

Gracious Space Community Conversation Toolkit Video Module Transcript

Thank you for taking time to watch this video today. I am Jennifer Karls co-founder and director of Roots of Inclusion and certified Gracious Space facilitator. Roots of Inclusion is a partner organization of the Family Engagement Collaborative. We have developed this training module for the Washington State Inclusionary Practices Professional Development Project. The purpose of this presentation is to provide an overview of the concepts and intentions of Gracious Space, and describe how these concepts have been incorporated into the Inclusionary Practices Community Conversation Toolkit. Gracious Space is the foundation for building a space of belonging. For a diverse group of people to engage in deep listening, and shared learning in a time of complexity and change. Creating belonging allows us to build trust and learn from one another as we engage in dialogue. By the end of this video module, you will know what the four elements of Gracious Space include, understand how Gracious Space is incorporated throughout the Inclusionary Practices Community Conversation Toolkit, and appreciate why Gracious Space matters, and is an essential component to the community conversation.

Gracious Space is not a new concept. There are practices in many cultures that reflect Gracious Space. At the Center for Ethical Leadership, Bill Grace and Patricia Hughes developed the four elements of Gracious Space that we will be discussing in this video. Their work was based on the vision of an environment where the stranger would feel welcome, and people could set aside their preconceived notions of each other, to be able to address challenges in more equitable and inclusive ways.

In their work, Pat and Bill defined Gracious Space as a spirit and a setting where we invite the stranger and learn in public. Pat has worked with Roots of Inclusion to develop an overview of Gracious Space. Let's hear from Pat now. Hello my name is Pat Hughes and I am delighted to be part of the Roots of Inclusion toolkit. I'm going to be sharing today some concepts and practices related to the body of work called Gracious Space. Gracious Space was founded in the late 1990s by the Center for Ethical Leadership. I am honored to be the co-founder of that body of work, and also the co-author of two books on Gracious Space. The original book Gracious Space a Practical Guide for Learning Together, and the second book called Courageous Collaboration in Gracious Space. So, I'm going to be sharing some slides so that we can follow along together.

I want to start out by asking you to look at these pictures and reflect to yourself what does a Gracious Space mean to you? We all have experiences where we have had moments in our past, something that feels like a Gracious Space. One of these images might appeal to you. We all have different ways of expressing Gracious Space. Cultures have expressed something like a Gracious Space since dirt. So, I want to be very clear, that Gracious Space isn't new, but what it does offer is some shared language, and a way of packaging the material, so that groups can, and organizations can build on it together. So, now that you've had your restful moment of imagining a graceful Gracious Space, let's move on into unpacking what a Gracious Space is, and what it could do for you and your organization, in your groups, especially with respect to creating more inclusion and belonging and stronger relationships.

So Gracious Space is many things. It is a collaborative leadership model; it has a built-in bias for collaboration. So, if we try to pair Gracious Space with a very strict hierarchy, where power is supported and not shared, then it will not be a good match. Gracious Space is a match for groups that want to be collaborative. It is an inclusive pathway. Gracious Space used as intended is very inclusive and can be a very great compliment for groups wanting to work in the realm of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and accessibility. It can be a framework for innovation. It can also be a container for having difficult or challenging conversations. And it's a curriculum. It's a curriculum that can be brought into many different programs and many different ways of application.

