

Building and Sustaining Community through Personal Narratives

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Overview

Taking the time to focus on how we care for each other by knowing each other's stories is a necessary component of successful collaboration. Whether you work directly with students, families, community partners, or other constituents, using **personal narratives** to build and sustain relationships based on trust and common values is a vital component. During this interactive workshop, you have the opportunity to pause and reflect on your own stories, discover common values with others, and draw on the collective wisdom of your peers. Learn how personal and group reflection supports relational trust as a necessary precondition for working in schools and communities.

Learning Outcomes	Agreements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore personal narratives that drive and sustain your work • Analyze the ways in which personal narratives can play a role in our communities of practice within GEAR UP and our local communities • Commit to using personal narratives in your community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a deep breath and reflect • Maintain confidentiality of stories you hear • Fully engage with others

More personal narratives and other protocols for building trusting relationships in community:
iel.org/protocols

Agenda

Time	Activity	Protocol
9:15	Welcome/Bienvenidos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honor place/Dondé estamos? • Tap Pilam Coahuiltecan Nation (Kwa-weel-tay-kans) Table Introductions: <i>Whose story do you carry into this space with you?</i> <i>“this is not a small voice you hear”</i>	Poem p. 3
9:45	Journey Line & Story: <i>How has your journey in the years 10-20 contributed to who you are today?</i>	Journey Line (pp. 4-5) Appreciative Listening (p. 10)
10:15	<i>Who has helped you on the journey?</i> Sweet Honey and the Rock song: Somebody has prayed me over	Partner p. 6
10:30-11:00	Break with Learning Walk partners	Learning Walk
11:00	<i>How does your past and present inform your future?</i> Emulation Poem: I came from a place where I am in a place where I want to be in a place where	Emulation Poem & Directions pp. 7-8
11:45	Debrief	Four Square p. 9

Learning Exchange Axioms

1. Learning and leadership are a dynamic social processes.
2. Conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes.
3. The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns.
4. Crossing boundaries enriches development and educational processes.
5. Hopes and change are built on assets and dreams of locals and their communities.

LEARNING EXCHANGE PROTOCOL
Personal Narrative
This Is Not a Small Voice

Sonia Sanchez

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JxMXZVafKk> (Sonia Sanchez talking about learning to become a poet.)

This is not a small voice
you hear this is a large
voice coming out of these cities.
This is the voice of LaTanya.
Kadesha. Shaniqua. This
is the voice of Antoine.
Darryl. Shaquille.
Running over waters
navigating the hallways
of our schools spilling out
on the corners of our cities and
no epitaphs spill out of their river
mouths.

This is not a small love
you hear this is a large
love, a passion for kissing learning

on its face.
This is a love that crowns the feet with
hands
that nourishes, conceives, feels the
water sails
mends the children,
folds them inside our history where they
toast more than the flesh
where they suck the bones of the
alphabet
and spit out closed vowels.
This is a love colored with iron and lace.
This is a love initialed Black Genius.

This is not a small voice
you hear.

Think of a young person whose story you carry with you, who has touched you in a special way, whose voice is not a small voice inside your head. What is about the young person that stays with you and motivates you to do work on behalf of all young people?

Turn to a partner and tell your partner in 1 minute what is special about the young person. Turn back to the group; each person will “call” the young person’s name and the group members will “respond” with PRESENTE – meaning s/he is here.

LEARNING EXCHANGE PROTOCOL

Personal Narrative

Journey Line

A journey line uses experience(s) as a moving force for change (Dewey, 1938) in the sense that the individual and collective experience(s) as remembered by participants constitute a story. In turn, the journey line themes provide generative knowledge about a subject. They can be used to construct the “story of self” on the path from childhood (earliest memories) to the present. The journey lines, when shared, become the “story of us” and can become a “story of collective knowledge or action” about a particular topic. Some examples of journey lines include:

- Journey line of COURAGE
- Journey line of CHANGE
- Journey line of TEACHING
- Journey line of LEARNING
- Journey line of TEAMING
- Journey line of COACHING
- Journey line of LEADERSHIP
- Journey line of BOUNDARY CROSSING
- Journey line of READING
- Journey line of EVALUATION
- Journey line of RESEARCH(ER)

Parker Palmer reminds us of why we need to reconstruct our journeys and share our stories of becoming. *Dividedness is a personal pathology, but it soon becomes a problem for other people. As teenagers and young adults, we learned that self-knowledge counts for little on the road to workplace success. What counts is the “objective” knowledge that empowers us to manipulate the world. Ethics, taught in this context, becomes one or more arm’s-length study of great thinkers and their thoughts, one more exercise in data collection that fails to inform our hearts.*¹

The introduction for each journey line and the reflection questions may change, but the process is the same.

