



Live Forum - October 17, 2019
RESISTANCE AND CONFLICT

WELCOME

KATHY BUTT-ELLWAND

Dear 3rd Thursday Assemblers! Welcome back, or, if it's your first time WELCOME! This is an exciting monthly online forum where people all over the world can gather to share ideas and good practice about different aspects of group facilitation.

Below you will find: A Check-in Question (please answer!); Goals and Agreements for today's session (please add anything you need/want to the agreements, and hit "like" to agree to uphold these agreements during the session); discussion questions and case studies (posted approximately every ten minutes; answer in any order). I will be facilitating this experience for 90 minutes. There will be a pdf transcript posted on the pyeglobal.org website, as well as the files of this facebook page, in a short while. These transcripts are so great we're thinking of making a book out of them!

Remember to keep refreshing the page to read the latest comments, and scroll down the page to read all threads. The threads will appear in order of most active, which can be confusing!

This month we are discussing 'Dancing with Resistance and Conflict':

'Facilitation' means to 'make something easy', but facilitating groups is often not easy! Group processes can bring up lots of emotions and be very triggering, and as a facilitator we are dancing with emotions and behaviours in ourselves and others and responding to constantly changing group dynamics. Sometimes conflict and resistance happens in our groups. We could be asking our group to step outside their comfort zone, or bringing something into consciousness that is difficult for them. We could be bringing together a group of people who are in conflict, or a conflict could arise as part of the group process. These things could also happen and be completely unrelated to what you are doing as a facilitator or the activity you are inviting the group to do, and be more about the wider life situation of individuals or groups coming into the room.

Let's think a little about what we mean by 'resistance' and 'conflict' in the context of facilitation... 'Resistance' can describe a spectrum of situations, at one end reluctance to join in; through to challenging or questioning the facilitator, or openly trying to sabotage or block the activities or process for others. It could happen in a gentle way, or could be more aggressive. 'Resistance' can give you information as a facilitator, like any behaviour, it can signal something that an individual or group needs; something that is not working in the activity or in your facilitation, it could give the facilitator or the group some useful learning that can be brought out;



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it could be a signal to try something else....but it can also trigger you as a facilitator, and it can seem very personal in the moment.

'Conflict' brings up lots of unpleasant ideas of arguing, violence...but it can be constructive if facilitated sensitively. If we think of 'conflict' as two individuals or groups with goals that are not

compatible...we can think of conflict as a broad term for lots of daily situations as well. There can be a huge amount of learning, and positive transformation arising from a moment of conflict. Today we will explore dancing with resistance and conflict, and share experiences about how we can transform these into learning and growth for ourselves and our groups.

CHECK IN

Kathy Butt-Ellwand

Check in Question: Describe the way you feel right now as something found in nature

Bunty Cumberpants The weather today immediately springs to mind ... a little bit all over the place with working, sorting, planning and wanting to be on the forum today ...

Aida Gadallah Today weather is cloudy rainy,..... my feeling is a stormy sea

Kathy Butt-Ellwand I'm a muddy pinecone

Ali A Very Heavy purple clouds with light trying to get in!

GOALS AND AGREEMENTS

Kathy Butt- Ellwand

Goals and Agreements for this session on 17th October 2019:

- 1) To share experiences on facilitating groups where there is resistance and conflict
 - Reflecting on our own experiences and hearing those of other facilitators round the world is a rich ground for learning
- 2) To increase our options as facilitators
 - having more options helps us to deal calmly and effectively when resistance or conflict arise, transforming these potentially triggering moments into opportunities for learning



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3) To have fun

- adding some joy and happiness helps everything along 😊

In order to achieve these, here are some suggestions for COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS to make our time together flow really well. Be sure to add what you need or want AT ANY TIME DURING THE PROCESS. Let the group know or privately message the facilitator if you are concerned that an agreement is being broken.

- 1) No put downs of self or others. Keep a positive, lift-up vibe. If the facilitator finds your comments aggressive or inappropriate in any way you will receive a personal message.
- 2) Be willing to entertain simultaneous truths. Rather than proving a point, try to listen to understand, and be willing to agree to disagree. At the same time, if you have a strong belief be willing to stand up for it. This will make our conversations rich!
- 3) Show your presence, by LIKING and by responding to keep the flow. Ask questions, make comments, connect. The technical trick for this format is to REFRESH your browser fairly often. The questions move around depending on how many people are answering, so please scan the whole page for new questions now and then.
- 4) Maintain CONFIDENTIALITY by not sharing names or personal information about the participants in your groups, sharing from your own perspective, and asking permission before sharing someone else's story.
- 5) Answer any questions in the COMMENTS below the question to keep the conversation organized and readable. Only open NEW questions in new threads.
- 6) You can come and go as you please, take as long as you like to respond, and basically enjoy the text-format to make this work no matter whether you are just waking up, just going to bed, or on your lunch break (time zones unite!!) A pdf transcript of the conversation will be provided. Feel free to continue the conversation even after the 90 minute period has ended.

DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

KATHY BUTT- ELLWAND

Discussion Question #1: Think of a time when you experienced resistance from a group....how did the resistance show up? What did you do? What did you learn?

Ali A Very Resistance.... the first thing I wanted to say is that I think there can be something really good and rich about resistance in a group. The word itself makes me think of personal (or collective) agency, being willing to go 'against the grain', do something different, say no, push for a different outcome. If our work is about empowerment, there is a lot to be affirmed and even celebrated in the impulse towards resistance, even if it's more 'knee-jerk' than chosen. I think



reflecting this back, and taking someone's resistance seriously - hearing it, noticing it, being curious rather than confrontational or thinking I know better, can all shift the dynamic to a more curious and collaborative one.

Kathy Butt- Ellwand Love this Ali, thank you

Ali A Very In terms of examples, I remember one particular time that I found really challenging when a young women (13 years old) didn't want to wear an apron in a session using acrylic paints, where this was part of the agreement for the whole group - which was also new). The way she expressed it was 'do you think I'm so poor that I can't just afford another shirt if this one gets painty? Do you think I'm on the breadline or something?' In a way this example includes both resistance and conflict - I think part of what she was doing was testing us as a project - were we just there for the 'poor' kids? (she had lots of social service interventions where no doubt this felt like the case) would we let her be here on her own terms? were we treating her like a child/patronising her by having rules that sounded like they were for babies? I've reflected often on this moment and think ultimately we made a pretty good call - we were consistent with the boundaries and the offer - that this was a space for her but we'd want her to wear protective clothing, just like the adults who come here and all the other young people - but also affirmed some of the feelings behind the 'content' of her resistance - 'it sounds like you're wondering what this space is all about really and wondering why you've been chosen to come? It's really important that you choose to come - we'd love to have you here and help you make things that you like, but it might be that you're not sure yet if you do really want to come - that's fine, you shouldn't rush a decision if it doesn't feel right' etc. It took several weeks but she did end up coming regularly, even bringing friends at break times to show them 'her' space and introduce them to the adults that she'd made her 'own' relationships with. I think rushing in, putting on pressure or changing the boundaries would have all made it feel less safe, and less like her own choice.

Bunty Cumberpants We once facilitated a weekend gathering where most of the participants were from one company, including the director. It is the only time where we have not had direct contact with the prospective participants beforehand and we know that the company paid for them to come, but it quickly transpired that they hadn't necessarily told them what they were coming for. Although the work we do does not involve too much deep process, there was a sense that some of those attending were really very uncomfortable with anything related to



self-growth. This meant that there was some sabotaging behaviour and unwillingness to take part, despite spending a fair bit of time setting up the container and holding the space with Agreements and a flow for the weekend. We did keep our integrity, i.e. stuck to our goals, tried to stay sensitive to their needs and learned how important it is for us to have conversations with people before they come along ... ensure really good communication

Ali A Very Super interesting. Thanks **Bunty Cumberpants**. I can really imagine that dynamic. I think sometimes it can happen even if there is an attempt at good communication/reflective questions before though right?! Can I ask if the more personal stuff was shared in the group or were there opportunities for more individual explorations for their eyes/minds only? I wonder if they were equally resistant to the self-exploration if it was more private?

Kathy Butt-Ellwand Thanks for sharing Bunty...so participation would start by including the participants

Bunty Cumberpants **Kathy Butt-Ellwand** yes, absolutely in this case. This is something we always do now. It was a steep learning curve! I really do take on board what others have said here about there being a richness sometimes in resistance though. I feel that it is a learning process and growth can result from 'noticing' into the resistance. We were certainly able to notice the reaction in ourselves too!

