

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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Courageous Dialogue Toolkit: Practical Wisdom for School Leaders

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Introduction

Karen E. Bohlin, EdD

Why this Toolkit and How to Use it

The beginnings of this project date back to November 2016. Prior to the 2016 presidential election, conversations in history classrooms about candidates' policies and platforms were robust, spirited and generally cordial. We were proud of students' civic engagement. They took the lead running a virtual poll revealing a divided vote in the school community and greater diversity of opinion than many other peer schools. On November 8th students returned home engaged, expectant and hopeful. 24 hours later, something shifted. Peer groups splintered. The post election discussions in class became guarded. Some students lashed out in anger. As one student put it, "people just stopped talking to each other." But that was simply the tip of the iceberg. Over social media, students from both sides of the aisle posted and reposted vitriolic comments and memes. Instead of discussing what they thought, felt and cared about, they reacted to one another online, fighting fire with fire.

We knew then that we needed to be more intentional about responding to context and building the conditions for trust and conversation. We needed to understand how to promote dialogue in a polarized environment and teach the skills and habits to do so. To that end, over the next few years, we began with the adults, bringing in speakers and discussing books including Sherry Turkle's *Reclaiming Conversation*, James Ryan's *Wait, What* and Arthur Brooks *Love Your Enemies*. We asked tough questions of ourselves as a faculty and staff: Do you feel safe to share and discuss views with individuals who hold ideas opposed to your own? If not, why? We generated conversation and meeting norms.

Using the Practical Wisdom Framework (PWF)[™] as our

guide (Bohlin, 2021), my colleague, Deborah Farmer Kris, and I developed an early iteration of the Coaching Conversations Protocol you find here in this Toolkit and encouraged teachers to practice reflective listening and wait time in their conversations with students. We asked them to document and report back on what they noticed. Additionally, in our faculty workshops and department meetings, we focused on intellectual virtues such as fair-mindedness and explored how to model, coach and teach them in the classroom.

This steady, organic and reflective work paved the way for the deeper work on dialogue we were called to engage in when a conflagration of variables posed new challenges in 2020: re-doing school as we know it in a global pandemic and helping students and adults make sense of unfolding economic, social, racial and political tumult. The fires seemed to spread at the unrelenting pace of wildfires in the west, posing new challenges to school leaders from week to week.

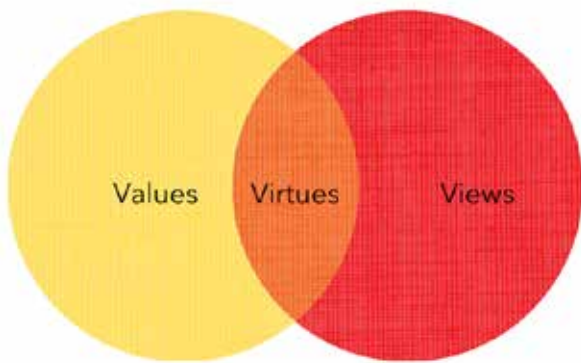
Competing Values & Views

In that conflagration, we find a wide range of values and views, many in competition with one another. And this is no surprise, as one of the great strengths of our pluralistic society is the diversity of cultural and religious values we are free to hold. In the American public square we have always been free to hold equally diverse views on politics, war, economics, social policy, the arts and entertainment. These values and views are informed by our experience, education, rich and varied traditions and deeply held beliefs.

However, on both sides of the political aisle, pundits and politicians urge us to communicate the "right views."

In the process they inadvertently take down individuals and groups, cutting off the possibility of dialogue. And, when we feel threatened or dismissed by an individual or group, we can become defensive, combative or withdrawn. The public square, as we know it, can seem too high risk for honesty, vulnerability and intellectual exploration. And as long as high profile adults continue to model polemics based on reductionism and labeling, young people—and adults—will be inclined to follow suit.

It is precisely at this crossroads of competing values and views that school leaders encounter fires: ideological debate; fear and mistrust; posturing and politicking. We can fight fire with fire and leave the ground scorched or harness its educational power to generate light, energy and warmth. The purpose of the *Courageous Dialogue Toolkit: Practical Wisdom for School Leaders* is to give school leaders the principles, practices and scaffolded tools they need to generate light—new understanding and knowledge; energy—dynamic learning and growth; and warmth—interpersonal trust and community.



Virtues at the Heart of Courageous Dialogue

When educators lead by promoting particular values and viewpoints outside their shared mission and aim, they run the risk of generating more heat than light (Ryan and Bohlin, 1999; Bohlin 2014). Rather than advocate for specific views or values, we believe that schools are ideal settings to nurture the virtues

at the heart of courageous dialogue: **respect, civic friendship, inquiry, fair-mindedness, intellectual curiosity, honesty, courage, self-mastery, good will and good judgment.**

We need civic friendship to engage others as *persons*, so we don't thoughtlessly reduce them to labels, stereotypes and facile posts. When we carelessly neglect another person's wholeness, we fail to recognize their inherent dignity and we lose something of ourselves as well: the opportunity to get to know a person, to understand them and grow wiser as a result. We know how it feels to be reduced to a viewpoint, pigeon-holed, rejected, or ignored. Social media makes this as real for teenagers as it does for adults. Being defined down by others can erode our confidence and resilience. And these experiences—or fear of such experiences—also undermine our courage and our ability to communicate who we are and what we care about.

We need **intellectual courage** to give an account for our principled convictions, especially when they are challenged. We also need **intellectual humility** and **honesty** to remain open to learning from one another, open to the truth, and open to revising our views and values, when we are reasonably persuaded. We need **respect** and **fair-mindedness** to engage those with whom we perceive as having views opposed to our own; we need **good will** to reach beyond our own circle of concern; and **self-mastery** to remain curious and not combative.

What is Courageous Dialogue?

There are two extreme reactions when faced with division and disagreement. One is simply "going along to get along." And there is no need for courage or the pursuit of truth with an anything-goes-stand-for-nothing attitude. The other extreme is jumping to conclusions, holding unreflectively to bias, labeling or dismissing others who disagree with our views and opinions.

Courageous dialogue aims higher. As we reflect on who we

are and what we stand for as a school community, we can ask ourselves: Am I open to learning from others and taking an interest in their perspectives? Am I willing to challenge my own and others assumptions—respectfully? What does it look like to bridge divides through conversation and argument? What steps can I take to move in that direction? How can I encourage interest, dialogue and authentic respect for people from a plurality of backgrounds, beliefs and traditions?

Courageous Dialogue is based on a few core assumptions:

- All human beings have dignity and intrinsic value and are worthy of our respect, regardless of their values, views or membership to a group.
- Courageous dialogue, virtue and civic friendship are fostered in the context of relationships based on trust.
- Educators have a responsibility to pay attention to and help others inquire about the context of persons and situations, as there are no one-size fits all answers to complex questions and challenges we face.
- Courageous dialogue empowers the agency of all participants and nurtures the fundamental desire to ask questions about what it means to be human, to live well and flourish, to know what our obligations are to ourselves, others and the world.

The *Courageous Dialogue Toolkit* distills the practical wisdom we need to answer these questions and operationalize them. It encourages individuals to explore the courage of their convictions, to honor the plurality of views we find in our school communities, and to develop the virtues and skills needed to meet each person with dignity.

In his “Three Characteristics of Socratic Dialogue” (1984), Steven Tigner, a dear mentor and wise teacher of teachers, explains that fairness, tolerance, and respect for freedom of conscience are starting points—what reasonable people owe one another. That said, he continues, holding these principles is “compatible with holding to standards of truth and error, of right and wrong, of good and bad, and of praise and blame.” It is important, he clarifies: “that the notion that ‘everybody has a right to his/her opinion’ does not mean that “everybody’s opinion is right.” To illustrate the point Tigner points to a great teacher of dialogue:

Socrates provides an illuminating example of one way of combining firm commitments and open-mindedness. Socrates had strong commitments, of course – so strong that he died for them. But they never turned him into a purveyor of doctrine. By pointedly professing his own lack of knowledge, by flexing his ignorance, he constantly kept his conversational partners mindful that the current conversation really mattered. Socrates was always prepared to change his mind if given sufficient reason. He had his convictions, all right, but not a one of them was bolted to the floor. He didn’t enter his outdoor classroom with any non-negotiable items, other than that the negotiating was to be governed by the force of reason rather than the threat of violence. (Tigner, 1984 p. 2)

Courageous dialogue opens the door to authentic inquiry and learning. Just as Socrates held firm to his principles and remained open to reasoned arguments, we can learn to share why we hold the convictions we do and to understand the reasons why others hold theirs. We can learn not to go along to get along but to disagree more so that we learn from others and others learn from us—in order to create a culture where open dialogue, respectful debate, and reasoned deliberation prevails.

To practice virtue in the public square, we need to learn how to meet each other respectfully and dialogue in ways that honor each person regardless of his or her views, values or membership to a particular group. In his famous *Seven Habits*

of *Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey wisely advised, “seek first to understand;” a simple reminder for relationship building in family, work, leadership, and life.

How to Use this Toolkit

The *Courageous Dialogue Toolkit* is a distillation of our collective experience, reflection, collaboration and research. We begin with a deep dive into the [Challenges and Opportunities for School Leaders](#) navigating fears and creating the conditions necessary for courageous dialogue to flourish. My colleague Barbara Whitlock takes the lead illuminating the reasons for these fears and the need to respond with courageous dialogue. She highlights lessons from United States history and her action research in the classroom to illustrate how to engage faculty/staff and students in courageous dialogue.

Want a point of entry to discuss Courageous Dialogue with the entire school community? Consider starting with my colleague [Barbara Whitlock’s masterful webinar Courageous Dialogue](#).

Want to stimulate thought, discussion and best practices in courageous dialogue for faculty, staff and parents? See the model of [Professional Development](#) we have built and iterated on together at Montrose School and our [Curated Reading, Viewing and Listening Library](#) that can be integrated into your PD plan for the year.

Concerned about an upcoming conversation with a particular person or team? Review the guidelines and suggested questions in [7 Tips to Foster Recalibration](#).

Need to prepare for a meeting fraught with conflict? See the [PWF Meeting Protocol](#).

Eager to facilitate more ownership and agency in colleagues and students? See the [PWF Coaching Conversations Protocol](#).

The purpose of this Toolkit is to invite school leaders to be more intentional about modeling, coaching and teaching courageous dialogue. It is applicable to any organization, home or community group. Each of the tools in this Toolkit is backed by the experience of practitioners who have used them to help transform fear and division into opportunities to build courage and trust.

