

Becoming Listeners

Setting Feedback Norms

Back in September, we set a respectful tone by talking about the conditions we need to do our best work and agreeing on meeting norms that we review at the beginning of each meeting. In October, before any of us presented our students' work, we did the Feedback Nightmares activity (Mohr, cited in School Reform Initiative, 2014), in which we each journaled about times when we had bad experiences giving and receiving feedback. After writing about our experiences, we shared our stories with partners, pulled out the commonalities, and made a list of feedback dos and don'ts. The partners shared our lists with the whole group and we edited our feedback norms to be:

- Start with the positive.
- Support one another with sensitive comments.
- Use discretion.
- Base feedback on observable facts.
- Give feedback only when asked.
- Be honest.
- Be professional.

Some of these items are in tension with one another. For example, I wondered how we could agree to both "give feedback only when asked" and "be honest." To follow these norms, we would have to cultivate good judgment and continue to trust one another.

Zones of Comfort, Risk, and Danger

Another piece of groundwork that I purposefully placed on an agenda was the Zones of Comfort, Risk, and Danger activity (School Reform Initiative, 2014). During this activity, we had a conversation about how the same experience might be risky for one teacher, comfortable for another, and feel dangerous for a third. We touched on some things that sent us into the danger zone, such as unproductive conflict, feeling like confidentiality might be breached, and talking about somewhat taboo topics on our campus such as how race, ethnicity, and class might affect someone's experience at Monroe Middle School. I emphasized how the zone of risk is often where the most powerful learning takes place and we should feel comfortable being vulnerable with one another because the protocols were designed to help us stay out of the danger zone. As I learned in my CFG training, protocols "constrain behavior in order to enhance experience" (McDonald et al., 2007, p. 8).