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Conversation

A Skill for the Culturally Proficient Leader

Listening . . . requires not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds. We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs. . . . It is not easy, but it is the only way to learn what it might feel like to be someone else and the only way to start the dialogue.

—Lisa Delpit (1995, p. 46)

GETTING CENTERED

Take a few moments and consider your professional learning goals for the near future. Describe what you consider as your communication strengths. In what area of communication would you like to grow? To what extent do you consider yourself effective in cross-cultural communications? What might be areas of growth in cross-cultural communications for you?

SKILLFUL USE OF COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Dr. Sam Brewer and his colleagues set forth a vision for the Maple View School District to commit its effort and resources to provide a high-quality education for all students that enables each one to achieve or exceed high academic and performance standards. Dr. Brewer committed to leading the district to examine behaviors and policies through the lens of Cultural Proficiency. In Chapters 3 through 6, we have had the opportunity to witness many conversations of Maple View educators and community members as they have learned the basic Tools of Cultural Proficiency—the Barriers of anger and guilt, the Guiding Principles, the Continuum, and the Essential Elements.

In the vignettes of the preceding chapters, we have learned that culturally proficient leaders are intentional in the use of their school's formal and informal communication networks. These leaders, who are both administrators and teachers, are aware of the power of person-to-person communication. They understand that building effective relationships involves guiding their colleagues to understand the *whys* of individual and group behaviors. Once the *why* is clear—the moral imperative for all learners—the *what* and *how* become structurally effective. Culturally proficient leaders structure faculty meetings, department/grade-level meetings, and meetings with parents and community members in such a way as to maximize person-to-person communication. These same leaders realize that when they foster effective communication in their ongoing work, they are increasing the likelihood that the requisite skills and attitudes will carry over into the informal conversations among their colleagues. Culturally proficient school leaders see that relationship building through conversation is an important component in developing schools responsive to the needs of diverse and ever-changing communities.

In her powerful book *Coming Together*, Margaret Wheatley (2002) tells us that conversation is an ancient art form that comes naturally to us as humans, but that human beings are becoming increasingly isolated and fragmented and need one another more than ever. Schools often are isolating places in which dozens of adults spend 8 to 10 hours in relatively autonomous activities and interactions with their students but rarely spend time in effective conversations with other adults. Teachers are in their classrooms with 20 to 35 students while administrators and counselors are consumed with their daily tasks. Formal meetings and professional development sessions are frequently for one-way communication of information. Too often, we are in regimented situations that provide little time or opportunity to nurture deep, substantive conversations about our practices as educators.

Communication within schools occurs in both formal and informal settings. Formal settings include the aforementioned faculty meetings, parent-teacher meetings, grade-level and department meetings, as well as formal classroom instruction. Wenger (1998) has described our more informal communication networks in terms of *communities of practice*. Often, our communities of practice are composed of the networks of communication that occur in the hallways, the parking lots, the faculty lounge, or any other informal setting.

Conversation is one of the most important forms of social behavior in our schools, yet it receives little attention in either its formal or informal settings. Some conversation processes promote communication while others seemingly end in miscommunication or noncommunication. Cultural Proficiency requires understanding and mastery of the modes of conversation that promote effective communication—namely, raw debate, polite discussion, skilled discussion, and dialogue. In this chapter, we discuss conversation and its relationship to communication, understanding, and Cultural Proficiency. Later in this chapter, we present four modes of conversation described by Senge (1994) and describe how they relate to one another and how use of different modes of conversation to either promote or obstruct Cultural Proficiency in school settings. The chapter ends with exercises for dialogic practice designed to assist educational leaders who choose to move their schools and districts toward culturally proficient practices.