The Practical Wisdom Framework (PWF)TM

People often come to the metaphorical table (ie, classroom, staff or parent meeting), hot or apprehensive. When they show up to a meeting or class, for example, with fixed ideas that someone or some decision is wrong headed, they tend to remain closed, not open to dialogue. They can even put up walls or assert power and force. They are often not in a position to afford the other person or team the attention they deserve. At such an impasse, when authentic dialogue seems impossible, what is an educator to do?

As a veteran school leader, I can attest that when we find ourselves at an impasse, we need a little help to create space between our first reaction and a considered wise response. This is why the Practical Wisdom Framework (PWF) is instructive (Bohlin, 2021). *Courageous Dialogue* is one powerful application of the PWF, a mental model that helps leaders to press pause in real-time and create the intentional space we need to facilitate careful deliberation and dialogue. In brief, the steps of the PWF that follow help to both activate practical wisdom and foster courageous dialogue:

Acknowledge your own and others’ first reactions and practice reflective listening: *What I hear you saying is.... Is that accurate? Can you tell me more?*

Reflect on and evaluate aims: *What are we aiming at and why? What do we know? Need to know? Who can help?*

Recalibrate and course correct based on new understandings.
Respond: *What small steps can we take that are aligned with our refined understanding of shared aim(s)?*

With the PWF as a guide, we are receptive to and acknowledge others' subjective emotional positions; we put them at ease and build trust. When school leaders acknowledge our concerns and allow us to communicate them, we feel heard and honored. An effective leader, like a good host, welcomes

her interlocutors, takes an interest in them as persons, and introduces them to her guests, highlighting natural points of connection. That's what hospitality is all about, and creating a culture for courageous dialogue requires leaders to be exemplars of hospitality and practical wisdom.

Facilitating courageous dialogue creates trust and warmth, harnesses the energy of sustained inquiry and reflection, and generates the light of understanding and knowledge our school communities need to flourish.

For more information on the PWF, see Bohlin, K. The Practical Wisdom Framework: A Compass for School Leaders. *Journal of Education*. July 2021. doi:10.1177/00220574211028828 or contact Karen Bohlin at kbohlin@karenbohlin.com



Debate, Discourse & Dialogue

Practical Wisdom from Students

While many educators argue that we need to give more attention to teaching careful and rigorous reasoning, and others that we need to provide more training in debate, we argue that discourse, debate and dialogue are not mutually exclusive. A good education needs to embrace all three.

Debate: For years, I have asked high school students to talk to me about how we can reclaim dialogue in the public square. We begin by defining the public square and distinguishing the definitions of **debate**, discourse and dialogue. What follows are student responses. Here's how they describe **debate**

- Splits into two sides
- Advances competing agendas
- Pits what is correct against what is incorrect
- Includes measured arguments
- Requires claims supported by evidence

In the last several years, student responses have become less clear and more tentative. Their experience with "debate" is heavily informed by what they have seen and heard among politicians as well as media and social media commentators. And, even though their teachers prepare them in class for the principles and best practices of debate as outlined above, their examples associate **debate** with

- Insults
- Labels
- Jabs, mud slinging, potshots
- Grandstanding
- Talking-over
- Cutting people off

Discourse: They distinguish **discourse** from debate and define it as the type of exposition required to give a class, lecture or presentation. It involves writing, teaching and speaking that

- Gives a logical account
- Develops an argument
- Uses research and evidence

Dialogue: What do they say about **dialogue**? Their experiences vary, but collectively they inevitably arrive at the following descriptors

- Discussion between two or more people.
- It includes enjoyment and/or a purpose.
- It helps us to learn, to gain information, understanding or insight.
- It is a way to express feelings, opinions, views.
- It is more comfortable than debate or discourse.
- It requires openness to be effective.
- It communicates "I want to hear you" and "I hope to be understood."
- It is not just to provide arguments, answers or responses.
- It is an opportunity to listen and to be understood.

Fostering courageous dialogue in our classrooms and school communities helps to facilitate both thoughtful discourse and respectful debate.

Challenges and Opportunities School Leaders Face

Navigating our polarized political culture casts school leaders as firefighters trying to keep our school communities safe when hot spots emerge. Yet, as school leaders, our goal is to shift from neutralizing dangers toward maximizing flourishing. To make this shift, we can lead our school communities with courage to practice civic dialogue that advances trust and openness as well as dignity and fair-mindedness. But to reach this goal, we need to recognize the factors that contribute to our warming political climate. The polemics that characterize our media and social media rhetoric constantly inflame our culture. Notification systems on the phones we hold close and the screens that dominate our days keep us in an agitated state. As exposed so well in the Netflix documentary *The Social Dilemma* (Orlowski, 2020), technocrats use our search and scrolling data to compete for and direct our attention. We find ourselves retreating into silos with those who affirm our own views – to avoid the discomfort of exposure to “the other side.”



We tend to do the same when we navigate potential conflicts of views with others in our lives. We know *those people* in our family, among our friends, and in our community whose political views leave us concerned or irritated. And we are often hyper-vigilant when we encounter new people to scope out “where they stand” before we risk engaging in discussion about contentious issues. While our politically divisive culture plays out aggressively over screens, research shows that most people avoid direct conversations about divisive issues. Why? Because of fear. We fear upsetting others, having to deal

with others’ potential reactions, getting upset ourselves, and fracturing relationships. A 2020 Pew survey of over 12,000 Americans revealed that 50% completely avoid political discussions (Jerkowitz & Mitchell, 2020). Most of the other 50% share their political views selectively, among those they assume will agree (Gino, 2020). We also watch for clues as to where others stand, and among young people this includes checking on others’ social media posts. We are guarded and cautious, careful about whom to trust.

It’s as though we are forced to operate dual personas. We have our private world where we nurture our own convictions, and we share our views in hushed side-bar conversations or in our social media posts among those we consider allies. Then, we have our public-facing selves, where we politely avoid potential conflicts but secretly make judgments about who might be an ally and who might be an enemy. Our days are spent avoiding potential hot spots, while we let in flaming rhetoric through our screens—or perhaps add our own incendiary flares through online platforms—at a safe distance from face-to-face encounters.

The combination of interpersonal silence and exposure to unleashed polemics over screens has dangerous social costs. We live on an unstable plain, afraid of sparking the pent up anger that seems to lie beneath the surface of others’ views, which we imbibe through screens and avoid in conversations. The fear is real and pressing.

As school leaders, we observe the same patterns in school communities. We are constantly trying to extinguish sparks from parents, faculty, and students who reflect the political divide – and who often challenge us to “show” where we stand as a school on controversial issues. We try to maintain a politically neutral but humanely compassionate stance: We educate and we care, and we try not to take sides. School leaders also battle a climate of parent and community distrust

for teachers' political leanings and their influence over students (McMath, 2020). Faculty and administrators fear parents whose views may not align with their views. They fear being misinterpreted for comments they make in the classroom. When individuals perceive that their views do not align with the dominant culture of school communities, they can fall into a "spiral of silence," and they may suppress or distort their views for fear of social censure (Journell, 2017). But how do we really know others' views when we practice so much avoidance? What happens when we make judgments in this interpersonal vacuum charged with fear? And how do we stand up for our principles and learn from the competition of ideas?

FROM FEAR TO AVOIDANCE

School leaders are trying to manage a climate of general distrust while they are also called upon to promote dialogue, build community, and prepare students for engaged citizenship. The risks of engaging in dialogue seem many, and we see few public models of civil discourse to guide us. These problems often place school leaders in the position of risk managers.

Fear heightens caution. Research suggests that, in our politically divisive culture, people tend to exaggerate the emotional risks of engaging in political conversations across ideological divides, and people tend to view their perceived opponent's views as extreme, a trend which has been termed "false polarization" (Yeoman *et al.*, 2020). While these fears lead to avoidance, people also underestimate the potential for shared agreement (Dorison, Minson and Rogers, 2019). As school leaders, we have to be clear about who we are, what we stand for as an institution and why. We also have to take on the personal risks, safeguard our institution from others' judgment and distrust, and also protect the needs of diverse constituents.

THE NEED FOR COURAGE

Courage is the virtue that can help us bridge the gap between the fears that lead to avoidance and the goods that we need to promote. Courage empowers the will to overcome fear in order to promote more noble aims. Aristotle says that courage is the mean between the excess of fear or cowardice and the deficiency of fear or recklessness, and it takes practical wisdom to help



us identify the mean in specific contexts -- to target the noble aim, and push through fears that inflame or inhibit us. As school leaders, our aim is to build community amidst our diversity, to promote voices open to sharing their stories and principles, in order to foster an environment that promotes respectful and fair-minded dialogue in exploration of truth. As school leaders, we want to facilitate voices tempered by reflection -- to speak with respect in order to promote the common good. We want to honor the unique dignity of each individual, develop norms to affirm that all are treated with dignity, and ensure that we grow in understanding as we do the hard work of authentic community building. Reaching these aims for community flourishing takes practice. As school leaders, we are called upon to model the courage that we hope to inspire in our faculty and students, in order to promote true community and to foster engaged citizenship. Yet the challenges school leaders face are weighty, and the risks of engagement may seem hazardous.

OBSTACLES TO COURAGE

Avoiding politics and controversial issues may seem like the safest path forward, and there are reasonable principles that justify avoiding such dialogue. An abundant body of case law supports policies that encourage teachers not to reveal their political views to students, for public school teachers do not have free speech rights in the classroom; instead, their speech is "hired" by a school board (Underwood, 2017: pp 76-77). For teachers in private schools with religious affiliations, teachers are also inhibited in their speech because they are required to serve as "ministerial agents" of the school's mission (US Supreme Court, 2020: *Our Lady of Guadalupe v. Morrissey-Berru*). Schools are also under pressure to teach students how to practice civility in political discussions in order to prepare them for engaged and effective citizenship (McAvoy and Hess, 2011).

While all teachers must practice fair-mindedness

to facilitate student voices, research shows that the prescription that teachers should not disclose their own political views when engaging in class discussions is unrealistic. Teachers have to craft curriculum, and this process involves selecting materials, generating questions, and managing class discussion -- and all of these choices involve teachers practicing judgment informed by their own convictions (Journell, 2011). And, while teachers may try not to reveal their biases, diverse constituents continuously make judgments



about perceived teacher biases. School leaders know this all too well, from countless comments, emails, and meetings that bubble up at regular intervals -- and which often surround elections and moments of crisis. School leaders may be tempted to advise teachers to steer clear of controversial issues to safeguard them and the school from judgment, but the political climate is too hyper-charged to dodge these sparks. In addition, such avoidance undermines the call to prepare students to become engaged citizens.

