

### 1. Pausing

Numerous researchers have conducted studies on the positive effects of teacher pausing and silence on student thinking. The ‘wait time’ research of Mary Budd Rowe (1986) has been replicated around the world.

Thinking takes time and high-level thinking takes even longer.

This research indicates that it takes from 3 to 5 seconds for most human brains to process high level thoughts. Not all people think the same way. This is especially evident in meetings and group work. Some people prefer to think out loud and construct their ideas externally; others prefer to process ideas internally and reflect and analyze before speaking.

The external processors often get in the way of the internal processors. This can be an alienating experience for deliberate, internal thinkers. The meeting topics move by before they have had a chance to contribute.

Groups become skilled at four types of pauses.

1. The first type occurs **after a question has been asked**, allowing for initial processing time for those being asked the question.
2. The second type occurs **after someone speaks**. Human beings think and speak in bursts. With additional processing time, more thoughts are organized into coherent speech.

The first two types of pauses require the questioner and other group members to monitor and control their own behavior. These are pauses to give other people time to think.

3. A third type is under the **control of each individual who is asked a question**. This is personal reflection time in which that person waits before answering. A person might say, “Give me a moment to think about that before answering”.  
At other times one acknowledges the question nonverbally, goes inside oneself to think and then responds to the question. This is also a nice way to model thoughtfulness for others and can be an important normative behavior in groups.
4. A fourth type of pause in meetings is a **collective pause**. This can be formally structured or can occur spontaneously. These shared pauses allow ideas and questions to settle in and provide note taking and reflection.

The intent of these breaks in the action is to create shared cognitive space for the group and its members.

Pausing begins a pattern that is followed by paraphrasing and questioning. Groups give themselves a powerful gift when they establish this pattern as a norm; pause, paraphrase and question for details, pause, paraphrase and question for a wider range of thoughts; pause, paraphrase and question about feelings.

Wait Time I <i>Pause after asking a question to:</i>	Wait Time II <i>Pause after group members respond to:</i>	Wait Time III <i>Pause before your own responses or additional questions to:</i>	Wait Time IV <i>Collective pause to:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow thinking time</li> <li>• Signal support for thinking</li> <li>• Demonstrate your belief in the capacities of others for thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow time for retrieval of additional or related information</li> <li>• Encourage piggy backing of ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model thoughtfulness</li> <li>• Signal your need to think before responding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give notetaking time</li> <li>• Allow time for reflection</li> </ul>

## 2. Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is one of the most valuable and least used communication tools in meetings.

Even people who naturally and skillfully paraphrase in one to one settings often neglect this vital behavior in group settings. Groups that develop consciousness about paraphrasing and give themselves permission to use this reflective tool **become clearer about their work and more cohesive as a group.**




Mediational paraphrases reflect the speaker's content and the speaker's emotions about the content and frame a level of abstraction for holding the content. The paraphrase reflects content back to the speaker for further consideration and connects that response to the flow of the discourse emerging within the group.

Three broad categories of paraphrase are:

1. **Acknowledging** emotion and content. If the paraphrase is not completely accurate, the speaker will offer corrections. *"So you are concerned about the budgeting process and ways to get input early."*
2. **Organising** by offering themes and 'containers' to organize several statements or separate jumbled issues. This is an especially important type of paraphrase to use when multiple speakers contribute to a topic. *"There appear to be two issues here. One is resource allocation and the other is the impact of those decisions on student learning."*
3. **Abstracting.** Paraphrasing within a flow of discourse often moves through a sequence of acknowledging, organising and abstracting.

Paraphrases move to a higher level of abstraction when they **name concepts, goals, values and assumptions:**

*"So a major goal here is to define fairness in the budgeting processes and compare those criteria to the operating values of the school."*

Three Types of Paraphrasing		
<p><b>Acknowledging</b></p> <p>A brief statement in the listeners own words - metaphorically: a mirror</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You're concerned about.....</li> <li>• You would like to see.....</li> <li>• You feel badly about.....</li> </ul>	<p><b>Organising</b></p> <p>A statement that offers themes or containers - metaphorically: basket /boxes</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You have two goals here: one is about _____ and the other is about _____.</li> <li>• We are struggling with three themes: where to _____, how to _____ and who to _____.</li> <li>• On the one hand we _____ and on the other hand we _____.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Abstracting</b></p> <p>A statement that shifts the conversation to a higher or lower level of abstraction – metaphorically: ladder</p>  <p>To shift up:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's important to you/us that ...</li> <li>• A belief you/we hold is...</li> <li>• A goal for you /us is...</li> <li>• An assumption you /we are holding is...</li> <li>• You/We are considering (high impact instruction)</li> <li>• You/We are (identity)....</li> </ul>

