

Tools FOR SCHOOLS

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EVERY EDUCATOR ENGAGES IN EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EVERY DAY SO EVERY STUDENT ACHIEVES

Effective presenters set the stage for learning

Tracy Crow

“As presenters, we do great with our content. We know our content backwards and forwards,” said

Deborah J. Estes, a learning consultant. “And, if you’re really good, you’ve planned for the process you’re going to use to get that content across.”

The element that separates a good presenter from a great presenter, according to Estes, is working in context. For Kendall Zoller, the key to moving from good to great presentations is what he calls delivery — how the presenter effectively lays the groundwork for learning. Zoller, president and owner of Sierra Training Associates, noted that “if you’re not at a point (as a presenter) where you understand how to set up the environment to allow for learning to take place, then the best content in the world won’t necessarily work for everyone.” Zoller’s work focuses on how nonverbal and linguistic patterns influence the learning environment.

The learning context begins the moment that the first participant meets the presenter. “You should be completely

ready to work context when the first person walks in the room,” said Estes, “because that’s when your presentation starts. You should not be arranging tables.” At that point, she believes, there is nothing more powerful than a handshake and calling a person by name to help establish an effective learning environment.

Presenters have the task of helping participants reach a state where they are “comfortable being uncomfortable, and they’re uncomfortable enough to learn,” said Zoller. This is one area where kids are different in their learning than adults — they don’t have to be uncomfortable to learn. Adults, however, need a safe environment to admit that they don’t know something, and a cognitively challenging experience so they are receptive to learning.

Acknowledging the resistance in the room is another

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The strategies on pp. 5-7 can elevate a presentation from good to great.

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step in helping participants be open to learning. This can be as simple as saying, “I know you have a lot of important work to be doing right now, and here’s how today’s time together will help you.” (See tool on p. 6.) Establishing the goals and expectations for the day, as well as the norms for how the group will work together, are also useful concrete actions to take early in a session.

The beginning of a workshop or learning session is critical. “In the first five minutes, we need to establish credibility, rapport, the what-why-how for the context of the work, and give purpose for why we’re here,” said Zoller.

ESTABLISHING CREDIBILITY AND RAPPORT

While credibility often refers to a presenter’s credentials or expertise, Zoller is referring to credibility as an attribute that a group of participants assigns to a presenter, based on how they perceive him or her. Nonverbal patterns can strongly influence this perception.

“If you want the group to perceive that you have credibility, you can increase that perception from them by doing something as simple as standing still as opposed to taking a step,” he said. Other nonverbal moves include breathing deeply from the abdomen rather than upward through the chest, and having your arms either down at your sides or with the lower arm extended so that it’s parallel to the ground. He refers to this as a credible stance.

Zoller cited another factor that influences participants’ ideas about a presenter’s intelligence. “We make our decisions about another person’s intelligence during their pauses as opposed to when they speak. The person perceived to be the most intelligent in a room is that person with a credible stance and the person who is silent when he or she is not talking,” he said.

How a speaker uses his or her voice is also important. The approachable voice, at one end of a vocal pitch continuum, has more variation and is used when the presenter is asking a question or inviting participants to speak. A speaker uses the credible voice, with a flatter tone and less

variation in rhythm, to make definitive statements. *The choreography of presenting: The 7 essential abilities of effective presenters*, coauthored by Zoller (2010), states that certain nonverbal patterns accompany each type of vocal pitch. With the approachable voice, the head bobs and

the speaker tends to blink and lean forward more. While using the credible voice, the speaker stands up straighter with the head still and his or her weight distributed evenly on both feet.

Presenters can take several routes to develop rapport.

Learning Forward BELIEF

Sustainable learning cultures require skillful leadership.

ESTABLISHING CONTEXT

When Estes thinks about the most important elements for a presenter to address in creating a good learning context, she uses the mnemonic “Because.”

- **Belief:** *Let’s examine our beliefs about _____.*
- **Expectations:** *What do you expect to get out of this? What do I expect you’ll take away?*
- **Community:** *We’re all in this together and will learn with each other.*
- **Attitude:** *I believe we’ll learn something really valuable today.*
- **Us:** *You and them working together=us.*
- **Standards:** *We hold high standards for the work we do.*
- **Energy and enthusiasm:** *The presenter sets the level of energy in the room.*

Both Estes and Zoller believe in the power of humor in building a relationship with a group, but only when the presenter is comfortable using humor. Opening protocols that surface expectations and norms, as well as inclusion strategies, such as “Like Me” (see tool on p. 5) also strengthen participant’s development as a group. According to Zoller, anytime you can get a group to do something together – whether laughing at a joke, raising their hands, or mirroring nonverbal patterns – you’re seeing a group in rapport with the presenter.

IMPORTANCE OF MOVEMENT

“The secret to moving people is moving people,” said Estes. She believes movement is the central mission of the brain. “Unless we have purposeful movement in our learning sessions, the brain is not going to be able to learn optimally,” she says.

