



Early Childhood Conference

What are Learning Café Conversations?

Learning Café Conversations are an informal dialogue which invites people to take part in discussions about a topical issue in an informal setting with others who are interested in the same topic. It is an opportunity to build relationships and help to clarify universal understanding. The conversation/discussion is seen as the end in itself, rather than a means towards a goal (ie. making a decision).

There will be two ½ hour sessions running; the first one at 12:15-12:45 and the second one at 12:45-1:15.

I'm a Table Host, what do I do?

- Welcome the participants as they enter.
- Introduce your self and the topic to be discussed
- Request that the participants fill out their name card
- Choose a note taker (paper/pens will be on the table). Our intent is to post the conversation notes on the web site.
- Give a brief overview of what the purpose of the Café is
- Explain the Café guidelines and Café Etiquette
- Talk briefly about your topic
- Pose a **powerful question** or two (see below for help with this)
- Encourage everyone to participate.
- Remember this is an opportunity to hear the participants questions
- Answer the participants questions as best as you can; if you are unable to answer but feel that you could find the answer for them, let them know that you will get back to them (if this is the case then make sure you have the participants contact information)
- Our MC will give a five minute warning to help wrap up the conversation
- A "Dinner Bell" will ring to signify when the conversation is over and to let participants know when it is time to move on

Things to think about:

The ability to facilitate working conversations that enhance trust and reduce fear is an important leadership capability. To succeed in this pursuit, it's essential for leaders to strengthen their skills in the use of dialogue and other engagement approaches that deepen mutual inquiry and foster collective intelligence. These capabilities include:

- Creating a climate of discovery
- Suspending premature judgment
- Exploring underlying assumptions and beliefs
- Listening for connections between ideas
- Encouraging diverse perspectives
- Honoring everyone's contributions
- Articulating shared understanding
- Harvesting and sharing collective discoveries

What is a powerful question?

A powerful question should:

- generates curiosity in the listener
- stimulates reflective conversation
- is thought-provoking
- surfaces underlying assumptions
- invites creativity and new possibilities
- generates energy and forward movement
- channels attention and focuses inquiry
- stays with participants
- touches a deep meaning
- evokes more questions

QUESTIONS FOR ALL SEASONS

Here is a series of questions that you may find useful to stimulate new knowledge and creative thinking. Look at these questions to stimulate your own thinking about questions related to your own specific situation. Play. Use your imagination.

Questions for Focusing Collective Attention on Your Situation

- What question, if answered, could make the most difference to the future of (your specific situation)?
- What's important to you about (your specific situation) and why do you care?
- What draws you/us to this inquiry?
- What's our intention here? What's the deeper purpose (the big "why") that is really worthy of our best effort?
- What opportunities can you see in (your specific situation)?
- What do we know so far/still need to learn about (your specific situation)?
- What are the dilemmas/opportunities in (your specific situation)?
- What assumptions do we need to test or challenge here in thinking about (your specific situation)?

- What would someone who had a very different set of beliefs than we do say about (your specific situation)?

Questions for Connecting Ideas and Finding Deeper Insight

- What's taking shape? What are you hearing underneath the variety of opinions being expressed? What's in the center of the table?
- What's emerging here for you? What new connections are you making?
- What had real meaning for you from what you've heard? What surprised you? What challenged you?
- What's missing from this picture so far? What is it we're not seeing? What do we need more clarity about?
- What's been your/our major learning, insight, or discover so far?
- What's the next level of thinking we need to do?
- If there was one thing that hasn't yet been said in order to reach a deeper level of understanding/clarity, what would that be?

Questions That Create Forward Movement

- What would it take to create change on this issue?
- What could happen that would enable you/us to feel fully engaged and energized about (your specific situation)?
- What's possible here and who cares? (rather than "What's wrong here and who's responsible?")
- What needs our immediate attention going forward?
- If our success was completely guaranteed, what bold steps might we choose?
- How can we support each other in taking the next steps? What unique contribution can we each make?
- What challenges might come our way and how might we meet them?
- What conversation, if begun today, could ripple out in a way that created new possibilities for the future of (your situation)?
- What seed might we plant together today that could make the most difference?