

The Conditions for Learning Checklist

Elena: If you've ever designed a PD session that had great content but still didn't land, then this episode is for you. Hello friends and welcome to the Bright Morning Podcast. I'm your host Elena Aguilar, and in each episode you will learn how to lead conversations and experiences that build connection and spark real change.

So today we're talking about something that often gets overlooked in professional development, but that is absolutely essential, which is. The conditions for learning because you can have the best content in the world, but if people don't feel safe, seen and engaged, then they won't take it in. All right, let's jump into this.

So a while back, I was asked to facilitate a half-day workshop for a group of school leaders. And the topic was coaching for equity, which is something that I have taught and led countless times. I had a clear agenda, a thoughtful sequence, and some solid tools that I was excited to share. But as I started preparing, I paused.

I thought about the folks that I'd be working with. They were coming from different districts. Some knew each other and some didn't. Many hadn't signed up voluntarily, and this was something that they had been told they needed to attend, and I knew that the topic itself. Coaching for equity can bring up a lot of emotions.

Some people get curious, others get defensive. And for many, the fear of saying or doing the wrong thing comes up. So instead of jumping into my usual content, I shifted my plan. I started that session by telling a personal story. I told a story about my own growth around equity. I talked about some of the mistakes that I've made and the discomfort that I've experienced because I wanted to show them.

I'm not here to lecture you. I'm here to learn alongside you. And then I invited them to do a quick reflective writing, and I asked just one question, what do you need in order to feel safe, open, and ready to learn today? And I gave them a

few minutes to write and then I asked them to turn and share. Just share with one other person.

And that was a chance to connect and a chance to be heard. So we spent the first 15 minutes of that session creating the conditions for learning, and it made all the difference. People were vulnerable, they asked questions, they stayed present in moments of discomfort, and afterwards they said things like, I felt like I could be honest.

I felt like I could actually learn something, and that's why this matters because so much more is possible when you invest in building a strong foundation in creating the conditions for learning. So today I wanna share with you the tool that I now use before every PD session that I design. It's got five simple questions that I ask myself to ensure that I'm creating the conditions for transformational learning.

I'm gonna walk you through each one, and I will share a few examples along the way. I have also written these all down for you. If you'd like a copy of those, you will find that linked in the show notes. Okay. Here's the first question. Is the purpose of this session clear? Meaningful and connected to participants' realities.

Now, if the answer is sort of then pause, because if people don't understand why something matters to them, they will disengage and then try this before you even dive into the content, name the purpose out loud at the beginning of the session. Say something like. Today we are exploring what it really means to create classrooms where every student feels seen, valued, and challenged.

Or you can say, we're focusing on how to design learning experiences that build curiosity, not compliance. Help people make that connection early and help them make it often. Here is the second question that I ask, that I ask myself. Have I created psychological safety? Will people feel safe? Asking questions, sharing honestly, and making mistakes and this is the bedrock.

And the good news is that there are simple moves that can build it. You can model vulnerability like I did, sharing my own stories of becoming a more equitable practitioner. You can also co-create norms with the group. You can start with a check-in that invites connection. But doesn't require people to go too deep, too fast.



One of my favorite prompts for connection is, what's something that's brought you a little joy this week? That question helps participants feel connected to each other, and it also can remind them that they are not here just as professionals. They are also here as people, and they can be seen as people.

The third question that I ask myself is, do participants have any choice or agency in the learning experience? Now, they can have choice or agency in small ways, like if you give them a prompt. And you give them two different ways to engage with the prompt. So you might say, you can journal about this or you can talk it through with a partner.

Choose what feels best. So when we offer choice, we send a message, and that message is, I trust you to know what you need. Okay, the fourth question is, are participants' identities. Backgrounds and lived experiences acknowledged and honored. So this one requires a little bit of reflection. So consider the examples that you're using.

Are they relatable? Do they reflect a range of perspectives? Do your materials include stories from different racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds? And maybe more importantly. Do you name the emotional reality of the work? So even saying something like, I know that some of you might be feeling resistance or worry or exhaustion, and all of those feelings are welcome here.

Saying something like that can create a huge shift in how people show up. Or you could also say. You bring your own stories, your own histories, your own identities into this space, and all of that is welcome. Okay, finally, the last question is, is there space for people to reflect, process and make meaning, not just consume information?

Learning doesn't stick when it is rushed. So give people time. Give them time to write, give them time to talk. Give them time to just sit in silence if that's what's needed. When I think about the best PD sessions that I have ever facilitated, it's not the ones when I packed in a ton of content. It's the ones when I created space for people to connect.

And to connect to themselves, to each other, and to the work. So here's a challenge for you this week. Pick one of these questions and bring it into your planning for your next PD session. You don't have to overhaul everything all at once. Just start with considering one condition, make one shift, and see what happens.



And if you wanna go deeper into this work, if you want tools and templates and real time practice, then join us at the PD workshop. It is the best place to learn how to design and facilitate PD that transforms. Now, if you work in virtual spaces, then our workshop called the Art of Virtual Facilitation will support you in bringing those same principles.

Into an online place and you'll find links to both of those workshops in the show notes, along with our free community webinars, our newsletter, and other resources that can support you. Alright, thank you for being here with me today, and if you are listening to us, please consider hopping over to Apple Podcast and leaving us a rating and a review.

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