ORGANIZATIONS AS RELATIONSHIPS

Exploration of conversation as a means to becoming culturally proficient begins with an examination of the concept of organizations. Traditionally, we study organizations at two levels: structural and systemic (Cross, 1989, tOwens, 1995; Sergiovanni, 2001; Wheatley, 1992). Weick (1979) provides us with a **framework** for understanding the systemic nature of organizations:

Most “things” in organizations are actually relationships, variables tied together in a systematic fashion. Events, therefore, depend on the strength of these ties, the direction of influence, the time it takes for information in the form of differences to move around circuits. (p. 88)

Viewing schools as relationships linked together as circuits is useful in understanding the interconnectedness of human social organizations and how information flows through them. Rather than schools being regarded

only as building sites, Weick offers a view of organizations—in our case, schools—that are grounded in the values and beliefs of individuals. He states:

The word *organization* is a noun, and it is also a myth. If you look for an organization you won't find it. What you will find is that there are events, linked together, that transpire within concrete walls and these sequences, their pathways, and their timing are the forms we erroneously make into substances when we talk about an organization. Just as the skin is a misleading boundary for marking off where a person ends and the environment starts, so are the walls of an organization. Events inside organizations and organisms are locked into causal circuits that extend beyond these artificial boundaries. (p. 88)

Maturana and Varela (1992) extend our understanding of organizations beyond the mechanics of linkages and circuits in relationships, toward an inward journey of life itself. They describe the organization of biological life, of which humans belong, as *autopoietic*, or self-organizing. The organization is a product of its own patterns, procedures, and processes and its responses or reactions to its environment and to external interactions. In other words, there is no separation between what it is and what it does:

That living beings have an organization, of course, is proper not only to them but also to everything we can analyze as a system. What is distinctive about them, however, is that their organization is such that their only product is themselves, with no separation between producer and product. The being and doing of an autopoietic unity are inseparable and this is their specific mode of organization. (p. 48)

Organizations exist within the hearts and minds of the people who are part of them; they are the collective values and beliefs of those people. Organizational values and beliefs, in turn, are manifest in people's normative actions. These actions comprise the agreed-upon inter-subjective reality of individuals that are experienced in the objective world, such as a place called school. When agreed-upon norms are breached in some fashion, conflict arises, which generates a struggle to reclaim the old norm by group members or insert a new one. For example, the goal of educating all children to high academic standards is a significant normative diversion from the prevalent educational practice of providing high standards for a select population of students.

Conflicts in the domain of norm-guided interactions can be traced directly to some disruption of normative consensus. Repairing a disrupted consensus can mean one of two things: restoring inter-subjective recognition of a validity claim after it has become controversial or assuring inter-subjective recognition for a new validity claim that is a substitute for the old one. Agreement of this kind expresses a *common will*. (Habermas 1990, p. 67)

Efforts such as Race to the Top (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009) and the Common Core College and Career Readiness Standards (National Governors Association, 2010) are structural responses to a vision of a new society. However, what will be required to make this vision reality is the renegotiation of a consensual norm around who is to be educated. This renegotiation has to begin in the minds and hearts of those responsible for providing the education. Principals, teachers, counselors, and parents will need to engage in the struggle to discard the old norm of sorting and selecting students, reserving rigorous education for the “best and brightest,” and agree to embrace a new norm of educating all to high academic standards.

Discarding an old norm and embracing a new one is a major task. It involves repairing a severe fracture in the bond around the old norm. This fracture engages the group in a crisis of legitimacy in the group’s original purpose, causing fierce argument among group members as to the right or correct normative value that reestablishes group identity. At this juncture, members critically partake in the language process to renegotiate norms to bolster healthy relationships for a successful organization. At this point, language is not defined as a symbolic tool representing the surrounding world but as a medium through which we interpret and transform our realities. Herda (1999) provides this insight as to the utility of language:

This medium brings us to the place of conversation and the domain of the text that gives us the capacity to redescribe or reconfigure our everyday world in organizations and communities. It is this redescription where social action, which moves beyond old behaviors and worn-out traditions, has its genesis. (p. 22)

Susan Scott (2004) aptly states, “The conversation is the relationship” (p. 6). Participating in what she refers to as “fierce conversation” is a key ingredient in sustaining healthy relationships and, by extension, organizations such as schools. Scott’s notion of “fierce” is less frightening than it might seem at first glance. Participants are encouraged to approach conversations intensely, robustly, untamed, and unbridled. “In its simplest

form,” she states, “a fierce conversation is one in which we come out from behind ourselves into the conversation and make it real” (p. 7). Scott outlines seven principles for mastering the fierce conversation. A brief outline of each follows:

- *Principle 1: Master the courage to interrogate reality.*
No plan survives its collision with reality, and reality has a habit of shifting, at work and at home.
- *Principle 2: Come out from behind yourself into the conversation and make it real.*
While many fear “real,” it is the unreal conversation that should scare us to death. When the conversation is real, the change occurs before the conversation is over.
- *Principle 3: Be here, prepared to be nowhere else.*
Our work, our relationships, and our lives succeed or fail one conversation at a time. While no single conversation is guaranteed to transform a company, a relationship, or a life, any single conversation can.
- *Principle 4: Tackle your toughest challenge today.*
Burnout doesn’t occur because we’re solving problems; it occurs because we’ve been trying to solve the same problem over and over.
- *Principle 5: Obey your instincts.*
Don’t just trust your instincts—obey them. Your radar works perfectly. It’s the operator who is in question.
- *Principle 6: Take responsibility for your emotional wake.*
For the leader, there is no trivial comment. Something you don’t remember saying may have had a devastating impact on someone who looked to you for guidance and approval.
- *Principle 7: Let silence do the heavy lifting.*
When there is simply a whole lot of talking going on, conversations can be so empty of meaning they crackle. Memorable conversations include breathing space. (p. xv)

Fierce and sometimes challenging conversations are commonplace in the culturally proficient school. Members of the school community readily critique their actions as a means of honing capacity to foster student

achievement. Forms of conversation provide varying opportunities to coalesce people's values and beliefs, to shape collective understanding, to reveal people's underlying values and beliefs, and to open them to change. Often, however, members of the community get stuck and do not know how to respond when faced with culturally destructive, incapacitating, or blind comments or questions. Although walking away from the conversation may be easier, silence gives power and permission to the speakers of hurtful and harmful words of injustice. So, the question becomes, *If I stay, what will I say?* This question led one of our colleagues to develop Breakthrough Questions as a way to counter the downward spiral of negative conversations. Breakthrough Questions are formed by using one of the Essential Elements as the stem and building the question using the collaborative nature of learning communities. The downward spiral shifts to upward, positive energy through questions posed from positive intentionality, inclusive, and exploratory language (Lindsey, Jungwirth, Pahl, Jarvis, & Lindsey, 2009). Structures for developing Breakthrough Questions are included in the Resources section of this book. Structured conversations help prepare the speaker for the opportunity to critically examine moral attributes, leading to a culturally competent co-constructed space.

THE ESSENCE OF COMMUNICATION: CO-CONSTRUCTING MEANING

When people competently communicate with one another they authentically generate and share information. Meaning is consensually co-constructed, leading to more coherent bonds within relationships. This social construction of meaning is the essence of communication, and to understand it, we refer to a conversation between two Maple View Elementary teachers, Joan Stephens and Connie Barkley. Joan and Connie are talking about the Cultural Proficiency seminar in which they had recently participated. Joan was struggling to understand her deep emotional reactions to the session and asked Connie, a colleague she knew she could trust, to hear her out and help her make sense of her feelings.

In their conversation, Connie and Joan scrutinized their moral reference points relative to Cultural Proficiency as an appropriate perspective for addressing gaps in student achievement. Connie openly questioned Joan about contributions they both may have made to undereducating children. She gained permission from Joan to take the deeper plunge of critical inquiry in connection with their held values, assumptions, and beliefs about racism and the achievement gap. She steadfastly challenged her own sense of responsibility. This form of communication seeks understanding and hinges on the parties reaching an agreement on critical areas of concern among them.

Traditionally, we think of communication as the transmission and reception of information by means of speech, writing, or other representations of language. Maturana and Varela (1992) portray communication as an internal process that is socially constructed. Habermas (1990) argues that communication of this nature involves a conversational standard where participants actively expose moralistic norms about which they “ought to do” in the attempt to navigate what they “will do.” In the conversation between Connie and Joan, Joan was at the point of discovering several things. First, she may be learning to recognize what she doesn’t know, in this case school-based instances of racism. Second, she has become aware that discussions about issues related to diversity engender within her deep feelings that she has ignored. Third, and most importantly, she had the opportunity to learn about the experiences of others in her school community.