Another justification that helps us avoid political dialogue is to rely on the claim that the school's aim is to promote tolerance. On the surface, tolerance seems like a noble aim, for we have to live alongside people with whom we disagree. But tolerance calls us merely to promote endurance, and perhaps a reluctant acceptance, that not everyone agrees. While we need to respect differences of perspective, the language of tolerance leaves us short of the goal for community flourishing. Ultimately, we need courage to build

community rather than shrink back behind dividing lines, which the veil of tolerance can mask. If we are to understand and build community with each other, we have to engage in deeper dialogue.

REACHING FOR HIGHER COMMUNITY AIMS

Aristotle says that every association “is a form of community” (*Politics* 1252.a). His term for community -- *koinonia* -- is an inclusive one that means “wherever individuals hold something in common.” Yet, communities, according to Aristotle, include both “a shared identity” and “heterogeneity” (Yack, 1985, p. 94). Likewise, a school organized around a clear mission establishes “a shared identity” while including a wide range of individuals of diverse perspectives. Aristotle establishes the role of communication as the means of exchange within communities:

The mere voice, it is true, expresses pain and pleasure ...but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the just and unjust; for it is the special property of man [we read human person] that he alone has perception of good and bad, just and unjust, and all other such things, and it is community in these things that makes a household or a polis (*Politics* 1253a).

In other words, two people can see the same thing but develop different perceptions and judgments. Through speech, we communicate our diverse perspectives; and through dialogue, we can reflect on and seek to understand the diversity of values and views that emerge in communities. By expanding the conversation, we can identify common ground as well as principled points of difference. By practicing dialogue strategies that promote dignity, we can build the kind of solid relationships that enable us to discover shared truths and respect each other despite our differences of opinion.

Aristotle affirms the role of friendship in building

Ultimately, for school communities to flourish, school leaders have to promote civic friendship, which acknowledges both a shared identity as well as differences of perception and judgment.

community: “the pursuit of a common social life is friendship” (*Politics* III.9.1980b29). For school communities to flourish, school leaders have to promote civic friendship, which acknowledges both a shared identity as well as differences of perception and judgment. Courageous dialogue is essential to nurturing the bonds of connection in order to promote greater understanding amidst our diversity.

LESSONS FROM US HISTORY

Forming citizens to live in a free republic remains a coherent legacy from our founding as a nation. When America first won its independence from the British monarchy, the emerging nation initiated a cultural revolution that preceded and followed the actual Revolution. As Bernard Bailyn emphasized in his signature 1967 study, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, the revolution was won in the hearts and minds of the people long before war broke out. Bailyn documented how the war was won through a vibrant reading public who circulated pamphlets and newspapers and gathered in taverns for energetic discussions. While the Constitution is a legal document that clarifies and binds our political institutions, engaged citizenship requires the ongoing work of spirited dialogue in inquiry -- that active work of developing hearts and minds. Parents and schools carry a responsibility to help form young people for engaged citizenship.

But this historical glimpse at America’s founding requires a broad lens on the past because new historical insights are continually unveiled as personal and family

narratives illuminate a more complex story about our experiences as Americans. This founding period was also built on exclusions, and there's much we need to learn in order to understand the long-term historical impact on those disenfranchised. Four hundred years ago, the first African slaves were brought in chains to the Virginia colony, and America -- in the words of former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice -- "was born with the birth defect of slavery." That birth defect remains visible. Over 230 years ago, after a Civil War with more casualties than any American war, chattel slavery was outlawed and African American men briefly won the right to vote in the Fifteenth Amendment. But states oversee voting, and segregation, terror, and other systematic efforts prevented most African Americans from voting until the Civil Rights Act of 1965. In addition to this lingering birth defect, men without property, women, some European immigrant groups, Asians, and Native Americans had to fight for the right to vote. Tracing the path toward voting rights is one of the most triumphant and tragic threads that weaves through American history. Many consider that the battle for greater inclusion in voting rights continues. And the good news is that our founders developed a system of government that has allowed us to work -- often peacefully and sometimes not so peacefully -- to "form a more perfect union" and to hold us accountable to the principles they established in the Declaration of Independence -- "that all are created equal...and are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

FROM COMMUNITY TO CIVIC FLOURISHING

These founding principles form a siren's call that remains ever before us as a nation, and this call remains an integral part of each school's mission. There are diverse responses to this call, some based on ideas but often grounded in experiences among Americans of different skin colors and ethnicities, as well as differences of access to educational and economic opportunities. Our rights as Americans come with a weighted history, and

we cannot pretend that there is one neutral history and experience of being an American.

Understanding our history and remaining open to learning from those with different experiences remains part of our responsibility as citizens -- as responsibilities always balance rights. We have much to learn about how we advance the common good. To define the good that we hold in common requires that we learn from diverse narratives to explore the complex truth of our history and our contemporary culture. By exploring diverse perceptions that underlie principled differences of judgment, we learn to temper our own assumptions and discover the common good.



Anyone who studies American history knows that the freedom to hold a plurality of views in the public square is one of the reasons behind our founding and a thread that follows through all of U.S. history -- it's nothing new. What's new is that we used to admire spirited dialogue, respectful disagreement and compromise -- the principled point of mediation among those with different views working toward incremental gains. Compromise does not signal a retreat from principle; compromise is a pragmatic, incremental step that embraces patience and respect for diverse views on what is good for our country.

Our school communities are places where students learn from the past in light of the present, where historic and contemporary voices are studied. Our classrooms and assembly halls are like the public

taverns of early America, where ideas are discussed, voices gain practice, and understanding develops over time. Schools are entrusted with educating students for democratic engagement, and we know that to learn well requires both instruction and practice. Refining our ability to listen and communicate in order to promote understanding and build community amidst diversity is how *e pluribus unum* plays out in school communities. Given the strains that our polarized politics and polemics-driven media and social media cause, there is an urgent need for schools to teach students how to deliberate well about both contentious and non-controversial issues, giving them the practice they need for effective civic engagement (Hess 2020).

As school leaders, we can model the courage that helps welcome the exchange of ideas. We can help guide our communities not to fear or demonize others' views. We can embrace these conversations so that we can build the relationships that enable us to find common ground and so we can remain open to truth as we practice civic engagement in our schools.

TEACHING DIALOGUE SKILLS TO BUILD TRUST

Studies reveal that those who engage in conversations that bridge political divides discover common ground and "feel closer to one another" (Gino, 2020). That growth in community bonds moves us toward the ideal of civic friendship. If the goal of community life is friendship, then learning how to communicate across differences in communities of shared purpose is essential to foster deeper connection in school communities and to prepare for engaged citizenship in a pluralistic society. Democracy also requires the free exchange of ideas, and patterns of reluctance to engage in dialogue undermine free and open discourse (Yeomans et al., 2020, p. 131; A Brooks, 2019, p. 104). Dialogue requires communication skills, a need that has only intensified with increased political polarization and social media influences that reduce dialogue and exacerbate polarization (Dorison, Minson and Rogers,

2019; A Brooks, 2019). Engaging in conversation is also essential for individual and community flourishing, as speech is the means of self-expression and interchange that helps us get to know others and enables others to get to know us.

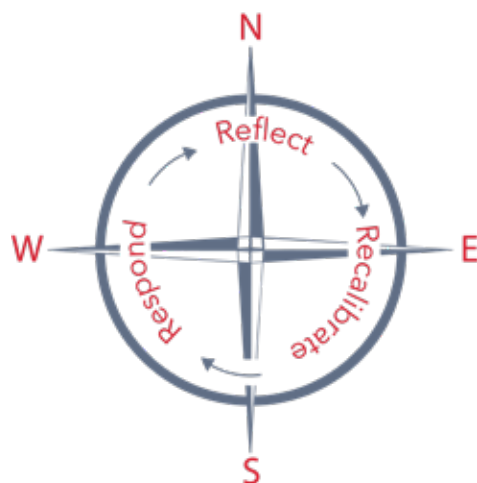
Learning how to manage this negotiation of self and others within school communities requires school leadership. As school leaders, we can shift from risk-managers to trust-builders to facilitate the conditions that enable school communities to express their fears, see that these fears are shared, and build norms to increase how safe community members feel to engage more courageously in face-to-face conversations. Ultimately, we need to revisit the pivotal work of Abraham Maslow's 1943 research on the hierarchy of human needs and remember that safety and security provide the requisite foundations for the trust essential to individual and community flourishing. The work of school leaders requires building safety and trust in order to create the conditions that encourage courageous dialogue.

As educators, we hold a sacred trust: schools must be dedicated to educating young people and preparing them for future citizenship in a democracy. Flourishing requires more than keeping our views to ourselves or tolerating others from afar. Flourishing requires building relationships and communities for civic friendship. Learning how to communicate courageously to foster dignity requires us to engage these challenges with practical wisdom.

THE PRACTICAL WISDOM FRAMEWORK (PWF)[™]

In her article, "The Practical Wisdom Framework: A Compass for School Leaders," Bohlin (2021) explains: "The Practical Wisdom Framework serves as a mental model, a leadership compass to help us navigate challenges and dilemmas with practical wisdom." Wise leaders know that, in moments of challenge, we face "stress tests of character," and we know that responding

with character requires courage and protocols that help us to pause and listen, be fair-minded, and remain open to learning and gain greater clarity on the truth.



As Bohlin states: “We can make small changes and build habits that help us to overcome our first reactions, create space for reflection and deliberation, and ultimately respond well to the tests of character we face.” The Practical Wisdom Framework (PFW) combines principles of character education with research on social-emotional learning as well as insights from psychology and neuroscience in “a few simple scaffolded steps to help leaders to move (themselves and others) from an

initial reaction to a reflective response” (Bohlin, 2021). Animated by courage and armed with practical wisdom, we can improve civic engagement in our schools and promote a culture where respect and dignity -- rather than fear, avoidance, judgment, and polemics -- prevail.

FINAL THOUGHTS

School leaders face significant challenges as they negotiate our highly-charged political climate. While managing risks to avoid hot spots may seem like the safest path forward, the reality is that a plurality of political viewpoints should be welcome in our school communities. As leaders, we are called to reflect on our formative aims as an educational institution: to promote individual and community flourishing in schools and to support democratic citizenship. To reach our aim requires the courage to acknowledge our fears, develop shared norms, and practice dialogue strategies that respect dignity, build trust, and foster civic friendship within our school communities. With the help of the Practical Wisdom Framework and resources within this Toolkit, we can create the conditions critical to support courageous dialogue and help our communities flourish.

