

# Bridging & Breaking

Belonging in Praxis



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# Bridging & Breaking:

Belonging in Praxis



Length —  30 minutes  
 60 minutes  
 90 minutes

## Description

A 60-minute “training for trainers” tool that supports organizers and advocates in understanding and adapting core concepts of Bridging and Breaking into their own work and communities of service.

## Audience

Organizers in base-building orgs, leadership and equity advocates in the non-profit sector and the private sector.

## Guiding Inquiries

- What are the mechanics of breaking and bridging?
- How can our organizations, teams, schools, communities embody practices that bridge?
- If belonging was a universal, global goal, how would institutions of power need to shift to include those who have been pushed out/excluded from the circle of human concern?
- What narrative and stories help us “suffer with” our perceived “Other”?

## Outcome

- Learners will gain an introductory knowledge about the mechanics of breaking and bridging.
- Learners will use real-world stories of bridging to design learning experiences that build on the animated video Bridging: Towards a Society Built on Belonging.
- Learners will gain experience in being able to guide others in understanding the concepts of bridging and breaking.

## Lesson at-a-Glance

- Opening Welcome (5 minutes)
- Video and Group Discussion (10 minutes)
- Intro to Breaking and Bridging Framework (5 minutes)
- Stories of Bridging Activity: Case Study & Design Challenge (30 minutes)
- Journal Reflection (10 minutes)

## Materials

- Copy of Praxis of Belonging: Bridging and Breaking Lesson
- Large Whiteboard or Chart Paper
- Colored Pens for Whiteboard or Chart Paper
- Copies of [Stories of Bridging Activity](#) (1 copy per participant)
- Copies of [Bridging and Breaking Frame](#) (1 copy per participant)

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Participants should have laptop / viewing devices, journals/paper and writing utensils.

**Sources/Resources**

[Othering & Belonging, Issue 1](#)

[Othering & Belonging, Issue 2](#)

[Othering & Belonging, Issue 3](#)

Film Links:

[Video Transcript - Bridging: Towards A Society Built on Belonging](#)

(Animated Video)

[Bridging: Towards a Society Built on Belonging](#)

(Animated Video)

Related Frames and Tools: See Activity Guide

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Lesson Plan



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## The Context/ Framing the Issue

**We bridge in order to become.** The heart of *bridging* is based on our society's willingness to engage and share in other's shared humanity, suffering, failures, and aspirations. It requires our willingness to recognize the similarities and the differences of a manufactured "Other" with space and empathy. To suffer with, is compassion. As Rumi once said, "The wound is the place where the Light enters you." To be clear, to connect with the failures and suffering of others, including those who have harmed us, does not mean we endorse them; it does not mean to be free of boundaries. Rather, we learn to listen to each other's fears and anxieties in our collective work to build towards an inclusive world of belonging. This does not mean we condone or accept acts of hatred and violent domination. When we learn to walk towards those we perceive as our "Other," we open ourselves and each other up to the possibility of being made more complete, reconstituted, stronger, and wiser.

We have to intentionally put in place the stories and structures that allow us to honor each other's anxieties because without those efforts to bridge, society will break: our world will continue to introduce more policies of fear, exclusion, marginalization and intolerance.

*To frame the activity, you might say something like...*

"Bridging is love-based, compassionate and strategic response response to isolation and "Othering." Bridging is a necessary antidote to exclusionary structures and practice of breaking. But it isn't easy. If you think about actual bridges in the world, we see how they are made to be walked on and over. To bridge requires that we connect with communities and structures in which we, ourselves, are likely to represent the "Other." So, in order to exist as an embodied ethic of bridging and belonging, we also need to be fluent in the art of "suffering with" and beside our "Other" or those who have been othered, including ourselves and our communities. Bridging is not about moving towards the status quo. We need to learn how to ignite, kindle and spread stories that bridge in order to create a larger "we". Today's workshop is designed to explore how we might do that."



## Strategies (Start of Lesson)

### 1. Welcome 5 minutes

### 2. Video & Group Discussion 10 minutes

## Bridges are made to walk on. – bell hooks

### Welcome, Land Agreements, Community Agreements

(See 'Activity Guide' to consider which activities are best suited for your context. These are essential for setting the tone of the learning space)

1. Watch [Bridging: Towards a Society Built on Belonging](#)



Click icon to watch video.



2. Reflect briefly on the film.
  - a. What did you see, hear, think?
  - b. What sensations does watching the film bring up for you?
  - c. What do you wonder or want to know more about?
3. Share the definitions of *Breaking* and *Bridging* with the group.

#### Breaking:

- Pulling away from other groups in ways that make it easier to tell and believe false stories of “us versus them”
- To initiate or foster practices that reinforce othering and dehumanizes a manufacture “them”
- A manufactured or manipulated inter-personal and/or structural response to a perceived “Other”

#### Bridging:

- Relating to other groups based on deep listening, empathetic space, and recognition of suffering
- Rejects that there is a ‘Them’ while recognizing our unique differences
- A strategic or intentional response to reject Othering

#### Role of stories and cultural narratives in bridging and breaking:

- Narratives of shared humanity, optimism, opportunity, and inclusion can help counteract the fear and angry populism we see today—which have grown out of widespread “breaking” stories that warn of a dark and scary future or an untruthful and sentimental historical past.

