment
- *Listen with Attention:* Respectful of the learning process of all members of the group
- *Tend to the Well-being of the Group:* Remaining aware of the impact of our contributions

### Four Agreements of Circle

- Listen without judgment (slow down and listen)
- Whatever is said in circle stays in circle
- Offer what you can and ask for what you need
- Silence is also part of the conversation

## General Flow of the Circle

- ⇒ Welcome – offer an overview of the class, topic or project for the day or for the week
- ⇒ Review the Three Principles and the Three Practices
- ⇒ Offer a ‘talking piece’
- ⇒ Set stage with a question to make the students in the circle reflect and reply
- ⇒ Be the guardian of the Process – manage time, keep the integrity of the circle
- ⇒ Come back prior to the end of class (or week) with a Check-out, then a Farewell

**For more information about Circle – visit: [www.peerspirit.com](http://www.peerspirit.com)**

After the host welcomes individuals to the circle and offers the overview of the session, he/she gives the group a Check-in question or questions. The host will place a ‘talking piece’ in the center of the circle.

To aid in self-governance and bring the circle back to intention when it goes astray, have a circle member volunteer to be the guardian of the process is helpful. This group member watches and safeguards the group’s energy, manages time, keeps the talking piece moving, and observes the group process.

The circle starts with a volunteer who walks to the center of the circle and takes the talking piece and responds to the question(s). They pass the talking piece to the left or clockwise – winding things up for the day.

If an individual is not ready to speak, the individual can ‘pass’ on their turn. The talking piece is moved to the next person. When the talking pieces comes back to the initial volunteer, those who ‘passed are again offered the talking piece. Everyone in the circle answers the host’s question(s).

The same circle process is offered as a check-out at the end of the session or week. Closing the class by checking-out provides a formal end to the session, a chance for students to reflect on what has transpired.

The host offers a review of the session along with the next steps (or curriculum topic), then he/she asks a question that is a review or reflection on the session/ day/ week.

The talking piece is placed in the center, a volunteer takes it and is the first to respond. The talking piece is passed to the right or counter-clockwise. When all have spoken, the hosts asks everyone to stand, make a bow as a show of respect and thanks to all of the members of the circle who have collaborated together during the session, day or work.

## What is Circle Good For?

One of the beautiful things about circle is its adaptability to a variety of groups, issues, and timeframes. Circle can be used as a methodology of “checking in” and “checking out” or a *way of making decisions together*. Be creative with circle and be ready for the deep wisdom it can unearth!

## Materials Needed

- Chairs arranged into a circle – students should be able to view each other without impediments (i.e. tables or desks)
- Talking piece
- Chime, bell, or other gentle noisemaker
- Center setting

## Reflecting on Circle

What are my insights about the Circle?

What further questions do I have about the Circle?

How could I creatively use the Circle in my education/educator practices?

## Basic Guidelines for Calling a Circle

This handout is a gift from PeerSpirit, Inc. an educational company devoted to life and leadership through Circle, Quest and Story. Founded in 1994, PeerSpirit has taught circle process in the US, Canada, Europe and Africa. It is a consortium consisting of Christina Baldwin, Ann Linnea and teaching colleagues with areas of expertise in health care administration, religious/church administration and congregational health, education, nonprofit boards, environmental and community revisioning. See: <http://www.peerspirit.com>

The circle, or council, is an ancient form of meeting that has gathered human beings into respectful conversation for thousands of years. The circle has served as the foundation for many cultures.

**What transforms a meeting into a circle is the willingness of people to shift from informal socializing or opinionated discussion into a receptive attitude of thoughtful speaking and deep listening and to embody and practice the structures outlined here.**

### THE COMPONENTS OF THE CIRCLE

- Intention
- Welcome Start-point
- Center and Check-in/Greeting
- Agreements
- Three Principles and Three Practices
- Guardian of process
- Check-out and Farewell

### INTENTION

Intention shapes the circle and determines who will come, how long the circle will meet, and what kinds of outcomes are to be expected. The caller of the circle spends time articulating intention and invitation.

### WELCOME OR START-POINT

Once people have gathered, it is helpful for the host, or a volunteer participant, to begin the circle with a gesture that shifts people's attention from social space to council space. This gesture of welcome may be a moment of silence, reading a poem, or listening to a song-- whatever invites centering.