So, here's the, the official definition of Gracious Space, which was derived after many years of research and conversation with, with community members associated with the Center for Ethical Leadership at the time. There are four parts to this definition, a spirit and a setting where we invite the stranger, and learn in public. Now these four elements are probably jargon right now, so my goal is to unpack these in the next several minutes so that you can understand what they mean, and then also start to position and aim those toward the work that you're doing. So, the first element is spirit, small s, and spirit simply means that we can be Gracious Space. It's about how we show up. What is the way that we interact with others? What is our vibe, if you will? We can be a Gracious Space. Surely, Gracious Space is about tools and techniques, but it's, it starts inside. It starts with what is our intention, and how do we bring that into our day? Gandhi said, be the change you want to see in the world. If you want more compassion in the world, be compassionate. If you want more joy, be joyous. If you want more inclusion, be inclusive. So, the spirit of Gracious Space is really saying, let's be intentional about how we show up. And with that, there are three levels, or three dimensions if you will, of the spirit of Gracious Space. The spirit is really about creating supportive environment for the work. It's about the energetic relationship that, that you have, and that others have with those around you. You know how sometimes, you walk into a room and other people were there before you, and you can tell right away whether it was a good meeting or whether it was a hard meeting, just by you know the, the gestalt or the vibe of what went on before you came. That's what we mean by the spirit of Gracious Space. So, if we know that this is contagious to others, then it behooves us to be thoughtful about the spirit that we are bringing into being. So, the first dimension is about our own uh spirit. And this can become a personal practice. I start my day by thinking about what, what do I have going on that day and what are a couple of aspects, um qualities, uh that I want to bring into that day that will help me be successful and positive? So, what comes with me when I walk into a room? What comes with you when you walk into a room, what uh what are you known for? What are the qualities that you want to, to leverage and, and give daylight to? At the next dimension, it's about the group, and about the group agreements around how the group will interact together. It's not about the work that they're doing, it's about the relationships that they have. In every organization and every group there will be an in-group and an out group. And so, group agreements is really around acknowledging that and saying how do we be together in a way that is belonging and inclusive for all? How does the group attend to relationship? How does it attend to learning? How does it attend to conflict? How does it attend to time? Does the meeting start on time? Does it start late? Who talks, who doesn't talk? Who leads, who doesn't lead? These are all things the group can pay

attention to and be intentional about, and that is the, the group part of the spirit of Gracious Space. And the last dimension, is about a higher purpose or a noble mission or cause that brings people together. It is that which provides shared direction and shared inspiration. It may be uh something that gets you up in the morning. So, when we think about at any given moment, we've got the self, the group, and a larger purpose, all of which can be sources of spirit, sources of inspiration, and ways for us to be mindful about how we were bringing ourselves into our day, into our world, in that way. So, as Wayne Dyer said, our intention creates our reality, and the spirit of Gracious Space is simply a reminder to be mindful about how we show up, because it is contagious. It does matter, it does have an impact on yourself and on others. Especially if you're the leader, people are watching you, and they're learning from you.

There are many qualities of the spirit, these are just a few. And, one of the practices around uh Gracious Space is to say well, which ones are you good at? Which ones come with you regularly, that you don't really have to think about it, but that, they're gifts. That's something that you can offer, by being intentional.

So, I encourage you to take a look at this list, and then also think a little bit more about, what is some feedback that you've gotten about positive qualities that you have, and that you bring with you into your interactions. And, how can you be more intentional about making that additive to the groups that you're part of? Not withholding it and being afraid of saying, oh I don't want to brag, I don't want to share this gift, except it's not a gift until it's given away. So, how do we bring in our quality of being present, or slowing down, or assuming positive intent, or you know, speaking truth? Because that's when it becomes a gift to the group. That's when it becomes a gift to ourselves and others.

So, let's move to the second element of Gracious Space, and that is setting, and this is about creating a supportive physical environment. So, this is about both in person and remote. We need to consider both environments now because we're going to be working in both environments, and we've learned a lot over the last year about how our physical spaces really matter to doing work together. And when we're not in a shared physical space how that detracts from the work, and then also what are some mitigations that we need to make so that we can continue to be inclusive, continue to have strong relationships, and continue to find ways for everybody to participate. So, the setting really asks us to focus on some meeting basics, like is there an agenda, has that been shared? um Do we have the materials that we need to support the activities that we'll be doing? What location are we in? Does this location have a history? Is it accessible? Is it findable? You know, is there natural lighting? um Are the tables set up so that everybody has a chair, right? Because, if people have to stand, or if they have to sit at a, at the little kids table, you've right now set up a hierarchy that's going to be really hard to undo. um The toolkit offers an accessibility checklist so there's a lot of great information on that on, on how to make your physical spaces accessible. It's also about time and timing. So, is now the right time to have the conversation, and have we given it enough time? A lot of times we try to rush through something and the meeting starts, we get to the good stuff right when the meeting is about to get over. So, thinking about the time is also part of the setting. And so is history, the history of place, the history of people, the history of, of

issues, and topics has a bearing on what we're trying to do in the moment, and we can't pretend otherwise. So, creating a supportive physical environment takes these things into consideration.