### 3. Posing Questions

Thinking is a biochemical process that engages the molecules of emotion and the molecules of cognition. We are wired to detect threat in the communication of others. Reducing the potential for threat in our questions means that how we inquire is as important as the topic of our enquiry. To keep others open and thinking, we need to pay attention to several important features in our communication:

- **Full Attention**

The invitation to think begins with our giving full attention to others in the group signaling that our full presence is available for this conversation and that we intend no harm. This physical message meshes with several important verbal elements that form an invitation to think together and think about the ideas being explored. Subtle mirroring of others' body language is a good starting point as it helps to build rapport and communicates that you are listening before any verbal communication occurs.

- **Approachability: Verbals and Nonverbals**

Using an approachable voice is the first element of the invitation. This voice is well modulated and tends to rise at the end of a statement, summary or question. (Grinder, 1997). This tonal package wraps around our questions and comments indicating the intention to invite and explore thinking and not to interrogate or challenge.

- **Plural Forms**

Two important syntactical choices invite colleagues to think with us and increase the options and possibilities for thinking. The first is to use the plural forms: *observations* instead of *observation*, *options* instead of *option*. The use of the plural form sets aside the need for evaluation and the sorting of ideas. Often group members need to hear their ideas aloud before they know which are the most central to the issues before the group.

- **Tentative Language**

The second syntactical choice is to use exploratory phrasing in statements, paraphrases and questions. Words like *some*, *might*, *seems*, *possible*, and *hunches* widen the potential range of responses and reduce the need of confidence and surety. Words like *could* and *why* may decrease the confidence of listeners by seeming to ask for premature commitment or a need to defend ideas and actions that are not yet fully developed.

- **Open-Ended Questions**

Invitational, mediational facilitators and group members frame their questions using the elements listed above. In addition, they frame their questions by using open-ended, non-dichotomous forms. These are questions that cannot be answered *yes* or *no*.

For example, instead of asking a group "*Did anyone notice anything unusual in this data set?*" they ask "**What might be some interesting or unusual things that you noticed in these data sets?**" By eliminating dichotomous stems such as, "Can you", "Did you", "Will you", or "Have you", facilitators and skilled group members invite productive thinking and promote a spirit of inquiry within the group.

- **Positive Presuppositions**

These language forms **assume capacity and positive intentions**. "*Given your knowledge of .....*", "*As an experienced professional.....*" Positive Presuppositions are **subtle and embedded** in a way of thinking and communicating. They let others know that we trust them to do the right things and have the right knowledge. Garmston and Wellman add, "Positive presuppositions reduce the possibility of the listener perceiving threats or challenges in a paraphrase or question."

## Posing Questions: To Explore Thinking

Using the elements of invitation, we pose questions to explore thinking by asking about perceptions, assumptions and interpretations, and invite others to inquire into their own thinking.

### Worked examples:

- Given our focus on student learning, what might be some of the priorities?  
(Positive presupposition) (tentative) (plural)
- As we consider these recommendations, what are some key viewpoints that emerge?  
(Inclusive) (plural) (plural) (open-ended)
- What might be some of the assumptions we have about.....?  
(tentative) (plural & open-ended)
- How might other stakeholders be interpreting this data?  
(tentative) (plural & open-ended)

### Further examples to extend thinking:

- What questions might we have about our interpretations?
- Given our concern and knowledge of this issue, what might be some of the observations and data that are influencing us?
- What are some of the perspectives you are considering as you are reflecting on this issue?
- As we are considering the bigger picture, what might be some of the factors and ripple effects that could be involved?
- What are some of our feelings about .....?
- As we are considering alternatives, what seems most promising?
- What might be some of the ways we will know when we are successful?
- What might be some of the goals we have for this meeting?
- What are some insights we might carry forward?

