

GUIDE

TO PLANNING AND HOSTING YOUR COMMUNITY LEARNING CONVERSATION

CONTENTS

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Introduction | 2 |
| What are CLCs? | 3 |
| Establishing your Vision | 4 |
| Getting Organized | 6 |
| --Timeline | 6 |
| --Logistics and Planning | 7 |
| --Invitations | 9 |
| Final Preparations | 11 |
| --Preparing to Facilitate | 11 |
| --Preparing Participants | 12 |
| --Preparing the Room | 13 |
| Implementation | 14 |
| Follow Up | 21 |
| Appendices | 22 |
| --Invitation Template | 22 |
| --Sample Opening Remarks | 23 |
| --Continuing the Conversation Form | 24 |
| --Checklist | 25 |

INTRODUCTION

Imagine you drive straight from work to a local public event that is supposed to be about increasing the connections between the school and your community.

Walking in, you realize it is not the stiff consultation you feared, but a lively conversation – you notice animated dialogue between the school commissioner and the director of a local literacy program, and the principal jumping up to show something to a parent. The facilitator warmly welcomes you, handing you a cup of coffee. Three hours later, you leave with new phone numbers in your pocket and some great ideas you are eager to implement.

All across Quebec

and Canada, people are concerned about the success of our students, the strength of our schools, and the sustainability of our communities. These things are interconnected. This guide will help us work together so that our children succeed, our schools contribute to the revitalization of English-speaking minority communities, and our communities contribute to strong and vibrant schools.

To reach this goal,

we must all be involved: parents, students, and adults from all walks of life. The success of students, schools, and communities are all inextricably interwoven – the more people involved, the bigger the impact.

It's already

happening: since 2006, Community Learning Centres (CLCs) have been connecting schools and communities. CLCs help to provide students and families with a wealth of resources to complement the services provided by schools.

This trend

of “community schools”, growing in Europe, Australia, and parts of the USA and Canada, is based upon the notion that it takes a village to raise a child. Quebec's community schools are on the leading edge of this exciting trend.

How often

do educators and community members really connect? In fact, the two sectors often misunderstand one another; they operate on very different schedules, with distinct challenges, cultures, and rhythms that can be difficult to bridge. The more we can understand the other and challenge stereotypes, the better our chances of successful collaboration.

The purpose

of this Community Learning Conversation Guide is to create a space for dynamic discussion between schools, CLCs and communities. Also, the results of these conversations will contribute to a brief submitted to Canada's House of Commons in 2013. We hope this brief will influence the decision makers to ensure the sustainability of our Community Learning Centres, our schools and our communities.

What is a Community Learning Conversation?

- > a gathering (we suggest 3 hours over supper) between key members of your school, CLC and community
- > a chance for people to talk to each other (not to the facilitator)
- > includes key individuals of all ages from both the education and community sectors
- > has easy to use discussion materials
- > is led by a facilitator with experience hosting large-group discussions
- > empowers participants to collaborate with one another

WHAT ARE CLC'S?

Community

Learning Centres are partnerships that provide a range of services and activities, to help meet the needs of learners, their families, and the wider community.

Their aim is to support the holistic development of citizens and communities through Life Long Learning. It is also to help schools in Québec's English sector become "Community Learning Centres" (CLCs) that serve as a place for education and community development and as models for future policy and practice.

Families, youth, principals, teachers, neighbourhood residents and community partners help design and implement activities. Activities focus on school development as well as community development.

In the long term, it is hoped that the CLCs may contribute to the revitalization of English-speaking minority communities in Québec

The CLC concept

is based on the assumption that the impact of school on student learning, youth leadership and engagement is strengthened by the support of family and community.

Working in

partnership is a core component of the CLC model. The definition of partnership is that the whole is different than the sum of the parts. It assumes there must be an individual or group of individuals poised and ready to act – but these do not have to be perfect people, but they believe in what they do.

ESTABLISHING YOUR VISION

Your community is unique. As you plan your own Community Learning Conversation, you will build on the framework outlined in this Guide, customizing and adding to it so that it creates the impact you want, in your school and community.

How will the Conversation work?

- It will be three hours, including time to socialize and eat. We recommend holding it from 6:00 – 9:00pm including dinner.
- This Guide is designed to support a Conversation with a small or large group. When determining the number of participants, consider how many you will need to achieve a good cross-section of your community, keeping the numbers fairly balanced between the school and the community. See the later section entitled **Getting Organized – Invitations** for more guidance.
- The venue should provide a warm and inclusive space for conversation. You may wish to consider choosing a neutral venue to help both school and community members feel on equal footing. If your event is larger, you will need separate break-out rooms for intimate discussions.
- Participants will spend most of their time discussing a few questions with one another, sometimes in small groups and sometimes as a whole.

| What is the difference between a Conversation and a Consultation? | |
|---|---|
| Consultation | Conversation |
| Participants orient towards facilitator | Participants orient towards each other |
| “Input” or “data” is the key aim | Interaction is the key aim |
| Participants get to express themselves | Participants get to learn about others, notice their own biases, and enlarge their perspectives |
| Resulting action is dependent on the organizer and can take time | Resulting action is in the hands of participants and can be immediate |

How can I adapt it to my local reality?

