Center for Leadership & Educational Equity

Norms Construction
A Process of Negotiation

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Purpose
This is a consensus building process that uses a series of negotiations to construct norms for a learning community.

Time
Approximately 45 minutes

1. **Negotiation with self:**
   a. Journaling to know your "self" (10 minutes) *write, list, draw*
   Participants have time to reflect and consider aspects of learning that are important when choosing to work and learn in community. Questions might include: What do you expect of yourself as a member of this group? What do you expect of others? What do you remember about a time when you experienced powerful learning in a group? What was present in that situation? Can you recall feedback and specific language that stood out for you while participating in experiences leading up to this point in the group's work (i.e. group juggle, feedback, text, etc.)?

   b. Proposing what *I need* (5 minutes) *circle ideas, highlight, combine*
   Based on the insights generated from journaling, negotiate your ideas down to 3 requests you would want to make of yourself for learning well in this group. For instance:

   In order to learn well with this group, I need to...

   c. Proposing what *we need* (5 minutes) *record on 3 sticky notes*
   Participants now translate the 3 ideas claimed as personal needs (in the previous negotiation with self) to group needs. Each request is transferred to a sticky note. Each sticky note will now "hold" one proposed norm for a total of 3 proposed group norms.

   To support this transfer of ideas from self needs to group needs, it may be helpful to offer a prompt such as:

   > In order to do our best learning together in this community, we need to:
   > 1. (sticky note #1)
   > 2. (sticky note #2)
   > 3. (sticky note #3)

   At the conclusion of this step, each participant should have 3 norms to take forward for additional negotiations.

   Participants signal the facilitator when they complete this process. The facilitator will match individuals to form pairs.

2. **Negotiation with one other colleague/pairs** (flexible timing)
   Each person brings to the pair the 3 sticky notes that represent their proposed norms. The 2 colleagues work together to re-negotiate their proposals (3 and 3 sticky notes) to a shared 3 sticky notes.

   Participants signal the facilitator when they complete this process. The facilitator will match pairs to form quads.

3. **Negotiation among 4 colleagues/quads** (flexible timing)
   Each pair brings to the quad their 3 sticky notes. Members of each quad work together to re-negotiate their proposals (3 and 3 sticky notes) to a shared 3 sticky notes.

   The facilitator knows that the groups have completed their negotiations when each group has posted their proposed norms.

4. **Negotiations "rest" with the group** (flexible timing)
   Each quad posts their 3 proposed norms for community review.
   The goal is to "see" our proposed needs with no additional conversation.

   The norms are read aloud "into" the community.
   The goal is to "hear" our proposed needs with no additional conversation.

   These proposed norms now serve as a reference point for continued learning in community.

5. **Negotiations achieve consensus and reside with the group**
   In preparation for the next meeting, the facilitator and/or volunteers from the group receive support from the learning community to re-organize and re-present this set of proposed norms for feedback at the opening of the next day's meeting.

6. **Norms re-visited**
   Group norms continue to "live" for the community. They can be routinely re-visited, providing the group a stable starting point for any needed re-negotiations.

Facilitation Notes

Preliminary Experiences
Constructing norms through a process of negotiations is often offered after proceeding through a preliminary set of experiences intended to develop understandings about professional collaboration and critique within learning communities. A sampling of preliminary experiences supported by facilitated conversations includes:

Group Juggle
    Debriefed using questions that attend to working together in groups toward shared goals
Micro-Lab or World Café
    Offering time to check in with individuals about their experiences and goals related to collaboration within community
Feedback Principles/Feedback Nightmares
    Perhaps using a Chalk Talk or walk-about to identify issues related to giving and receiving feedback
Compass Points
    Helping to identify learning needs based on learning styles
Learning from Text
    Using text to help us identify words and ideas that might help us generate shared language.

It seems to be helpful for the group to have a sense of the work they will be doing together before offering norms. The intention is that members will have a sense of what they are constructing norms in order to help them do well together.

Revising Proposed Norms
When the proposed norms are posted and "rest" with the group, it provides time and space for group members to disassociate from particular norms offered by particular people. Revising and editing with a large group can also become tedious after members have spent so much energy in negotiations. Most groups are pleased to have the facilitator and/or volunteers do the editing necessary to represent the norms to the group at the beginning of the next meeting.

A Norms Review Process
• Many groups set time in a meeting agenda to review their norms. Questions that encourage "tending to" group norms include:
• In what ways are our norms helping us "grow" our thinking?
• Should we change our norms in some way in order to help us better meet our goals?
• What norm(s) are we using well?
• What norm(s) seems difficult for us?
• What norm will I/we work on today?

You can find the protocols mentioned above and more at clee.org.