For more information on the PFW, see Bohlin, K. The Practical Wisdom Framework: A Compass for School Leaders. *Journal of Education*. July 2021. doi:10.1177/00220574211028828 or contact Karen Bohlin at kbohlin@karenbohlin.com

Professional Development

Strategies to Promote Courageous Dialogue

As school leaders, we know only too well how fragile the adult workplace can feel amidst a divisive political climate. Yet, in the absence of open dialogue, teachers too can devolve into enclaves of shared political views or retreat into “spirals of silence” if they perceive that their political views are out of alignment with the dominant school community. Fear of administrators, parents, and other constituents leave teachers reluctant to trust. The legal climate contributes to teacher caution, in their roles as employees of school boards. As school leaders, we need to facilitate opportunities to build trust among faculty in order to create a climate where adults can express their fears and questions about engaging in controversial issues. Ultimately, adults need to have practice to name their own fears and to establish norms that build trust in order to develop a school culture that promotes courageous dialogue.

As school leaders, we work to establish a collegial culture. Establishing patterns of reflective practice among colleagues can have an equalizing effect among those who serve in diverse hierarchical roles (Tsang, 2007: p. 683). Colleagues share an intimate understanding of the school culture, and they can provide support and insight for navigating the complexities of political discussions. It sometimes takes courage for a school leader to break through “the shroud of silence” that occurs in some school cultures, but colleagues can give us new insight into ourselves (Brookfield, 1995: p. 34-36). Through collaboration, for example, teachers can help administrators uncover potential misperceptions that can form in the absence of direct dialogue (Brookfield, 1995: p. 36).

The following professional development workshop activities highlight a “community of practice model,” which emphasizes the value of a group of practitioners sharing insights to innovate practice (Kennedy, 2014: p. 345). In this model, teachers work collaboratively to reflect on their practice in light of institutional goals, with the expectation that all are equal in an enterprise

that seeks to identify fears, develop shared norms, and establish a supportive environment for courageous dialogue.

1. OPENING ACTIVITY: NAMING AND SETTLING EMOTIONS

The first task is to create an anonymous survey to help teachers reflect on their own emotions about engaging students or peers in dialogue and to assess how aligned or misaligned they feel in relation to the school mission and culture. The private space to reflect creates a safe avenue to open discussion. After completing the survey, teachers could contribute anonymously to a Wordle (wordle.com), in which they input words or phrases to describe their emotions about engaging in such discussions. This app can be generated live on a monitor and provides a collective way for people to see their views among others’ views, thus opening the discussion in an organic way because the responses are visible to all.

2. SMALL AND LARGE GROUP REFLECTION: In small groups, teachers share how they feel about responding to questions in the survey, and then groups decide what to share in the larger group discussion to follow. Inviting people to talk in smaller groups before engaging in larger groups gives them time to reflect, honors diverse temperaments, and prevents a few voices from dominating (Tuttle, 2021). Guided questions include:

- *What experiences have you had discussing controversial issues at school, and what have you found challenging about engaging in such discussions?*
- *In discussions with students, how do you facilitate students sharing and exploring their views while holding and refining your own?*

3. ACTIVITY TO DEVELOP SHARED NORMS Ask teachers to form new groups, each equipped with a giant post-it note, and invite them to reflect on what, in their experience, “respectful, courageous dialogue” and “open to learning” looks like and sounds like. Invite them to distill these ideas

as a group and propose shared norms for facilitating discussions about controversial topics. Ask each group to present their ideas with the full group and look for points of alignment. At the end, invite a volunteer from each group to join forces and create a pared-down consensus list.



Additional activity: Ask the faculty and staff to read three chapters from Arthur C. Brooks *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America from Our Culture of Contempt* (2019): Chapter Four (“How can I love my enemies if they are immoral?”), Chapter Six (“Tell me a story”), and Chapter Eight (“Please disagree with me”) and identify practical takeaways in terms of a) what we do well as a school community; b) what we can start; c) what we should discontinue or be mindful of avoiding.

4. REFLECT ON AIMS & SCHOOL MISSION: Invite the faculty and staff to gather in small groups to read the school mission with the goal of identifying words or phrases that could serve as guideposts for courageous dialogue. Ask each group to present their insights to the whole group.



Added challenge: Rather than end the discussion with a fragmented list, ask each group to craft a story in which they develop a plot line to organize the principles and practices generated by their group. Crafting a story helps order the principles and animates prescribed action.

5. USING PWF PROTOCOLS: [The Practical Wisdom Coaching Conversations Protocol](#) or [Practical Wisdom Meeting Protocol](#) involves a series of structured questions to foster practical wisdom in context or the heat of the moment, when it is more difficult to press pause and deliberate well (Bohlin, June 2021).

6. EXIT TICKET: Invite each teacher or staff member to use small post-it notes of different colors to jot down their key takeaways and post them onto three different boards: “Something to reflect-on goal,” “Personal next-step goal,” and/or a “Suggested next-step goal for the school.” Share a Google document that captures the aggregate of the three lists and invite additional input.

7. FOLLOW-UP: Administer a pre-test and post-test survey to help gauge how the professional development affected faculty understanding of courageous dialogue, feelings toward them; and level of confidence about engaging in courageous dialogue. Share the [Curated Viewing, Listening and Reading Library](#).

Student Case Study

In early October 2020, when the US presidential election season was roiling in the news and throughout social media, I announced our upcoming civics unit to my 11th grade students with my characteristic enthusiasm, hoping to prime their excitement for this new learning adventure. Yet, an uneasy quiet settled over the room. I noticed shifting eyes and squirming in seats. The next day, I gave them an anonymous survey to help them reflect on their emotions about discussing politics. One student commented as she was leaving: "Wow, you could have heard a pin drop in the room."

The survey revealed that the primary emotion students associate with discussing politics is fear. Students revealed that they feared being judged by others, and they feared adding social strains over perceived political differences. Because of such fear, they largely avoided direct conversations about politics. These students' responses confirm national trends, and it resonated through the muted keyboard clicks in my classroom, when students took that initial survey.

Nevertheless, my students are charged up about politics, and they communicate frequently about politics -- but at what they consider a safe distance -- through social media. In a follow-up survey, I discovered that 67% of my students made assumptions about other students' political views based on social media posts, and only one student indicated that she based her perceptions about another student's political views on a direct conversation. What students are not saying at school, they are posting online; and social media becomes the outlet for their self-suppressed voices. Through online platforms, my students told me that they find people who agree and share their views in large networks of like-minded peers. Clustering into silos of those who share their views also includes making judgments about those perceived as opposed. One student shared her fears and frustrations about discussing politics: "I've been frustrated by my friends' harsh reactions and their tendency to vent about other people's political views, regardless of whether I agree with them or not. It makes me feel like, if I were to have a conversation about politics and we were to



disagree even a little, they wouldn't consider me a good friend anymore." Another student reported: "It's hard to be open...it can be hard not to worry about others' opinions of you."

The interplay between adolescents' desire for acceptance from their peers and the dominance of social media in peer relations (Chen and Rohla, 2018) takes on added complexity in a politically-charged but conversationally-silent climate. Students in my class reported feeling pressure to like and repost political messages, and others reported that they interpreted some peers' silences or non-political posts as insensitive to political issues. Adolescents are trying to form their political principles in a highly charged social media

culture (Spies, Shapiro and Margolin, 2014). While reluctant to speak openly, student comments fly freely over digital platforms. What they often forget is that their posts are public, and their peers view their posts. In the absence of direct conversations, the potential for misjudgment inferred from social media behavior is high. Perceived sides form in this conversation vacuum. Much devolves into the safe distance of peer enclaves and social media outlets.

When school leaders do not address the social fears and issues that inflame political wills, student divisions are pushed out of view -- and out of the reach of adults who can help.

COURAGEOUS DIALOGUE STRATEGIES

1. Get to the heart of emotions first. As the preceding narrative reveals, I have discovered that acknowledging emotions as legitimate first reactions actually makes space for thoughtful reflection (Bohlin and Kris, 2018 and Bohlin 2021). This first step allows us to teach dialogue strategies to help form adolescents in principles for civic virtue and provides them with the practical habits that can contribute to courage for political dialogue. The day after my students filled out that pre-unit survey, I broadly acknowledged their fears, and the students opened up and gradually settled into the process of reflecting on and discussing their fears. Providing a safe way for students to release their individual fears -- and see that their fears are shared by others -- helped settle their emotions, increase trust and promote readiness for thoughtful dialogue and study.

2. Provide models to inspire. Following the naming of emotions, students viewed the [TED talk "How our Friendship Survives our Opposing Politics"](#) (Quattromani

[and Arledge, 2017](#)), which provided a concrete model of two friends who worked through their polarized political views to strengthen their friendship through courageous dialogue. This video primed the students to visualize a higher aim: that they could nurture friendships if they pushed past fear and engaged each other courageously. Their excitement surged as they left class that day.

3. Collaborate on discussion norms. The next day, the students engaged in discussions with smaller groups to develop class norms to help them feel safer and more confident engaging in courageous dialogue. I posed the question: *What principles will facilitate discussions that promote community flourishing?* And they made lists on giant post-it notes spaced throughout the room. Each small group reported, and we culled from these ideas to create a list of actionable classroom norms. They agreed on the classroom norms listed below, which we posted in the classroom.



1. Disagree with ideas, not people (respect people - no personal attacks).
2. Don't put people in a box or make assumptions.
3. Show the same respect inside and outside the classroom.
4. Use reflective listening, and ask questions to understand, not to persuade.
5. Resolve tensions as quickly as possible.
6. Assume good intentions and look for common ground.
7. Don't invalidate or dismiss others' opinions or views.
8. Be calm and settle your emotions.
9. Don't interrupt or talk over anyone else.
10. Be patient - let everyone voice their thoughts and opinions before moving on.
11. Be aware of your body language.
12. Be self aware and hold yourself accountable.

As Election Day drew closer, I pulled out the list of class norms and posed the question: "So, how are we doing with our classroom norms outside class?" I read each norm and paused for reflection. The mood was much lighter, and students laughed openly. One girl reported: "To tell you the truth, I'd give us a D+ at best." Chuckles and nods followed. While her assessment was not encouraging, the more open and brightened tone of the class gave me hope that we had shifted from dread and avoidance to a climate of improved trust.