Most of us are like Joan, in that we experience this inner communication process when encountering an object or a situation that is alien or unfamiliar. Until the alien object or situation is present, these processes are hidden in the background of our consciousness tacitly operating. In Joan’s case, it was the seminar on Cultural Proficiency that triggered her internal sense-making process pulling background values, assumptions, and beliefs into foreground operation. In her struggle to understand the experience, she internally processed the information using the most familiar life experience framework available to her. As it is the case for most of us, in these situations, what is said may not be what is heard. Communication depends not only on what is transmitted but also on the internal sense-making process of the person who receives it. To Joan’s credit, she courageously reached out to Connie for help in checking her own understanding of what was presented during the Cultural Proficiency session as well as her own reaction to the presentation.

MODES OF CONVERSING

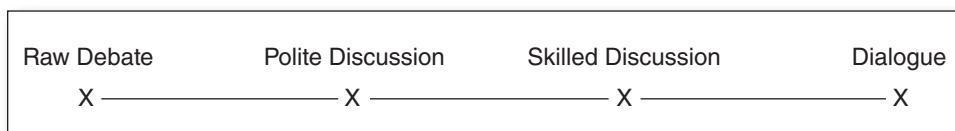
To better help us to understand the connection between communication/conversation and Cultural Proficiency, we introduce what Senge (1994) identified as four forms of conversation most likely to occur in organizations:

- Raw debate
- Polite discussion
- Skilled discussion
- Dialogue

Each form of conversation has distinct purposes and produces specific results. Knowledge of these distinctions can be important for leaders who

are intent on leading their schools or districts toward culturally proficient practices. As you read this section, reflect on the narratives from the previous chapters that struck you in particular ways. You will be able place those narratives at various points along Senge’s conversation continuum. To illustrate the four forms of conversation, we continue Joan and Connie’s conversation in four alternative scenarios—raw debate, polite discussion, skilled discussion, and dialogue.

Figure 7.1 Senge’s Conversation Continuum



Raw debate represents complete advocacy and, although at times polarizing, can identify people’s stand on issues. A form of conversation that is rarely helpful in the exploration of issues and ideas is *polite discussion*. Polite discussion, prevalent in schools, is characterized by masking of one’s feelings or reactions to issues under consideration. *Skilled discussion* involves a balance of advocacy and inquiry and is most efficient and effective in school settings. *Dialogue*, the opposite of raw debate, involves an intentional discussion in which participants, over time, seek to gain a shared understanding of a topic or issue.

When you review the tables in Chapter 6 or the conversations in Chapter 3, you see examples of these four forms of conversation. As you reread the tables in Chapter 6, from left to right, you will distinguish movement from raw debate to skilled discussion and on to the potential for dialogue.

The four conversation forms, depending on the topic, the purpose, and the situation, are useful in reaching understandings and taking action. To use them effectively, it is helpful to understand both their purpose and their potential outcomes.

Raw Debate. This form of conversation is represented by complete advocacy on the part of each member. Participants hold onto a predetermined position and strategically engage one another. The result is there are declared winners and losers at end of the exchange. This form of conversation can be active or benign. An active form is evident when participants knowingly stake their positions on the issues and relentlessly advocate for their viewpoints. The benign form of debate is evident in hierarchical organizations in which agendas and executive actions forecast predetermined positions and are used to overwhelm opposing ideas. In either case, a power-over dynamic is established, with the winner holding claim to supreme control of the relationship.

If Joan and Connie extend their conversation into active raw debate, it might take this course:

- Joan:** I have a lot of trouble with that “what are you willing to do, Joan” position! I am willing to become a teacher. I am willing to keep my credential current through professional reading and university coursework. I am willing to come to class prepared. My question is, “Why don’t their parents care enough to make sure their kids come to school to learn?”
- Connie:** I think that is a fair question. My question to us, not just to you, is “What is our role in working with the parents?”
- Joan:** I didn’t become an educator to become a social worker! My responsibilities are very clear—to teach!
- Connie:** Well, it seems to me that you have a very narrow view of our work and that you are unwilling to entertain any reasonable suggestion.

If it continues, this conversation will most likely devolve into a contentious point-counterpoint conversation until a winner is declared or one party relents. Let’s see if polite discussion has any promise for Joan and Connie.