That’s why Estes stresses the importance of movement for attendees during presentations. She strives for some kind of purposeful movement at least every 14 minutes. “It’s key in our learning sessions, and it’s key in our classrooms,” said Estes.

“You can be listening to the best speaker in the world, and you’ll just zone out and not even realize you’ve done it. You get lethargic. And then, anytime you have large body movements, you’re bringing glucose and oxygen into the synapses of the brain. Anytime you can jar the brain to get it out of automatic, that’s good.”

As Estes monitors her audiences, she can see clues that people aren’t with her, that they’re bored, confused, or distracted. That’s the time to change their state, the physical

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The first 5 minutes

The very beginning of the meeting is critical to establishing an environment conducive to learning. During this time, the presenter or facilitator establishes not only credibility and rapport, but also sets the level of energy and establishes expectations for the group's work over the course of the workshop or meeting. In the opening minutes, the presenter is responsible for:

- 1. Focusing attention and energy.**
Nonverbal tools help bring eyes to the presenter.
- 2. Clarifying the facilitator's role.**
Whether for a meeting or a presentation, participants benefit when the leader specifies his or her role.
- 3. Framing the work.**
Establishing purposes and outcomes helps groups work more effectively.
- 4. Acknowledging resistance.**
When presenters acknowledge resistance, participants can move beyond it.
- 5. Developing inclusion.**
Presenters have many options for helping participants focus attention on the workshop and each other. (See p. 5 for an example.)
- 6. Arranging the charts.**
Visuals help participants focus their attention on particular content.
- 7. Activating relevant knowledge.**
Participants begin to engage in the content as they reveal what they already know about it.

Source: Garmston & Wellman, 2009.

Continued from p. 2
or emotional place that they are in, often through movement.

ACCELERATING LEARNING

We do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience, believes Estes. “As my great hero Madeline Hunter used to say, teach a little, check a little, teach a little, check a little. As long as you and I are teaching, or talking, kids do not learn.” They only learn when we stop talking and their brains are able to make meaning. Adult learning situations have to reflect that idea as well.

Since she believes so strongly in the importance of reflection during a presentation, Estes often combines opportunities for reflection with movement — that’s how she makes most of her movements purposeful. For example, she might ask participants to just stand and take several steps in one direction or another and partner up to share reactions to a piece of content. “For longer sessions, I use the make-a-date protocol,” where participants identify ahead of time several other participants that they’ll meet up with later in the day. Such

Learn more about nonverbal communication

- *Nonverbal communication across disciplines, Vols. 1, 2, 3* (2002), edited by Fernando Poyatos, John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- *The elusive obvious* (2008), by Michael Grinder, Michael Grinder and Associates.
- *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences* (1985), by Howard Gardner, Basic Books.
- *Social intelligence* (2006), by Daniel Goleman, Bantam Books.

processes offer socialization opportunities as well as easy ways to build in both movement and reflection throughout the session.

Zoller uses the concept of four communication points of reference to explore creating greater receptivity to learning. One-point communication is with yourself; two-point communication is between you and another person or a group. The concepts of three- and four-point communication are quite useful for thinking about how to work effectively with groups. With three-point communication, a presenter refers to an object in the room — it could be a PowerPoint slide, an easel, or a worksheet. “When participants can look at the content or data, you’re really supporting their learning. People tend

to think a different way when they look at a piece of paper or a slide than they do when they look at a person’s face,” said Zoller. Four-point communication allows the presenter to refer to someone who isn’t in the room — pointing to teachers out there, for example. Zoller noted that a presenter can say, “There are some teachers out there who think not all children can handle this new curriculum.” This allows the presenter to carefully address resistance and misconceptions in the room.

A GREAT RESPONSIBILITY


Estes stresses the importance of the attitude, energy, and enthusiasm of the presenter. If you’re tired, “fake it,” she said. “If your enthusiasm as the presenter isn’t high, why would your participants have any enthusiasm? You have to be the most energetic person in the room.”

“Professional development is a commitment,” said Zoller. “That puts a lot of responsibility on all of us to be as effective as we can. Knowing the subject matter is not the only thing you should be an expert at. There are so many layers.”

REFERENCES

Garmston, R.J. & Wellman, B.M. (2009). *The adaptive school: A sourcebook for developing collaborative groups* (2nd ed.). Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

Zoller, K. & Landry, C. (2010). *The choreography of presenting: The 7 essential abilities of effective presenters*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

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Location matters

“We know location and emotion are strong anchors for memory,” said Zoller, so tying new concepts to location is an effective way to move new knowledge from short- to long-term memory. Garmston & Wellman (2009) use a strategy they term the visual paragraph. As a presenter, you state, “There are three major points to consider about this topic.” Then you move to one location, talk about the first concept. You move to the second location to talk about the second concept, and so on. Zoller stresses the importance of the credible stance with deliberate pauses in each location. “When participants ask you a question, you move to the location of the concept they’re asking about,” he said.



Like me

Use this strategy early in a session to help participants get to know one another and build group unity and rapport.