4. Teach Dialogue Strategies. Students read and discussed Arthur C. Brooks' 2019 book, *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America from Our Culture of Contempt*, as the principal text to learn dialogue strategies. We looked closely at both the

community-building principles behind these strategies and practical approaches to enhance consensus-building through conversation. Brooks encourages Americans to seek out those with diverse views and to engage in discussions with "love and respect," guided by dialogue strategies such as the following:

- Tell personal stories to increase social bonding.
- Welcome diverse perspectives by showing curiosity for others' views by asking questions aimed to understand.
- Understand Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt, 2012) and the role of compassion and fairness to find common ground in political conversations.
- "Practice warm-heartedness" (Brooks, p. 40) amidst conflicts to keep the goal of relationship-building above ideology in such conversations.

Reading and discussing this book as a class led to a marked increase in student hopefulness that the strategies Brooks offered could help them develop more courage for political dialogue. I administered pre- and post-unit surveys to assess how developing discussion norms and learning dialogue strategies affected their courage to engage in courageous dialogue. Our civics unit ended on Election Day 2020, and a post-unit survey revealed that 100% of my students reported growth in dialogue skills and 76.5% reported increased courage for political dialogue. I ended the unit with such a high. Job well done. File that unit away, and move onto the research papers.

EPILOGUE

Two months later, during the week I had devoted to research paper revisions, we were all glued to television screens watching an angry crowd storm and desecrate the Capitol. We felt shock, indignation, and fear for the upcoming inauguration. I also learned through the student grapevine that emotions and tensions were soaring among pockets of peers over reactions to social media posts.

At first, I felt frustrated and thought: *Do we have to go*



back to step one with each new crisis? But, eventually, I settled my own emotions and reminded myself: *These are kids. Asking them to become reasonable agents of civic dialogue is an awful lot -- especially when adults in America are so publicly not living up to this standard.* To counter the fragmented exchanges on social media, I gathered the class over Zoom two days after the events at the Capitol, to create a place to share emotions and perspectives and to facilitate authentic dialogue using the [Practical Wisdom Meeting Protocol](#). After that Zoom session, students expressed gratitude for this opportunity to break down perceived divides. They made an action plan too: to use the Bipartisan student club as a venue for mediated dialogue, and I offered my help.

BUILDING A SCHOOL CULTURE FOR COURAGEOUS DIALOGUE

It has become clear to me that empowering student courage for authentic dialogue, during adolescence, requires ongoing adult support. The theme of courageous dialogue continues to reverberate throughout the student body. A student newspaper article included this comment by the writer:

"Courageous dialogue teaches us how to have disagreements peacefully. One political conversation can't break the relationship. Well, the same goes with our community and with our nation...Getting angry is

natural – but holding onto hatred is toxic. Remember that, though we are individuals with differing beliefs, we are a nation of people who must act with love. How do our courageous dialogues mend our current broken bridges? By listening. By having empathy."

While our courageous dialogue initiatives have inspired students, challenges remain. As one student told me: "You covered everything we needed to know about how to have a respectful conversation, and...we did gain some courage. Now that we completed this unit, I'm not afraid to share my political beliefs, but I will most likely not go up to an individual and start a conversation."

Ultimately, I learned that this work of building a more civil civic culture remains ongoing; and, like so much work in education, short-term measures are insufficient to assess impact. While schools can work to create nurturing environments to help civic culture flourish, the larger political culture continues to rage outside and through digital screens. Ultimately, we have to remember that adolescents are young shoots, who, though nurtured by our efforts, are affected by countless other environmental factors. Our students need time to grow, and they need the help of school leaders to support them with attentive care and abundant patience.

A PWF Model for Crisis Communications

Amidst a worldwide COVID pandemic where over half a million Americans died, and citizens' lives were disrupted by quarantine and economic strains, we have been forced to confront racial attacks, political violence, and an on-going immigrant crisis. Our students and their families have faced countless "stress-tests of character" ([Kris and Bohlin, 2020](#)), including personal losses and traumas, while our nation continues to assess our trust in political leaders and systems to ensure justice for all Americans. Schools remain at the epicenter of how local communities help children make sense of these contemporary crises in light of our history and hopes as a nation.

As school leaders, these events place us in the position of crisis managers. Whether you are using the *Courageous Dialogue Toolkit* to help you navigate a crisis or not, the ultimate goal is to establish a school culture committed to facilitating dialogue in order to foster deeper community bonds built on respect for dignity and shared character aims. In the process, school leaders help their constituents develop a vision for the common good and provide a hopeful path forward to civic friendship and community flourishing.

Crises elicit emotional reactions. Our brains and bodies are wired to protect us from dangers. When the senses perceive danger, this data activates the amygdala and hippocampus and triggers fight-flight-freeze responses. Our complex limbic system stores memories of what we fear and locks in associations to remind us when dangers emerge. Exposure to stimuli that trigger such emotions -- as well as active avoidance of such stimuli -- keep the brain in a state of danger-readiness. Given our primal tendency to remain alert before perceived danger, consider the effect of media and social media notification systems -- which bathe us in a steady state of fear-inducing stimuli. Our first step as school leaders is to honor first emotional reactions in a non-judgmental way, to encourage reflection and guide recalibration and response aligned with

the common good.

As school leaders, we have a responsibility to facilitate ways constituents can name and settle first reactions in order to pave the way for thoughtful conversation. The following examples show how one school used the Practical Wisdom Framework to respond to the racial crisis exacerbated by the death of George Floyd in May 2020 and to the political crisis reflected in the storming of the capitol in January 2021.

A MODEL FOR ALL-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION.

Just after the death of George Floyd in May of 2020, the Head of School wrote a letter to all constituents: parents, faculty, staff and students. The letter modeled courage, empathized with first reactions, and raised sights toward higher aims to engender hope. The excerpts below highlight a three-step blueprint for crisis-response:

Acknowledge first reactions with empathy. *"I am grieving. So many are suffering in the wake of George Floyd's death...."*

Connect school mission to aims. *"Our mission calls us to respect the dignity and value of every person. We talk about it every day, but it is not something we can ever take for granted. Asking and responding to the big questions --What does it mean to be human? To be free and to flourish? What is required of each of us to build a just society? --are at the heart of our program."*

Instill hope. *"What gives me hope is all of you. We have the power to make a difference. Learning to love, as St. Thomas Aquinas put it, is about "willing the good of the other." This is our moment of decision, of resolve to love authentically."*

Following up on this communication, the Management Team used the [Practical Wisdom Coaching Conversations Protocol](#) to engage all the stakeholders --parents, faculty, and students--in individual and small group conversation. The process

of engaging others and acknowledging their first reactions fostered empathy and trust. It opened the way for shared reflection and dialogue about what we know, what we need to know, and who and what resources can be helpful to us in making sense of a complex and sensitive situation. See also the [Faculty Professional Development Workshop](#) for more ideas.

FACILITATING RECALIBRATION: STUDENT CASE STUDY

When school leaders model courageous dialogue with faculty and staff, they equip them to guide students. In the section that follows we offer two models of crisis response led by teachers. For more details, see the [Student Case Study](#).

EMAIL COMMUNICATION

After the death of George Floyd in May 2020, while students were at home in COVID quarantine, a teacher who taught history and English wrote the following email to her students:

I'm inviting all those who studied the history of African Americans in US History and our race unit in AP Lang & Comp to open up this email thread as a dialogue. You are emerging voters, and you've learned a lot this year. This moment in history is painful, and it must be examined fully in order to help us understand and know how to respond in our hearts to what we hear in the news. You can dialogue with me by just replying or with your class through a reply all, in which I will also engage in the discussion.

The teacher explained why she chose to use a group email as a first-response: "I reached out to students because I knew they were talking in siloed pockets of social media, and it was vital that they learned how to dialogue in real time." Eight of 19 students replied to the email thread, and several students first emailed the teacher individually and later the full group after she encouraged the students to practice strategies they'd

learned in class to be courageous in dialogue.

AD-HOC ZOOM GATHERING

Two days after the storming of the Capitol on January 6, 2021, when the US Senate had gathered to ratify the 2020 presidential election results, a teacher learned that student tensions were building over social media posts. She immediately reached out to her class to establish a Zoom meeting to facilitate face-to-face conversation. She used the PWF to help students:



ACKNOWLEDGE EMOTIONAL FIRST REACTIONS

Students posted their first emotional reactions in the Zoom chat, and the teacher facilitated discussion about the shared concerns raised. This process helped students settle their emotions and see that others shared their concerns. A sample of student comments about first emotional reactions: "Shocked, horrified, angry, scared, and confused."

REFLECT ON HIGHER AIMS

The teacher then asked the students to reflect on what patterns they saw by reading the first reactions of their classmates. Through this reflective process, students discovered common ground and higher aims. Comments included:

"Unity that what happened was a disgrace to the country, unity that we can all agree that what happened shouldn't ever happen again."

"We should be aiming for civil discussion and respect for the freedom of speech and expression despite the point on the political spectrum a person lands."

RECALIBRATE & RESPOND

The teacher asked the students to reflect on what next steps they could take as a school community to foster

more face-to-face communication. Over the next weeks, students prioritized promoting courageous dialogue through student government initiatives, hosted a poetry discussion that focused on the message of hope in Amanda Gorman's poem "The Hill We Climb," and made plans to host topic-focused discussions through the Bipartisan club.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

To be effective crisis managers, we, as school leaders, can accompany both the faculty and students to help

them develop a culture that encourages all constituents to engage in courageous dialogue. In these short crisis-response scenarios, the school leader initiates communication to acknowledge first reactions and rally the community around higher aims. The teacher who gathers her students encourages them to recalibrate and bring courageous dialogue into the broader school community. These shared practices provide a window into ways educational leaders can build a culture of courageous dialogue that turn crises into opportunities for community learning and growth.



Courageous Dialogue: What are we aiming at?

How Do You Approach Subjects that Require Courageous Dialogue?

WHAT IS MY FIRST REACTION?

I feel contempt for certain perspectives

I avoid engagement out of fear of conflict

What are we aiming at? Engaging in courageous dialogue to promote individual and community flourishing.

What do we know?

- Our culture and communities are diverse.
- When people hold strong convictions, they often distrust others with opposing views and often only open up if they are assured the other already agrees with them. The opposite is also true: in the absence of clear understanding of where another person stands, people tend to make assumptions.
- Respecting diverse views and building a country that promotes courageous dialogue is good for our culture and our republic.

What do we need to know?

- How do we model courage in dialogue?
- How do we promote the virtues of courage, fair mindedness, empathy, compassion, and love through such dialogue?