- You can add discussion topics that your school board or community want to know more about.
- You determine who’s invited – the people in the room are critical and determine what happens next.
- You choose who will open the event and welcome participants, and who will facilitate. Obviously different people lend a very different flavour to an event.
- You select the right location that both educators and community partners will feel comfortable in.

- You identify any important local traditions or key people to incorporate into the event. Perhaps think of some really successful local events that you have heard about or attended. What common ingredients did they have? Did any well-known leaders “champion” the event? Did someone make their special dish that everybody loves?
- You can choose to hold one (or more) local Conversations between a school, CLC and its community, or you may choose to hold a board wide Conversation which would have a more regional, macro focus. Using video-conferencing is an option. As you want to ensure that participants are interested in connecting with one another, it is important to choose one option, then invite the right people based upon this vision.

Where will this lead?

Next steps are in the hands of the participants in the room. This Guide will help you to plan and hold an event that helps participants to connect with one another and feel empowered to act, which makes exciting next steps more likely to become a reality.

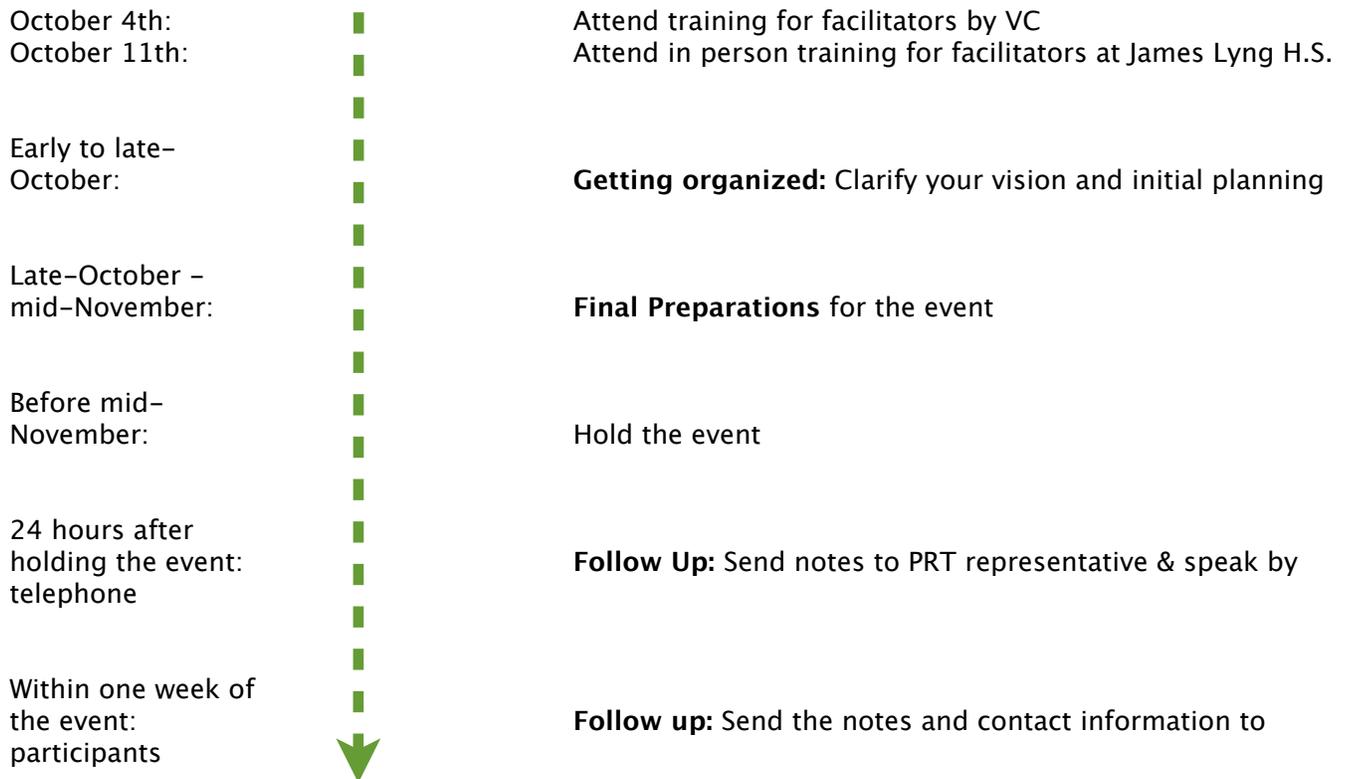
Hopefully, key decision-makers will be in the room at this event. However, participants in the room may envision some important next steps on the part of those who are not in the room – perhaps they require the support of the school board or a large community organization in order to move forward with an idea. In this case, ensure there are concrete next steps that participants in the room can take to facilitate this happening – perhaps two people to take leadership in writing a letter to request a certain action to be taken.

The facilitator of this event has an important role in encouraging participants to move away from thinking passively of their role in upcoming steps to thinking actively about what they can do together. This requires a shift in thinking from the consultations we are accustomed to participating in. It also may require identifying smaller, more feasible next steps than we are used to doing.

