Norms of Collaboration

Adapted from ThinkingCollaborative.com

PARAPHRASING
Paraphrasing involves recasting another’s thoughts into one’s own words. Paraphrasing helps to reduce group tension by communicating an attempt to understand another. Paraphrasing can advance the conversation when it is used to: (1) acknowledge and clarify what has been said; (2) summarize and organize ideas; and (3) shift the focus of the conversation to a higher or lower level of abstraction (e.g. providing examples, making generalizations, or observing cross cutting themes). Using different types of paraphrasing help members of a team hear and understand each other as they evaluate data and formulate decisions. It is helpful when the speaker signals their intention to paraphrase (“So, you’re suggesting...”, or “I think I’m hearing...”) and focuses the paraphrase to a level that helps further the group’s thinking.

PAUSING
Pausing slows down the conversation. It provides for “wait time,” which has been shown to dramatically improve thinking. It signals to others that their ideas and comments are worth thinking about, dignifies their contributions, and implicitly encourages future participation. Pausing enhances understanding and questioning, and greatly increases the quality of decision making. In cultures that don’t often promote introspection, pausing inherently changes the rhythm of discourse. Requesting a pace change (e.g., “could we take a minute to think more about this before responding”) can be helpful in promoting pausing over time.

PAYING ATTENTION TO SELF AND OTHERS
Collaborative work is facilitated when each team member is explicitly conscious of self and others: be aware of information shared, and how it is said, and how others are responding to it. As we pay attention to someone else’s way of processing information, we are better able to communicate with them. When we pay attention to self and others, we recognize when we may have been speaking too much or too little. When others may not have had equitable opportunities to share, we invite them to do so. It is helpful to be curious about other people’s impressions and understandings, but not judgmental.
PRACTICING CULTURAL PROFICIENCY
The intention of practicing cultural proficiency is to seek perspectives, knowledge, and skills in order to promote inclusion, equity, and social justice. Individuals and teams developing cultural proficiency recognize that multiple viewpoints enrich group expertise and seek out viewpoints that are not represented. Cultural proficiency is grounded in the understanding that none of us is ever fully culturally proficient. Those who work toward cultural proficiency recognize their learning is never complete and that their way may not be the only or “best” way. They recognize the systemic nature of oppression and the need to take small and large actions that advance an equitable society.

Practicing cultural proficiency requires individuals to understand their own cultures and identities, and to recognize they may have societal privileges which disadvantage others. People practicing cultural proficiency seek out and honor the histories, perspectives, and cultural practices of others. They regularly reflect on their own progress toward being more informed, skilled in action, and inclusive.

PROBING FOR SPECIFICITY
Probing seeks to clarify terminology, information, ideas, feelings or perceptions that are not yet fully understood. Probing can be either specific or open-ended, depending upon the circumstances. One might ask, “Tell me more about...” or “What makes you say that?” or “I didn't understand your meaning, could you explain?” Recognize that care is needed in probing as the tone of voice used could feel supportive, harsh, or intimidating. It is helpful to ask for clarification of vague nouns and pronouns (e.g., “they”), action words (e.g., “improve”), comparators (e.g., “best”), rules (e.g., “should”), and universal quantifiers (e.g., “everyone”).