Who can help?

See the [Curated Viewing, Reading & Listening Library](#) for a collection of excellent resources useful in promoting courageous dialogue.

Educator's role: To facilitate courageous dialogue

We need to engage in and promote courageous dialogue among students to fulfill three guiding principles:

- Honor the dignity of human persons.
- Build a flourishing community.
- Facilitate student reflection to help students develop the habits that promote practical wisdom (reflection, recalibration, and response) and that help them practice how to use their freedom responsibly.

Habits to Cultivate for Courageous Dialogue

COURAGE

To engage in dialogue and be willing to learn from others. To overcome fear to pursue what is good and right.

HUMILITY

To be willing to admit what we do not know and understand. To appreciate that we cannot know what it is like to see through each person's lens or walk in their experiences.

OPENNESS

Open to inquiry, study, listening, dialogue and wise counsel. Openness to refining one's perspective based on compelling evidence and reasons from reliable sources. Willingness to admit mistakes.

FAIR-MINDEDNESS

To research, listen, consider and question all perspectives in an unprejudiced manner.

PATIENCE

To trust the process of reflection and discovery, allowing students to develop ownership of learning as they wrestle with challenges and practice building trust.

LOVE

To love our students, their families, our colleagues, and to listen and explore ideas with attention and respect, whether we agree with them or not.

Why Courageous Dialogue is Vital to Civic Culture

To build a culture of courageous dialogue, we need to model, coach and teach it. This section provides a brief overview of the [webinar](#) by the same title, which provides a robust first point of engagement for professional development in courageous dialogue.



Courageous Dialogue

What it is, why it matters, and how to promote it.

Can we talk? In this election year, can we pause and reflect on how we are preparing our own children and students for civic life? When our children and students look back on this time, what will they remember about our words and actions? What is the pattern of comments, the nature of dialogue in our homes and classrooms? What legacy in civics are we advancing?

TIDY BOXES, FUNNY MEMES, AND THE CULTURE OF CONTEMPT

When we talk about our political culture, we have a tendency to think broadly: our contentious political leaders, our gridlock legislature, the liberal vs conservative leanings of US Supreme Court justices. And we talk about media bias. This leads us to use global, reductive language, such as “the system,” or to use superlatives such as “all” democrats or “all” republicans. When we point fingers at others’ bad behavior, we often wring our hands and sometimes rage about how others are getting it wrong. But by pointing at others, we lose sight of our personal responsibility.

We also have a tendency to reduce other people to tidy boxes. We make assumptions based on a comment we heard or read on social media or other clues we interpret. We have scientific brains, and we like to sort, organize, categorize -- and ultimately create a container to hold all the information we associate with a person or group. It makes us feel like we are in greater control,

too. But such reductive thinking diminishes each individual’s human dignity. The assumptions we make about others also form the roots of prejudice.

In addition, we are immersed in an emotionally-charged social media and comedy culture that keeps us high on sarcasm and contempt: the more clever and cruel the better. Arthur Brooks -- author of *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America From the Culture of Contempt* (2019) -- calls this the “outrage industrial complex,” and he documents studies that prove that these emotionally-charged experiences hit us like a surge of dopamine -- and it’s addictive.

I also love a good laugh. I appreciate free speech, and I recognize that politicians are ready targets for satire. But sometimes I wonder if there’s a secret middle school bully or bystander in too many of us, because it seems so easy to join in when others dehumanize our politicians and mock them without boundaries. If we can become numb to violence by constant exposure to violence on screens and in video games, can’t we become numb to psychological cruelty, too, through constant exposure?

Generalizing the problem, putting others in boxes, getting dopamine hits by immersing ourselves in the culture of contempt -- these patterns can blind us to the ways we add to

divisiveness in our society. Moving from such cacophony to “we the people” seems impossible. When it comes to politics, our expectations are often low. Rather than expect people to demonstrate their best humanity, we anticipate their worst. And sadly, we let ourselves join

in. **But, we can do better.**

Our children and students need us to do better. Here are some tips that can help us engage with others rather than minimize them.

STRATEGIES FOR COURAGEOUS DIALOGUE

Step 1: Start with emotional awareness and empathy. Be patient. As a teacher who regularly discusses charged issues in my history and literature courses, I’ve learned that I need to recognize non-judgmentally the emotions of others first, and give them the time and space to settle those emotions, before we can engage in rational reflection. Emotions are powerful, and you can’t rush that time-table by pushing out facts and arguments; these can feel like weapons shot at a vulnerable person, when someone is emotionally charged.

Step 2: Model openness and curiosity. Be patient. We need to facilitate others’ voices by asking questions that demonstrate our openness to learn from them, and use reflective language to make sure we’ve understood their views accurately. Aim to understand. When you offer an opinion, start with common ground (e.g. “We both worry about racism in our country. I hear that you think the problem is x, and I’ve been thinking a lot about y problem too. What do you think?”) Keep engaging by prompting with questions, rather than shutting the door with a firm end-point statement. Think of each discussion as a first discussion, not as a last-chance discussion. Keep the door open for more conversation.

Step 3: Keep the ultimate, long-term values in view. Be patient. In any given conversation, you must affirm the others’ inherent dignity. You need to strengthen your relationship with that person by affirming them through

the care and courage you demonstrate through this exchange. Reflect as the discussion goes on: “Is this a good time to share my views, or is it better to wait?”

Ultimately, we have to remember that we are part of many teams, but we have a greater unity -- broadly speaking as Americans contributing to a shared civic culture. When we engage with other Americans in political discussions, we carry the responsibility of “we the people” in our hands -- through our voices, in our body language, and through our screens.

Step 4: Respect human freedom and American pluralism. As Americans, as well as those in diverse faith traditions, we recognize that our freedom is essential to our dignity. Freedom is messy; and the fact that each individual is free means that we can disagree. As individuals, we have the right to our own conscience and we have a responsibility to act on our convictions. But we also live amidst other free people, and we have to respect that they too have a right of conscience. One of the most destructive implications of vitriolic comments made by members of both parties in our super-charged political culture is the assumption that the best solution is to eliminate the views of the other party.

But an election is not a process of elimination; it’s a fragile consensus amidst a nation filled with people who do not agree -- and who will never fully agree. We have

a diverse culture, and we have diverse perspectives on what is best for our nation. We will always have this diversity, and this diversity is good.

Arthur Brooks reminds us that the competition of ideas is essential in a democracy. We should embrace rather than resist this competition. We should facilitate dialogue and not avoid, shut down, or shout over others.

Anyone who studies American history knows that diversity of views on core principles has been part of our founding and a thread that follows through ALL of US history; it's nothing new. What's new is that we used to admire compromise -- the principled point of

mediation among those with different views working toward incremental gains. Compromise does not signal a retreat from principle; compromise is a pragmatic, incremental step that models patience and respect for diverse views on what is good for our country.

Welcome the exchange of ideas. Don't fear or demonize others' views. Embrace these conversations so that we can build the relationships that enable us to find common ground and so we can remain open to truth. For, if the truth will set us free, we must allow the free exchange of ideas for all truth to surface. We have much to learn.





A Curated Reading, Viewing and Listening Library

ARTICLES

[We Have to Bridge our Divides. My Uncle Reminded Me How to Begin](#), by Terry Tempest Williams, *Boston Globe Magazine*

[Building Trust Across the Political Divide: The Surprising Bridge of Conflict](#) by April Lawson

[Nine Non-Obvious Ways to Have Deeper Conversations](#), by David Brooks, *New York Times*
[What Unites Us](#), A Washington Post Interactive

[The Ginsburg-Scalia Act Was Not a Farce: There is a lot for us to learn, not just from their friendship, but from their intellectual combat](#), by Jennifer Senior, *New York Times*

[Toxic Polarization: The Numbers](#), by the Listen First Project

[After Votes Are Counted, What Will It Take To Reconcile The Country?](#) NPR interviews Eric Liu
[Bipartisanship Isn't for Wimps, After All](#), by Arthur Brooks, *New York Times*

[4 Tips for Talking to People You Disagree With](#), by Megan Phelps-Roper, TED Ideas

[How two Great Friends overcame Politics](#), by Peggy Noonan, *Wall Street Journal*, July 2, 2021.

VIDEOS AND PODCASTS

[TED Talk- How Our Friendship Survives Our Opposing Politics](#) by Caitlin Quattromani and Luran Arledge

[TED Talk - How to Have a Voice and Lean Into Conversations About Race](#), by Amanda Kemp

[TED Talk- The Danger of a Single-Story Narrative](#), by Chimamanda Adichie

[TED Talk- Take "The Other" Out to Lunch](#), by Elizabeth Lessor

[TED Talk- Declare Dignity: Donna Hicks](#)

[TED Talk- How to Have Constructive Conversations](#), by Julia Dhar

[ListenFirst Friday Inspirations](#): A collection of videos of people sharing their efforts to "positively connect across differences with folks they naturally encounter and in more intentional conversations."

[Netflix - The Social Dilemma](#)

[2020 Election: Where Do We Go from Here?](#) Montrose School Podcast

[Let's Talk About Race](#) Montrose School Podcast



A Curated Reading, Viewing and Listening Library

TEACHING GUIDES

[Dialogic Teaching](#)

[Teaching your students Effective Conversations Skills](#)

[Difficult Dialogues](#)

[Teaching the Art of Civic Dialogue](#)

[3 Steps for Civil Discourse in the Classroom](#)

[Students Learn to Put "Civil" in Civic Discourse](#)

[Civil Discourse in the Classroom](#)

As a school or curriculum team, build your own library of resources!



Guiding Questions

Using Film to Explore Courageous Dialogue

Film clips provide a wonderful opportunity to explore how individuals navigate difficult conversations – sometimes with courage and understanding but sometimes with fear and judgment. By watching screen depictions of conversations, students can take a step back and analyze a moment from an emotionally safe distance – and then explore how what they have learned can be incorporated into real-world interactions.

After you identify a moment of “courageous dialogue” in a film clip -- such as one from one of the films below – engage students in critical thinking with guiding questions such as these:

Determine Context:

- What is the context of this film clip?
- What internal and external factors contributed to this moment/situation?
- What are the external and internal conflicts or tensions in the story?
- How do characters respond to these challenges?

Imagine First Reactions: Imagine you were in this situation.

- What initial reactions would be understandable under the circumstances?
- What emotions might a person experience?
- When watching the film, what were your first impressions of the relevant characters and the situation at hand?