[www.peerspirit.com/](http://www.peerspirit.com/) Extracted from *The Circle Way, A Leader in Every Chair* by Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea, Berrett-Koehler, ©2010. May copy for non-commercial use.

### ESTABLISHING THE CENTER

The center of a circle is like the hub of a wheel: all energies pass through it, and it holds the rim together. To help people remember how the hub helps the group, the center of a circle usually holds objects that represent the intention of the circle. Any symbol that fits this purpose or adds beauty will serve: flowers, a bowl or basket, a candle.

### CHECK-IN/GREETING

Check-in helps people into a frame of mind for council and reminds everyone of their commitment to the expressed intention. It insures that people are truly present. Verbal sharing, especially a brief story, weaves the interpersonal net.

Check-in usually starts with a volunteer and proceeds around the circle. If an individual is not ready to speak, the turn is passed and another opportunity is offered after others have spoken. Sometimes people place individual objects in the center as a way of signifying their presence and relationship to the intention.

### SETTING CIRCLE AGREEMENTS:

The use of agreements allows all members to have a free and profound exchange, to respect a diversity of views, and to share responsibility for the well-being and direction of the group. Agreements often used include:

- We will hold stories or personal material in confidentiality.
- We listen to each other with compassion and curiosity.
- We ask for what we need and offer what we can.
- We agree to employ a group guardian to watch our need, timing, and energy. We agree to pause at a signal, and to call for that signal when we feel the need to pause.

### THREE PRINCIPLES:

The circle is an all leader group.

1. **Leadership rotates** among all circle members.
2. **Responsibility is shared** for the quality of experience.

3. **Reliance is on wholeness**, rather than on any personal agenda.

**THREE PRACTICES:**

1. To speak with intention: noting what has relevance to the conversation in the moment.
2. To listen with attention: respectful of the learning process for all members of the group.
3. To tend the well-being of the circle: remaining aware of the impact of our contributions.

**FORMS OF COUNCIL:**

The circle commonly uses three forms of council: talking piece, conversation and reflection.

*Talking piece council* is often used as part of check-in, check-out, and whenever there is a desire to slow down the conversation, collect all voices and contributions, and be able to speak without interruption.

*Conversation council* is often used when reaction, interaction, and an interjection of new ideas, thoughts and opinions are needed.

*Reflection, or Silent council* gives each member time and space to reflect on what is occurring, or needs to occur, in the course of a meeting. Silence may be called so that each person can consider the role or impact they are having on the group, or to help the group realign with their intention, or to sit with a question until there is clarity.

**GUARDIAN**

The single most important tool for aiding self-governance and bringing the circle back to intention is the role of the guardian. To provide a guardian, one circle member at a time volunteers to watch and safeguard group energy and observe the circle's process.

The guardian usually employs a gentle noise-maker, such as a chime, bell, or rattle, that signals everyone to stop action, take a breath, rest in a space of silence. Then the guardian makes this signal again and speaks to why he/she called the pause. Any member may call for a pause.

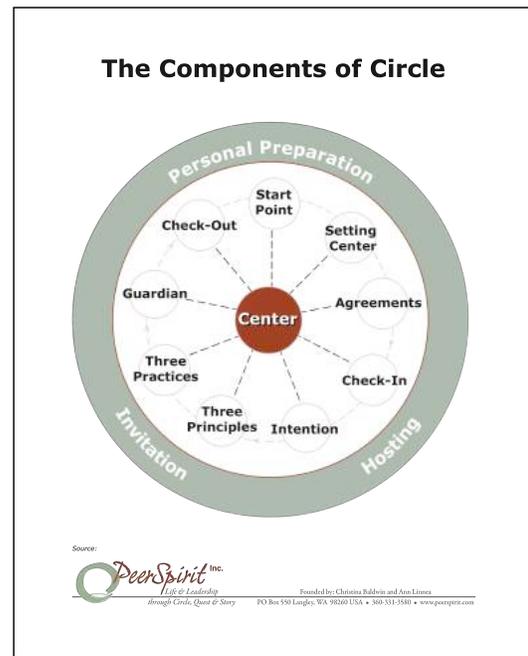
**CHECKOUT AND FAREWELL**

At the close of a circle meeting, it is important to allow a few minutes for each person to comment on what they learned, or what stays in their heart and mind as they leave.

Closing the circle by checking out provides a formal end to the meeting, a chance for members to reflect on what has transpired, and to pick up objects if they have placed something in the center.