PROCESS

- Participants move chairs back from tables so it will be easy to stand if appropriate.
- Name categories like “My work is done at the elementary level” or “I have been in this district five or more years,” or “I am a principal,” or “I am typically up before 6 a.m.”
- As people stand, remind them to look around and see who else is also in that group.
- Finally, make the category “other” for roles. (In other words, if your role has not been called, please stand.) The facilitator asks standing members to state their roles.

ALTERNATIVES

- For parent groups, change the prompts. (My first child in this school, I attended this school, I speak a language other than English.)

TIPS

- Because this strategy is done as an inclusion activity when you do not yet have a relationship with the group, it is important to state the multiple purposes of inclusion activities like this. They include setting norms of participation, focusing mental energy inside the room, answering the question “Who am I in relation to others in the room?” and beginning the journey from an aggregate of individuals to a group.
- The category “other” is essential. People feel left out if their role is not acknowledged.
- Do not ask participants to say “Like me” when they stand. Perhaps this is appropriate for elementary children, but it is embarrassing for adults.

NOTES AND APPLICATIONS

Source: Garmston, R.J. & Wellman, B.M. (2009). *The adaptive school: A sourcebook for developing collaborative groups (2nd ed.)*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers. Reprinted with permission.

Anticipating resistance: Choreographing an opening

Plan your verbal and nonverbal actions as you approach a group that you expect may contain resisters. Consider how you establish your credibility and rapport with group members that you know have legitimate concerns with how they will spend their time with you.

VERBAL	NONVERBAL
Thank you for coming this morning.	Maintain direct eye contact with group. Use a mix of credible and approachable voice with an open, palm-up gesture.
As if you had a choice!	Pause with the hands vertical. Stand still and wait for a laugh.
On the agenda are four topics ...	Look at agenda, use a credible voice, pause after each topic. With the last topic stated, turn to the group, freeze your body, and count internally, 3-2-1.
Before we get started ...	Silently walk a few feet from the easel (facilitation space).
I imagine a number of you would rather be _____ today and are resistant to being required to attend this workshop.	Gesture to the fourth point. Pause periodically. Use credible voice. At the end, stand still, pause, and silently count 3-2-1. Then move halfway back to the easel.
There is good reason to want to be with your students. For those of us in education, that is where our passion lies.	Speak in an approachable voice. Use a palm-up gesture to group and inclusive language (our).
Sometimes in order to serve our students well, we have to take care of our own learning.	Take a few steps toward the front center of the group. Speak in an approachable voice and use gestures of inclusion, palms up. Use downward beat gestures accompanying the words of your message like a maestro directing an orchestra. Pause, stand still, and silently count 3-2-1.
Our first agenda item is ... (And get started.)	Turn and walk toward the easel. Point to the first agenda item using a new voice pattern, pace, and volume as you state the first agenda item.

Acknowledging resistance

For an upcoming session, take a few moments to think about possible sources of resistance. Name the resistance in the space below.

Next, craft a narrative and design the choreography to identify and deliver the message to your group. Consider using the table above to facilitate your thinking, and then practice the dance.

Source: Garmston, R.J. & Wellman, B.M. (2009). *The adaptive school: A sourcebook for developing collaborative groups (2nd ed.)*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers. Reprinted with permission.

Influencing and monitoring group volume

As the presenter, you can influence the volume of the voices in the room. Groups may resent what they perceive as direct management of their behavior. However, your careful guidance as the presenter can change the volume without the group perceiving overt presenter control.

1. Get the large group to work in small groups of four to eight.

As they work, stand off to the side of the room and listen. Recognize the increases and decreases in volume. You will hear them. Listen long enough to identify the timing of the increase to decrease pattern.

2. Wander over to a small group, and engage in conversation with them.

As you talk with them, simultaneously listen to the collective volume in the room. You are now going to do two things: first increase the volume of the whole group and then decrease the volume of the whole group.



To increase the volume:

As the collective group volume increases, increase your volume as you talk to the small group. Continue to raise your volume in distinct, incremental steps. However, do not raise your voice volume

like the clarinet increases pitch at the opening of Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue"; that continuous increase will not be as effective as distinct step increases. When it is done well, you will notice an increase in volume higher than the highest volume from the last cycle.

To decrease the volume:

As the group volume begins to decrease, say a word or two to the small group at a volume slightly louder than the group volume at that instant. Then pause for a brief second and continue talking to the small group in an even quieter voice volume, again doing so in a stepwise

fashion. Done well, this technique can actually get a group of adults to stop talking without any perceptions of direct management.

Source: Zoller, K. & Landry, C. (2010). *The choreography of presenting: The 7 essential abilities of effective presenters.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Reprinted with permission.

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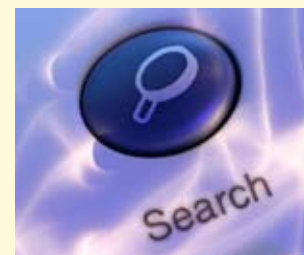
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