

Having Critical Conversations for Student Achievement

Karen Hume is a Student Success Lead on leave from the Durham District School Board as well as an author and speaker.

Her recent books include *Start Where They Are: Differentiating for Success with the Young Adolescent* and *Supporting and Sustaining Differentiated Instruction: An Administrator's Guide*. For further information, visit www.karenhume.ca.

In the DVD segments for *Having Critical Conversations for Student Achievement*, Karen Hume talks about the importance of identifying and articulating our beliefs about student achievement; examining those beliefs in conversation with others and through reflection on data; and finding effective ways to change our own and other people's minds.

Segments:

1. Facilitating Critical Conversations for Student Achievement
2. How do we learn?
3. How do you ensure student success?
4. What do you believe?
5. How do you change your own and other people's beliefs?

Segment 1: Facilitating Critical Conversations for Student Achievement

(Length: 4 minutes)

Synopsis:

Notes for the facilitator to be considered while planning the session

Look for the following:

A sensitive, high-risk activity which needs:

- Environment to support risk-taking – no observers; confidentiality
- Task to be completed after the session, with guarantee of success
- Relentless sharing of success stories
- Appropriate use of data to inform action

Additional information:

Context is going to be very important to a successful session. For people to be willing to take risks, they need to feel they are being well treated and that you are concerned for their comfort and personal security. Everything, from the temperature of the room to the timing of the breaks, has an impact. In your planning, consider the following:

- An off-site venue or a sign for the door that indicates that the session is closed to observers
- A room that is large enough to allow some measure of privacy for table groups

- People sitting in groups rather than in lecture- or classroom-style seating
- Groups based on like-role and/or comfort with each other (i.e., if working with multiple schools, put school teams together; if working within a school, put departments together)
- A variety and abundance of refreshments, both healthy options and comfort foods
- The name and phone number of someone who will take and immediately convey any urgent messages from participants' workplaces (so you are able to reassure people that they can turn their BlackBerries and cell phones off during the session)
- Timing. When this session was delivered live, it took a full day and people felt that it could have gone longer. Read through this entire guide to determine the timing and sequence that works for your group. Then, if possible, provide participants with an agenda before they attend the session.
- An optional but well received consideration is to build on the use of films (see below) by decorating using an Academy Awards theme. Paper film reels, clapper boards, black and silver balloons, and inexpensive red carpeting are readily available from party supply stores.

Films are used in each segment of this session. The reasons for using films are provided in Segment 2 rather than here, so that all participants understand their value. The activities provided with each film are modified from an excellent book noted in "Digging Deeper," below.

As facilitator, you have several responsibilities regarding the appropriate use of films. They include:

- Ensuring that the film is lawfully obtained and displayed. MISA Barrie, Curriculum Services Canada, and Karen Hume make no representations or warranties about the ownership or permitted use of audiovisual works.
- Viewing the clip before using it.
- Having the clip cued up before your presentation.
- Telling participants if the clip includes any offensive language.

Needed for the segments:

For all segments

- Paper and pen for each participant
- Flipchart paper and markers (on hand)
- Post-it notes—various sizes, lined or unlined—at each table
- Session agenda

For Segment 3

- *Apollo 13* feature film
- *Apollo 13* activity card – provide enough copies at a table so that people can see the questions and reflect privately before discussing as a group (perhaps one card for every two participants)

For Segment 4

- *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* feature film
- *Indiana Jones* activity card – one copy for every two participants
- Data sets cards – print from PDF document to business-card stock; you will need five pages of business cards to make a set for a group

For Segment 5

- *Stand and Deliver* feature film
- *Stand and Deliver* activity card – one copy for every two participants
- Large ruled index cards – one per person
- Changing Minds award – one per group

Digging Deeper

Olsen, Walter and Sommers, William (2006). *Energizing Staff Development Using Film Clips: Memorable Movie Moments that Promote Reflection, Conversation and Action*. California: Corwin Press. (Distributed in Canada by Nelson Education.)

General helpful tips for facilitators (copy provided to each Board by MISA Barrie Region PNC):

Hamlin, Sonya (2006). *How to Talk So People Listen: Connecting in Today's Workplace*. New York: HarperCollins.

Segment 2: How do we learn?

(Length 3 minutes)

Synopsis: Significance of conversation to learning; why to use film to support conversation

Look for the following:

- Conversation is the action that makes learning happen
- Making the invisible visible: can't change beliefs you don't see
- Conversations need focus and direction; data provides this
- Conversations benefit from connection to other aspects of life; film provides this
- Five reasons for using film

Segment 3: How do you ensure student success?

(Length: 6 minutes)

Synopsis: Defining success for your school or system when "failure is not an option"

Look for the following:

- Introducing the film *Apollo 13*
- Pause to watch film clip
- Challenging assumptions: why we don't, why it is necessary, need for courageous leadership and sense of urgency
- Need for new information to inform actions: data, past experiences
- Focus on what you want to create, not just what you want to fix
- Pause for *Apollo 13* activity – reflection, group discussion
- Three ways to address the question, “What is success going to look like in my school or board if failure is not an option?”

Digging Deeper:

For additional creative ways to challenge assumptions:

Schenck, Ernie (2007). *The Houdini Solution: Put Creativity and Innovation to Work by Thinking Inside the Box*. Toronto: McGraw Hill.

Segment 4: What do you believe?

(Length: 7 minutes)

Synopsis: Critical conversations require identification of beliefs and understanding of relationship between beliefs and actions; significance of data.

Look for the following:

- Introducing the film *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*
- Pause to watch film clip
- Congruency of beliefs and actions
- Finish sentence – “The most important characteristic of students in my school is...”
- Pause for *Indiana Jones* activity – reflection, group discussion
- Four Demons of Insufficiency (Blankstein)
- Circle of Influence and Circle of Concern (Covey)
- Determining data you have and data you need
- Pause for data card sorting activity

Digging Deeper:

For an in-depth discussion of how educators can use data to prevent failure (copy provided to each board by the MISA Barrie Region PNC):

Blankstein, Alan (2004) *Failure is Not an Option: Six Principles that Guide Student Achievement in High-Performing Schools*. California: Corwin Press.

Segment 5: How do you change your own, and other people's beliefs?

(Length: 17 minutes)

Synopsis: The responsibility we all have for acknowledging when our beliefs are unhelpful; Gardner's seven ways to change minds

Look for the following:

- Introducing the film *Stand and Deliver*
- Pause to watch film clip
- Explanation of activity
- Pause for *Stand and Deliver* activity
- Explanation of index card activity
- Pause for activity
- Howard Gardner's seven ways to change minds
- Combining contents of our minds and formats
- Steps to mind changing
- Introduction of final activity – laser talk or role play

Digging Deeper:

For a fascinating, in-depth look at how we can influence our own minds (provided to each board by MISA Barrie Region PNC):

Gardner, Howard (2006). *Changing Minds: The Art and Science of Changing Our Own and Other People's Minds*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.