Polite discussion. Participants in this form of conversation have an orientation akin to debate. Although they give appearances of agreement, they actually intend discord. They achieve this by masking their positions in an attempt to show politeness, never truly revealing their thinking about the topic. Polite discussions occur in at least two forms. In a face-to-face conversation, polite discussions are often filled with words such as *but*, *except*, *only*, and *however*. In this form of conversation participants are careful not to reveal their true values and feelings but rather to participate in a dance of deception. Polite discussion often occurs as another form when people participate in a discussion, not revealing their feelings or opinions, but when encountering their colleagues in the hallways or in parking lots have no difficulty expressing their true reactions. Had Joan and Connie chosen to continue their conversation as a polite discussion, we may have heard something like the following:

- Joan:** Well, that Cultural Proficiency presentation yesterday certainly was interesting, but . . .
- Connie:** What do you mean “interesting, but . . .”?
- Joan:** Oh, it was okay. It’s just that when you have been here as long as I have, you learn that every few years some new initiative shows up and a consultant comes in and reminds us of what we need to do to be successful with these kids in our classes. I just check it off my list of “diversity experiences.”

- Connie:** It sounds like it was a waste of your time.
- Joan:** Oh no, I just know the game.
- Connie:** The game? I'm not getting your point.
- Joan:** Oh, it's nothing in particular. By the way, Connie, tell Dr. Campbell that I'll be glad to serve on any committee she organizes. Tell her she can always count on me!

What do you think? At this point in the conversation, do you think it's likely that Joan is willing to do the deep internal work of integrating the Five Essential Elements of Cultural Competence as standards for her work as an educator? It appears that she is closing herself to that opportunity and politely choosing superficial compliance as her path.

By moving their conversation to the level of skilled discussion, Connie and Joan can have heightened opportunity to use conversation to explore each other's support and resistance to issues related to diversity.

Skilled discussion includes a balance of inquiry and advocacy and is a productive way of conversing. Healthy debate is encouraged with an equal balance of dialogue. Leaders who are effective in skilled discussion balance their conversations by seeking to understand another's perspective. They openly reveal their own position on a topic and seek to understand another's viewpoint through active questioning. They are aware of their own assumptions and beliefs and know how to express them in meetings. They encourage everyone's participation in meetings. They seek to gain multiple perspectives on issues. These leaders guide discussants to critically examine their own beliefs and assumptions.

- Joan:** Connie, your comment that "we are not observers, we are participants in the change process" is disconcerting, at best.
- Connie:** I'm not sure what you mean, Joan.
- Joan:** I've been on the curriculum committee for the past three years. I've been the one to press our colleagues to actively integrate the teaching standards into our daily work. I don't see myself as an observer.
- Connie:** On those issues, you are definitely a facilitator and supporter. My comments are about your reaction to the topic of racism. My interest isn't to put you into a corner, but to be responsive to your request for me to listen to your reaction to the Cultural Proficiency presentation. How can I be most helpful to you?
- Joan:** Good point! You're doing it by keeping me focused. As difficult as this is, I do appreciate it!

Though this part of the narrative doesn't indicate shared understanding, it does demonstrate the ability to engage relationships that could lead to investigative exchanges around deep educational issues. Both Joan and Connie experience the opportunity to gain an understanding of each other's position on the topic at hand, and they both seek an understanding of each other's feelings and reactions as they emerge in the conversation. Dialogue may provide Connie and Joan the opportunity to take a next step in the process of substantive, deep, enlightening, and effective conversation.

Dialogue is oriented toward inquiry for the purpose of developing a collective understanding of a given topic. A reciprocal power dynamic, participants attempt to bridge perceived or real differences and come to understand each other's viewpoints. They actively seek to uncover underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs that govern action. Thus, participants in dialogue gain information and insight not only about others but also about themselves.

Joan: You know, this topic of racism perplexes the daylight out of me.

Connie: Perplexes?

Joan: As you've noted, I'm resistant to the information and at the same time I'm aware of intense reactions roiling within me. This may blow you away, but I'd like to learn more about racism.

Connie: Where do you think your resistance comes from?