As you can imagine, leaving things in the hands of participants makes “who is in the room” even more critical!

GETTING ORGANIZED: TIMELINE

This timeline gives a general overview of the steps that need to be taken in order to plan and hold the Conversation. See later sections in the Guide for details.



GETTING ORGANIZED: LOGISTICS & PLANNING

The following steps should be considered when planning your Community Learning Conversation. A checklist is provided at the end of this guide to help you plan before, during and after the event.

1) Determine the date of the event which should take place before mid-November. Check to ensure that nothing else is happening on that date that may conflict for participants. We recommend choosing a weeknight.

2) Determine the time of the event. It is suggested to hold it between 6 and 9 o'clock on a weeknight to allow those that work to attend, including those that work outside the school system such as parents. Making the time "inclusive" of people from the school and community sector alike is critical to the success of this Conversation. Consider factors such as offering childcare to facilitate parents attending, and choosing a wheelchair accessible space.

3) Choose the location. You might want to consider using part of your budget to choose a neutral venue. You might also want to use a school or school board room or a meeting room of one of the community groups invited. If you are holding part of your event using VC, you will need to adapt the Implementation Steps accordingly, and with this increased complexity you may want to carefully consider hiring a facilitator comfortable with VC. If you are including more than 25 participants, your venue must have break-out rooms for discussion groups. Events that have 80 people talking in one large room for three hours tend to be frustrating experiences for participants!

4) Plan your budget. You will be reimbursed for up to \$5 000 to help you plan and organize the event. The following are a few suggestions on how you may decide to use the funds:

- Hire a facilitator (bilingual) or facilitators
- Book a venue
- Order a meal and refreshments
- Buy materials
- Purchase invitation cards
- Hire a notetaker
- Create a report based on the notes for your own use

5) Add your local flavour. Determine locally if you want to add one or several questions to the guide. This Community Learning Conversation is intended to support connectivity between schools, CLCs and communities, to build knowledge about what is working well in this area, and to discover what areas we might focus on in future. The existing discussion questions in the guide are carefully crafted for this purpose. However once you have tackled the existing questions, you are encouraged to add any questions you would find useful to discover more about, or discussion topics you feel would help participants to better connect and understand one another in your area.

6) Decide who's doing what.

- A) **Decide who will lead the group.** If more than 25 participants will be attending, you will need more than one facilitator, and for groups over 50 you will also require an MC. You may decide to hire one or more professional facilitators, or to have the discussion(s) led by the event organizer or someone else. The discussion leader doesn't have to be an "expert" but should have experience and skills in leading discussions. You will need people who can facilitate others' dialogue rather than people who are anxious to offer their own opinions. As you will have many francophone participants (we hope), it will be important to have a bilingual facilitator.
- B) **Clarify who is the coordinator** for the event, taking responsibility and providing leadership for the logistics and other areas of planning.
- C) **The introduction to the evening** sets the tone and establishes credibility. We recommend asking one person from the school board to act as "Board Host" (such as the Chairman of the Board or a commissioner) in partnership with one person from the community to act as "Community Host" (such as the Executive Director or President of a respected community organization). In the appendix, we provide a sample opening that has been crafted especially for this purpose – to provide background information and create the right expectations for the Community Learning Conversations. For consistencies' sake, we ask that all Community Learning Conversations begin by having the Hosts use this opening text. Of course it can be modified as required to fit your local context. Who would you like to act as Hosts? Who would be most compelling, welcoming, and credible? What combination would work well?

GETTING ORGANIZED: INVITATIONS

The following steps should be considered when deciding who to invite and how to do it. A checklist is provided at the end of this guide to help you plan before, during and after the event.

How many participants should attend? Who are the key players that must attend to make the evening a success? Your event must include a diverse group that is representative of the whole community, including francophones. We suggest inviting parents, students, teachers, school and school board administrators, commissioners, representatives from community and health groups. You might want to consider inviting municipal representatives, as well. If you choose to publicize the event, you might also want to invite the media. A list of possible people to consider is provided below.

Will you invite the media to your event, or send out a press release afterwards? CLC coordinators can consult their Communication Plans in their handbooks and / or speak to their PRT Representative.

How will you recruit participants?

1. Establish a strategy. Methods for recruiting participants will vary depending on the scale of your program and what kind of community you are in; you may do it entirely by phone, you could send an invitation by e-mail or mail, or you may be distributing e-mailed invitations as part of a coordinated effort with others. Could partners such as CHSSN, CEDEC, QCGN forward the invitation to their networks too?

The person sending the invitation is very important. Who will generate excitement to attend? Who will most encourage participation? We all know it is a challenge to get people to attend these events. You might want to meet with 2 or 3 people to strategize on who needs to be there and how to get them to attend.

If you decide to have invitations sent from several different people, ensure it is clear who participants RSVP to, and who will follow up with participants who don't RSVP. Establish a process so that the event coordinator is informed and can keep track of invitations sent, declined, and accepted.

