



A Guided Conversation Among Leaders in Changing Times

Linda Cannell

Retired Academic Dean, North Park Theological Seminary

Cannell, Linda. 2015. A Guided Conversation Among Leaders in Changing Times. *Common Ground Journal*. [v12 n1 Spring]. ISSN: 15479129. www.commongroundjournal.org. EDCOT. Form: eJournal. Pages: 11-25. Keywords: conversation, consultation, hana.

Abstract A discussion of the HANA conference and consultation formats with benefits and limitations indicated for each.

INTRODUCTION

This issue of *Common Ground Journal* consists of papers that were produced at the HANA Consultation described elsewhere in this issue. This gathering of North American leaders—30 from Asian immigrant communities, and 30 from Latino/a immigrant communities—was designed as a consultation because the challenges faced by these communities cannot be addressed effectively through presentations, nor can these challenges be understood without input from men and women with varied experience who represent different organizations, cultures, and/or sectors of society.

HOW THE CONFERENCE AND CONSULTATION DIFFER

The pervasive temptation of leaders is to make structures and systems the channels of development rather than people. If working with people, rather than managing systems, becomes the root task, then essential processes become those embedded in conversation and consultation (e.g., framing questions, discerning patterns and trends, reflecting on experience, and designing proposals for responsible action).

Peter Cha and I have learned that an effective consultation requires significant attention to process. For the HANA Consultation, and with Armida Belmonte Stephens and Juan Martinez as partners in planning, we refined some processes and added others. More on that after a description of how a consultation differs from the conventional conference format:

1. A consultation is not a conference. In other words, the intent is not to invite “special speakers” to share their knowledge while others listen—often with little understanding of how people are listening, what they are taking away from the event, or even if they are listening! Certainly, the conference format serves some purposes well, but if the intent is to enlighten understanding, stimulate reflection on experience, and foster action/response, the consultation format is typically more effective.
2. The consultation format requires a different approach to planning. While the details of venue, accommodation and meals, technological support, promotion, and so on are essentially the same for both the conference and consultation, consultation planning differs in some respects. To plan an effective consultation, a team must meet every few months and, as was the case of the HANA Consultation, may need to meet over 2–3 years to discuss the overall theme, issue, or problem common to a group of people, plan ways to incorporate diversity, determine subject areas for focused

interaction, create facilitated exercises for both large group and small group settings, design questions to prompt thought and interaction and to lead to consideration about appropriate action, discern experiences that will strengthen relationship and consequently interaction, consider ways to and determine areas of knowledge and/or practice where input from one or more specialists may be needed.

3. For both the conference and consultation the venue is important. It should be accessible, with suitable tables and chairs, and equipped with all that will be needed to support the presentations, group work, and other events. However, if possible, the venue for the consultation should be larger than what is required for exhibits and seating at speakers' presentations and workshops. At a consultation, space is needed for both seating and the display of work that results from the group interactions. In addition, participants need room to walk around—to interact without feeling crowded, to move from table to table as the work of the consultation requires, and space to engage the various planned exercises. As a “rule of thumb,” a consultation will require about one-half to twice as much space than is considered suitable for a conference—depending on the activities planned and interaction expected.
4. At a conference it is customary to organize the meetings around presentations (sometimes including workshops or “breakout” groups) and to include a number of “things to do or see while you’re at the conference.” At a consultation, relationships and subsequently interaction are strengthened when experiences such as observation of exemplars (sometimes external to the venue), worship, storytelling, sharing of personal experience relative to the overall purpose, small group problem solving, and so on are as integral to achievement of consultation outcomes as discussion and building on the input of one or more specialists and/or scholars.
5. A well-designed conference will extend one’s understanding of a subject and possibly lead to differences of perspective. Typically, conference organizers are more concerned with presentations than outcomes. They trust that understanding will result and that potential difference(s) will be examined responsibly. A well-designed consultation will extend understanding; but along with intellectual engagement, the planners intentionally include unstructured interpersonal time for informal conversation, as well as time within formal sessions for facilitated exercises. Such time is needed because the issue or problem of the consultation inevitably prompts differences of perspective and expression of attitudes. The facilitator(s) fosters dialogue and examination of attitudes and perspective, creating opportunities for all participants to learn, in a welcoming context, how to engage women and men from various cultural and organizational backgrounds. Hopefully, this engagement will result in the construction of new insights and perspectives, and proposals for responsible action.
6. Conference planners may be intentional about who is invited to participate in the events of the conference. Consultation planners more often than not will limit the number of participants using certain criteria for attendance (e.g., by specifically inviting participants known to have experience or interest in the theme of the consultation). The planning team also will discuss and determine criteria for those who are invited to serve as leaders of focused group interactions. In other words, a conference tends to focus on *specialist* sharing of information that may or may not be known to participants, and participants typically self-select which presentation(s) to attend; a consultation is organized to make use of the diverse experience and difference of perspective of *participants* in relation to a particular problem or issue.