As people shift from council space to social space or private time, they release each other from the intensity of attention being in circle requires. Often after check-out, the host, guardian, or a volunteer will offer a few inspirational words of farewell, or signal a few seconds of silence before the circle is released.

May your circles be great teachers and places to rest on the journey.



[www.peerspirit.com/](http://www.peerspirit.com/) Extracted from *The Circle Way, A Leader in Every Chair* by Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea, Berrett-Koehler, ©2010. May copy for non-commercial use.

## 2. Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is a strategy for intentional change that identifies the best of 'what is' to pursue dreams and possibilities of 'what could be'. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a cooperative search for focusing on strengths, passions and other life-giving forces that are found within everything that holds potential for building on what is right or positive. This focus on strengths and what is right offers an opportunity for individuals to accept what is known and to build in what works. This approach is the only successful way to bring about long-term change and deep learning. (*Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987*)

**For more information on Appreciative Inquiry go to:**

<http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>

### **Social Capital Skills (Social and Emotional Learning) Practiced with Appreciative Inquiry**

Social Capital skills built using Appreciative Inquiry include:

- Seeking the positive
- Managing negative situations by looking for the positives and then seeing how could this situation become manageable
- Looking at life, people, daily situations from a positive vantage point

### **Assumptions**

- In every learning situations ....something works
- What we focus on becomes our reality
- Reality is created in the moment - there is more than one reality
- The act of asking questions influences the community in some way
- People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future when they carry forward parts of the past
- If we carry forward parts of the past, they should be what is best
- It is important to value differences
- The language we use creates our reality

<b><i>Problem Solving</i></b>	<b><i>Appreciative Inquiry</i></b>
"Felt Need" Identification of a problem or issue	Appreciating & valuing the best of "what is"
Analysis of causes	Envisioning "what might be"; looking at what is 'right' or what is 'known'
Analysis of possible solutions	Dialoguing "What should be or could be" Innovating "What will be"
Basic Assumption: Learning is a problem to be solved.	Basic Assumption: Learning is a mystery to be embraced.

### **General Flow of an Appreciative Inquiry Process**

Appreciative inquiry can be done as a structured process going through phases of

- o **DISCOVER:** identifying class or learning processes that work well.
- o **DREAM:** envisioning class or learning processes that would work well in the future.
- o **DESIGN:** Planning and prioritising those positive processes.
- o **DELIVER:** implementing the proposed design.

Engage students in creating the most useful 'classroom' process for their learning. Then have students help plan the class, identify how to address a problem or an issue / figure out a different way to support the natural learning process by focusing on what is working or what is right, then asking what could I or we do differently to move forward!

The basic idea is to build learning approach around what works, rather than trying to fix what doesn't.

At the center is a **positive topic choice** – how we ask even the first question contains the seeds of change we are looking to enact.

Appreciative Inquiry can also be used as a way of opening a class or conversation by identifying **what already works**. What do you value most about your self/work/organization?

## **What is Appreciative Inquiry Good For?**

Appreciative Inquiry is useful when a different perspective is needed, or when we wish to begin a new process, set of information, academic or work skills with a fresh, positive vantage point. Appreciative Inquiry can help move a group that is stuck in “what is” toward “what could be”. Appreciative Inquiry can be used with individuals, small groups, or large classes.

## **Reflecting on Appreciative Inquiry**

What are my insights about *Appreciative Inquiry*? What further questions do I have about *Appreciative Inquiry*?

What might be possible if I used an appreciative approach to begin a new content standard or step in our curriculum?

How could I be sure that all students are learning the next steps they need to build on the skills/knowledge they already have acquired?

How could I use Appreciative Inquiry when discussing test results with students?

How could I use Appreciative Inquiry in a workplace situation to train or supervise new workers?

### 3. The World Café

The World Café is a method for creating collaborative learning conversations around questions that matter in teaching in the classroom, innovative teaching, administratively, or real life educational situations.

