



# Facilitating Consensus

*Teacher Resource Guide*

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# Agenda:

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Importance and purpose of facilitating consensus

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# Purpose:

Our “Connect with Kindness” curricula are intentionally called Child-Generated because they are based on the analysis of the children’s entries to the Kindness Project.

There are four lesson types within each of the seven themes. Reaching consensus with students is embedded into each “Kindness Immersion”, which is the more extended of the lesson types.

The purpose of this presentation is to help teachers acquire knowledge and develop skills they will need to support students of all ages to reach consensus.

This presentation is not designed to be used as an instructional aid with students.

# Why Consensus is Needed:

- Coming to consensus as a group requires perspective taking and problem solving.
- Consensus takes more time to reach, but it is very instructional for students of all ages.
- Asking the students to vote to determine the lesson path for all 3 “Kindness Boosts” lessons works well because the amount of time these lessons take to complete is minimal.
- Kindness Immersion lessons are more involved and take longer to complete, so the teacher needs to do more work to assess what the group really wants to do.

# Processing Conflicting Ideas:

Students handle conflicts with peers at school in many different ways.

Most students likely do not have the skills needed to think about how someone else's idea might be the best idea for the class.

Reaching consensus takes more time than voting, but it is a powerful way to help students handle conflict and to learn that others have valid points of view.

# How to Recognize Conflict:

Students might show the following emotions when they conflict with a peer about a “student-generated lesson idea”. **They might:**

- Avoid participating in the lesson or shut down.
- Be polite and just go along.
- Not feel safe to be totally honest, so they indirectly disagree.
- Show frustration/act out.
- Worry about having problems with friends if they do not go along with their idea.
- Be shy or sensitive and not comfortable sharing.

# Consensus Misconceptions:

Teachers may think that they have reached consensus with students, because:

- Students are fine, they seem to really like the proposal/idea.
- Students seem okay, some are even promoting the proposal/idea.
- Students are not acting out or showing frustration with the proposal/idea.
- All the students voted, and the majority said that they supported the proposal/idea.

# DuFour's Definition of Consensus (2006):

1. ALL points of view have been discussed, and

2. The **will** of the class is obvious, even to students who most oppose it.



# Steps toward Consensus:

1. A specific proposal must be created and communicated with all the students (write it down for all to see and read it several times). For example: We will pull weeds at the retirement center everyday during lunch recess for the next three weeks.
2. Pros and cons to the proposal must be discussed, with students who are grouped randomly, not based on their current opinions.
3. The **will** of the group must be determined.

# Determining Pros and Cons:

- Randomly divide students into two groups.
- Each group reviews the SPECIFIC proposal/idea.
- One group lists only the PROS while the other group lists only the CONS. Be sure to tell students no matter how they personally feel, they must list the pros/cons and defend their group's list to their classmates.
- Each group shares-out, taking their assigned "stance".

**Note:** **Very young** students will need simpler words such as like/dislike as opposed to pro/con. They will also need support writing their responses/making their list. They could even draw their emotional responses.

# Sharing Pros and Cons:

- As each group presents their “stance” (pro/con) the other students carefully listen.
- After each group presents their “side”, the listening students are invited to add to the presented list of pros or cons.
- Throughout the process everyone is encouraged to ask for clarification on any point they do not understand, and
- No student should know where any other students stand on the issue, personally. It is vitally important that all the students remain neutral throughout the process. This will be challenging for less mature students, which is why we recommend practicing the process when the stakes are lower.

# Determine the WILL of the Group

## First:

- Ensure that all students understand the proposal/idea under consideration.
- Teach students to use the “Fist to Five” strategy (see next slides).
- Ask students to express themselves using the “Fist to Five” by simultaneously showing their level of support.

# The “Fist to Five” Approach:

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This is a process by which a teacher can learn where, on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest, how much each student supports the proposal/idea.

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When implementing a “Fist to Five,” ask students to all turn their bodies and eyes, so they are completely facing the teacher and no one else.

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Ask students to place their hands on their heart (this is so other students who may be behind them do not see their responses), and to show you, using their fingers, how they are feeling about the proposal/idea.

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Teach students, using developmentally modified language as needed, what each number of fingers means (see next slide). Note: For students under the age of 8 the “fist” may not be appropriate.

