



Attributes of a Learning Community

This approach was used by the Foxfire Networks to train teachers in the Foxfire Approach. It was probably used by other groups as well, but that is where I learned it. – Marylyn Wentworth

Purpose

To establish basic attributes of good learning communities through real participant experiences. The attributes become goals/guidelines for checking on progress as a new learning community develops.

Time

One hour

Process

1. Participants write about a personal experience in a learning community that they *know* was a place of positive learning for them. It could be a club, a church group, a school experience, a course, or a support group; any group that was a positive learning community. Their writing should include the reason for the group's existence, how the group was structured, and what made it a positive learning place.
2. In groups of 3 or 4, participants share their stories with one another.
3. As each story is told, the group picks out the attributes that made that learning community productive and satisfying (*everyone really listened to each other, we worked cooperatively to get things done, there was a lot of respect for different opinions...*).
4. Each group makes a list of the 4 or 5 attributes that seem to stand out for them. Sometimes they will be attributes that show up in all the stories, sometimes it will be an attribute that only appears in one story but seems really important to the group.
5. Each group names one attribute in turn while the facilitator records on a general list. Any repeated attributes get noted with stars (*).
6. When the list is complete (the facilitator can reword for a succinct list), the facilitator asks the group if this list seems like a good list of attributes to guide the group as it forms its own community of learners. Additions can be made at this time. If anything on the list seems hard to do, or inappropriate to the group, a note to that effect is written next to that attribute.
7. At different points during the seminar/workshop, the Attributes of a Learning Community are checked for development and progress.

Note: This same process can be used to look at the attributes of a good learning experience. It gets at the essential elements of what is going on when people know they are learning at a high and satisfying level. The initial question gets changed to "Think about a time when you know you were really learning a lot, and loving it. Write about that time..."