1. Introduce the concept of a journey line as an individual and collective story.
2. CHOOSE A SET OF questions or prompts for the journey line topic.
3. Share examples of the particular journey line you are using based on your experiences (on a journey line you have constructed before the workshop).
4. Ask participants to write or draw a journey line for 6-8 minutes.
5. Share in duos or trios and you may want to share as group.
6. Extension: Collect common themes from journey lines.
7. Optional: Collect and analyze stories from journey lines

1. Palmer, Parker. (2004). *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, pp. 6-9.

LEARNING EXCHANGE PROTOCOL

Personal Narrative

Journey Line

- In the journey line below, recall 3-5 key events/occurrences in your life from ages 10-20 that helped to shape your life today.
- You can decide if these occurrences were of high or medium importance.
- Then choose one story of an event/occurrence that most resonates with you at this moment.

Life Events

Importance	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
High Importance											
Medium Importance											
Low Importance											

LEARNING EXCHANGE PROTOCOL

Personal Narrative

Somebody Has Prayed Me Over

Note: All protocols have multiple origins. The strength of a protocol is in the ability of facilitators or planners to adjust/revise for use in your context. <http://www.nsrharmony.org/free-resources/protocols/a-z> is a good source of multiple protocols for school, district, community and organizational use.

It is best if you can download and play the song from Sweet Honey in the Rock while teacher or students read lyrics. As facilitator, talk about an experience of someone who has had a special effect on your life – the somebody who has helped you over. Your story should be no longer than 2 minutes.

Who is an educational mentor or colleague who has helped you over?

Who is a person who has helped you get to where you are today -- a guide, a mentor who has been important and is the angel that sits on your shoulder? What might that mentor whisper in your ear today?

Somebody Has Prayed Me Over by Carol Maillard of Sweet Honey and the Rock (for Ed Love, Howard University art professor, who passed over some years ago)

Somebody has prayed me over Somebody has
marked my way
Somebody has prayed me over Somebody has
marked my way
Somebody has prayed me over No place you
cannot go
Somebody has marked the way No love too
deep to feel
Somebody has prayed me over No hope too
high for heaven
Somebody has marked my way No dream you
dare not dream
Vision set on tomorrow
Head high heart wide open
Mind clearly on my future
Lovin, every single day
Protectin me, seein' me, hopin' for me,
givin' me strength
To dare to be, dream to be,
all that I have to be
Guidin' me, inspirin' me, ancestors live inside
me

Daring me to be the future, pullin' me I hear
them callin"
No place you cannot go Somebody has
prayed me over
No love too deep to feel
Somebody has marked my way
No hope too high for heaven
Somebody has prayed me over
No dream you dare not dream
Somebody has marked my way
Vision set on tomorrow
Head high heart wide open
Mind clearly on my future
Learnin' every single day
Protectin' me, inspirin' me, ancestors light to
guide me
Pushin' me, pullin' me, helpin' me to be the
future.
Protectin' me, inspirin' me, ancestors light to
guide me
Pushin' me, pullin' me, helpin' me to be the
future

LEARNING EXCHANGE PROTOCOL

Personal Narrative

Emulation Poem

To emulate is to copy or use as a guide; it is to echo what you have read or heard or seen. The emulation poem is an opportunity to use an example poem to write your own poem. The purpose of writing the **emulation poem** is to gain some greater knowledge and insight about colleagues' or students' backgrounds. While we often know people from years of working with them, we occasionally have surprises. Initially it opens up dialogue in a way that frees the writer to say precisely what elements of his/her upbringing, history, or current life are particularly important at this time of life.

PREPARATION: Write a poem yourself in 10 minutes or less. Type and add to the examples, substituting any here for yours.

DIRECTIONS: Tell participants you did this in 10 minutes and they can too. Read your examples and two or more examples aloud. Either the facilitator or participants can do the reading. Then participants use the lines on the blank page to write the poem. If persons have laptops, of course, they may use these.

There is sometimes a look of disbelief, but once people start writing, they seem to be fine. Sometimes, it takes a few moments for participants to "get going" on the writing because, as we know, everyone thinks and writes differently, so as facilitator – do not change prompt; just gently encourage participants to write. After 8-10 minutes (and some poems may be incomplete) ,ask writers to read to a single person or a small group. Adjust reading and discussion time to the size of group (2-6).