Because of the pervasiveness of the conference format among academic, mission, and congregational leaders, a consultation can be stereotyped as a “sharing of ignorance.” In other words, some are reluctant to “waste time” at a gathering where the focus is not on a speaker(s) whose expertise and knowledge matches or exceeds their own. And some specialists and/or scholars will not accept an invitation to present their expertise or focused information where their input is seen (simply) to be

supportive of (or secondary to) the interaction of the participants. And, like students we have known, some participants just want to sit and listen to a speaker with no expectation of response.

If a consultation is not well planned, if attention is not given to who should participate, and if the team fails to design a variety of appropriate processes to facilitate interaction and encourage response, the criticisms are deserved.

PROCESSES TO FACILITATE INTERACTION AND ENCOURAGE RESPONSE

In *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*,¹ Randall Collins traces the history of thought and reveals a sociology of intellectual change. He argues that the ideas we often attribute to one or a small group of individuals were in reality constructed out of the spirited interchange of ideas across wide-ranging intellectual, and often cultural, networks—a global consultation across time if you will.

In *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*,² Margaret Wheatley proposes a return to ancient traditions of conversation where people talk about what is important to them. Central to the process of conversation as she describes it is sharing and listening, seeking together to understand, commitment to responsible action, and reflection together on that action. Similar to what Collins discovered in his research, Wheatley notes that most of what we would consider significant events in history began with clusters of people talking. However, “conversation” in this case is more than just coffee break interaction. A critical skill of leaders is to share their perspectives clearly, but it is equally important that they listen to one another. To listen well requires the ability to frame the sort of probing questions that will help people respond with something that is worth listening to by others—in other words, something that will actually help move thought, plans, and decisions forward.

In keeping with the insights presented by Collins and Wheatley, an effective consultation will include many, if not all, of the following processes:

Elicit input from among those who will become participants. Invite their feedback on how the purpose was described; questions they believe are important related to that purpose; and ideas for themes for the working groups at the consultation.

1. Invite some participants to assume responsibility in areas that will have significant impact on the work of the consultation (e.g., mealtime ambiance, promotion and displays, blogging the events of each day, technological support, welcome and hospitality, worship planning and leadership, preparatory research, and so on). Planners must maintain contact with those who accept responsibility to ensure integrity with the overall purpose and to be available to help.
2. Tailor planned, facilitated exercises to both the purpose and the participants. For example, the HANA planners understood that leaders of different ethnicities who were not acquainted with each other would be reticent to mingle and interact. And, indeed, at the beginning of the consultation, Asian leaders congregated at some tables and Latino/a leaders sat together at other tables. The facilitator replaced the often overused “get acquainted” activities with a prepared simulation game that placed the participants in situations where they had to work together to solve a simulated but real-to-life problem. After the simulation the table groups were mixed and remained so for the duration of the consultation. Throughout the consultation, the facilitator(s) involved participants in various large and

¹ Randall Collins. *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

² Margaret Wheatley. *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future* (San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2002).

small group experiences related to the purpose and themes of the consultation—exercises designed to promote thought, discussion, relationship, and response.

