



## Connections

*Developed by Gene Thompson-Grove.*

### **What is *Connections*?**

***Connections*** is a way for people to build a bridge from where they are or have been (mentally, physically, etc.) to where they will be going and what they will be doing. It is a time for individuals to reflect — within the context of a group — upon a thought, a story, an insight, a question, or a feeling that they are carrying with them into the session, and then connect it to the work they are about to do. Most people engage in *Connections* at the beginning of a meeting, class, or gathering.

### **There are a few things to emphasize about *Connections* for it to go well...**

- It is about connecting people's thoughts to the work they are doing or are about to do.
- Silence is OK, as is using the time to write, or to just sit and think. Assure people that they will spend a specific amount of time in *Connections*, whether or not anyone speaks out loud. Some groups — and people within groups — value the quiet, reflective time above all else.
- If an issue the group clearly wants to respond to comes up in *Connections*, the group can decide to make time for a discussion about the issue after *Connections* is over.

### **The "rules" for *Connections* are quite simple**

- Speak if you want to.
- Don't speak if you don't want to.
- Speak only once until everyone who wants to has had a chance to speak.
- Listen and note what people say, but do not respond. *Connections* is not the time to engage in a discussion.

Facilitating the process is also straightforward. Begin by saying "*Connections* is open," and let people know how long it will last. A few minutes before the time is up, let people know that there are a few minutes remaining, so that anyone who hasn't yet spoken might speak. With a minute or so to go, let the group know that you will be drawing *Connections* to a close, and again ask if anyone who hasn't spoken would like to speak. Before ending, ask if anyone who has spoken would like to speak again. Then end.

Ten minutes is usually enough time for groups of 10 people or fewer, 15 minutes for groups of 11-20 people and 20 minutes for any groups larger than 20 people. *Connections* generally shouldn't last more than 20 minutes. People can't sustain it. The one exception is when there is a group that has been together for a period of time doing intensive work, and it is the last or next to the last day of their gathering.

Some people will say that *Connections* is misnamed, since people don't connect to (or build on) what other people have said. However, the *process* is a connecting one; and powerful connections can still occur, even though they are not necessarily the result of back and forth conversation.



## Compass Points: North, South, East, and West An Exercise in Understanding Preferences in Group Work

*Developed in the field by educators.*

### **Purpose**

Similar to the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory, this exercise uses a set of preferences which relate not to individual but to group behaviors, helping us to understand how preferences affect our group work.

*Note: See the third page, Compass Points Explanations Expanded, for additional descriptions of the 4 preferences.*

### **Process**

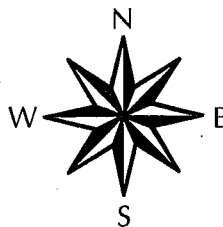
1. The room is set up with 4 signs on each wall — North, South, East, and West.
2. Participants are invited to go to the direction of their choice. No one is only one direction, but everyone can choose one as their predominant one.
3. Each direction group answers the 5 questions (see next page) on a sheet of newsprint. When complete, they report back to the whole group.
4. Processing can include:
  - Note the distribution among the directions: what might it mean?
  - What is the best combination for a group to have? Does it matter?
  - How can you avoid being driven crazy by another direction?
  - How might you use this exercise with others? Students?

### **North**

*Acting — “Let’s do it”;  
likes to act, try things, plunge in*

### **West**

*Paying attention to detail — likes  
to know the who, what, when,  
where and why before acting*



### **East**

*Speculating — likes to look at the  
big picture and the possibilities  
before acting*

### **South**

*Caring — likes to know that  
everyone’s feelings have been  
taken into consideration and  
that their voices have been  
heard before acting*

## North, South, East, and West

Decide which of the 4 directions most closely describes your personal style. Then spend 15 minutes answering the following questions as a group.

1. What are the strengths of your style? (4 adjectives)
2. What are the limitations of your style? (4 adjectives)
3. What style do you find most difficult to work with and why?
4. What do people from the other directions or styles need to know about you so you can work together effectively?
5. What do you value about the other 3 styles?