For more information on World Café visit: [www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)

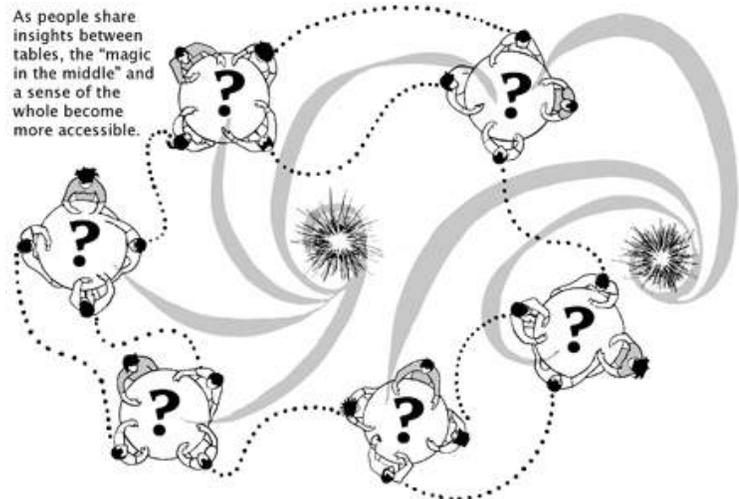
#### Social Capital Skills (Social and Emotional Learning) Practiced with World Café

The Social Capital skills practiced in café include:

- Collaboration
- Working in a team
- Listening and discussing diverse ideas or opinions
- Building a collective diagram or model
- Managing time
- Taking a leadership role
- Self advocacy
- Putting abstract ideas into a visual model
- Active listening
- Framing powerful learning questions
- Peer learning and coaching, etc.

#### 7 Operating Principles of World Cafe

1. Create hospitable space: ensure a welcoming, safe place.
2. Explore questions that matter in learning the course content, getting a project started or keeping it going, or in exploring issues of daily life.
3. Encourage each person's contribution; continually invite all participants to add to the café conversation
4. Connect diverse people, diverse insights, and diverse ideas. Diversity builds richness and depth to every conversation
5. Connect abstract ideas in a visual picture by using graphic organizers, webs or mind maps. Seeing the connections is crucial to sustaining learning.
6. Listen together for patterns, insights and deeper questions that emerge from the conversations
7. Make collective knowledge visible and easy to harvest/share by creating graphic organizers, mind maps or webs.



## Assumptions of World Café

- The knowledge and wisdom we need is present and accessible.
- Collective insight evolves from honoring unique contributions; connecting ideas; listening into the middle; noticing deeper themes and questions.
- The intelligence of the group emerges as the individuals connect to each other personally as well as to the diverse ideas of their conversation partners are expressing.

## General Flow of a World Café in Education

- ⇒ Clarify the context (why is this issue important?)
- ⇒ Seat 4-5 students at café-style tables or in conversation clusters. This number is critical not to exceed because of the need and purpose if for everyone to be engaged and it doesn't work with too many people.
- ⇒ Have the café group select one person to be the host or hostess.
- ⇒ The host/hostess selects a time keeper and someone to take lead on creating the graphic organizer, mind map, or web
- ⇒ Ask the question for the café groups to discuss. The host/hostess writes the question on the top of their easel paper in the center of the table.
- ⇒ Begin the café and let the dialogue continue for 15 - 30 minutes.
- ⇒ Ask the host/hostess to stay at the table as a "host" for the next group. He/she can invites the current group to students to move to other tables while also inviting new students to come to their café.
- ⇒ As the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of café begins, instruct the hosts at each café table to share key insights, questions, and ideas from the first café *briefly* with the new table members. Then question for the overall café is then reread by the host/hostess. A new timekeeper and graphic creator is selected. The host/hostess begin the new conversation, building on/adding to the first graphic.
- ⇒ After you've moved through the rounds, allow some time for each café table and the whole-group harvest the conversations.





## Operating PRINCIPLES OF World Cafe:

- Focus on what matters
- Suspend judgments, assumptions, and certainties
- Speak one at a time
- Listen to each other carefully
- Listen together for insights and deeper questions
- Slow down to the speed of your breathing
- Be aware of your impact on the group
- Divergent opinions are ok
- Contribute with your mind, body and heart
- Link and connect ideas
- Play, doodle, draw - Have fun!

### What is World Café Good For?

A World Café is a great way of fostering interaction, collaboration, sharing learnings or knowledge, peer teaching/coaching, generating fresh ideas, and dialogues with both large and small groups of students. It is particularly effective in surfacing the 'collective wisdom' of groups with diverse students at different instructional levels or with diverse backgrounds. The café format is very flexible and adapts to many different purposes - knowledge sharing, skill building, relationship building, deep reflection, project planning.

When planning a café, make sure to leave ample time for both moving through the rounds of questions (likely to take longer than you think!) and some type of a whole-group harvest.