2. Make a list of who should attend and, as you will be asking them to RSVP, keep track of their responses– this will facilitate your work when you are following up. If several people / organizations are involved in sending out invitations, the event coordinator will need to keep track of all invitations sent and RSVP's received on a master list.

3. Create the Invitations. An example of the invitation is provided at the end of this guide – please do modify it as you like. As mentioned above, it is important who sends the invitation, but it is also important who signs it, and these do not have to be the same people. Think through who your invitation should be signed by for maximum credibility. Ideally, it will be signed by a representative of the school board (Director General, Commissioner, Board Chair, principal?) as well as a representative of the community (. Could these co-signers be the same people as the Conversation Co-Hosts who will welcome participants and open the session?

4. **Send them out.** Keep careful track and communicate well with others who are helping with this step.
5. **Follow up.** Thank those participants who sent an RSVP, and prompt those who did not.

Suggestions of who to invite

- School board community
 - DG
 - Directors
 - Principals
 - Teachers
 - Students (sec 4 & 5)
 - Parents – all parents, not just PPO and Governing Board parents
 - Commissioners
 - Guidance counsellors
 - Consultants
 - Professionals
 - Spiritual animators
 - Adult/Voc Ed personnel
 - Parent Committee representatives
 - Retired personnel
 - volunteers
 - Janitors
- CEGEP personnel and former school board students
- University personnel and former school board students
- Local business owners – small companies and larger industries
- Community leaders
 - Municipal councillors / Mayor
 - Leaders of community organizations
 - Churches/religious organizations
 - Francophone leaders in the community – including local French school leadership
 - Police/fire officials
 - MNA / MP
 - Senior's groups
 - Royal Canadian Legion
- Community members with no kids in schools (i.e. taxpayers, interested citizens)
- Community organizations and groups (local and regional) – QCGN regional associations
- Aboriginal and other cultural community members
- Health partners: i.e. CHSSN, NPI, CSSS, AMI Quebec etc...
- Economic Development Partners: i.e. CEDEC, SADC, CRE, CLD, etc...
- Carrefour jeunesse emploi
- Members of the partner tables
- Literacy organizations

FINAL PREPARATIONS: PREPARING TO FACILITATE

You may have hired a facilitator or a small team of facilitators to animate your evening, or you may be doing it yourself. Either way, this section helps to prepare for a successful and smooth event. The facilitator plays a key role in the success of this Conversation. Even more so than your standard “consultation”, with this kind of dynamic Conversation the facilitator needs to be able to think on his or her feet, provide clarity and focus, and when appropriate, let the group go.

The facilitator also needs to have a certain level of competence in order to help the group experience points of difference as learning opportunities rather than reasons to get upset – for example, imagine how differently a school board representative and a community member might see the barriers to closer collaboration between the two sectors.

Take time to carefully familiarize yourself with the Implementation section of this Guide. Walk yourself through the steps one by one, as you will soon walk participants through them during the Conversation. For each step, think through what the room will be like, what participants may be thinking and feeling, and what challenges you may need to plan for. The more familiar you are with the steps and the aims of each step, the more smoothly you will be able to facilitate dialogue.

Next, we recommend that you do a trial run of the Conversation session. Gather together three or four colleagues and try running through the process, asking for their feedback and ideas along the way. Keep in mind that some of the group formations will be irrelevant with your mini trial run group, and the process will go much more quickly with so few people.

If there are several facilitators collaborating on this event for a larger group, they should meet (with the MC if you have one) to go through the steps together and ensure they share an understanding of what each step looks like and what each person’s role is.

Tips for facilitators

- Be ready with “prompting” questions (eg. “Can you say more about that?” “Do you see a link between what you shared and Mary’s point?” “That’s a really interesting point. Why do you think that is?”)
- Be relaxed and friendly – people appreciate some well-placed humour
- Keep careful track of time and summarize what you’ve heard occasionally
- Draw out quiet participants (“Jean, do you have anything to add at the moment?”)
- Don’t let dominant people or factions take over (“Let’s hear from anyone who hasn’t spoken on this point yet.”)
- Don’t allow the group to focus on you, to make you the “expert” or “answer” person. Direct participants to respond to one another. (“Would anyone like to respond to that?”)
- Use your body language – when you want the group’s attention, be front and centre, and when you want them to talk to one another, withdraw yourself
- Don’t let the group get hung up on unprovable facts or assumptions (“These are two different perspectives surfacing, which is great – tonight is all about better understanding these kinds of different perspectives. Susan, can you share a bit more about your view?”)

FINAL PREPARATIONS: PREPARING THE PARTICIPANTS

You already have your list of confirmed participants, the booked venue, catering arranged, and all the other major pieces. One to two weeks prior to the Conversation it is helpful to call or send a reminder e-mail to attending participants, reiterating all the details (who, what, when, where, why) and providing directions.