And there's lots of ways to do that, there's lots of ways to think about rearranging the furniture, or bringing in toys, or snacks, or coffee, or chocolate goes a long way just, just being thoughtful about how are you going to think about the space, so that it is inclusive and supportive of the work that you're trying to do and not getting in your way. For example, if you were wanting folks to have roundtable conversations and you found that you were in a conference room where all the seats were bolted to the floor in, in rows, you've got a setting that now is not helpful to what you want to have happen. I've had that happen to me and what I've done instead is say, hey just turn around in your chair and kind of gather up even if you can't move your chair. You can certainly turn around in it or talk to a neighbor, you can still try to create that, that relationship. So, let's move on to the third element of Gracious Space and that is invite the stranger, and this essentially means to seek and be open to difference, to ask ourselves, in this issue, in this situation, what perspective might we be missing? Whose voice is typically not included? What might we learn if we invited this perspective, or this voice?

How do we get smarter before we make decisions? It can be a very strategic approach, as Peter Senge says in this quote here, "difference is an opportunity to learn more about the system". So, how do we learn more, how do we stay curious before saying, I know it, I know it, I've known it but when I came in, and I haven't changed my mind at all, and I still know it when I leave. This is the way a lot of meetings are run and this is the way people experience the world a lot of times. So, invite the stranger ask us to see each other as valuable, see each other as valid, and see each other as kin, see the other as kin. Humans have a history of seeing difference as deficient, as seeing those folks with differences as less than, or other. And so, invite the stranger, at its very core, is about seeing the other as kin and being willing to learn and stay open to learning in that space. We also have the internal stranger and this can include things like our own expectations, our own fears, our own assumptions and biases. We all have them, we're all brought up with different experiences and different cultures, and that, that, that shapes how we see the world and our expectations of it. And so, being alert to both the external stranger, which might be people, or ideas, or perspectives, or feedback, or surprise. And the internal stranger which is our own

way of seeing the world. And, and just being attuned to both the internal and external stranger. And the term itself comes from Parker Palmer, an author and teacher, who does a lot of work at the intersection of courage, and leadership, and spirituality. And he has a saying that, in community, there's two truths. The first is the last person you want to show up, shows up and the second truth is, just when you've gotten rid of that person, somebody else comes to take their place. So, he concludes our ability to be in community has everything to do with our ability to be with difference, to invite the stranger. Otherwise, we're a club, and all but one of us can go home, right? So, being open to difference finding ways to learn and to continue to expand our own world view.

So, what Gracious Space is really in line with is the belief, and the fact, that in diversity we get more perspectives, from more people, with more ideas, and more, and more voices. And that from that will come better outcomes, because we'll have different perspectives, we'll have different points of view. We'll, we'll stay curious a little bit longer, until we see something and we make better decisions. Our outcomes are better, our results are better. However, here's the rub, just because you have diverse groups doesn't necessarily mean that you will get better outcomes. There's a piece in the middle that is critical, and that piece is about being intentional and bringing in proactive, inclusive methods, and leadership that promotes engagement, that promotes belonging, that, that makes it so that everyone is seen as fully human and having something of value to contribute. That's how you get from diversity to better outcomes. And Gracious Space is a container that holds all three of those pieces, and this is called the Diversity Value Proposition. This is definitely something that we want you to try at home. So, the last element of Gracious Space is learning in public, and this essentially means that we are open to possibility. Tather than coming in rigid and right, We come in saying, I'm going to listen, I'm going to pay attention to my judgments, and maybe try to judge a little bit less. I'm going to ask questions like, what if? How about? What would happen if? And maybe I'm gonna need to say I don't know, and that's really hard, especially for leaders who are expected to know. And if we've learned anything in this past year of 2020 and 2021, we cannot know everything there is. Lots of surprise, lots of things being unlearned and relearned, and um this has been a year of lots of learning in public. And it involves taking risks, it involves making mistakes, and that can be very vulnerable place. So, if we create a Gracious Space, it is more likely that we will be able to learn together, and unlearn and relearn, to unfreeze and refreeze, the way that we do things and to share our learning.