Motivation:

- What might be guiding each individual’s decision making and why?
- What hopes, fears, beliefs, aims, or assumptions are they bringing with them to the conversation?

Identify Courageous Dialogue:

- Describe the scene or scenes that best exemplify a courageous dialogue.
- How does the interaction play out (consider rewatching the scene, reviewing the script from the scene, or even having the students reenact the scene)?
- What do each person’s words, actions, and attitudes reveal about their character?

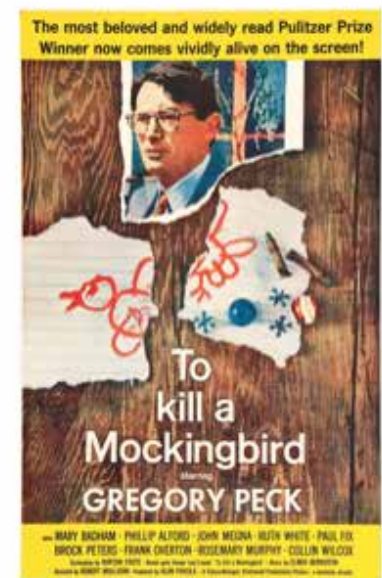
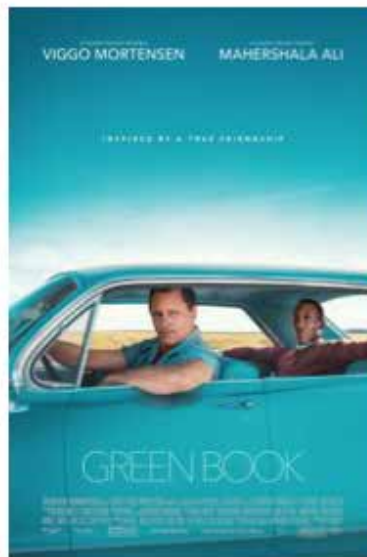
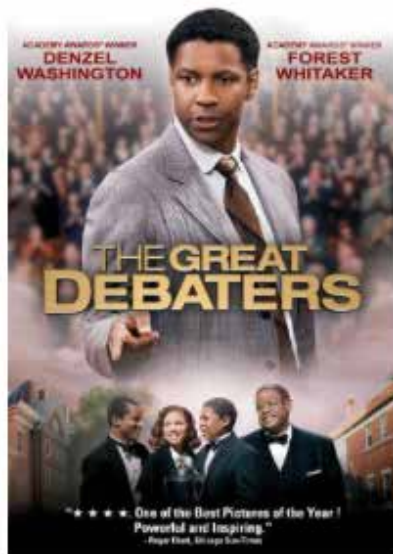
Character Strengths:

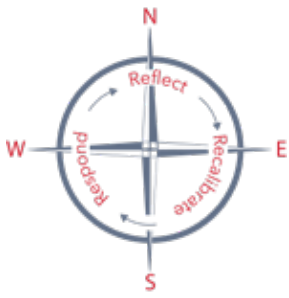
- In this situation, what virtues/strengths are being tested?
- What virtues/strengths would they need to make the best possible decision?

Explore Alternate Responses:

- How could this scene have played out differently – for better or worse?
- What were the array of possible choices the characters had in front of them – and what would be the potential consequences of each?

Sample Films That Highlight Courageous Dialogue Around Race





A Practical Wisdom Meeting Protocol

Rooted in the theoretical underpinnings of the Practical Wisdom Framework (Bohlin 2021), Bohlin and Kris created a professional protocol for responding to conflict with practical wisdom, especially in meetings, when it is challenging to bring all parties into constructive dialogue.

RESPONDING TO CONFLICT WITH PRACTICAL WISDOM: A FACULTY/STAFF PROTOCOL

1. Remember to practice reflective listening. Honor all stakeholders' first reactions and offer empathy: *I hear you. That's tough. I can understand why you feel hurt, frustrated, confused, disappointed, etc. It sounds like you feel (emotion) because (situation). Adopt an attitude of curiosity:*

- *Help me understand how you see the situation. I heard you say _____. Am I hearing you correctly? Can you tell me more about that?*
- *What bothers you the most about this right now? If you had a magic wand, what would you change?*

2. Reflect. In advance of the meeting, seek clarity and context on the situation. During the meeting, interact in a way that honors the dignity of each participant.

- *What do we know? What do we need to know? Who has the expertise to help us understand the people or issues?*
- *What are the different individuals/constituencies aiming at?*
- *What questions do we need to ask to get to the same page?*

3. Recalibrate. Establish common ground – an aim or “high point.”

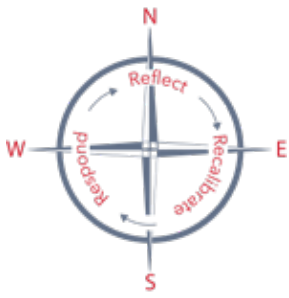
- *At the end of the day, what I heard you say matters most is...*
- *It sounds like we are both motivated by...*
- *While we may be coming at this from different places, we can agree on...*
- *Here's what we are both aiming at...*

4. Respond. Explore possible small steps that match this aim.

- *What if... (active, collaborative brainstorming)*
- *What are one or two small steps we could take that align with this aim?*
- *Keeping this vision in mind, how do we want to move forward from here?*

FOLLOW UP: LET'S CHECK IN ONE (WEEK/MONTH/QUARTER'S) TIME TO ASSESS AND RECALIBRATE AS NEEDED.

Excerpted from Bohlin, K. The Practical Wisdom Framework: A Compass for School Leaders. *Journal of Education*. July 2021. doi:10.1177/00220574211028828 For more information on The Practical Wisdom Framework and its application, contact Dr. Karen Bohlin kbohlin@karenbohlin.com



A Practical Wisdom Coaching Conversation Protocol

Rooted in the theoretical underpinnings of the Practical Wisdom Framework (Bohlin 2021), Bohlin and Kris created the Coaching Conversations Protocol to help students engage in the reflection, recalibration and virtuous response at the heart of courageous dialogue.

PRACTICAL WISDOM COACHING CONVERSATIONS PROTOCOL

1. Remember to practice reflective listening. Honor students' first reactions and offer empathy: *I hear you. That's tough. I can understand why you feel hurt, frustrated, confused, disappointed, etc. It sounds like you feel (emotion) because (situation). Adopt an attitude of curiosity:*

- *Help me understand how you see the situation. I heard you say _____. Am I hearing you correctly? Can you tell me more about that?*
- *What bothers you the most about this right now? If you had a magic wand, what would you change?*

2. Reflect. Help students press pause and reflect:

- *What are you aiming at? What would you like to see happen?*
- *What might this situation look like from so-and-so's point of view?*
- *Can you name what you see as the goods or values in conflict?*
- *What strengths do you have that can help you handle this? (tenacity, patience, courage, compassion, creativity, empathy, hope, gratitude, resilience, etc).*

3. Recalibrate. Encourage/facilitate small, restorative actions that calm the stress response, recalibrate the mind, and make problem-solving easier. These include a walk, exercise, sleep, rest, art, music, journaling, prayer, deep breathing, meditation, nutrition, or a conversation with a friend/parent/teacher.

4. Respond. Support students as they look for solutions that are aligned with a noble aim, which are meaningful to them and will help them grow. This might sound like:

- *"That stinks. How do you want to handle it?" (Damour, 2020)*
- *This is an exciting/difficult challenge. How can you break this down? What's one step you can take right away?*
- *What choices match who you want to be?*
- *What support do you need from me (or someone else)?*

Excerpted from Bohlin, K. The Practical Wisdom Framework: A Compass for School Leaders. *Journal of Education*. July 2021. doi:10.1177/00220574211028828 For more information on The Practical Wisdom Framework and its application, contact Dr. Karen Bohlin kbohlin@karenbohlin.com

7 Tips for Recalibration

Even when we are clear on our aim -- respecting the dignity of all interlocutors and providing an environment where it is safe to share and explore perspectives and disagree respectfully --we need tools at hand to help us recalibrate when the conversation or our own first reactions get hot.

1. Begin with an outlook of curiosity.

Avoid making assumptions. Be curious. Ask good questions: *Help me understand why you think that? Can you tell me more about that?*

2. Reframe your first reactions.

When somebody's behavior upsets or confuses you, ask yourself: *What are three possible reasons why she/he may have said or done that?*

3. Wonder. Make a habit of wondering: *What else might be going on here? What do I know, what do I need to know and who can help?*

4. Get creative. Ask yourself:

How can I be part of the solution? What small step can I take to build a bridge? To open a pathway to conversation?

5. Practice reflective listening.

Okay, can I just reflect back on what I heard you say? What I hear you saying is....Is that accurate? Tell me more about _____. I want to understand better.

6. Share your ideas.

Speak the truth with clarity and charity. Have you considered the possibility that...? *Would you be open to hearing the way I see things here?*

7. Remain open.

Don't close yourself off. Keep a learning mindset, open to new perspectives, data, and understandings. *Where might I go to learn more about this issue? What perspective am I not seeing? Who can help me understand further? Who can help me see my own blind spots?*

Adapted from K.E. Bohlin, [8 Tips for Promoting Dialogue in a Climate of Division](#)



Creating Class Norms for Discussion: A Lesson Plan to Foster Empathy, Respect & Fair-mindedness

OBJECTIVE

This lesson helps teachers and their students develop shared classroom discussion norms that support courageous dialogue, intellectual engagement, and respect for diverse perspectives. Shared norms help students feel safe and understand how to express their ideas; they also cultivate intellectual habits that honor the dignity of each person: reflective listening, empathy, humility, and fair-mindedness.

OPENER

Rules are different from norms. Bring out the difference through these discussion questions:

What are rules? What is one rule in your family – something you are explicitly told you should or should not do? Who makes the rules?

Norms are a little different. Norms are an agreement among members of a group – like a family or classroom – about how they are going to behave and treat each other. It's a way of being and communicates what you value and who you want to be as a community.

Think about a positive norm in your family -- an expectation or way of behaving that isn't a rule, but just understood?

Classroom discussions work best when we have shared norms about how we treat each other. Teachers and students build classroom norms together.

Show students this scale below that offers two extreme ends of the spectrum regarding how people participate in class discussion.

How Do You Approach Classroom Discussion?

WHAT IS MY FIRST REACTION?

I am distracted or disengaged
I am reluctant to participate

I jump in without listening
I talk over people

Ask: *Where do you fall on this scale – closer to one side or somewhere in the middle? What are we aiming for? What is the sweet spot between silent disengagement and aggressive dominance?*

DISCUSSION & ACTIVITY

Share: We all want this classroom to be a place where we feel respected. Let's create some shared discussion norms – norms that allow each of us to bring our ideas and our best selves to class, even when we are talking about difficult subjects.