Use **Speaking Order** to invite the group to reflect on why they believe individuals, leaders and structures of power in society *break* in moments of change.

**3. Mechanisms of Breaking and Bridging: A Framework**  
5 minutes

“The idea of stoking anxiety, resentment, or fear of the “other” is not a new electoral strategy in American politics. Appeals to nativism, racism, and xenophobia are evident in almost every period of American history.” ([Othering & Belonging Journal, Issue 1](#))

Distribute the Bridging and Breaking Frame chart.

Briefly explain the strategic, structural and interpersonal mechanisms of bridging and breaking. You may want to do a deeper-dive into the chart in a follow-up.

**4. Case Studies & Framework**  
30 minutes

**Stories of Bridging Activity**

Prepare the group to study real-world stories of bridgers and practices of belonging and remind them that one of the best ways to learn something is to prepare to teach it to others.

Each group will work in teams to engage with an article, organizational website or video that highlights a story about communities across the country and world who bridge in their work.

Groups should first identify a community of learners for whom they will introduce the concepts of bridging and breaking. Teams will then develop a set of 3-5 guiding questions and a 30 minute activity to help learners dig deeper into the concepts of bridging and breaking that use the Mechanisms chart and their assigned case study as the core example.

Bring the group back together to present their activity and 3-5 questions to the larger group.

**4. Journal**  
10 minutes

- Ask the group to reflect on their learning today.
- Share the following prompt: *Think of a community in which you or your organization may be perceived as the “Other.”* Project or write the following questions on a whiteboard:
  - How would your organization prepare itself to bridge towards that community? What would be your organization’s first 3 steps towards *bridging*?
  - What new understanding or information might you need in order to embody both the spirit and skills required [of bridging](#)?
  - Do you believe there are appropriate moments or situations in which bridging may require a “pause”? When and how?

Thank the group for being together and for building communities of belonging.

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## Activity Guide

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## Welcome and Opening Activities

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### Alter/Altar Space

As time and space allows, prepare the space for learning by making room for viewing films, holding circle, and engaging with exercises particular to your module. Optionally set a place for inclusion of any relevant objects of beauty or importance (books, flowers, art, etc.) and inviting participants to do the same.

### Music

Play music as participants arrive and get settled. Some suggestions for songs: We Are-Sweet Honey and the Rock, Pata Pata-Miriam Makeba, People Everyday, Two Hearts-Valerie June, Waiting in Vain- Bob Marley, Can I Kick It-A Tribe Called Quest, I Am That I Am-Peter Tosh.

### Circle Process

Most lessons open and close with circles, where participants and facilitator(s) stand or sit in a circle (or semi-circle or oval as needed!) in order to transform traditional, hierarchical learning spaces into collaborative community spaces.

### Breathing Exercise

Invite participants to engage in an embodied practice of mindfulness and internal and external presence.



This icon indicates a talking point.

You might say something like: *“Exhale first. Breathe in deeply. Hold it for a moment. Exhale slowly.” (pause) Now take 3 deep breaths on your own. When you breathe in allow yourself to receive the air. As you exhale, relax completely.”*

### Land Acknowledgement

Open with an acknowledgement of the land we stand on. Explain that land acknowledgement is an important element of reckoning with our collective past. It is a way to shift power by remembering and honoring the historical truth, the trauma, and the knowledge that our indigenous family is still here and has for centuries maintained stewardship over the land we are on.

A formal, opening acknowledgment of the indigenous land we stand on includes acknowledgement of the indigenous community whose land was colonized (in North American contexts). If more research is needed by facilitator, <https://native-land.ca> is an excellent resource.

### Conocimiento

A Spanish word meaning “knowledge or conscience.” The Conocimiento Principle, a principle of the Latinx/Chicanx movement for transformation and equity, recognizes that common unity begins with the process of shared awareness and understanding, or Conocimiento.

