

SHAPING CULTURE

LESSON 1: DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY LEARNING AGREEMENT

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

-  *Develop a community agreement for joint learning among a group.*
-  *Learn from stories about personal educational experiences.*

LESSON OVERVIEW

Creating a Community Learning Agreement is a way of developing mutually agreed-upon ground rules for group communication and civil discourse. This lesson guides the use of a participatory process among participants to shape a culture of learning.

The process of developing the agreement should model the approach to civic professionalism presented in this guide; thus, it is essential to create an inclusive process where all participants feel their voices are valued in contributing ideas and perspectives. The result should be a mutual and respectful set of norms that serve as the foundation for a vibrant learning community.

SUGGESTED PLAN [ø 75 minutes]

LESSON PREPARATION

1. Familiarize yourself with the World Café method for hosting dialogues with large groups. This method includes processes for creating a welcoming environment, holding rounds of small-group conversations around key questions, and sharing insights. (See <http://theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/> for more information.)
2. Choose a space where you can document the Community Learning Agreement in a way that lets the whole group view it. Options include a whiteboard or chalkboard, a large flip chart, or a virtual recording place.
3. Set up several stations for small groups around the room with flip chart paper and pens for notes at each table.

INTRODUCTION [15 minutes]

Explain the importance of collectively establishing community ground rules for creating a productive and inclusive learning community. Note particularly that this process models a democratic method for developing group norms in public settings, so it's an important skill to practice in the classroom as students develop as civic professionals.

Ask for examples of how participants have developed and experienced formal or informal community agreements. Inquire about written and unwritten norms, rules, and rituals in various aspects of their lives. Mention things like walking on a path, forming lines at a coffee shop, or raising hands in class as everyday examples.

Introduce suggestions for group agreements from leaders in facilitation and civil discourse, such as adrienne maree brown. In *Emergent Strategies* (see Recommended Readings at the end of this guide), brown offers some of her favorite learning agreement recommendations, including these:

- Listen from the inside out and bottom up (a feeling in your gut matters!).
- Engage tension, don't indulge drama.
- W.A.I.T.—Why Am I Talking?
- Make space, take space—balance the verbose and the reticent.
- Confidentiality—take the lesson, leave the details.
- Be open to learning.
- Be open to someone else speaking your truth.
- Building, not selling—when you speak, converse, don't pitch.
- Yes/and, both/and.
- Value the process as much as, if not more than, the outcomes.
- Assume best intent, attend to impact.
- Self care and community care—pay attention to your neighbors.

Introduce World Café as a process for strategic dialogue among a diverse group of stakeholders. (See <http://theworldcafe.com>)

SMALL-GROUP ROUNDS [⌚ 45 minutes]

ROUND 1 [⌚15 minutes]

Form groups of approximately 4 to 5 participants and ask each group to respond to a series of questions aimed at capturing a set of ground rules for a community agreement. Have someone in the group take notes to document stories and insights.

Questions for the first round might include:

- Think of the best discussions you've been involved in. What happened that made these conversations so satisfying?
- What kinds of ground rules would help the class have conversations like these?

ROUND 2 [⌚15 minutes]

Have participants move to another group. The groups may choose to leave one person as the "table host" for the next round. This person provides continuity between by explaining what happened at the table in the previous round to the new group of participants.

Ensure that someone in the group adds to the prior group's notes to document stories and insights from the new round.

Questions for the second round might include:

- Think of the worst discussions you've been involved in. What things happened that made these conversations so dissatisfying?
- What kinds of ground rules would help the class avoid conversations like this?

ROUND 3 [⌚15 minutes]

Participants should then move to a third group. The groups may once more choose to leave one person as the table host for the final round. Again, have someone in the group add to the notes to document insights in this final round.

The goal of the third round is for the group to synthesize the results of the prior two rounds of ground rules brainstorming. Ask the groups to list, expand, and refine the ground rules generated through discussions.

LARGE-GROUP HARVESTING [15 minutes]

Invite the groups to share a few stories from the first two rounds, and then the curated list from round three for the Community Learning Agreement. Document the responses on a board or flip chart so that they are posted in a visible place.

Check in with the group to ensure there is agreement about the items on the list. Make clear that this is a living document to be returned to during future sessions.

Finalize the ground rules and ask for volunteers to help make some kind of public documentation of the Community Learning Agreement. This might be done virtually, in the classroom space, or both. If possible, house the community agreement in a visible space so students can hold each other accountable for maintaining civil and productive dialogues.