3. Provide the work group leaders with a document that identifies 4–5 facilitated exercises and a few questions they can use as needed. For the HANA consultation this document was distributed in advance, but we didn't expect the leaders to read it carefully beforehand. Only as they experienced some exercises at the consultation, and only as they began to understand the particular dynamics of their group, would they see the possibilities of using an exercise or question(s) designed to further dialogue and decision-making.
4. Establish criteria for participation and identify those who meet those criteria. To avoid the tendency to simply invite those who are familiar (e.g., friends, colleagues, those from our own context and culture, well-known leaders in the particular community) ask others to suggest leaders who could contribute to and profit from the consultation.
5. Seek out some who have experience and skills in facilitation. They will either serve as consultants and trainers of others who will be the consultation facilitators, or they will serve as facilitators throughout the event. Effective facilitators know that consultation requires time to reflect, synthesize, observe, and identify patterns. They know that the participants must be encouraged to become dialogue partners and mutual decision-makers.
6. Determine what background information is needed to support collaboration and decision-making. Seek out specialists and/or scholars who will accept a supporting role. They must understand that their presentation(s) is not to be the centerpiece of the consultation. They will provide essential background in specific areas to inform interaction and proposals for action. It is important that the invited resource person(s) plans to stay for the entire consultation to respond to questions from the working groups and/or to interact informally with participants.
7. The expectation of response. Therefore, plan a concluding exercise or series of questions to prompt ideas for action. Include also take-away ideas/questions for evaluation of that action. (As an example, see under Case Examples below.)

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF A CONSULTATION EXPERIENCE

Over many decades, the persisting direction of organizational theory has been toward the recognition that organizations are affected by people's behavior, commitments, and feelings about the organization; and that organizations, in turn, affect the development of people and the ways in which they work out their vocations individually and in working teams. In any organization, fundamental tasks of leadership are to discern the capacities of people, and to foster an environment where they can test their capacities and learn. Charles Handy³ has observed that organizations typically operate on the assumption of *incompetence*. Instead of developing people, leaders seek to control; they give directives and attempt to exert power over the other. Resolution of conflict or difference is managed by memo and/or a policy statement, neither of which is developed collaboratively. When an organization functions on the assumption of *competence*, on the other hand, paying attention to the development of people and the release of creative imagination is at least possible.

As organizations confront the forces of change, many leaders recognize the necessity of providing opportunities for people to practice skills such as inquiry, collaboration, accepting and working across difference, observing patterns and trends, decision-making, and so on. Leaders build strength in organizations when they think and act developmentally—which means investing in building the capacities

³ See Charles Handy, *The Hungry Spirit: Beyond Capitalism, a Quest for Purpose in the Modern World* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998).

of colleagues and in the analysis and shaping of systems that affect them. Organizations function best when people are respected and helped to do better the sorts of things that give organizations their energy and effectiveness.

Participating in a consultation experience could foster the sort of skills that are increasingly valued in organizations. In *Getting to Maybe*,⁴ Westley et al. describe the skills of social innovators. Many of the skills they illustrate are important practices for members of organizations and communities committed to consultation and action. And these skills can be developed in effective consultation experiences. Some examples follow:

- Skills common to social innovators include the capacity to see patterns, big picture thinking, and “knowing how to interpret information and convert it to knowledge you can use to move forward.”⁵
- Social innovators in complex systems recognize that the effort to create specific, measurable objectives can lead to tunnel vision. “In contrast, when astute social innovators tackle an issue or a problem, they realize that they don’t yet know enough to set specific goals or measurable targets; they also understand that different participants have different aims in the change process—and that those participants themselves should play a major role in goal setting.”⁶
- It will never be possible to have all the data necessary for a complete picture before action is taken. Similarly, evaluation is flawed when viewed as a snapshot at a point in time. Evaluation is an ongoing process and functions best when members of the organization are empowered to ask questions and suggest areas of inquiry. Teams reflective of the diversity of the organization are created to examine progress on complex issues. “[O]ngoing data collection and assessment [help] policy makers adapt their decisions and implement their principles in the face of changed conditions.”⁷

A CONCLUDING OBSERVATION

When organizational practices are shaped by the presumed need to compete for resources, leadership behavior devolves to managing for scarcity rather than managing for opportunity. Fear drives out the possibility of creative input, alternative perspectives are limited, and new ideas, especially those from within the organization, are less welcome; innovation is stifled, and the organization becomes increasingly rigid.

In contrast, Ted Ward once asserted that the challenge of the 21st century would be for institutions to learn how to relate to and work with other institutions across human boundaries. He was correct. In *The Necessary Revolution*, Peter Senge states what should be obvious by now—the world is shaped by networks or webs of organizations.⁸ Participation in well planned consultations will assist the development of the behaviors and attitudes that make significant partnerships across agencies possible.

⁴ Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Quinn Patton, *Getting to Maybe: How the World Is Changed* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2006).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 83–84.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁸ Peter Senge, Bryan Smith, Nina Kruschwitz, Joe Laur, and Sara Schley, *The Necessary Revolution: How Individuals and Corporations are Working Together to Create a Sustainable World* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), pp. 9–10.