# “Fist to Five” Language:

- Five Fingers= I LOVE this proposal/idea, or this is my favorite proposal/idea.
- Four Fingers = I like parts of the proposal/idea, or it is my second favorite proposal/idea.
- Three Fingers = I am okay with the proposal/idea and am willing to participate in the class.

**\*If most hands indicate a 5, 4, or 3, your students have reached a consensus!**

# “Fist to Five” Language, Continued:

- Two Fingers = I am not yet ready to support this proposal/idea, but I am warming to it.
- One Finger = I do not like this proposal/idea at all, and I am not very happy about participating, but I will go along.
- Fist = No. If I could, I would veto (get rid of) this proposal, regardless of what everyone else in the class thinks. Using the fist may not be appropriate for young children who may be immature. For example, they may show a fist just to be disruptive.

**If most students indicate 2, 1, or fists, then your students have not reached a consensus.**

# After “Fist to Five”:

The teacher should immediately be able to see the WILL of the class by looking around the classroom, at each students’ hand.

If the WILL is to proceed (Students mostly indicated 5,4,3), then all students are expected to follow through with the decision.

Depending on students’ maturation level, the teacher may want to have one-on-one discussions with individual students who indicated 2,1, or a fist to validate their feelings and to seek better understanding.

Note: If you have an electronic student response system this could be used in place of the fist to five strategy using fingers.



# A Note:

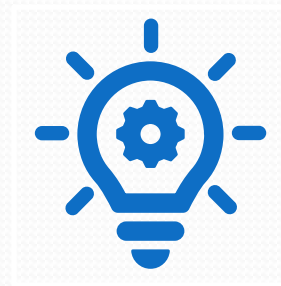
Very young or immature students may not like being part of a group that does “not align” with their current feelings, so it is important to practice consensus with small decisions, like this proposal: “We will play with balls at recess today.” This helps students get used to the idea of making a lists of pros/likes or and cons/dislikes regardless of how they feel.

- If an idea is brought forth by the class that is not reasonable or doable, the teacher needs to acknowledge the idea and tell the class they will not be able to do it and why.
- It is helpful if the teacher tracks whose ideas are being used for all “Connect with Kindness” lessons, so they do not always select the ideas from the same student or group of students.

# What to do if consensus is not reached:



If it is not evident that the class has reached consensus or if the indications from students were too close to call, the proposal/idea does **not** go forward.



**If this happens, teachers can:**

1. Run a pilot or a test using the proposal/idea or a modified version of the proposal/idea, or
2. Take more time to discuss the idea/proposal, perhaps discussing pros and cons again, and
3. Bring the proposal/idea up again, at another time.

# Steps for Practicing Consensus with Students:

It is recommended that teachers **practice the process** of reaching consensus several times with students before doing it for a “real” proposal/idea:

- Ask students to number-off by 4.
- Identify a leader/scribe for each group.
- Write a specific proposal around a hypothetical idea like “The school will give free ice cream for students on Fridays”. For **very young children** the proposal should be something real, like: “We will read the Cat in the Hat after lunch”.
- Divide students with the odd numbers listing the “pros” and the even numbers listing the “cons” for the proposal. (Students may need to move to opposite sides of the classroom to conduct their small group discussions.)

# Steps, continued:

Bring all students back together as one large group.

Each group shares what their group listed, then asks for other thoughts. The teacher should list those thoughts.

Confirm the proposal by restating what was written down to begin with.

Confirm that students understand how to use the Fist to Five strategy.

Ask for students to express themselves using the “Fist to Five” strategy, by facing the teacher.

Discuss how the strategy helped everyone to better understand the proposal/idea before reacting to it with a decision.

# Consensus is the KEY:



It takes MORE time to take students through a true consensus process.

Consensus is the key to highly effective outcomes for Kindness Immersion lessons.

Students will have more clarity about what the class is doing and how their actions will impact others.

# Self-Check

- According to DuFour, consensus happens when?
- What are three specific strategies we need to do when we are attempting to build consensus?
- What is the “Fist to Five” strategy?

# References

The content used for how to reach consensus outlined in this presentation was based on the following book:

- DuFour, R., Dufour, R., Eaker, R., Many, T. (2006). Learning by Doing, A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work, Solution Tree Press, 163-167.