

The Art of Focused Conversations for Schools

by Jo Nelson

The Art of Focused Conversations method is useful in helping people process information presented or helping people reach their own thoughtful conclusions.

Focused conversation method moves through four levels of thinking:

- ↓ *Objective*: dealing with data and sensory observation,
- Reflective*: related to personal reactions and associations,
- Interpretive*: about meaning, significance and implications, and
- ↓ *Decisional*: concerned with resolution.

Focused conversation method has the potential to

- a) extend **thinking** and learning capacity,
- b) make **learning** meaningful,
- c) make **communications** in groups effective
- d) help prevent and **solve problems**, and
- e) strengthen the effectiveness of **evaluation**

Objective Questions

1. Who or what was involved?
2. What were the objectives?
3. What is the purpose?
4. What does the document say?
5. Tell me all that was involved in the event?
6. What words were used?
7. Describe what you saw/experienced.
8. What are some of the concerns (name, your staff) has experienced?
9. What steps did we go through? First? Second? Next?
10. What were the main points?
11. What body language did you notice?
12. What are question of clarity you have?
13. What words or phrases catch your attention?
14. Share one experience you have had related to this topic.
15. What facts stand out to you?
16. What other information do you know?
17. What comments have you heard?
18. What has happened since the last time we met? (Accomplishments, events, activities related to our task).
19. What statistics do we know?
20. What behavior were observed or reported?
21. Where have you seen _____?
22. What is one thing you heard?
23. What specific acts of misbehavior have you seen?
24. What are the positive things you observed?
25. What did you do?
26. What are the rules?
27. Which parts do you remember the most?
28. What is one strategy you use?
29. What is important to you?
30. What were the topics covered/discusses?
31. Share the precise data you collected.
32. Explain step by step what happened?
33. Tell all the information.
34. What happened?
35. What was the goal?
36. What percentage of the project did you complete?
37. State the history that led to the event.
38. Tell about all those that participated and contributed.
39. What do you want to get done by when?
40. What is the foundation the premise is built on?

Reflective Questions

1. What part did you laugh at?
2. When were you afraid?
What was confusing, exciting, or overwhelming?
3. What have you been grateful to someone for?
4. What images stick with you?
5. Who do you identify or relate to?
6. What am I interested in that this reminds me of?
7. What surprises you?
8. What memories came to mind?
9. At what point were you happy?
10. When did you really understand?
11. What made you irritated or angry?
12. What was your favorite part?
13. What was your first reaction?
14. What concerns you about the implementation?
15. What was inspiring to you?
16. What is causing you anxiety, stress, or unsettled feelings?
17. What part strikes you as the most powerful?
18. What parts are most alarming?
19. What part are you okay with?
20. What is frustrating you?
21. Which part did you really hate?
22. What about our work do you feel best about?
23. Where did we struggle the most?
24. What part of the work ahead seems like a heavy burden?
25. What did your face look like? Make a face like that.
26. What's the worst part of this for you?
27. What are the challenges?
28. What is the most enjoyable?
29. What shocked you about this?
30. What made you want to escape?
31. What is one thing that makes you mad?
32. What parts were the tiniest bit hopeful or a little fun?
33. What worries you the most about his behavior?
34. Where in your body did you feel your frustration?
35. What do you like to do here?
36. When do you feel sad, angry, or unhappy here?
37. What did you feel the most proud of? What do you wish you had done better?
38. What surprises were in the program for you?
39. Where have you had a big "aha!" happen?
40. What part put me on the edge