Use your own creativity, flexible. USE YOUR IMAGINATION

### Harvesting

- limited only by your imagine

### Materials Needed

- o Tables and chairs - if none are available, have students site on the floor or use chairs around a sheet of easel paper
- o Tablecloths or something to make the classroom feel 'comfortable' and hospitable to conversation
- o Easel chart paper or paper placemats for covering the tables
- o Markers - lots of colored markers or crayons
- o Easel chart or large butcher paper for harvesting collective knowledge or insights
- o Create a set of permanent posters/table tents of Café Etiquette - create with your class

## Reflecting on the World Café

What are my insights about the *World Café*? What further questions do I have about *the World Café*?

In what context can you imagine using this method of listening and learning that would be just perfect for your students?

What would be some good questions for cafes on content areas – knowledge areas and to build specific skills?

How could you use cafes to plan group activities? How could you use cafes to problem solve issues around persistence or specific classroom management issues/ideas?

What are the 5 various ways that you could harvest the ideas that generated by the cafes' that you've hosted?

## 4. Open Space

The goal of Open Space Technology is to create time and space for students to engage, ask questions, and/or share knowledge around issues of concern to them (such as review of an upcoming test, managing a project-based learning experience, planning a 'real life' field trip around a content issues or topic of interest.

Using Open Space in classes can result in a transformative experience for the individuals and groups involved. It is a simple and powerful way to catalyze effective working conversations and truly inviting students to thrive, be in the role of leader, knowledge sharer, and questioner.

**For more information on Open Space, visit: [www.openspaceworld.org](http://www.openspaceworld.org)**

### **Social Capital Skills (Social and Emotional Learning) Practiced with Open Space**

The Social Capital skills practiced in Open Space include:

- Leadership
- Asking questions
- Offering something of interest to others
- Active listening
- Asking for help and offering help
- Diagramming and/or summarizing a conversation



### **Principles of Open Space**

- Whoever comes are the right people
- Whenever it starts is the right time
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could have
- When its over its over

**The Law of Two Feet:** If you find yourself in a situation where you are not contributing or learning, *move somewhere where you can.*

PASSION & RESPONSIBILTY

The four principles and the law work to create a powerful event motivated by the passion and bounded by the responsibility of the participants.

## Roles in Open Space

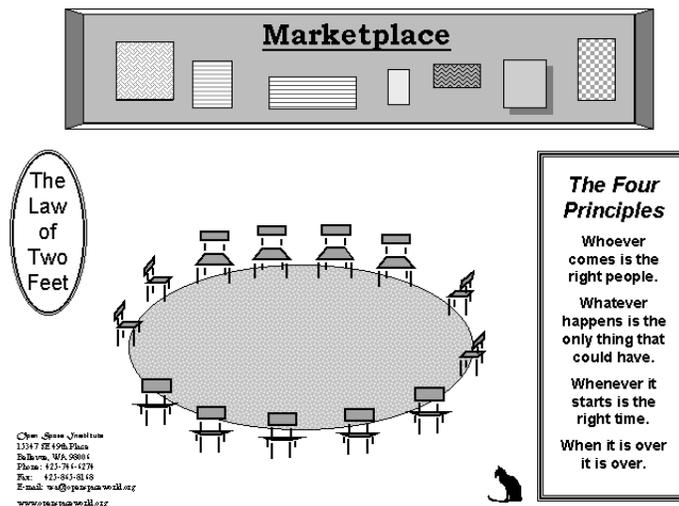
- Convener
- Participant
- Bumble bee and...
- Butterfly



## General Flow of an Open Space Meeting

The group convenes in a circle and is welcomed by the **host**.

The **host** provides an overview of the process and explains how it works. The host invites people with issues of concern, questions, ideas to share or knowledge to offer to come into the circle, write the issue on a piece of paper or colored index card and announce it to the group.



The people with the issues, questions, ideas or knowledge to offer are "**conveners**."

The convener either identifies their own place to host a conversation or is placed in a location by the host. He/she then places their paper or card with their issue, question or knowledge to offer on the wall, hangs an easel paper under the paper/card on the wall

When several conveners are set-up, the host invites the members of the group to join the conversations they are interested in – again, the students can be a participant, bumble bee or butterfly.