RESOURCES TO ASSIST CONSULTATION INTERACTION

The following are not listed in any order of priority. They share fundamental qualities that are useful for consultation experiences: They recognize the importance of human engagement, listening to one another, respecting the diverse ideas and experiences of participants in the process, releasing the creativity of people, giving people a voice in development, idea sharing, and evaluating—using criteria all have had a part in developing.

Stimulating Conversation: *The World Café*⁹

The World Café is a hospitable space to explore questions that matter. The process encourages broad contributions from the team, connecting of diverse perspectives, listening and sharing collective discoveries with a view to responsible action. The World Café design incorporates *focused dialogue around substantive questions, shared stories, and case studies; a structured inquiry task; and one or more plenary sessions for synthesis and decision-making*. In the rounds of dialogue, ideas build on one another while participants explore questions and issues that matter to them in their life and work. Though possible outcomes are often identified, conversations are not focused, at least initially, on finding solutions. The more important outcome, and one that happens best in conversation, is to discover suitable questions to ask in relation to an issue. Though not necessary, some have found it helpful to have a presentation from a specialist/scholar prior to the three rounds of conversation. In the plenary session(s), after the rounds of conversation, connections among ideas are explored and questions are clarified. Knowledge sharing, possibilities for further inquiry, and opportunities for research and action may emerge.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

Rather than look for problems or weaknesses, look for what is working, or what has promise. Recognize the creative capacity of people to reflect on current realities in light of an imagined future—to capture the life-giving elements of the past to energize the present and the future. Key to AI is the formation of significant questions.¹⁰ Cooperrider and Whitney suggest that human systems grow in the direction of that about which they persistently ask questions.¹¹ Therefore, inquiry is encouraged and time allowed for people to talk together and explore ideas.

Looking Differently at Our Problems

The way we talk about a problem or situation is part of the problem. Part of the solution is to talk about it differently. Name two or three of the most frequently talked about problems in relation to the theme of [this] consultation.

⁹ See Juanita Brown with David Isaacs and the World Café Community, *The World Café: Shaping our Futures Through Conversations That Matter* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005).

¹⁰ Juanita Brown (The World Café, 91) tells the story of two different approaches to asking questions in a community development effort: The less dynamic question was “Have you thought about cleaning up the river?” Apart from being in the generally unproductive yes/no form, the question would not take the people to useful thinking that leads to action. In this case, the more useful questions were, “What do you see when you look at the river? How do you feel about the condition of the river? How do you explain the situation with the river to your children?” This approach is more risky for the community development specialist because it leaves open the possibility that the people will see the problem (and hence possible solutions) differently. But, the reality is that it is most often the people who live with the situation who can see the way through the problem more clearly. The advantage of an outsider’s perspective, of course, is when the insider has been blindsided by bias, tradition, or familiarity..

¹¹ See David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005); Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003).

- What assumptions are present in the way the problems are discussed?
- How might we talk about these problems differently?
- In what ways does thinking differently allow us to view the situation differently?

Case Examples

Ask participants to write a brief case example that reflects the issue addressed by the consultation. Discuss the examples, looking for patterns and reflecting on action. In the process people are often able to identify blockages. Use thought questions rather than yes/no questions. For example: What do you perceive happened in this situation? Why? How is this situation or problem similar to or different from other situations or problems? What do you want to start doing, stop doing, continue doing? What went well, what didn't work? What happened? Why? What will we do differently next time? (Note: These questions could also be used as "take-away" ideas for evaluation of the action planned at the end of the consultation.)

Concluding Options for the Consultation: Stewarding Our Conversations

- In what ways will you continue and expand the conversations that took place at this consultation? With whom? How?
- Suggest one or more concrete ideas for a partnership with (name the relevant organizations or groups).
- How might you continue productive conversations about important matters raised in this consultation?
- How many different ways can you suggest for collaboration—how might we help?
- In what ways can ideas or findings from this consultation be disseminated in your communities? What are you willing to do to help disseminate findings—to whom and for what purpose? How might we help? Whom might you contact to share ideas and insights from your work at this consultation?
- What potentially fundable issue and/or project derived from the work at the consultation could you suggest?

Sharing Questions

Use one or more of the following to stimulate personal reflection on the experience with one or more of the themes:

- Tell at least one story from your ministry that illustrates questions or doubts or particular feelings about this theme.
- Describe an event or realization related to this theme that stimulated your desire to pass on something of worth to others in your context.
- Tell us of a time when you were conscious of being significantly influenced by someone else in relation to this theme.