So, in summary there are many different ways to activate Gracious Space. The four elements are portals or doorways through which you can enter. You can start with the setting, and that is going to create some spirit. You can start with asking questions, and that is going to invite difference. There's lots of different ways to start and there's lots of different ways to have the conversation. So, these are just a few, uh reminders of some of the ground that we've covered today, ways to create a Gracious Space. And again, the hope is that this is a tool that will make your work more joyous, more collaborative, more inclusive, and grant you some improved and more sustained results. If you're interested in learning more about Gracious Space you can contact me at my website at trilliumleadership.com. You can also check out the Ted Talk that is available in the ether. You just google Gracious Space Ted. Thanks very much for your time and attention. uh Best wishes to you all. We heard Pat talk about what Gracious Space is and describe for us the four elements of Gracious Space, which are the spirit, setting, inviting the stranger, and learning in public. The intent of creating a Gracious Space is to allow us to learn more about ourselves, listen to others, build relationships, and to collaborate and learn together. Let's think about how this connects to the Inclusionary Practices Community Conversation Toolkit. When we prepare to have complicated conversations, a primary focus must be on inclusion. Building a space of belonging is a crucial aspect. We each have something to learn from one another. No one individual's experience is the same and taking time to listen and learn from others, allows us to build trust as we tackle complicated challenges facing our communities. In the community conversation, we invite people to listen deeply, ask questions,

be curious, and learn from one another. Learning from one another challenges us to consider perspectives other than our own and seek to be open to growing in our ability to empathize and understand more of the complexities of a problem. Seeking perspectives from everyone in our diverse community allows us to more fully understand the status quo and barriers that are preventing meaningful change. Without diverse perspectives, we are likely to address a problem with gaps in our understanding. The combined wisdom of diverse people, with different experiences, seeking to address problems collectively, is more likely to lead to a better solution, anchored in equity, fairness, and the opportunity for every individual to reach their full human potential.

The spirit of Gracious Space is a key component of building a space of belonging and being inclusive. We can each personify Gracious Space in the way we participate in the process, how we welcome others, and invite people to join the conversation. And be mindful of the greater good through our work considering, the larger purpose of why we are bringing people together to have a conversation about inclusive education. The toolkit reinforces the spirit of Gracious Space in the way that it provides a building a planning, and the intentionality around that process. Allowing the individuals to create a space of belonging by bringing with them their qualities of spirit. It also is intentional in how a group is invited to join the conversation, with a focus on an opportunity for shared learning around common purpose. There are many ways that spirit is considered in the toolkit. Two of the intentional components include group agreements and the diamond pattern of interaction. Group agreements are a useful tool to make sure participants have a common understanding of how interactions will take place during the community conversation. They will help people stay focused on building relationships, listening, and learning from other perspectives. They also give the facilitator something to refer back to should any conflict arise. Within the community conversation there will be opportunities for interactivity and multiple modes of engagement, accessible to diverse participants. The facilitator guides participants through a process of individual reflection, small and large group discussion, and integration of learning. This process is modeled after the Diamond Pattern of Interaction. By using the Diamond Pattern of the Interaction, participants will have the opportunity to share their ideas and reflect verbally, through writing, and drawing. When we think about the setting in the context of the toolkit, we're considering how the physical space supports the conversation and creates an inclusive environment. Consider how the space, where the conversation will take place, supports the work that you're doing. Be aware of the history of the place, how people will feel when they're in the space, and how you can ensure it is accessible to all. The intentionality of the toolkit to create a space of belonging, where people are willing to share their authentic perspectives, is woven throughout. But it is explicit through the accessibility checklist that has been developed.