### Linking together the first three norms:

Groups give themselves a powerful gift when they establish this pattern as a norm; pause, paraphrase and question for details, pause, paraphrase and question for a wider range of thoughts; pause, paraphrase and question about feelings.



## 4. Putting ideas on the Table

**Ideas are at the heart of group work.** The intention underlying putting ideas on the table is to **make our thinking transparent** in a way that supports others in engaging with our contributions.

When ideas are owned by individuals, the other group members tend to interact with the speaker out of their feelings for and relationship to that person, rather than with the idea presented. This is especially true when the speakers have role or knowledge authority related to the topic at hand.

In order to be effective, **ideas must be released to the group.**

“Here is an idea for consideration .....”

“One possible approach to this issue might be .....”

To have an idea be received in the spirit in which you offer it, **label your intentions:** “

“This is one idea”

or

“Here is a thought.....”

or

“This is not an advocacy I am just thinking out loud.”

**Knowing when to pull ideas off the table is equally as important:**

“I think this idea is blocking us; let’s set it aside and move on to other possibilities.”

When continued advocacy of an idea seems not to be contributing to group members’ thinking this may be a signal to pull back and reconsider approaches. The key is not to get too wedded to your ideas as you put them forward and take it personally if the idea doesn’t get taken up. Get used to putting your ideas on the table, but not crawling up there with them! The idea is to for the group to consider and examine all ideas as part of the collective

It’s easier for more talkative group members to put their ideas on the table, so **consider using pausing and paraphrasing** more often as it provides a respectful prelude that gives us permission to pose questions. With those questions, we seek to first understand others before putting our own ideas on the table.

## 5. Providing Data

**Data have no meaning on their own - meaning is a result of human interaction with data.** Many schools are data rich and meaning poor. Adaptive groups develop the capacity to discern what data are worth paying attention to and what collaborative practices help people engage with data in ways that increase their ownership and willingness to act on conclusions.

Data can be **quantitative or qualitative**. Schools are difficult places to motivate and govern with numbers. A 6% rise in student reading scores may be less compelling than a teacher's incidental tale of a challenged reader who makes a breakthrough. Reasoning by anecdote is often more common than reasoning with data. Interpreting and using data are learned skills that take time and practice to develop.

**Knowledge, meaning and commitment result from dialogue and discussion about what story is told by the data.** Without organized story making, people in organisations make up their own explanations for events. Part of the reason for this is protection from unwanted truths.

- **Three-point Communication**

Third Point is a nonverbal strategy that comes from the work of Michael Grinder. It establishes a triangle, with the facilitator as one point, the group as a second point and data or focusing information as the third point (see figure 1).

Third Points might include professional articles, text selections, samples of student work and displays of quantitative or qualitative data. The focus on the third point **increases participants' psychological safety**, separating the information from the facilitator and allowing group and allowing group members to talk with and about the data without having to make eye contact with colleagues.

Skilled facilitators aid this process by depersonalizing the information under consideration. They do so by impersonal language to describe the information – *the data, this information, that chart, the article, the student work* – instead of using personal pronouns to describe information – *your students' work, our results, your test scores*. The goal is to turn data and information into a "thing". It is much easier to talk about "things" than to talk about "us" as in Two-point communication situations (as shown in figure 2).