Conversations convene for the balance of the class. **The convener** captures the important points of the conversation they lead by making a graphic organizer, mind map or web to summarize the conversation. He/She posts their summary on the wall. All of these summaries will be shared as a harvest in some way and returned shared back with the larger group.

## What is Open Space Good For?

Open Space is useful in almost any context, including pre-test reviews, planning outing, managing of curriculum topics, classroom management, collaboration, and to deepen learning about issues and content.

**Materials Needed:**

- A blank wall that will become the agenda of topics or questions
- A wall for recording and posting the results of the dialogue sessions
- Breakout spaces for the small group discussions
- Paper on which to write session topics/questions plus Markers/Pencils/Pens
- Posters listing the Principles, Law of Two Feet, and Roles

## **Reflecting on Open Space**

What are my insights about Open Space? What further questions do I have about Open Space?

How do you see Open Space being used in building a learning community?

How could you see Open Space being used in your light of being career awareness or core standards?

## Powerful Questions

*While answers tend to bring us to closure, questions open up to exploration.*

### Asking the right question

Asking the right question is the most effective way of opening up a conversation and keeping it engaging. A high-quality question focuses on what is meaningful for the participants, triggers our curiosity and invites us to explore further.

*If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on it,  
I would use the first 55 minutes to formulate the right question  
because as soon as I have identified the right question  
I can solve the problem in less than five minutes.*

*Albert Einstein*

When beginning each class, it is helpful to have an overall question - one that itself embodies the purpose of the class. This is the *key question* or the *calling question* for the conversation.

The conversation may include other questions than the calling question. The questions you choose - or that people discover during conversation - are critical to its success.

### Guidelines for choosing questions:

- A well-crafted question attracts *energy* and focuses *attention* on what matters. Experienced hosts recommend asking open-ended questions, not ones that have a simple yes/no answer.
- Good questions invite *inquiry* and *curiosity*. They do not need to promote action or problem solving immediately.
- You'll know a good question when it continues to surface good ideas and possibilities.
- Check possible questions with key people who will take part in a conversation. Does it hold their attention and energy?

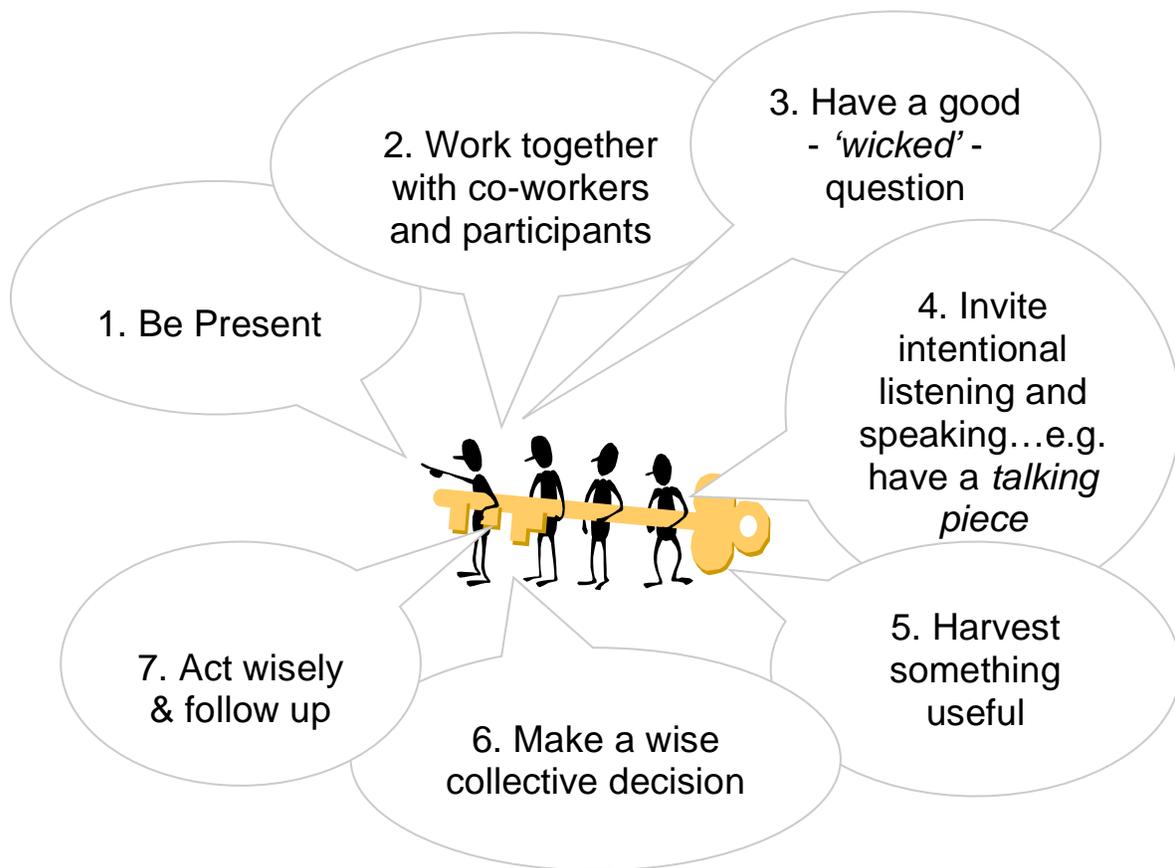
### A powerful question:

- Is simple and clear
- Is thought provoking
- Generates energy
- Focuses inquiry
- Challenges assumptions
- Opens new possibilities
- Evokes more questions

### A powerful question focuses Attention, Intention and Energy

# Essentials of Participatory Learning Design

## Seven Little Helpers



*What do you need as a minimum to host Participatory Learning?*

1. Be present!
2. Have a good & powerful question?
3. And have a stone - a talking piece, which is the simplest structure or tool that can be used to create intentional speaking and listening.

### The Seven Helpers

Over the years, these initial three tools have expanded to include 'seven helpers' that are the source of good conversational design. At the bare minimum, if you use these tools, conversations will grow deeper and work will occur at a more meaningful level.

These seven helpers bring form to fear and uncertainty and help us stay in the chaos of not knowing the answers. They help us to move through uncomfortable places together, like conflict, uncertainty, fear and the groan zone and to arrive at wise action.

1. Be present
2. Have a good question
3. Use a talking piece
4. Harvest
5. Make a wise decision
6. Act
7. Stay together

### **1. Be Present**

Inviting presence is a core practice of hosting, but it is also a key practice for laying the groundwork for great learning. There are many ways of bringing a group to presence, including:

- Start with a moment of silence
- Check in with a personal question related to the theme of the meeting
- Pass a talking piece and provide space for each voice to be heard
- Start well. Start slowly. Check everyone in.

### **2. Have a Good Question**

A good question is aligned with the need and purpose of the meeting and invites us to go to another level. Good questions are put into the center of a circle and the group speaks through them. Having a powerful question at the center keeps the focus on the work and helps groups stay away from unhelpful behaviors like personal attacks, politics and closed minds.

A good question has the following characteristics:

- Is simple and clear
- Is thought provoking
- Generates energy
- Focuses inquiry
- Challenges assumptions
- Opens new possibilities
- Evokes more questions

It is wise to design these questions beforehand. As you dive into these questions, harvest the new questions that are arising. They represent the path you need to take.

### **3. Use a Talking Piece**

In it's simplest form a talking piece is simply an object that passes from hand to hand. When one is holding the piece, one is invited to speak and everyone is invited to listen. Using a talking piece has the powerful effect of ensuring that every voice is heard and it sharpens both speech and listening. It slows down a conversation so that when things are moving too fast, or people begin speaking over one another and the listening stops, a talking piece restores calm and smoothness. Conducting the opening round of a conversation with a talking piece sets the tone for the meeting and helps people to remember the power of this simple tool.

Of course a talking piece is really a minimal form of structure. Every class should have some form of structure that helps to work with the chaos and order that is needed to co-discover new ideas. There are many forms and processes to choose from but it is important to align them with the nature of living systems if innovation and wisdom is to arise from chaos and uncertainty.

At more sophisticated levels, when you need to do more work, you can use more formal processes that work with these kinds of context. Each of these processes has a sweetspot, it's own best use, that you can think about as you plan meetings. Blend as necessary.

#### 4. Harvest

Never meet unless you plan to harvest your learnings. The basic rule of thumb here is to remember that you are not planning a class, you are instead planning a harvest. Know what is needed and plan the process accordingly. Harvests don't always have to be visible; sometimes you plan to meet just to create learning. But support that personal learning with good questions and practice personal harvesting.