The toolkit is very intentional about accessibility. Accessibility really happens well before someone comes into a shared space. The checklist gives planners a guide to think about accessibility from the perspectives of the physical space, ensuring it is accessible for people who use a mobility device, or require other accommodations to access the space. It also considers how people feel when they are there. There's also a focus on accessibility of the content and participation. It considers how to support people who require interpretation and translation,

and people who use augmentative communication devices. These components are discussed explicitly in the checklist. Accessibility is core to allowing people to attend, to feel that they belong, and that their input matters.

Inviting the stranger is foundational to creating and supporting inclusive communities. We do this by intentionally seeking out a broad stakeholder group and creating opportunity to embrace different perspectives and approaches. By inviting the stranger, we're allowing individuals the opportunity to reframe their perspective. To ask, what can I learn from the stranger, or those that have different experience than my own? And then being willing to examine, what is the stranger in me? How am I feeling, what are my triggers, and what assumptions and biases do I hold? We know that when we invite people with different perspectives into a space, with different ideas than our own, conflict will be a result of those efforts. Gracious Space is not about creating a conflict free space, but rather understanding that conflict is good and necessary to reach equitable and inclusive outcomes. Planning for conflict is an important aspect of how the toolkit was developed. If designing an education system to be equitable and include the needs of every learner were easy, we would have done it already. By committing to embracing different perspectives and opinions, we will learn from them and develop stronger relationships, resulting in better outcomes and more inclusive schools and communities.

The toolkit is also very intentional about inviting the stranger. We've developed a community conversation mapping tool. The tool allows the planning team to think broadly about who is involved in the system that they are working to address. It calls on the team to be deliberate about who's invited to the conversation and supports the opportunity to build relationships across the stakeholder groups, people who may not have typically come together to have these conversations, and breaking down silos. Having a more holistic conversation leading to meaningful change. The final element is learn in public. This is all about being open to learning and possibilities with others in the community. Community conversations are about relationship building, creating a shared understanding, and moving to action. When we embrace learning in public, we become willing to be vulnerable ourselves, and be open to others perspectives and possibilities. By committing to learning in public, we are creating an environment where curiosity, and learning for others is supported. The toolkit reinforces learning in public by allowing a space for sharing ideas, having discussion and intentional ways of interacting. One of the tools used for allowing learning in public, is that of Appreciative Inquiry.

Gracious Space and Appreciative Inquiry our partners. We create a setting with Gracious Space and expand that by asking questions that are open and clean, so participants can be authentic in how they respond to the question, and not feel pressured to answer a specific way. Organizing the community conversation around open and clean questions allows participants to see what is in the system that has potential, rather than simply, simply focusing on the problems. These components of Gracious Space, Appreciative Inquiry, group agreements, and open and clean questions, all work together to build and reinforce the space of belonging, allowing us to utilize all of these inclusive practices to engage diverse participants and hear all

voices. We can then move to action knowing that we have learned from a diverse group of people and will have arrived at a better, and more equitable, and inclusive solution.

You can learn more about the toolkit by watching the Introducing the Community Conversation Toolkit webinar. And, you can stay in touch and find out about upcoming events, publications, training series, and check out other training modules with deeper dives into other aspects of the toolkit. We will be providing links in a resource document for this module. Now as we close this learning module, I want to encourage you to take time to do a personal reflection. Think about one thing in this presentation that resonated with you. Then reflect on that one thing. What will I do? What action can I take based on my learning today?

Thank you for watching. We hope that you'll learn more about the Community Conversation Toolkit and about the elements of Gracious Space.