

## The Courageous Conversation Compass

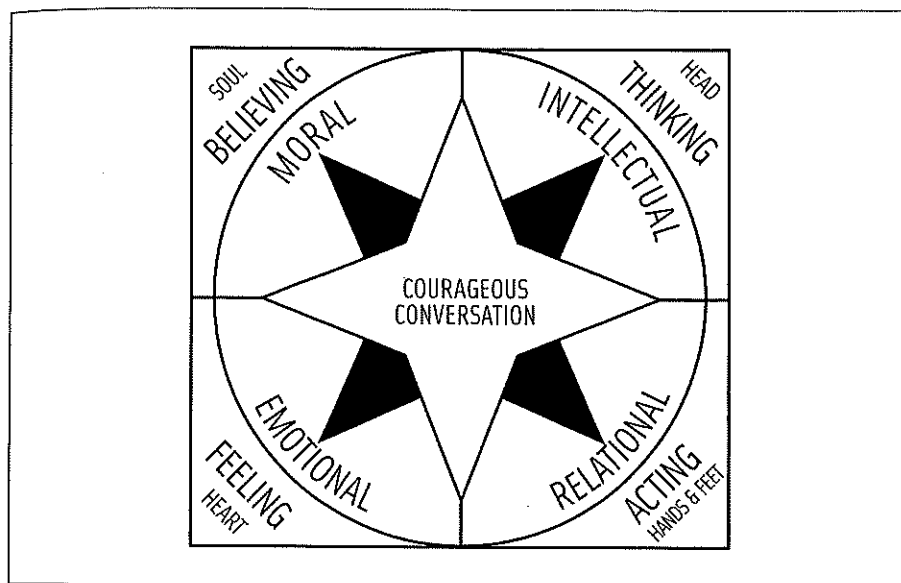
Linda Darling-Hammond (1997) has said, "In order to create a cohesive community and a consensus on how to proceed, school people must have the occasion to engage in democratic discourse about the real stuff of teaching and learning" (p. 336). Part of this "democratic discourse" is providing enough time and space in the Courageous Conversation so that every educator's perspective and experience can be listened to and affirmed. The Fourth Condition of Courageous Conversation asks us to use the Courageous Conversation Compass to determine the place of engagement at which each participant in the dialogue is processing the content.

Video



The Compass  
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Figure 2.1 The Courageous Conversation Compass



I developed the Compass as a personal navigational tool to guide participants through these conversations. It helps us to know where we are personally as well as to recognize the direction from which other participants come. Collectively, it leads us to a mutual understanding of our varied beliefs and opinions and helps us locate the sources of our emotions and actions or lack thereof.

On the Courageous Conversation Compass, I have identified four primary ways that people deal with racial information, events, and/or issues: emotional, intellectual, moral, and relational. These are the four points or cardinal directions of our compass.

- *Emotionally*, we respond to information through *feelings*, when a racial issue strikes us at a physical level and causes an internal sensation such as anger, sadness, joy, or embarrassment.

- *Intellectually*, our primary response to a racial issue or information may be characterized by personal disconnect with the subject or a steadfast search for more information or data. Our intellectual response is often verbal and based in our best *thinking*.
- *Morally*, we respond from a deep-seated *belief* that relates to the racial information or event. This belief has to do with the rightness or wrongness of a given racial issue. The justifications for one's moral views are often situated in the "gut" and may not be verbally articulated.
- *Relationally*, we connect and respond to racial information through our *acting* or what is most often characterized as specific behaviors and actions.

In a sense, emotional responses are seated in the heart, intellectual responses in the mind, moral responses in the soul, and relational responses in the hands and feet. This Compass together with the Six Conditions and Four Agreements fulfills the complete definition of Courageous Conversation.

## REFLECTION

For the purposes of better understanding and personalizing the Courageous Conversation Compass, consider the following topics.\*

- Affirmative Action
- Emergent Bilingualism
- The United States of America's First Black President
- Tribal Sovereignty of Indigenous Nations in the United States

As you say each of the aforementioned phrases and think about its significance, where do you initially locate yourself on the compass? If the phrase is not familiar to you, what does recognizing your lack of racial consciousness trigger? As you ponder the topic for a longer period of time and begin to connect it to your own personal experience, where do you travel on the compass? Do you experience significant or minimal movement?

\*Readers outside of the United States should feel free to substitute here four context-specific, current racial topics before engaging in this reflective exercise.

## A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

Margaret Wheatley (2002) has asked, "What would it feel like to be listening to each other again about what disturbs and troubles us, about what gives us hope, about our yearnings, our fears, our prayers, and our children?" (p. 3). To gain full