

INTRODUCTION COUNCIL – THE ART OF LISTENING AND SPEAKING FROM THE HEART

The Council is a practice of speaking and listening from the heart. Through compassionate, heartfelt expression and empathic, non-judgmental listening, Council inspires a non-hierarchical form of deep communication that reveals a group’s vision and purpose. (...) When Council is integrated into the school classroom, the learning environment is transformed.”(CIS website of *The Ojai Foundation*, <http://cis.ojaifoundation.org/>).

The practice of Council connects academic and social-emotional learning. Based on indigenous, worldwide “cultural dialogical” practices, including Native American traditions as well as contemporary organizational management practices, a Council is a formal, structured process that includes sitting in a circle and passing a “talking piece” (an object used to identify the speaker) in response to a prompt from the facilitator. The Council encourages community building, conflict exploration, sharing of personal and cultural stories, collective decision making and a large dose of humor is a supportive and compassionate environment. There is a tremendous variety of Council forms, which each can support a situation in a group or with individuals – from a controversial point of dispute to a lifting of group wisdom.

In the classroom, teachers and students might develop their own intentions (guidelines) or use the “four intentions” of Council, as developed by students and facilitators associated with The Ojai Foundation (USA):

- **To listen from the heart:** practicing the "art of receptivity", suspending judgement, reaction, and opinion
- **To speak from the heart and with heart:** learning to "speak into the listening"
- **To speak spontaneously** without planning and only when holding a “talking piece”
- **To “keep it lean”** or get to the "heart of the matter" so everyone has time with the talking piece

*“The Quality of our Work
flows from the Quality of our Relationships.
The Quality of our Relationships
flows from the Quality of our Communication,
The Quality of our Communication
flows from the Integration of our Mind, Heart, Body, Spirit.”
(Marlow Hotchkiss)*

“The Council is a great activity to help students talk about their problems, issues, troubles or ideas and it contributes to the improvement of the classroom’s atmosphere.” (Krenare Lleshi, teacher of the ACES network, who has tested the activity with her class).

Links:

Video-Clip: Council in Schools – Return To The Heart.m4V (The Ojai Foundation, 8,46 min.)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FLeO49owxU

More information on the website „The Council in Schools“ (The Ojai Foundation):
www.cis.ojaifoundation.org/guidelines-stories-tips