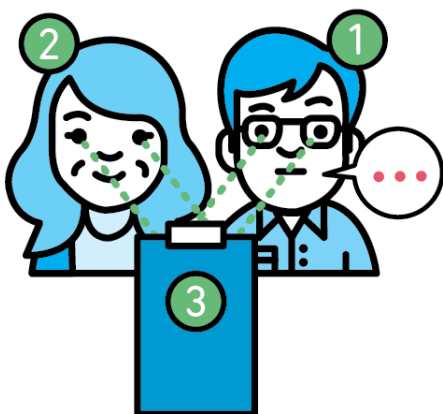


Figure 1. Three-point communication

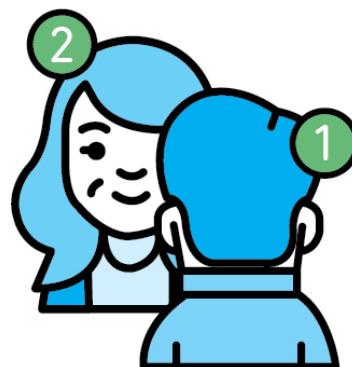
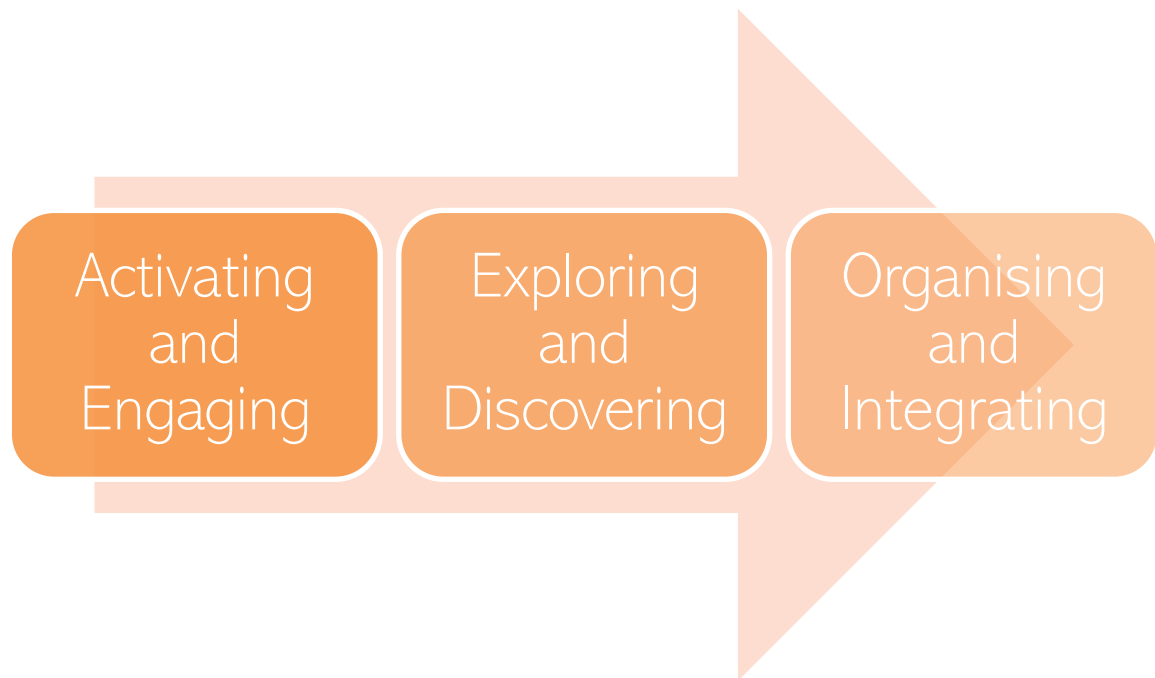


Figure 2. Two-point communication

- **Data Driven Dialogue Process**

In their book *Data Driven Dialogue*, Bruce Wellman and Laura Lipton (2004) offer a collaborative inquiry process to construct meaning from data.

The three phases of the process are:



In the **Activating and Engaging** phase, collaborative inquirers surface experiences and expectations prior to examining the data.

Prompts for dialogue during this phase might be:

- “What are some predictions we are making?”
- “With what assumptions are we entering?”
- “What are some possibilities for learning?”

In the **Exploring and Discovering** phase, collaborative inquirers observe and analyze the data. Prompts for dialogue might include:

- “What seems to be surprising or unexpected?”
- “What are some patterns, categories or trends that are emerging?”
- “What are some things we have not yet explored?”

In the **Organising and Integrating** phase, collaborative inquirers generate theory.

Prompts for dialogue might include:

- “What inferences/explanations/conclusions might we draw?”
- “What additional data source might we explore to verify our conclusions?”
- “What are some actions we might take as a result of our conclusions?”