Tips for participants

(You may consider posting these on the wall and inviting participants to add other tips)

- Keep an open mind
- Get curious about other points of view
- It's okay to disagree
- Help keep the discussion on track
- Speak your mind freely but don't take over
- Turn off cell phones
- Talk to the group, not the facilitator
- Humour and an adventurous attitude are welcome

FINAL PREPARATIONS: PREPARING THE ROOM

Room preparation is one of the most commonly overlooked ingredients to a successful event. Have you ever walked into a public event, consultation, or dialogue and been struck at the warm and inviting atmosphere? Small touches such as a table cloth, softer lighting, flowers, and a warm and enthusiastic greeting at the door each add up to a striking entrance. Participants will immediately feel more relaxed and comfortable, leading to a much better conversation.

Move the tables and chairs into an arrangement that will facilitate whole-group discussion, with participants facing one another rather than having a podium at the front. Depending on the kind of tables you have, this could be a circle or square shape. In a larger room, you could have only chairs in a circle (this is the most inclusive), with tables and chairs nearby to sit down at over dinner.

Set up a table near the entrance with name-tags, refreshments, and folders. You may wish to include a list of all participants and their organizations in the folders. Include the “Continuing the Conversation” form (template found in the appendix).

Participants will want to be able to follow up with one another after the Conversation, so we suggest circulating a Contact Sheet at the beginning and end of the event – you can prepare this ahead of time by creating a list of participants’ names, titles, and organizations they represent, with a blank space for them to add their contact details if they are willing to share them. Afterwards you can send a typed copy of this sheet to all participants as part of your follow up.

Checklist of Materials

- Contact Sheet
- “Continuing the Conversation” Forms (see appendix)
- Name-tags
- Markers
- Refreshments
- Dinner
- Cups, plates, cutlery, napkins
- Flip chart
- Tips for Participants (see next box) up on the wall if desired
- Discussion questions up on the wall if desired (see Implementation section)

IMPLEMENTATION

The following Implementation Guide leads you through the facilitation of the Conversation step by step. The main sections are designed for a group size of about 12 – 25 participants. After each main section, you will find a “Large Group Adaptations” section describing some changes to consider implementing if you have chosen to work with larger numbers.

Overview

- Step 1: Include participants as they arrive
- Step 2: Welcome & dinner
- Step 3: “Understanding the Other” energizing activity
- Step 4: Group discussion
- Step 5: Closure

FACILITATION STEPS 1 & 2

STEP 1: PRE-WORKSHOP 5:30 - 6:00

It is an important moment when participants enter the room. If they are made to feel welcome and comfortable immediately, it sets a positive tone for the entire event, and participants are more willing to contribute in positive, open ways.

- ▶ Welcome participants warmly at the door. Distribute name-tags (if necessary) and folders. Draw their attention to the Continuing the Conversation forms and suggest they may wish to jot down thoughts during the event, completing it at the end.
- ▶ Introduce participants to one another when possible if they don't know each other.
- ▶ Note the contact sheet in case they wish to fill it out and stay in touch with others.

STEP 2: WELCOME & DINNER 6:00 - 6:30

The aim of this section is to feed everyone, make them feel included and comfortable, and help them to understand what this session is going to be like. The timing is important because you want to move into the next activity by 6:30 but you also don't want to interrupt people if they are still eating.

FACILITATION STEPS 1 & 2

- ▶ Invite participants to get their dinner from the buffet and sit down
- ▶ Let participants know the session is beginning once they are settled but still eating, at about 6:15
- ▶ Start the session when people are well into their meals so that they are finished by the end of the introductions. You need to be able to move smoothly from introductions into the next activity which involves standing and moving.
- ▶ Co-hosts open the session by reading the Opening Remarks (*see Appendix*)
- ▶ Introduce yourself and your role as facilitator and briefly describe what tonight's session will be like (dynamic discussion, an activity to get more connected to each others' realities, and action steps before closing). Mention that participants can feel free to speak in English or French, and that the session will be facilitated bilingually (or in English as the case may be).
- ▶ Facilitate a go-around of introductions (for example: name, organization, and what they hope to get out of the evening).

FACILITATION STEPS 1 & 2

LARGE GROUP ADAPTATIONS

STEP 1: PRE-WORKSHOP 5:30 - 6:00

You may want to extend this period of time with a larger group, and to register them upon arrival.

Consider having several "greeters" at the door and someone at a registration desk.

Nametags would be essential.

STEP 2: WELCOME & DINNER 6:00 - 6:30

This section would need more time with a larger group. If you are hosting more than 45 participants, you might consider spending more than three hours on the event, and moving it to a weekend.

With 20 - 30 participants, you could still have a go-around of introductions, but the facilitator will need to clearly ask that each person is very brief (name and organization - about ten seconds). If you have over 30 participants, try asking participants to make triads with people they don't know or know the least, to introduce themselves and to discuss what they hope to get out of the evening. Give them 3-5 minutes to do so. You can mention that the next activity will allow them to meet more people.

FACILITATION STEP 3

STEP 3: “UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER” ACTIVITY 6:30 - 7:10

The purpose of this activity is to cultivate curiosity and empathy for the other. For those in the school system, it will help them to be able to identify with the community member’s reality, and vice versa. This activity will set the group up for a successful and dynamic discussion, minimizing defensiveness, trying to be “right”, or sell one’s viewpoint to the other... leading to greater possibilities for collaboration, and richer data.