Joan: I am not sure. Maybe from growing up in a community with no diversity, I'm guessing?

Connie: Where did you live?

Joan: We lived in a very popular city, but not the inner city. It was very progressive. But we did not go to certain parts of the city and live away from any major happenings. Don't get me wrong—we did do things with other schools from across town at events like football, basketball, and other sports.

Connie: When you think about your early experiences, who comes to mind as the leading voice when you think about not being involved with other groups?

Joan: Hmmmm! I never looked at this topic like this before. This is really powerful.

Connie: Yes, racism evokes strong emotional reactions, most of which are associated with our personal experiences and fears. This is great! You've taken responsibility for your own learning.

In our work, we teach two basic dialogic skills that could contribute to Connie and Joan's dialogic conversation. As illustrated in this latter dialogic scenario, participants discuss with one another the "why" of their beliefs or actions. As Connie and Joan's dialogic group forms, they will share viewpoints about racism, student achievement, and other substantive topics. An important component of their sharing exchange will be to probe one another as to why they react to situations or topic they may be perceived as difficult. To move to a deeper level of understanding, they will ask and respond to questions that begin with the "where," "when," and "who" of the sources of their beliefs and assumptions.

Joan and Connie's dialogic journey will cause them to explore their closely held perspectives, or horizons. Horizon is the scope of vision that one might view from a particular vantage point. The depth of your understanding in a given situation is affected by the width or narrow expanse of your horizon.

The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of opening up of new horizons, and so forth. . . . A person who has no horizon does not see far enough hence overvalues what is nearest to him. On the other hand, "to have a horizon" means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it. A person who has a horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon, whether it is near or far, great or small. (Gadamer 1991, p. 302)

Connie and Joan will eventually come to a moment where their horizons are fused and both emerge with a broader and deeper understanding about various readings, racism, and, most importantly, a recognition of how their individual belief systems are developing.

Examining one's own beliefs and assumptions is an essential undertaking in becoming culturally proficient. Cultural Proficiency involves, after all, an inward journey in which one increasingly understands his own beliefs and actions and the impact his beliefs and actions have on others. A commitment to the process of dialogue is one way for people to deepen their knowledge of themselves and others. Too often, discussions on issues such as racism, privilege, and entitlement are held in a debate format in which positions become increasingly polarized. The consequence of raw debate is the creation of winners and losers and not the development of understanding. As Freire (1999) states, "Only dialogue truly communicates" (p. 45).

Education is a profession grounded in community. How well we communicate with students, parents, and one another is pivotal to the strength of

relationship bonds among diverse populations within our education community. Conversation comprises a set of skills that when practiced, can be improved. The following exercise is a successful process we recommend for your use in leading groups in the appropriate use of the four conversation modes. It is not a time-consuming activity. It can be used as a professional development exercise or in grade-level, department, or school faculty meetings. Once you have conducted the activity with colleagues, it is easy to practice any one, or combination, of skills in future meetings. Culturally proficient leaders, as we have indicated throughout this book, are intentional in their work with colleagues, which is why we commend this activity to your use.

PRACTICING CONVERSATION SKILLS

First, have participants review and discuss the conversation continuum. Then place them in dyads (pairs) for the purpose of beginning a dialogue. Instruct participants to move away from tables, facing their partners. The activity is conducted in three rounds. Each round builds on the preceding rounds to provide scaffolding for participant learning.

Round I, limited to three minutes, is an open discussion in which participants are given no guidelines or rules for their conversation. Participants are to engage in conversation as they might in any usual professional setting. As mentioned earlier, we suggest the topic of conversation to be about *change*.

This round serves two purposes. First, participants warm to the activity. Second, it provides the facilitator with immediate data about how the participants engage in conversation. As they converse, the facilitator listens to the participants' word selection, their tone of voice, and the rhythm of their interaction. All three factors play a major role in a successful conversation. Questions, particularly those beginning with the word *why*, are important indicators of the beginnings of a successful dialogic conversation. A courteous exchange of comments can indicate that the participants are engaged in polite discussion. A fast rhythm with few or no questions asked may indicate a debate is in progress.

