GOING DEEPER—TEXT-BASED LEARNING
THE PRACTICE OF LISTENING IS A TRANSFORMATIVE ACT

Inquiry requires a different mindset. Instead of conversations made up of turn taking—each person waiting to give his opinion—the focus of inquiry shifts to the need to better understand each other. The greatest gift a team can give another is positive and respectful responses. So often in group work we get an idea in our head and can't wait to share. In this bid to share, we stop listening and instead pay more attention to our thoughts. Inquiry requires that we slow down the process to temporarily put aside our own thoughts and fully engage in the process of understanding. It requires conscious attention to breaking with old habits and practices.

This ability to linger with each other's thoughts is one of the most powerful gifts members of a team can give to each other. When we linger and inquire about what others consider important, they feel validated and are more willing to contribute. In order to do this, team members need to learn to shift from self-thought to **accountable listening** practices.

Listening is a reciprocal process and the response behaviors of team members are just as important as the questions asked during an inquiry period. All too often teams report that they are working on "listening" and yet have no evidence to support their behaviors. Perceptions do not always match practices. We have all worked with others who claim to be "good listeners" but actually are not. The purpose of accountable listening for teamwork is to close the knowing-doing gap for "listening." In a previous book Diane framed positive, respectful responses as *accountable listening.* (Sommers & Zimmerman). The three practices of accountable listening are 1) **confirming paraphrase**, 2) **thoughtful pause**, and 3) **ethic of inquiry**.

Accountable Listening Practices

In their book *9 Professional Conversations to Change our Schools,* Sommers and Zimmerman (2018) define "accountable listening" practices listed below:

- Confirming paraphrase: Listeners confirm the commitment to listen deeply and seek to understand by summarizing their personal understandings of the person who has spoken. When such a paraphrase is offered, the speaker responds to verify accuracy, to clarify details, and to extend thinking.

- Thoughtful pause: Listeners confirm the commitment to listen for understanding by taking time to think about their responses. When groups learn to slow down and linger, these pauses occur naturally. Complex ideas take time—about 3 to 5 seconds by some estimates—to process.

- Ethic of inquiry: Listeners confirm the commitment to listen by probing for understanding. The ethic of inquiry requires an openness to being curious about what others think—even if you do not agree. The minute we start to judge others' ideas we are back in our heads, and we lose a chance to build a coherent thread in the meaning-making process. When we hear something we do not agree with, staying curious helps us respond. The

(Continued)

(Continued)

paraphrase makes sure what you hear is indeed what the speaker intended. The pause gives the listener time to craft supporting responses. Sometimes another paraphrase is warranted; other times a question is in order. This respectful listening and probing are the ethic of inquiry.

The ethic of inquiry stays positive when questions are asked from a personal point of curiosity. Invitational phrases are helpful, such as "I am curious about how you came to . . .?" "I am wondering how you . . .?" And finally, when the time comes, "I am thinking about this differently than you. Can I share how I think about this?"

All three of these responses are critical to the processes of building coherent knowledge—that common deep understanding about practice (see Chapter 9). It is this ability to talk congruently about how the team understands and takes action that builds actionable coherent knowledge. All three of these responses are critical to the processes of developing collective efficacy—that common deep understanding about how practices impact student learning, which is the focus of the second text-based learning opportunity offered in this chapter.