To harvest well, be aware of four things:

- **Create an artefact.** Harvesting is about making knowledge visible. Make a mind map, draw pictures, take notes, but whatever you do create a record of your conversation.
- **Have a feedback loop.** Know how you will use your harvest before you begin your meeting. Is it going into the system? Will it create questions for a future meeting? Is it to be shared with people as news and learning? Figure it out and make plans to share the harvest.
- **Be aware of both intentional and emergent harvest.** Harvest answers to the specific questions you are asking, but also make sure you are paying attention to the cool stuff that is emerging in good conversations. There is real value in what's coming up that none could anticipate. Harvest it.
- **The more a harvest is co-created, the more it is co-owned.** Don't just appoint a secretary, note taker or a scribe. Invite people to co-create the harvest. Place paper in the middle of the table so that everyone can reach it. Hand out post it notes so people can capture ideas and add them to the whole. Use your creative spirit to find ways for the group do their own harvest.

#### 5. Make a Wise Decision

If your class needs to come to a decision, make it a wise one. Wise decisions emerge from conversation, not voting. The simplest way to arrive at a wise decision is to use the three thumbs consensus process. It works like this:

First, clarify a proposal. A proposal is a suggestion for how something might be done. Have it worded and written and placed in the centre of the circle. Poll the group asking each person to offer their thumb in three positions. **UP** means "I'm good with it." **SIDWAYS** means "I need more clarity before I give the thumbs up" **DOWN** means "this proposal violates my integrity...I mean seriously."

As each person indicates their level of support for the proposal, note the down and sideways thumbs. Go to the down thumbs first and ask: "what would it take for you to be able to support this proposal." Collectively help the participant word another proposal, or a change to the current one. If the process is truly a consensus building one, people are allowed to vote thumbs down only if they are willing to participate in making a proposal that works. Hijacking a group gets rewarded with a vote. Majority rules.

Once you have dealt with the down thumbs, do the same with the sideways thumbs. Sideways doesn't mean "no" but rather "I need clarity." Answer the questions or clarify the concerns.

If you have had a good conversation leading to the proposal, you should not be surprised by any down thumbs. If you are, reflect on that experience and think about what you could have done differently.

#### **6. Act**

Once you have decided what to do, act. There isn't much more to say about that except that wise action is action that doesn't not over-extend or under-extend the resources of a group. Action arises from the personal choice to responsibility for what you love. Commit to the work and do it.

#### **7. Stay Together**

Relationships create sustainability. If you stay together as friends and co-learners you become accountable to one another and you can face challenges better. When you feel your relationship to your closest mates slipping, call it out and host a conversation about it. Trust is a group's most precious resource. Use it well.

## Additional Resources

### Books and Websites

Many resources are available – books, articles, websites, blogs, communities. We included a few websites in the section on core methods. Remember to check out YouTube for videos about Participatory Learning’s methodologies.

As starting points or hubs for more extensive lists of resources, we suggest:

[www.artofhosting.org](http://www.artofhosting.org)

Baldwin, Christina

*Calling the Circle – The First and Future Culture*

*Storycatcher – Making sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story*

[www.peerspirit.com](http://www.peerspirit.com)

Brown, Juanita with David Isaacs & the World Café Community

*The World Café – Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter*

[www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)

Corrigan, Chris

*The Tao of Holding Space*

*Open Space Technology – A User’s Non-Guide (with Michael Herman)*

[www.chriscorrigan.com](http://www.chriscorrigan.com)

Cooperrider, David and Srivastva (2000)

*Appreciative Inquiry: Rethinking Human Organization Toward a Positive Theory of Change*

[www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu](http://www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu)

[www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/whatisai.pdf](http://www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/whatisai.pdf)

Owen, Harrison

*Open Space Technology – A Users Guide*

*Expanding our now - The Story of Open Space Technology*

*The Spirit of Leadership - Liberating the Leader in Each of Us*

[www.openspaceworld.org](http://www.openspaceworld.org)

Senge, Peter

*The Fifth Discipline*

*The Fifth Discipline Field Book (with Ross, Smith, Roberts, and Kleiner)*

*The Art and Practise of The Learning Organization*

*The Dance of Change (with Art Kleiner, Charlotte Roberts)*

Wheatley, Margaret J.

*Leadership and the New Science:*

*Turning to One Another*

*Finding Our Now*

*A Simpler Way (with Myron Kellner-Rogers)*

Whitney, Dianna and Trosten-Bloom, A.

*The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: a Practical Guide to Positive Change.*





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