At the end of the three minutes, instruct the group to stop all interaction, and provide a general critique of the conversational patterns you have observed. Often in the first round, participants fail to listen to one another: They cut into each other's sentences, advocate for points of view, and fail to negotiate differences. Pursuit of collective understanding seldom occurs in this round. Most groups in this round begin conversation with the rhythm of a debate, which is extremely fast. Encourage them to slow the pace and listen to each other's words.

Round II is a controlled conversation session for which the facilitator sets certain rules. The facilitator suggests the topic for this activity. It is important that the topic be general enough to allow for dialogue to ensue. It is our experience that the topic of *change* usually works well as an initial topic of discussion. *Change* is one of those topics that affect everyone—personally and professionally. It is important that the topic not be one rooted in debate. For example, selecting the emotive topic of *racism* is not advised for groups beginning this process. Difficult topics like racism can be tackled as participants master the various modes of conversation.

Each participant is given 90 seconds to continue discussing the topic of *change* while the partner sits and only listens. Although the speaker is allowed to move freely, overt physical gestures or sounds of agreement or disagreement from the listener are not permitted during this round. The facilitator keeps track of time and signals the appropriate moment when participants switch roles. At the end of the round, the facilitator halts all conversation and initiates a debriefing of the process. A question we find effective to begin the debriefing session is *What are your insights as a result of this exercise?*

Most newcomers to dialogic conversation find this step to be extremely difficult because of old habits of jumping into the conversation without listening to what others have to say. Often participants are startled by what they learn from this round. First, they have difficulty believing how slowly time seems to pass during the allotted 90 seconds. Second, they become aware of their inner voice that wants to rush into the conversation before the other person has finished commenting. For many, it is the first time they are aware of how little they listen to one another because of their unwillingness to silence their inner voice and focus on what others have to offer. For the first time they are aware of their continuous orientation to advocate a point and hold ground rather than becoming involved in inquiry of one another's perspectives on an issue.

Round III participants begin a structured process to learn skills of dialogue. Allow 10 to 12 minutes for this round. Participants are encouraged to ask clusters of three to five "why" questions to uncover the speaker's assumptions and predispositions around the topic. For example, when participants discover that they associate control with the topic of change, they may ask *Why is it necessary to be in control of change?* A second "why" question may be *Why is control important?* A third may be *Why do we need to control the lives of others?*

The second step in this round is for participants to ask *where* and *when* questions of one another. *Where* and *when* questions help participants see themselves at a place in time. Understanding of one's own assumptions and beliefs can be revealed as one reflectively responds to questions such

as *Where did I learn that change was good or bad? When in my life did I develop such attitudes? Where (or when) did you get the notion that change is controllable?*

The third step involves asking the question of *Who?* This is extremely powerful. A simple question like *From whom did you learn this?* gives one insight into beliefs and values derived from relationships earlier in one's own life. Identifying these relationships affords participants the opportunity to understand when, where, and from whom their values and beliefs were learned. It has been our experience that participants, upon discovering these *where, when, and who* connections, discover that many of their values and behaviors function like unspoken contracts with people important in their earlier lives. This knowledge alone provides people with the opportunity to retain, modify, or replace values and/or beliefs—the ultimate compasses for normative action.

Debrief the three rounds by asking participants these questions:

1. What are the contrasting characteristics of the three rounds of conversation in which you were engaged?
2. What seemed comfortable in each round? What was challenging in each round?
3. How do you compare the third round, dialogue, with the conversations that take place in your school setting?

Bohm (1996), a leading proponent of the benefits of dialogue, indicates that true dialogue occurs when we are willing to invest sufficient time. We know that in our schools, time is precious. Although we don't have unlimited time and other resources for professional development, there are several steps leaders must take. We have found that in a short period, participants can learn to navigate the continuum of conversation well enough to have the *beginnings* of good dialogue on difficult issues like racism, entitlement, and oppression. By understanding how to steer colleagues through the four modes of conversation, leaders are able to use dialogue as a way of gaining understanding of their own and others' attitudes and values about issues of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, language proficiency, and ability.

Educators who understand the bases for their own values can choose to change their behaviors. Similarly, these educators can also examine organizational policies and practices for underlying biases. In the next chapter, we discuss the lab protocol technique for educators to examine their policies and practices.