- What support, training, or coaching in relation to this theme do you wish you had in the early years of your ministry?

Rank Order

Put the situations we have been discussing in order from the least to most comfortable for you. Explain your choices.

Private Reflection

Reflect on the following questions privately:

- How does this theme make me *feel*?
- What do I *think* about the basic premises behind this theme?
- What do my reactions to the theme tell me about *myself*? About others? About *God*?
- What, if anything, does our work on this theme make me want *to do*?

Following Through After Work and/or a Discussion¹²

1. To follow through on ideas.
 - What will happen now?
 - Who is or was affected?
 - What problems could arise?
 - What are the positive and negative consequences?
 - What factors might have changed the outcome?
2. To summarize at the end of a session.
 - What were the main points of our conversation/work?
 - What are the most important results of our session?
 - What still needs to be considered?
3. To identify examples or analogies.
 - What else is this like?

¹² Adapted from Kenneth Chuska, *Improving Classroom Questions* (Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1995, 2003).

Response After a Period of Conversation/Discussion¹³

In light of our conversations today, respond to the following questions. Use the sheets of paper and markers at your table to record your ideas.

- If there was one thing that hasn't yet been explored but is necessary in order to reach a deeper level of understanding or clarity, what would that be?
- What requires further thought before we can commit to action?
- What action(s) are we ready to take in the next 3–4 months? Describe 1–2 essential steps in relation to the action(s).
- What will require our immediate attention as we move toward our next steps?

Note-Taking Pairs

As you begin the session, ask participants to work in pairs to synthesize information from their notes and/or observations during the specialist's or scholar's presentation. Alternatively, ask them to create an improved synthesized version of their individual notes.

Send-a-Problem/Question

Place a substantive question or a concisely written problem underlying the theme in envelopes—enough to give one envelope to each person in your work group. Provide time for each person to reflect on the question or problem, generate possible responses, and record his or her best response on a 3x5 card and place it in the envelope. Call time and instruct the participants to pass their envelope to the next person. Repeat as often as needed. Participants consider the responses as they receive them and uses them to refine and improve upon their original response—adding another 3x5 card to the envelope each time. At the end of the activity, discuss the final responses and determine what might be of value to the work of the consultation.

Concept Formation

A neglected task in critical thinking is the intentional linking of ideas to other ideas. Concept mapping (or concept webbing) is a commonly used exercise to help sharpen this skill. Provide a large sheet of paper or access to a whiteboard. Identify one essential and central concept that has emerged from the conversation about your theme. Using this concept as the starting point, create a “conceptual map” that shows *graphically* how the starting concept links to other concepts. Typically, the starter concept will be printed in the middle of the paper or whiteboard. From this starting point extend lines out to other related concepts. The graphic can take a hub-and-spokes form, a web, a spiral, or other shape. Once the concept map is completed, examine it for inconsistencies, implications, gaps, insights, and so on. What has the conceptual map contributed to understanding of the theme? What action steps are suggested?

Dear Diary, Today I...

Ask participants to think of an incident related to the consultation theme. They are to imagine that the incident happened that day and they are now, in the evening of that day, writing a diary entry that captures their thoughts and feelings about the incident. “Dear Diary, Today I...”. Call time and invite some to read their entries, which you may or may not use as prompts for discussion. Tip: Avoid the tendency to fill the silence too soon. You might allow a full minute to go by before you say something like,

¹³ Adapted from The World Café.

“No one is expecting Pulitzer Prize winners, so...”. Or, “If you wish to keep your diary entry private that is not a problem, but if any wish to share...”. If no one responds, convey that that is okay, and then move on to the next thing. However, it is likely that someone will break the silence and offer to read. Acknowledge the reading with a nod, or “Thank you, anyone else...”. Do not launch into a speech about *your* response to the diary entry. If discussion seems warranted, facilitate it.

Brief Encounters: Facilitator’s Guide (time required: 30–40 minutes)

Adapted from a simulation by Andrea MacGregor.¹⁴ (Numerous commercially developed simulation games are available. Some may be adaptable to the theme of the consultation.)

Introduction

- Everyone has a culture. It shapes how one sees oneself, others, and the world.
- Behavior is affected in large part by cultural beliefs and values.
- Culture is like an iceberg. Some aspects are visible; others are beneath the surface.
- Invisible aspects influence and may cause the visible aspects.