EMULATION POEM: I COME FROM A PLACE WHERE... LYNDA TREDWAY

I come from a place where the simple life is valued,
where gossip at the grocery store is the lifeblood of knowing,
where the routine of meat and potatoes and a vegetable is supper,
where the principles of democracy and Christianity are revered but too often not a reality,
where spring planting depends on how wet the fields are,
where irrigation wells hum in summer,
where my father's last fall harvest time came too soon in his life,
and where blankets of snow come in winter and we ice skate on the pond,
where I walked the shelterbelts of my childhood seeking to know
looking at leaves and trees and wondering how to grow into my own life,
where Saturdays were catechism and cleaning, and Sundays church and family,
where school and friends were a refuge
where my family was unpredictable and secretive and my security came from my own thoughts and hopes and
reading about a larger world that I wanted to inhabit
I went to a place where city life moved faster,
where rain meant problems with traffic instead of an answer to prayers,
where preserving democracy and the values of learning, giving, and doing became my life direction
where I learned to cast myself in roles as mother, friend, and aunt in ways that fit my sense of freedom and where
my white girl self grew into a woman who saw herself as an ally for justice
I am still going to a place where the Elysian fields of knowledge and care and kindness are the main currency and
where the illusive goals of equity and justice are worth giving your life to and for

I come from a place where

I went to a place where (or I am in a place where)...

I am going to a place

Four Square Debrief

+ = useful Δ = change that might be helpful

<p>Content +/-Δ How content are you with the content?</p> 	 <p>Questions ???</p>
<p>Process +/-Δ How useful were the processes to your learning?</p> 	<p>Affirmations/Appreciations</p> 

Appreciative or Constructivist Listening Protocol

The purpose of the protocol is to share with a partner a story that connects you personally to the learning. Sometimes listening or silence is difficult with some persons new to the protocol. At times, the listener wants to ask questions, but the listener needs to refrain from this as this protocol helps the speaker reflect and construct his or her thinking. Even if there is silent time, it is useful for the thinking. There are other occasions in our work for questions, feedback and co-constructed conversation.

Norms for Engagement

- Assume best intentions.
- Listen fully to a partner, sitting eye to eye and knee to knee.
- If there is silence in the designated time, that is fine. The listener may use nonverbal responses.
- As the listener, do not comment, give feedback, or add your story; you are listening, not editing, giving your fullest attention to the speaker.
- Maintain double confidentiality – you will not repeat a story heard, and you will not ask your partner about the story he or she tells outside of this exercise unless he or she raises it again with you.

Facilitator Role

You will want to model this with a willing person if this is the first time you are using appreciative or constructive listening with this group. Introduce this as a way to have someone listen to you completely without judgment for two minutes.

- A facilitator reviews directions and keeps time. A timer that beeps is good.
- Prepare and have participants respond to a designated prompt.
- State norms of engagement. Ask if there are questions.
- Let everyone get settled with partner. If they do not know each other (or know each other well), give time for interchange to meet and greet before starting. Have dyad decide who goes first. Be a “warm demander” on the protocols for the dyad, as it is uncomfortable for some at first – but necessary.
- The first person shares for two minutes (or selected time) without interruption, even if he or she is silent. The listener may give nonverbal feedback. That might include subvocalization like “ummm...” but does not include verbal feedback, questions, other stories, etc.
- Join the single person if there is an uneven number.
- Do clear “bordering” of this activity by setting time and saying “go” and “stop” after two minutes. Make sure the dyad changes partners.
- Debrief activity at end, accepting all responses, but not necessarily defending the process. It takes some people longer to get used to this than others.
- Two minutes for cross-sharing may be added to the end of the protocol.
- Remind persons of double confidentiality at end of process.

Adaptations

- You may decide to do this in trios after your community has done the dyad work frequently, but do not recommend starting with this.
- Depending on the content of the sharing, you may decide to ask for persons to contribute their ideas – but not partner’s.
- You can choose to have full discussion after but remember norms.

The original constructivist listening protocol was designed by Julian Weissglass, Professor Emeritus, UC Santa Barbara. Please transfer this citation to any documents you use for the appreciative/constructivist listening protocol. Weissglass, J. (1990). *Constructivist Listening for Empowerment and Change, The Educational Forum* 50(4), 1990. 351- 370 . The url link to the article is:
<http://ncee.education.ucsb.edu/articles/constructivistlistening.pdf>