Interpretive Questions

1. Where did you have a breakthrough?
2. How will it affect you? Your work?
3. What has been most worthwhile?
4. What has been least helpful?
5. What was the most outrageous thing he did to allow/encourage learning?
6. Why did that happen?
7. What might I learn from this?
8. What did you discover about yourself?
9. If you were in their position, what would you do?
10. Why is this important?
11. What will be the greatest challenge to you in applying this?
12. How are these issues similar or connected?
13. What seems most “on target” about what they are doing there in relation to our school’s needs and objectives?
14. How is this similar to the equation we did last class? How is it different?
15. What are common elements in your experience of successful learning?
16. What were some unique elements?
17. What patterns did you hear – where more than one group (person) said the same thing?
18. What is it you think the author was trying to get across to the readers?
19. What makes that an important message?
20. How were you changed by the experience?
21. In which areas did we work most effectively together? Where do we need to improve?
22. What is a value that comes from your observations and reflections?
23. Which of these issues concerns you the most?
24. What would you have done differently?
25. If you were in this picture, who would you be and what would you be doing?
26. Where did you have problems? Why?
27. What are some alternative to this draft?
28. Which of the recommendations are most important for you? Why?
29. Which parts are most critical to complete?
30. Which of the questions, concerns, objections or obstacles that you have heard so far is going to require the most careful response?
31. What was missing from this session for you?
32. What trends are emerging?
33. What does this reveal about who you are?
34. What are some of the root issues?
35. What do you perceive to be the possible implications of this new situation, both positive and negative? Why?
36. What might this look like when we are done?
37. What are some of the things you can do to deal with it?
38. Which of these goals is your top priority?
39. How are you different now?
40. In the big picture of things, what is the importance of today?

Decisional Questions

1. How would you name the whole?
2. Draw a picture about this.
3. What do we need to do over the next few months?
4. Who will take on which tasks?
5. What recommendations do you have?
6. What do I do to carry out this assignment?
7. If you do it over again, what would you do differently?
8. How do you think this knowledge or experience will help in the future?
9. Who needs to be involved?
10. How will you start?
11. Based on what we've seen to date, what can we set as learning objectives for the end of the next week?
12. What do you need to do to master this process?
13. Summarize the underlying factors.
14. How do we implement our learnings?
15. How has this story changed you, or your thinking?
16. What are you willing to commit to?
17. What can we call this exercise?
18. How would you summarize the meaning of this?
19. How will the response be organized?
20. How can we support each other?
21. What is one thing you'll do as follow-up at your school?
22. Who will take responsibility for any of these changes?
23. What do we want to suggest to the team?
24. What are our next steps? Who will do them?
25. What are all the things we have to do to get this done?
26. What is the first action you have planned in your project?
27. What else can we do to assist you?
28. What are appropriate consequences to these problems?
29. How can we clear this up?
30. How shall we communicate our decision to the rest of the parents, staff, and students?
31. How can we put these together to create a solution we can live with?
32. Who will make sure these things happen?
33. What strategies can be applied?
34. What can we do to prevent this from happening again?
35. What can we do to care for each other?
36. What choices will you make?
37. When shall we come back and evaluate what's working, and regroup?
38. What might we do to limit this destructive behavior and encourage positive behavior?
39. Who will you go to if you need more help?
40. What areas will we focus on?

Sample: Focused conversation

| Solving a Safety Problem | |
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| Designed for Parents and Community | Opening People have come to me with concerns about the traffic safety around the school. This meeting has been called to talk about this and make some changes before someone is hurt or killed. |
| Situation Concerns have been voiced about traffic safety around the elementary school. The parent council is discussing the problems. | Objective Questions When you observe our children coming to school and leaving it, what are some problems you have seen? What are previously reported problems you have heard about? |
| Rational Aim To create a plan for improving traffic safety around the school. | Reflective Questions Which of these problems worries you the most? |
| Experiential Aim To enable parents to come away knowing that the children will be safer. To experience working together on a problem. | Interpretive Questions What are the underlying problems that need to be addressed? |
| | Decisional Questions What can we do in order to improve this situation? What will these measures cost in money and time? How will we pay for them? How can we involve the students in improving the situation? Who will make sure these things happen? |
| | Closing Parents have had the chance to voice their fears and concerns about school traffic safety. We will all work together to create a safer area for the children. |

Planning template

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|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Topic | |
| Rational Aim | Opening |
| Experiential Aim | Objective Questions |
| | Reflective Questions |
| | Interpretive Questions |
| | Decisional Questions |
| | Closing |