## 6. Paying attention to Self and Others

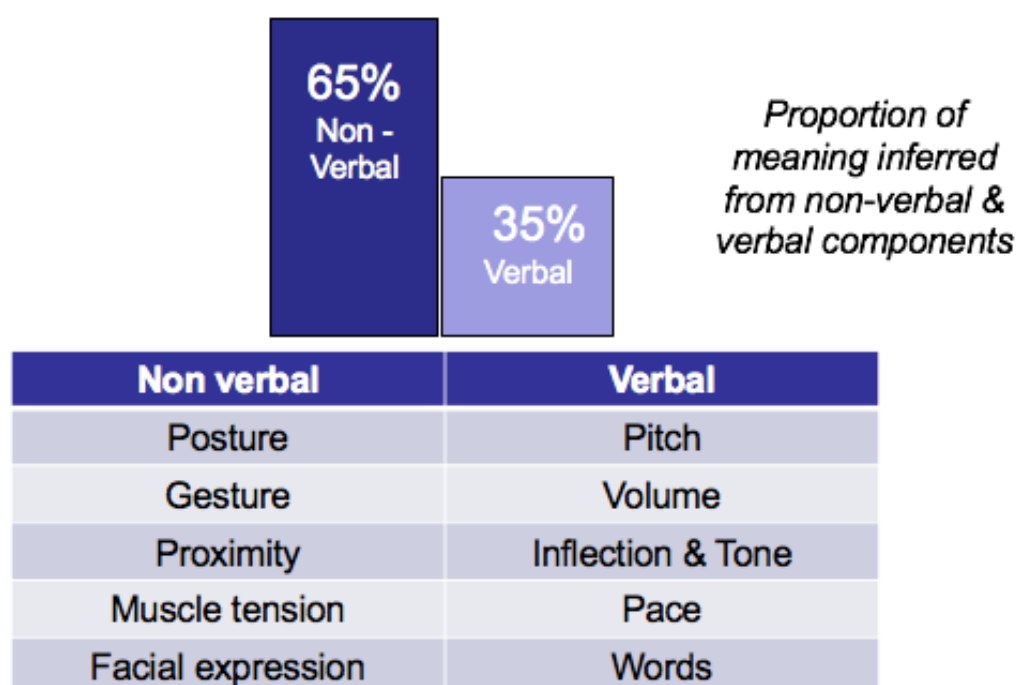
Meaningful dialogue and discussion is facilitated when each group member is conscious of oneself and of others.

Skilled group members are aware of what they are saying, how they are saying it and how others are receiving and responding to their ideas. This includes **paying attention to both physical and verbal cues in oneself and in others**.

Since the greatest part of communication occurs nonverbally, group members need consciousness about their **total communication package** (Goleman, 2006). This includes posture, gesture, proximity, muscle tension, facial expression, and the pitch, pace, volume and inflection in their voices.

One important skill to develop is paying attention to and responding to human uniqueness.

See section **2. Paraphrasing**, which offers some tips for communicating with global and concrete thinkers. In addition to using those ideas, skilled group members often try to match the language forms of others. This occurs when the respondent joins in a metaphor offered by another.



Burgoon, Buller & Woodall (1989) Nonverbal communication: The unspoken dialogue.



## 7. Presuming Positive Intentions

Assuming that others' intentions are positive encourages honest conversations about important matters. Using positive intentions in your speech is one manifestation of this norm.

This is an operating stance that group members must take if dialogue and discussion are to flourish; it is also a linguistic act for speakers to frame their paraphrases and questions within positive presuppositions (see section 3. **Posing Questions** for more detail).

Positive presuppositions reduce the likelihood that a listener will perceive threats or challenges in a paraphrase or question. Instead of asking,

*"Does anybody here know why these kids aren't learning?"*

a skilled group member might say,

*"Given our shared concern about student achievement, let's examine our assumptions about what might be causing gaps in learning."*

The first question is likely to trigger defensiveness.

The second approach will most likely lead to speculation, exploration, and collective understanding. This is especially true when a speaker has strong emotions about a topic and even more important when the respondent initially disagrees with the speaker.

Here's an example.

### Speaker:

*"I'm really ticked off about the lack of communication in this school. We never find out about the important things until everyone else knows about them. In fact, I get more district news from the local paper than I do from internal sources".*

### Respondent:

*"So as a committed professional, you'd like useful information about our organisation in a timely fashion and in a means convenient for you. As you think about such a system, what might be some important components?"*

In the example above, the respondent **presumes** that the speaker is a committed professional who wants to solve a real problem. People tend to act as if such presuppositions are true. The emotional processors in the brain hear the positive intention and open up to access high level thinking (LeDoux, 1996).

## References

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