In *Brief Encounters* participants explore the interaction of two cultures—one outgoing and casual, the other more reserved and formal—with different social norms. Cultural-norms sheets (see below) have been created for the Pandya and Chispa cultures.

Instructions

1. Print sufficient cultural-norm sheets for the Pandya and Chispa cultures (see below). About half the large group will be Pandya, the other half Chispa.
2. Remove all furniture from the center of the room. Explain to participants that they will adopt the cultures of two unfamiliar groups, interact with each other, and then examine their reactions.
3. Divide the participants into Pandya and Chispa groups. The groups should be about the same size, balanced for gender as much as possible, and diverse in terms of ethnicity or other group factors.
4. Select a group of about 4–6 to serve as observers. The observers are to watch closely as the Pandyas and the Chispas interact. They may move among the participants, but they may not touch or speak to them. They will share their observations during debriefing.
5. Send the Pandya and Chispa groups to opposite corners of the room. Give each group a copy of their cultural norm description. Ask the members of each culture to become as familiar as possible with their particular characteristics and behavior. Give the two cultures the following instructions:
 - Seek out members of your own and the other “culture.” You may not avoid interaction with the other “culture.”
 - Attempt to engage members of your or the other “culture.” (Suggest 2–3 questions that are relevant to the purpose of the consultation.)

¹⁴ Go to http://www.acadiau.ca/~dreid/games/Game_descriptions/Brief_Encounters.htm. See also Proposal to Peace Corps, Appendix A, at <http://obtc.org/conference/index.php/2013/2013/paper/download/303/96>. Last accessed October 20, 2014.

6. Have one of the observers visit the Pandya group to emphasize the importance of staying in character, and that males in their culture should be chaperoned at all times. Remind them of the Pandyas' reserved behavior and their reluctance to initiate contacts with people of other cultures.
7. Have one of the observers visit the Chispas and emphasize the importance of staying in character, and that members of this culture make several brief contacts rather than a few lengthy ones. Define a "contact" as eliciting a verbal or a nonverbal response from a member of the other culture. Remind them of their friendly, outgoing nature and their eagerness to meet people from other cultures.

The Simulation

1. Announce that two groups from imaginary countries have been invited to a party sponsored by an international organization. The party organizers hope the two groups will get acquainted and learn about each other. Introduce the cultures as Panyas and Chispas, providing no more information about their respective characteristics. Invite the groups to interact (if desired, play background music).
2. The observers should walk among the groups, looking for behaviors that can be described and discussed during debriefing. After 10 to 12 minutes, call time and end the party. Each culture group returns to their respective corners to discuss what they learned. Observers meet to compare notes.
3. Give each group about 10 minutes to prepare their observations. The Chispas' report will describe Pandya behavior and the values that people could expect to encounter if they visited the Pandya nation. The Pandyas will create a similar description of the Chispas' culture.

Debriefing

Use questions such as the following to guide discussion of how our own cultural biases influence the way we view other groups. Be sure to ask the small group of observers to give their views on the participants' attempts to communicate across cultures and to maintain cultural norms.

1. How did you feel about the behavior of the members of your own group? Of the other group? Did your group's report use positive, negative, or neutral terms to describe the other group?
2. Ask participants to discuss whether or not they agree with each of the following statements:
 - People have difficulty describing the behaviors of other groups in non-judgmental terms.
 - People acquire cultural norms fairly quickly.
 - Most cultural norms are maintained through peer pressure.
 - The same or similar behavior can be perceived differently depending on one's group norms. For example, what appears friendly to Chispas seems pushy to Pandyas.
3. What real-world situations were illustrated during the *Brief Encounter*?
4. What lessons from this activity would you want to keep in mind if you were going to spend time with people from an unfamiliar culture?

Pandya Cultural Norms

- Pandyas are reserved and do not initiate conversation, speaking only when spoken to.
- Pandyas have formal speech patterns, using “sir” and “ma’am” or other titles.
- Pandya women have more status than men. Men are chaperoned by Pandya women.
- Pandya men avoid eye contact and respond through their chaperones.
- Pandya men do not speak directly with women from other cultures.
- Pandya men can talk to men from other cultures. They can maintain eye contact with men from other cultures.

