

Anatomy of a Team Meeting



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At the Futures Initiative (FI), we have a 2-hour meeting with the whole team every week where we plan our collective work, update each other on the state of our individual or small group projects, and discuss pedagogy. This week, we had our second meeting of the semester, together with old and new team members. The responsibility to lead the meeting rotates among the team members, and I was the leader this week. I prepared an “annotated” agenda for our new members to learn about our practice of running collaborative

meetings. I am summarizing these annotations below to provide a window into our inner workings, and to show the practice of how we apply radical pedagogy to create team meetings everyone is engaged in.

First thing's first: the week's leader creates and sends the agenda to everyone, which is based on a template but always starts with a personal touch: for example, photos of trees and flowers from a nature walk, celebrating Black history month, or a Spring festival in the Basque country. I like to think that this gives our teammates a glimpse of ourselves outside of work — what we find beautiful and care about. Then, the agenda provides some links to remind the readers of items we previously discussed or established: last week's notes, the annual plan, monthly schedule, and the current newsletter draft.

During the first 10 minutes of each meeting, we settle in: we used to brew tea together during this time, but now that we are all connecting to each other remotely, those of us who are big tea drinkers do this individually in our homes. (It is kind of hard to replace the camaraderie that sharing tea and snacks creates, but we are happy to be saving that experience for safer times when we can be around a table.) I was the team meeting leader this week, so I experimented with breakout rooms to simulate sitting next to each other and having a small chat with a teammate or two, by using active listening prompts. As we have new members in our team, breakout rooms worked well to establish some more intimacy in the less than ideal situation of getting accustomed to a new workplace that is fully online. Most importantly this week, we learned that many of us (and some of our kids) love watching Avatar: the Last Airbender.

The two big components of the team meeting are: collaborative agenda setting and an activity. Activities have included a Google drive scavenger hunt (nerdy fun! and so we all know where we can find collective materials), team building exercises where we find our strengths, CV/resume/cover letter workshop to prepare ourselves for the job market, meditation sessions to relax, etc. Traditionally, activity follows agenda, but this can be reversed, depending on the schedule or meeting goals.

Collaborative agenda is the heart of our team meetings: it allows us to run team meetings horizontally, rather than a top-down model. Everyone takes a few minutes to write down for themselves a few items that they would like to discuss, keeping the horizon of the semester in mind. Then, each member shares their items, and similar items get “votes” to determine an order of priority in the schedule. (If there are items we don’t get to at the end, they move to the next meeting’s agenda.) When I first started, I was amazed to witness the extent to which everyone was tuned into the flow of the semester from the get go: because of the responsibility to the collective in setting the agenda all together, people feel invested in each other’s projects and program areas, often without being prompted externally. The discussion can move from planning to pedagogy and back seamlessly: the meeting is a space where we define and redefine what we are doing, while exploring the relationship between what we do in our quest to challenge existing structures, and how we do it.

FI Fellows are all graduate students, while we also teach our own courses independently on CUNY campuses. We go back forth between positions in the hierarchy of the university as teachers and learners. Based on the pedagogical principles of Freire, hooks, Lorde, and others, we seek to create and maintain a space of respect and equality, in the classroom and in the community. In the words of Cathy

Davidson, “Democratic structures support everyone and, if structured well, offer each person a chance to contribute uniquely to the collective.”

To read more about the theory behind this practice, read FI fellow Christina Katopodis’ post, [Revolutionary Office Meetings](#).

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[Collaboration](#), [Higher Education](#), [Pedagogy](#)

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