This activity will go better if you get people to stand up and move around at the beginning, rather than letting them sit in their chairs and turn to their neighbour. If they are standing and walking during this activity, it is energizing and friendly rather than serious and slow. Accomplish this by asking everyone to stand up and move into the middle of the room before giving the instruction to find a partner.

Note: if the debrief conversation is going well and seems to be rich, consider extending this topic until 7:30, and reducing the time for Step 4.

- ▶ Give a quick overview of the 3 rounds and share the aim. Give a heads up about the “Sharing” step in particular so that they are prepared.
- ▶ **ROUND ONE:** Instruct participants to find a partner that is from the sector (school/community) they themselves are not from. Those identifying with both sectors can simply find someone they don’t know. Partners have 2 minutes to identify one thing they have in common that they find surprising (for example, A and B both have a child in the same class).
- ▶ **ROUND TWO:** Give a 30 second warning, then find a new partner (again, from the other sector). They have 2 minutes to identify one shared belief they have about student success (for example, both believe that student success starts at home).
- ▶ **ROUND THREE:** Give a 30 second warning, find a new partner (again, from the other sector). They have 5 minutes to identify one thing they see differently than one other related to student success (for example, ‘A’ thinks schools need more funding; ‘B’ thinks more funding should be diverted elsewhere) and to ensure each understands the other’s perspective well enough to share it back to the full group on their behalf.
- ▶ **SHARING:** Give a 30 second warning, then all come back to the full group and sit down. Each participant *convincingly* shares the topic that was seen differently *from the other’s perspective only* (for example, A shares B’s perspective about diverting more funding elsewhere.)
- ▶ **DEBRIEF:** Mention that this is *not* about determining ‘ultimate truths’ - but rather about seeing how there can be many truths, and they are all incomplete. Facilitate a whole group discussion to debrief: e.g. Qs: ‘*what was challenging about this activity?*’ ‘*What did you get out of it?*’ ‘*What did you appreciate?*’

FACILITATION STEP 3

LARGE GROUP ADAPTATIONS

STEP 3: “UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER” ACTIVITY 6:30 - 7:10

This activity can be quite exciting as a large (over 25 participants) group, but you need a big enough space so that participants can spread out quite a bit as they walk around, and so that pairs are far enough from the next pair so that they can hear each other despite the volume of so many talking in the same room.

You will need a bell, gong, or music you can play to catch everyone’s attention fairly quickly between rounds without yelling into a microphone and being authoritarian about it. If you have music you can play between rounds, let folks know this is the signal to finish speaking, break off from the pair, and begin walking around in silence until you provide the next instruction. When you put the music on, increase the volume gradually so that people have about 20 seconds of time to finish their thought before the music is too loud.

At the end of this activity, with 25 - 40 participants you can still sit together in a circle and simply ask for several volunteers to convincingly share the topic that was seen differently, from their partner’s perspective. After several people have shared, move into a facilitated discussion as per the Debrief step.

If you have over 40 participants, you will need to do the last two steps (Sharing & Debrief) differently. Ask participants to get into small groups of 3 or 4 with people they did not partner with during any steps and to find a place to sit down together. Their task is to each convincingly share their partner’s perspective on the topic they saw differently, and then to debrief the experience together. What was challenging? What did you get out of it? What did you appreciate? Give them 15 minutes. After 15 minutes, ask for everyone’s attention from where they are sitting. Ask a few volunteers to share any insights or “aha” moments their small group had with the entire group. This full-group debrief may be quick or you may extend it if everyone looks interested and engaged - sometimes the content from this kind of activity is very rich.

FACILITATION STEP 4

STEP 4: GROUP DISCUSSION 7:10 - 8:15

This group discussion activity should help participants:

- *to clarify the links they see between schools/CLCs and community*
- *to see the benefit of closer collaboration*
- *to identify some priorities for collaboration they would like to pursue further.*

Depending on the group size and atmosphere you may need to facilitate more closely by maintaining a speakers list; however if this is not necessary, the conversation may be richer with a more hands-off facilitation style. Your main task here is to get the group to orient towards each other - not to you - for a rich conversation.

FACILITATION STEP 4

- ▶ Check to see if people have their food and are ready to begin.
- ▶ Tell participants about your facilitation style (speakers' list?) and to orient towards each other, not you. Go through the *Tips for Participants* on the wall (see previous section in this Guide). Ask if there is anything to add.
- ▶ **QUESTION 1: In what ways are schools and communities connected?** *(Possible prompting questions: How do they impact one another? Any concrete examples you can think of to illustrate your point?)*
- ▶ **QUESTION 2: What are some ways in which our community and our schools/CLC are currently collaborating well together for student success?** *(Prompting questions: Can anyone share a story or an experience you had of great school/community collaboration? What was the impact? What factors led to such great collaboration?)*
- ▶ **QUESTION 3: Thinking about these ways in which we're already collaborating well, how can we do even better?** *(Prompting questions: What are some untapped assets we could start putting to work for student success? What are some exciting new areas for collaboration? How can we collaborate better?) (Note: Try to draw on factors identified in Question 2 to help overcome barriers)*
- ▶ **QUESTION 4: What are a few critical areas we could focus our collaborative efforts on for greatest impact?** *(after some discussion, see if they can narrow it down to 2 or 3)*
- ▶ **OPTIONAL:** Add your own question(s) here.

