

Connections

Connections is a way for people to build a bridge from where they are or have been (mentally, physically, etc.) to where they are going and what they will be doing. It is a time for individuals to reflect—within the context of a group—upon a thought, a story, an insight, a question, or a feeling that they are carrying with them into the session, and then to connect it to the work they are about to do. Most people engage in Connections at the beginning of a meeting, class, or gathering.

There are a few things to emphasize about Connections for it to go well...

- It is about connecting people's thoughts to the work they are doing or are about to do.
- Silence is ok, as is using the time to write or just sit and think. Assure people that they will spend a specific amount of time in Connections, whether or not anyone speaks out loud. Some groups—and people within groups—value the quiet, reflective times above all else.
- If an issue the group clearly wants to respond to comes up in Connections, the group can decide to make time for a discussion about the issue after Connections is over.

The “rules” for Connections are quite simple:

- Speak if you want to.
- Don't speak if you don't want to.
- Speak only once until everyone who wants to has had a chance to speak.
- Listen and note what people say but do not respond. Connections is not the time to engage in a discussion.

Facilitating the process is also straightforward. Begin by saying “Connections is open,” and let people know how long it will last. A few minutes before time is up, let people know that there are a few minutes remaining, so that anyone who hasn't yet spoken might speak. With a minute or so to go, let the group know that you will be drawing Connections to a close and ask again if anyone who hasn't spoken would like to speak. Before ending, ask if anyone who has spoken would like to speak again. Then, end.

Ten minutes is usually enough time for groups of 10 people or fewer, 15 minutes for groups of 11–20 people and 20 minutes for any groups larger than 20 people. Connections generally shouldn't last more than 20 minutes. People can't sustain it. The one exception is where there is a group that has been together for a period of time doing intensive work and it is the last or next to last day of their gathering.

Some people will say that Connections is misnamed, because people don't connect to (or build on) what other people have said. However, the process is a connecting one; and powerful connections can still occur even though they are not necessarily the result of back and forth conversation.

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