–Roberto Vargas, Ph.D

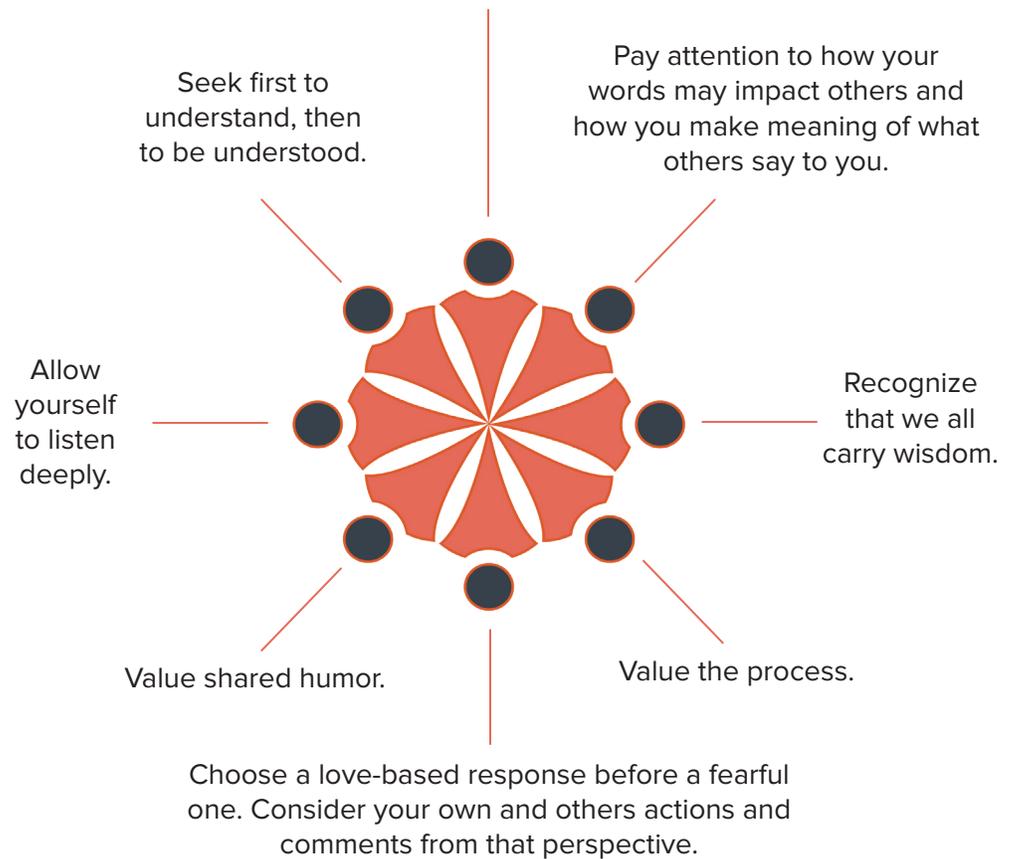


You might say something like... *“Conocimiento was used and highlighted during the Farm Workers’ Movement in California to bring people together in community to understand and leverage each others’ strengths.”*

The process of Belonging begins by identifying what’s already beautiful and present. Conocimiento is a practice that centers the human experience as meaningful and worthy. It is a practice that shares and uplifts the strengths of each person in relation to the collective, in order to achieve a common purpose. It will be important to practice *conocimiento* in your workshops to support people’s ability to feel immediately connected for a common cause.

## Community Agreements

Use and adapt these agreements to help set the tone, intentions, values and ethics of the learning environment.



## Various Thinking and Speaking Protocols

**Save the Last Word** - Save the Last Word is a thinking and discussion routine used to clarify and deepen thinking about a text.

**See, Think, Wonder** - See, Think, Wonder is a thinking routine developed by Project Zero (Harvard Graduate School of Education) to help learners make careful observations and develop their own ideas and interpretations of what they see.

- What do you see?
- What do you think about what you see?
- What does it make you wonder about?

**Parts, Purposes, Complexities** - Parts, Purposes and Complexities is a thinking routine that helps learners slow down and make careful, detailed observations of an object or system they are examining. This routine encourages them to look beyond the obvious features of an object or system and to consider its functions and complexities. Parts, Purposes and Complexities is a thinking routine created by Agency by Design with Harvard Project Zero.

- What are the parts? What are its various pieces or components?
- What are its purposes? What are the purposes for each of these parts?
- What are the complexities? How is it complicated in its parts and purposes, what are some complexities of the relationships between the two, what questions arise?

## Speaking Order

Speaking Order is used in social practice circles around the world. It is one way to address and practice the reversal of systemic inequities introduced and held by white supremacy and patriarchy. Speaking order supports a shift in power from the people who have been granted the most power in our society based on colonialism, imperialism, and paternalism. These systems function to bias societies towards a worldview of hierarchical domination over others rather than a holding a viewpoint of community wisdom and collective good.

Speaking Order is often difficult to explain in settings where the system of inequity is not understood by all in the room, particularly with people in positions of privilege (such as white men) who may be used to holding more space in conversation and/or decision making, or are new to understanding white privilege and the role it plays in perpetuating the historical oppression of people of color around the world.



To introduce Speaking Order, you might say something like: *“We are going to practice shifting the power dynamics today. We will use Speaking Order as a way to reckon with our shared history of imperialism and a white ruling class. Speaking Order will ask that anyone who self identifies as having been granted the most unearned power in our society... based on factors of race, gender, age, religion, ability, etc...will let others speak before weighing in. Again, we ask the group to internally self-identify and simply stay mindful throughout our time together of who takes up the most/least airtime in group discussions and decisions. Speaking Order asks that the floor be turned over to lead from the wisdom of those who have been most “Othered” and carried most of the burden of societal oppressions. We acknowledge that there can be discomfort around this ask regardless of your positionality or “situatedness”, but invite this practice as a model for authentic reconciliation and as a path to increase mutual Belonging.”*

## More Useful Resources

- [Culturally Responsive Resources](#)
- [Restorative Circle Processes](#)
- [Pillars of Andragogy](#)