- For 3 minutes, quietly write down answers to the following two questions: Think about a time you felt heard by a group of people? What were the little (or big) things that made a difference?
- Now, think about a time when you did not

feel heard – or where sharing your ideas felt difficult or unsafe. What were the little (or big) things that contributed to that?

Then, give each student three sticky notes. On each note, ask them to write down one practical way that we can make our discussions safe, welcoming, and enjoyable for everyone. Put these prompts on the board:

- What does a good discussion sound like?
- What does a good discussion look like?

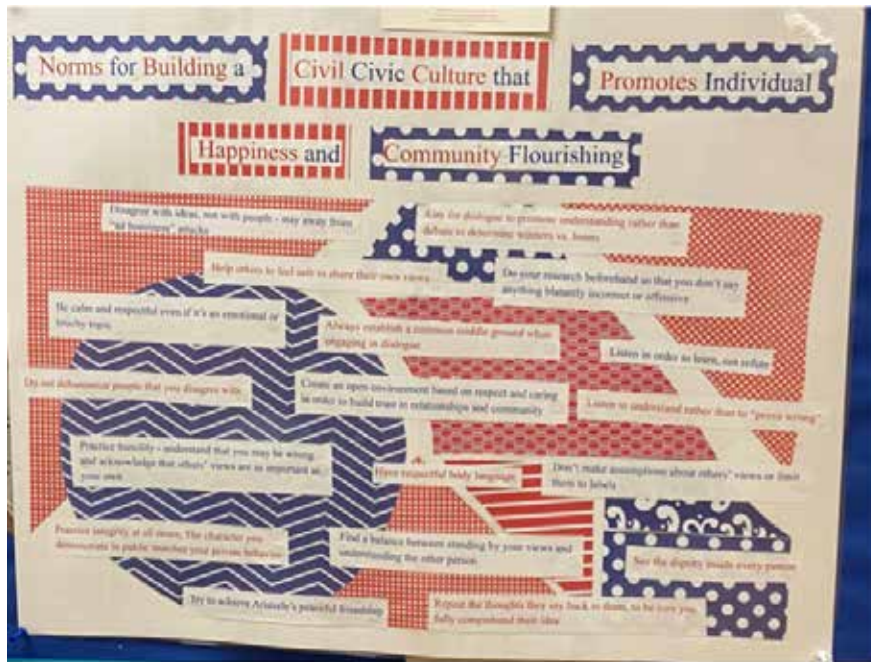
- How is the room arranged?
- What phrases could we use?
- What attitude do we bring?

Break students into small groups. Ask them to share their sticky notes – one person at a time. What do their notes have in common? If two or more notes are similar, have them “stick” them together.

Then, have students present their top ideas to the class – as each group shares, another group can “stick” on post-it notes that support the ideas being shared.

Turn these synthesized ideas -- the ones that have multiple sticky notes – into Discussion Norms (e.g. “In Our Class discussions, we will ____, ____, and ____”).

Here is an example of class discussion norms from a high school English class:



These norms include, for instance:

- Disagree with ideas, not with people – stay away from *ad hominem* attacks.
- Create an open environment based on respect and caring in order to build trust in relationships and community.
- Repeat the thoughts they say back to them, to be sure you fully comprehend their ideas.
- Be calm and respectful even if it's an emotional or touchy topic.

REFLECTION

Ask students to choose one discussion norm that they think will be challenging for them and write about it. Why will this one be a challenge? What can they do to make it a personal “norm” or habit?

Truth In Journalism & Dorothy Thompson:

A Lesson Plan

OBJECTIVE

This lesson helps students – especially those in English, history, or journalism classes or related extracurricular activities – explore the character strengths that Dorothy Thompson displayed as a journalist committed to courageous dialogue and truth-telling.

OPENER

Journalist Dorothy Thompson once said: “There is nothing to fear except the persistent refusal to find out the truth, the persistent refusal to analyze the causes of happenings.”

Put up this quote and then prompt students to take a few minutes to write down some thoughts to these three questions:

- *Have you ever felt afraid or nervous to know the truth about something?*
- *Why do you think some people refuse to seek the truth about things?*
- *Think of someone you know – in person or in history – who is committed to learning and truth. What words would you use to describe them? What character traits do they have?*

Give students a few minutes to share their ideas in small groups, then open up the discussion. Here are some character strengths that may come up in the discussion or that the teacher can add to the conversation: fair-mindedness, tenacity, carefulness, curiosity, humanity, courage, humility, empathy, respect, honesty, responsibility, integrity.

DISCUSSION & ACTIVITY

Share with students more about Thompson’s story: Dorothy Thompson was an American journalist and radio broadcaster who lived from 1893 to 1961. She lived through many personal

as well as national and international challenges.

In her early career, she advocated for women’s suffrage, then went into journalism and radio. She became known as the “First Lady of American Journalism.” In the late 1920s and the 1930s, Thompson worked in Germany (the Weimar

Republic at the time), where, in 1931, she had the opportunity of a lifetime: interviewing Adolf Hitler.

She was allowed to ask just three questions, which had to be approved in advance. After the interview, Thompson wrote that Hitler was “formless, almost faceless: a man whose countenance is a caricature; a man whose framework seems cartilaginous, without bones. He is inconsequential and voluble, ill-poised, insecure – the very prototype of the Little Man.” Clearly, this is not a favorable description (depending on the age of your students, you may have to explain further). Her scathing assessment and subsequent critical book, *I Saw Hitler!*, which warned of the dangers of Hitler coming to power, resulted in the German government formally expelling her from the country in 1934. She was the first American journalist to be forced to leave.

Her truth-telling career didn’t end there. When back in America, Thompson continued her writing and broadcasts denouncing the German government – she even publicly ridiculed a speaker at a 1939 rally for the German American Bund (American Nazis) amidst 20,000 Nazi supporters in Madison Square Garden!



Dorothy Thompson, June 12, 1939. *Time* magazine (public domain).

Also in 1939, Thompson made the cover of TIME Magazine (above). In the cover article, TIME wrote that she was equal in influence to Eleanor Roosevelt, who was First Lady at the time. They wrote: "She and Eleanor Roosevelt are undoubtedly the most influential women in the U.S." The article reported that Thompson had 7,555,000 readers of her column On the Record in 196 newspapers and 5.5 million radio listeners on her Monday night politics show.



Display the photo of Thompson (above) from a radio broadcast and ask students what they notice. Now that they know more about Thompson's stand against the Nazis, have them respond to the following question: *What character traits did Thompson*

need to tell the truth and promote a more courageous public dialogue? For example, she showed courage when speaking out against Hitler while in Germany and employed curiosity when interviewing people for her newspaper stories and radio show; she asked thoughtful questions, utilized multiple kinds of media to share her voice, and boldly shared the truth though she knew the consequences. She did her research in advance and approached her interviews and broadcasts with preparation and confidence.

REFLECTION

After creating a class list of habits and methods that have come up during the discussion, have students reflect on the following prompt: *Pick one attribute that we discussed today. How could you practice this trait to help you have more courage in your interactions with others?*

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Karen E. Bohlin, EdD

Karen E. Bohlin is a recognized thought leader in character education and applied virtue ethics. In June of 2021 she completed her 18 year tenure as head of Montrose School, where she founded the *LifeCompass* Institute for Character & Leadership. Director Emerita and Senior Scholar at Boston University's Center for Character and Social Responsibility, she has served as an educational advisor at the state, national and international level; co-architect of the National Schools of Character Program; fellow at the Jubilee Centre at the University of Birmingham in the UK; editorial reviewer and contributor to the *Journal of Character Education* and the *Journal of Education* at Boston University; and co-director of the Kern Partners in Character & Educational Leadership (KPCEL).

A scholar-practitioner, she has taught at the middle, high school and university level and is the author and contributing author of several articles and books including *Teaching Character Education Through Literature: Awakening the Moral Imagination* (Routledge 2005), *Building Character in Schools* (Jossey-Bass 1999) and *Happiness and Virtue: Beyond East and West: Toward a New Global Responsibility* (Tuttle 2012). The dual focus of her work is educating leaders in practical wisdom and using poetry, literature and film to illuminate moral motivation, what she calls the "schooling of desire."

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Deborah Farmer Kris

Deborah Farmer Kris is passionate about sharing the best research and practices that help parents and educators answer the question, “How can we help our children thrive?” Deborah works as a parenting columnist and consultant for PBS Kids, she writes about education for MindShift (an NPR education blog), and she is a senior associate at Boston University’s Center for Character and Social Responsibility. Over the course of her career, Deborah has taught elementary, middle and high school, served as a school administrator, and directed a girls leadership institute. Her writing has been featured several times in *The Washington Post*, and she is the co-author of the book *Building Character in Schools: A Resource Guide*. A popular speaker, she has presented to hundreds of parents and educators around the country on topics related to character development.



Gabrielle Landry

Gabrielle Landry is a Junior at Harvard College studying Philosophy and Education. During her leave of absence from 2020-2021, she worked as a Research Intern for the *LifeCompass* Institute at Montrose School. Gabrielle is also a Student Fellow Associate at the Abigail Adams Institute, an independent humanities center in Cambridge, and volunteers as a mentor for high school girls at a Boston-based leadership program. In April 2020, she created her website and blog, *Thoughts and Doodles*, where she writes about philosophy, education, and flourishing and features her other work, including her 2017 TEDx Talk “The Power of Perspective.”

The *LifeCompass* Institute for Character & Leadership at Montrose School

Montrose School is a National School of Character (1999 & 2017) and serves as a resource to educators and school leaders internationally.

Founded by former head of school, Dr. Karen Bohlin in 2017, the *LifeCompass* Institute provides Montrose parents, faculty and students with practical resources that explore how human beings develop the habits of mind, heart, and character they need to flourish under any circumstances. Our *LifeCompass* Fellows draw from ancient wisdom and engage in current research – all with an eye to helping our students and families develop the vision and habits they need to thrive and make a contribution in the world.

To learn more about LCI, visit <https://www.montroseschool.org/life-compass>

Montrose serves a diverse population of middle and high school girls from over 50 towns and communities in the greater Boston and MetroWest area of MA as well as international students from Austria, Mexico, Chile, Spain, China, Korea, Andorra and the U.K.

For more information about Montrose School, please visit www.montroseschool.org.