Chispa Cultural Norms

- Chispas are informal and friendly.
- Among Chispas there are no gender roles. Men and women behave the same way.
- Chispas are outgoing. They love to make contact with people from other cultures.
- Chispa contacts are brief and casual. A response is elicited and the Chispa person moves on.
- Chispas are democratic and call everyone by his or her first name.
- Chispas value cross-gender contacts more than same-gender contacts.

The following exercises are adapted from Stephen Brookfield, *Teaching for Critical Thinking* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012).

Closing Reflection

At what moment were you most engaged as a participant?

At what moment were you most distanced as a participant?

What action that anyone took in the group did you find most helpful?

What action that anyone took in the group did you find most confusing?

What surprised you most about the group?

Circle of Voices

In the first round, no one interrupts the speaker. Then the person to his or her left speaks for about a minute—but is required to incorporate elements of the first speaker's comments into his or her remarks. This process continues around the circle, with every speaker responding to the immediately preceding speaker's comments. The circle ends with the first speaker, who responds to the immediately preceding speaker's comments as well. Following the cycle, the group can engage in open conversation—seeking clarification, asking questions, offering additional contributions.

Structured Silence

Every 15–20 minutes call for 2–3 minutes of intentional silence—a reflective pause. Participants are asked to think quietly about one of the following questions (different questions are chosen by the facilitator for each pause):

- What was the most important point made in the last 15–20 minutes?
- What was the most puzzling or confusing point made in the last 15–20 minutes?
- What question do we most need to address in the next period of our discussion?
- What new perspective or interpretation was suggested for you in the last 15–20 minutes?
- What assumptions that you hold about this topic were confirmed in the last 15–20 minutes?
- What assumptions that you hold about this topic were challenged in the last 15–20 minutes?

Give participants 3x5 cards to keep track of ideas or insights. Invite response before proceeding with the discussion.

The Appreciative Pause

At least once in every discussion, the facilitator calls for a pause of about 1–2 minutes. During this time the only comments allowed are from participants who acknowledge how something said by another participant contributed to their learning, whether

- A question that was asked suggested a new way of thinking
- A comment clarified something that until then was confusing
- A comment opened up a new line of thought
- A comment helped identify an assumption
- A comment identified a gap in reasoning that needed to be addressed
- A comment was intriguing and had not been considered before
- A comment showed the connection between two other ideas or contributions when that connection hadn't been clear
- An example that was provided helped increase understanding of a difficult concept.

To Generate Multiple Perspectives

- “Let’s look at this issue and start with a different premise. For example...”
- “What would this issue look like if we began from a different starting point?”
- “Try to imagine you have no experience with this matter. Where would your instinct tell you to start?”
- “Try to think of the most unlikely ways of understanding this matter—the weirder the better. What would they be?”
- “Who or what perspective is missing and what would it look like if that perspective was included?”
- “What radically different examples can you give of this theme? In what different directions could these examples take our analysis?”
- “What questions or issues have been raised for us today? What remains unresolved or contentious about this issue?”

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brookfield, Stephen. *Teaching for Critical Thinking*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012.

Brown, Juanita, with David Isaacs and the World Café Community. *The World Café: Shaping our Futures Through Conversations That Matter*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005.

Chuska, Kenneth. *Improving Classroom Questions*. Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation: 1995, 2003.

Collins, Randall. *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Cooperrider, David, and Diana Whitney. *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005.

Handy, Charles. *The Hungry Spirit: Beyond Capitalism, a Quest for Purpose in the Modern World*. New York: Broadway Books, 1998.

Senge, Peter, Bryan Smith, Nina Kruschwitz, Joe Laur, and Sara Schley. *The Necessary Revolution: How Individuals and Corporations are Working Together to Create a Sustainable World*. New York: Doubleday, 2008, pp. 9–10.

Westley, Frances, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Quinn Patton. *Getting to Maybe: How the World Is Changed*. Toronto: Random House Canada, 2006.

Wheatley, Margaret. *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*. San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2002.

Whitney, Diana, and Amanda Trosten-Bloom. *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Linda Cannell retired as the Academic Dean at North Park Theological Seminary in December 2011. From 2006–2008, she was Lois W. Bennett Distinguished Professor of Educational Ministries at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, and for nineteen years before that professor of Educational Ministries and director of the Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies program at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois. She has held numerous church staff and guest faculty positions. In Canada, she directed EQUIP Ministries for eight years serving as a consultant to churches, denominations, and theological schools in Canada and the United States.