



Gray Chautauqua

Conversations worth Having...Experiences worth Sharing...

Discussions and experiences centered on thought, philosophy, spirituality, culture, education, current/historical events, science/technology, the arts...leading to lasting personal and community enrichment.

Gray Chautauqua is inspired by the spirit of Chautauqua Institution <<http://www.ciweb.org/>> and the rich history of Daughter Chautauquas and Circuit Chautauquas <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chautauqua>> highly popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Chautauqua is an Iroquois term which means, among other things, “two moccasins tied together.” The logo, inspired by the “two moccasins”, symbolizes the spirit of Gray Chautauqua. Two right footprints represent two separate individuals. These two footprints side-by-side characterize common experiences and how our paths cross, even if moving in different directions. Moving in opposite directions illustrates that what is behind us is yet before another; each having something both to give to and gain from the other.

Gray Chautauqua is an open environment for deep thought, open dialogue, experiences and learning. A space for critical thinking where it is recognized as

- Seeing both sides of an issue
- Being open to new evidence that disconfirms your preconceived ideas
- Reasoning dispassionately (not influenced by strong feeling)
- Demanding that claims (especially your own) be backed by evidence
- Deducing and inferring conclusions from available facts, where conclusions can change in the face of new available facts...

...and a place for problem solving when it is done for the good of the community. This will not ever deteriorate into a debate. Debate assumes that people already know the best answer to the question being investigated; right and wrong; with a winner and a loser. Gray Chautauqua is an environment that invites discussion and experiential opportunities that invite deeper scrutiny and intellectual dialogue. The intention is not to find the “answer”, but to broaden one’s intellectual and emotional perspective on a given subject.

Thoughts on Format:

Guide - The individual who is presenting the topic of discussion or leading the experiential activity. Not a lecture. The Guide will be given up to 10 minutes to introduce the topic and set the stage for the dialogue. The Guide will then use whatever interactive format desired to develop a discussion between themselves and all participants. End with a “challenge”, “application’, “for further discussion”, “next steps” to encourage on-going dialogue, application, and change.

Facilitator - Serves as an emcee, of sorts. Will introduce the Guide and welcome all to the group, enforce the group norms (*see below), serve as time-keeper, help to ask leading questions... Begin with, “The ‘Guide’ is NOT saying...” or “The ‘Guide’ does not want you to think ...”

Participants – all those attending and invited to engage in the discussion.

*Below are two sets of norms that I have found helpful in creating healthy and collaborative group dialogue.

The Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations

Stay Engaged:

Staying engaged means “remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue” (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 59).

Experience Discomfort:

This norm acknowledges that discomfort is inevitable, and that participants make a commitment to bring issues into the open. It is not talking about these issues that create divisiveness. The divisiveness already exists in the society. It is through dialogue, even when uncomfortable, that healing and change begin.

Speak Your Truth:

This means being open about thoughts and feelings and not just saying what you think others want to hear.

Expect and Accept Non-closure:

This agreement asks participants to “hang out in uncertainty” and not rush to quick solutions which require ongoing dialogue.

Adapted from Singleton, Glenn E, and Linton, Curtis, *Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*. 2006. Pp. 58-65. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Seven Norms of Collaboration

Pausing: Pausing actually slows down the to and fro of discussion. There are fewer “frames per second” to deal with. It provides for the precious wait time which has been shown to dramatically improve critical thinking. Pausing and the acceptance of moments of silence creates a relaxed and yet purposeful atmosphere. Silence, however initially uncomfortable, can be an excellent indicator of productive collaboration. Pausing also signals to others that their ideas and comments are worth thinking about. It dignifies their contribution and implicitly encourages future participation. Pausing enhances the quality of discussion.

Paraphrasing: To paraphrase is to re-cast or translate into one’s own words, to summarize or to provide an example of what has just been said. The paraphrase maintains the intention and the accurate meaning of what has just been said while using different words and phrases. The paraphrase helps members of a group hear and understand each other as they evaluate statements and formulate thoughts. Paraphrasing is also extremely effective when reducing group tension and individual anger.

Probing: Probing seeks to clarify something which is not yet fully understood. More information may be required or a term may need to be more fully defined. Clarifying questions can be either specific or open-ended, depending upon the circumstances. Gentle probes increase the clarity and precision of a group’s thinking and contribute to trust building because they communicate to group members that their ideas are worthy of exploration and consideration.

Putting forward ideas: It takes a degree of self-confidence and courage to put forward an idea and it is vital that groups nurture such self-confidence and courage. Ideas are the heart of a meaningful discussion. Groups must be comfortable to process information by analyzing, comparing, predicting, applying or drawing causal relationships.

Paying attention to self and others: Collaborative work is facilitated when each team member is explicitly conscious of self and others' not only aware of what he or she is saying, but also how it is said and how others are responding to it. "Understanding how we create different perceptions allows us to accept others' points of view as simply different, not necessarily wrong. We come to understand that we should be curious about other people's impressions and understandings, not judgmental. The more we understand about how someone else processes information, the better we can communicate with them.

Presuming positive presuppositions: Of all the seven norms of collaboration, this one may be the most fundamental, for without it, the rest are meaningless. Simply put, this is the assumption that other members of the team are acting from positive and constructive intentions (however much we may disagree with their ideas). Presuming positive presuppositions is not a passive state but needs to become a regular manifestation of one's verbal responses. The assumption of positive intentions permits the creation of such sophisticated concepts as a "loyal opposition" and it allows one member of a group to play "the devil's advocate." It builds trust, promotes healthy cognitive disagreement and reduces the likelihood of misunderstanding and affective/emotional conflict.

Pursuing a balance between advocacy and inquiry: Both inquiry and advocacy are necessary components of discussions. The intention of advocacy is to influence others' thinking; the intention of inquiry is to understand their thinking. Maintaining a balance between advocating for a position and inquiring about the positions held by others further inculcates the ethos of a genuine learning community.

Adapted from Garmston, Robert H. and Wellman, Bruce M., *The Adaptive School: Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups*. 1999. Pp 37-47, Norwood, MA: Christopher Gordon. <http://www.state.gov/m/a/os/43984.htm>