5. LISTENING & LEARNING (LARA)

One strategy for practicing communication is to listen and learn, and then to respond to what they are saying. It's not about agreeing, but about understanding. When the person feels heard, they might hear you more fully, and dialogue is more possible.

Listen, **A**ffirm, **R**espond, **A**dd (LARA) is a method that is based on dialogue before responding. For example:

1. *Listen*, to understand what they are saying, and to find something—a fact or a principle—on which you agree.
2. *Affirm*, by making a connection with the person and thus conveying that you understand them.
   Respond in ways that show respect, even if you disagree. Many people want to start with this step, but
3. doing so can limit the process.
   Add information. Communicate what's on your mind in a thoughtful way that conveys that you want to
4. continue the conversation.

Practice this conversation activity with another person. The following is an example from which to learn:

1. Listen (other person speaking): "The real cause of the achievement gap is that minority students have opportunities but are not working hard enough to succeed."

2. Affirm (you speaking): "I'm glad that you recognize that society offers opportunities and appreciate the importance of hard work."

3. Respond (you speaking): "My concern is that too many students attend schools with inadequate resources which keep them from success."

4. Add information (you speaking): "Some people want to change the schools that keep achievement gaps in place. What about providing them with more funds for improving achievement of all students? Would you attend a community meeting to discuss the issue?

What topic did you choose to practice with? Write in the responses for each of the four stages of LARA.

What did you notice for each of the stages?

Was it easy or difficult for you to both listen and affirm before responding?

Did you learn anything new from the other person, or about yourself? If so, what?