FACILITATION STEP 4

LARGE GROUP ADAPTATIONS

STEP 4: GROUP DISCUSSION 7:10 - 8:30

With large groups, you will need one facilitator per group of 15 - 25 participants. Split participants up in a way that maintains a fairly even distribution of the two sectors in each group, such as randomly counting off participants into groups A,B, and C (remember that participants will tend to choose to join groups full of people they know if they self-select).

Ensure that each discussion group has their own break-out room and that the facilitator will lead the group back to the main room by 8:30 allowing for a bathroom break on the way if needed. Try to avoid having one group hold their discussion in the main room - it is awkward when break-out groups return and need to wait in the hallway or else intrude.

For large groups, it is recommended that this activity is extended 15 minutes to end at 8:30. That said, it will be important to re-group at 8:30 on the dot or else participants will be getting ready to go home and will not want to return to the main room. With this extra time, facilitators should spend the last 20 - 30 minutes identifying concrete things participants want to *act upon* based on this evening's discussion. Perhaps these are one or two things an individual would like to do; perhaps it is a project that four participants came up with during the discussion. The facilitator may choose to end their small group discussion by offering participants a minute of individual reflection, then using a go-around during which each participant can share what they intend to put into action after tonight.

FACILITATION STEP 5

STEP 5 CLOSURE 8:15 - 9:00

This is an important time during which the group can move from talk to action. Introducing this activity, help them to be clear that they can't wait for representatives of the school or the community to act - it is up to them to act across sectors on what was discussed tonight if they wish to. Stress the opportunity they have in the remaining time to connect more closely with a few individuals. Share your hope that action will come out of tonight's session.

"Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world: indeed it's the only thing that ever has." --Margaret Mead

FACILITATION STEP 5

- ▶ Introduce the activity and its aims. The task is to get into triads to discuss what of value was learned tonight, and to figure out how to put that into practice in some concrete way. Choose your own groups of 3-4.
- ▶ Ask them to keep it realistic - only discuss things that they are likely to do. They can be very small things! They add up!
- ▶ After 10 minutes, give a 5 minute warning. After 15 minutes, call the group back together and ask those who feel comfortable to share. If there is time and - most importantly - participant energy, you could facilitate a brief closing discussion focused on next steps.
- ▶ Draw participants' attention to their Continuing the Conversation forms and contact sheet (provided in appendix). Ask them to fill out their Continuing the Conversation forms before leaving and to put them face down on their chairs.
- ▶ If there is time, have a quick go around to allow each participant to share what they are taking away from tonight's session in one sentence or less.
- ▶ Warmly thank participants for coming and close the session.

FACILITATION STEP 5

LARGE GROUP ADAPTATIONS

STEP 5 CLOSURE 8:30 - 9:00

Following the Large Group Adaptations suggested in Step 4, participants can re-join the large group, and a few volunteers can share the highlights from their small group discussions and also their commitments to action. A brief facilitated discussion can follow depending on the energy level of participants (although it is likely they will be tired and ready to leave at this point). Ask participants to fill out their Continuing the Conversation forms and to leave them on their chairs, then thank everyone for coming and close the session.

FOLLOW UP

These Follow Up steps will ensure that all partners and participants in the Community Learning Conversation process get the information they require to maximize impact.

1. Send the notes from your Conversation to your Provincial Resource Team representative within 24 hours.
2. Send a scanned copy of your Continuing the Conversation forms to your PRT Representative. They will compile the results.
3. Call your PRT representative for the follow up interview (for up to 1 hour). The purpose of this call is to discuss or clarify the notes taken during the event. You will be asked to provide further insight as to what we can extract from this event. This interview is important as it provides essential information and data that will be used to write up a brief, which will be submitted to the House of Commons in early 2013. It will be comprised of all the data of the Community Learning Conversations that were held across the province. We hope this brief will influence the decision makers to ensure the sustainability of our Community Learning Centres, our schools and our communities. We also hope that these Community Learning Conversations will bring CLCs, schools and communities closer together to work together towards meeting the needs of students in all our communities.
4. Follow up with participants within one week by sending the notes/report and also the list of contacts.

For further information or support,
contact your Provincial Resource Team
representative, or:

Debbie Horrocks
dhorrocks@learnquebec.ca
450 622 2212 ext 227

APPENDIX: INVITATION TEMPLATE

NOTES: You will want to adapt this to be appropriate in your community and depending on who is signing the invitation. Don't forget to include the date, time, location (with directions if necessary), and a contact person for more details.

Dear _____,

You are warmly invited to participate in a Community Learning Conversation which will be held on _____, from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. this event will be held at:

_____ .

The purpose of the evening is to bring together schools, Community Learning Centres, and community representatives to partake in a conversation. We want to foster connectivity and collaboration between these (sometimes quite distinct) worlds.

Together, we can find ways to ensure that our work to sustain strong communities, strong schools, and successful students builds upon our collective successes.

Dinner will be provided.

RSVP by: (date)

For more information, please contact:
person name, phone number and email address.

Your presence is important. Please join us.

Name(s) & Signature(s)



APPENDIX: SAMPLE OPENING REMARKS FOR CO-HOSTS

Note: this text will have to be adapted to your reality. For example, if you are not holding the Conversation in a school, “this school” mentioned in paragraph 3 should be referred to more specifically. Please have your Co-Hosts go through this text and correct it so that they feel comfortable with it.

Bonsoir, good evening, and welcome to our “Community Learning Conversation”. [Co-Hosts self-introduce here]. We are so pleased that you made the decision to spend a few hours with us today to share ideas on what we can do to strengthen ties between our school and community.

Today’s event is not a consultation, it’s a conversation. It will be a success if we talk about how we can all work together to help our youth succeed and become even more curious about one another when we leave than when we walked in. It’s not about being given an opportunity to vent to the powers that be, with nothing coming out of it. Instead, this is a rare opportunity to get to know each other better, share ideas with one another, learn new concepts and determine how we want to build on our exchanges as we move forward. Let’s use this time for educators to get a better understanding of the realities of community members and partners, and for community partners to better grasp the daily life of working in schools. With these enlarged perspectives, we are confident that we can move forward together more effectively.

Now, the groundwork for this gathering has been laid by the Community Learning Centres initiative. This school (these schools are) is a Community Learning Centre (CLC), supported by the Provincial Resource Team, by your school Principal and school board, and your own CLC Coordinator. CLCs represent a relatively new concept in Quebec education, and are part of the cutting edge of an exciting international trend to more closely connect schools and communities, based on the long tradition of schools and communities fostering each others’ well-being and the realization that it takes a village to raise a child. The CLC concept is breathing new life into many English school communities across the province. Tonight, we want to find out more about what’s making this work, what we can do better and how we can ensure our schools and communities are vibrant and sustainable.

Now, this topic is the first order of business, but it would be a shame to get such a rich cross-section of school-community partners together without enlarging the conversation at least a little. With that in mind, we will have a few discussion topics that go beyond this school-community connection, and your role in it.

Whatever perspective you bring to this evening’s conversation, there is no doubt that the landscape around us is an evolving and challenging one. A newly elected government, continuing strains on public finances, uncertainty about the future – all of these factors weigh heavily on many of us – perhaps, even more so on Quebec’s minority language communities. Our schools, our community organizations and Community Learning Centres are part of that landscape. When things are in flux, it’s usually a good time to seek allies, to sit down and talk...to look for common ground rather than conflict. That’s our plan for today’s “Community Learning Conversation”. And to help all of us follow up effectively, your organizers will share the report of today’s proceedings, including everyone’s contact details (with your permission).

Thank you for being here. And now, your discussion leader for the evening...

APPENDIX: CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION FORM

**Thank you for attending this Community Learning Conversation.
The following information helps us to understand your experience and to
determine relevant next steps.**

1. What did you get out of attending this Community Learning Conversation?
2. What did you most appreciate about the session?
3. What do you wish had been done differently?
4. Based on what you heard during the Conversation, what do you think are two or three priority areas for schools, CLCs and communities to collaborate on in the future?
5. Please write additional comments, notes, or reflections here:

APPENDIX: CHECKLIST

Getting Organized

| TASK | NOTES | COMPLETE? |
|--|------------------------|-----------|
| <i>Example:</i> Choose & book location | Tyndale hall - room 22 | Y |
| Select the date (check for overlaps/conflicts in community and education sectors) | | |
| Select the time | | |
| Plan your budget | | |
| Choose and book location and catering | | |
| Determine local vision for conversation including adding questions to the Guide | | |
| Choose and book facilitator(s) if needed | | |
| Ask a school board representative (chair / commissioner / DG/Director) and a community representative (well known Executive Director or President) to open the session | | |
| Choose and book other support roles (if needed) | | |
| Identify desired participants and mobilizers (other individuals who can help by sending certain invitations) | | |
| Write and send invitations | | |
| Follow up with participants (confirm / prompt) | | |

Final Preparations

| TASK | NOTES | COMPLETE? |
|---|-------|-----------|
| Purchase and print all materials | | |
| Determine roles --greet participants --do introduction --facilitate --take notes --other? | | |
| Prepare to facilitate --familiarize self with Guide --do a trial run --have a final check-in meeting for anyone with a role just prior to the Conversation | | |
| Room set up: --table and chair placement --flip charts, markers --items posted on walls (e.g. participant tips) --welcoming touches | | |

Follow Up

| TASK | NOTES | COMPLETE? |
|---|-------|-----------|
| Send typed notes and scanned Continuing the Conversation forms to Provincial Resource Team representative within 24 hours | | |
| Meet by phone with Provincial Resource Team representative | | |
| Follow up with participants within one week: send notes and contact details (with permission) of all participants | | |