Bunty Cumberpants **Ali A Very** thanks. Yes, great question, there were many opportunities for both sharing in the group and exercises which were individual/private explorations with no pressure to share at any time. However, even with private exploration, a couple of people could not even participate in that. Fortunately, we do have a lot of opportunities that afford participants to take time out, as well as spaces in between. Sometimes it feels like that is where the most important work can take place

Aida Gadallah Last month i was leading cf1 with a group of ages 50 to 65 years old , work in the field of training , one of them was a professor in the university. they surprised that we are too young according to their age (me and my co-facilitator) that we are youth, they were giving us very offensive comments and critic every step (especially the professor) I was understanding



that this comes from their nonacceptance to be trained by youth , i didn't take it personally , i kept my smile and body language friendly and my replays to their comments were logic, I learned that seeing the real direction of the resistance helps in creating a friendly learning container

Ali A Very Wow super interesting [Aida Gadallah](#)! Have you come across the idea of 'rank dynamics' in training? I find it a really useful way of thinking about power and privilege. The idea is that there are lots of different kinds of rank intersecting - so there might be a rank in age and years of experience, even a rank in 'formal' or 'recognised' learning spaces like a university over 'informal' like cf1! But it sounds like you had a rank in self-awareness on this. I wonder if you considered naming the dynamic a bit or wondering about it out loud? Do you think they might have been able or interested to see this or a bit too inflammatory..?!

Aida Gadallah [Ali A Very](#) yes i had trained about power in AOF , that awareness helped me a lot , do you mean that i had to name the dynamic with them in the training ? wooww it would be helpful and may reduced the resistance

Kathy Butt Ellwand Thanks for this example [Aida](#) sounds like you were able to 'dance' with this resistance by responding but not taking it personally.

Kathy Butt Ellwand [Ali A Very](#) do you have any links or tools to explain more about 'rank dynamics'? Sounds really interesting!

Aida Gadallah [Kathy Butt-Ellwand](#) yes , it was an amazing challenge , i loved being in such experience as an opportunity to learn more about my facilitation

Ali A Very [Kathy Butt-Ellwand](#) I know it from process work or process-oriented psychology. Found a couple of PDFs but haven't had a proper look - reckon they'll be interesting though:

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j...>



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Kathy Butt- Ellwand [Ali A Very](#) Thanks!

Kathy Butt- Ellwand I was leading a workshop about preparing to go to university, and accessing funding to study in the UK and in Europe...a lot of school students now feel that university education isn't accessible to them because of the cost, and so it's a sensitive subject...I was trying to help them to feel empowered to go...anyway, when I started talking about studying abroad there was a lot of angry muttering...initially I thought they were bored by my presentation but I asked some of the students what they had been saying while everyone was engaged in an activity, and it was just after the UK had voted to leave Europe. These young people were slightly too young to have voted, and they were very angry about the decision, as it directly affected them and their future, and funding to study abroad...we had a great group discussion on the topic after this, and I was glad I asked instead of reacting.

DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

KATHY BUTT-ELLWAND

Discussion Question #2: Describe a time you experienced conflict in a group...what happened? What did you and the group learn from it?

Aida Gadallah At the beginning of Oct. i was following applying Funtasia after school program in a small town in one of the classes i found two girls fight (11:12 years old). One of them has a very strong leadership personality and she knows that very well and use it in controlling the group (call her H) she was refusing the another girl (call her S) to be in her group fights with H



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and cry because she was feeling that she can't do anything alone without H (who is the leader , the thinker , the planning.....) After a long conversations by using questions (to discover the pain , its source , where is weak appear,, how can empower the person , how bring the two together) I gave S the opportunity to discover her strengths and that she can do things and succeed by herself then to work in a group haven't saw that the group is not weak or failure. The whole group learned about the meaning of team work and that all of us has his/her strengths

Kathy Butt-Ellwand Thanks for sharing [Aida Gadallah](#)....did you work with the two girls separately first then have a conversation together? It's so hard being 11 or 12 years old!!!

Aida Gadallah [Kathy Butt-Ellwand](#) yes, at first with the 2 girls then with the group

Ali A Very So interesting [Aida](#). I find those kinds of situations hard! Especially the risk of shaming either one of them and making the power pattern even stronger! I like that you framed the discussion with questions to help them map it out for themselves.

Ali A Very Oh no! I just wrote a gigantic thing but lost it! I was in a particularly difficult conversation around whiteness and cultural appropriation recently. It involved a mainly white group of activists, and came about following some of the people of colour in the group asking mediators to share that they didn't feel comfortable going to a protest about racism by the Home Office (UK government department responsible for immigration policy) next to white people with dreadlocks. The conversation later involved some of the white people speaking about feeling 'persecuted' 'excluded' and 'oppressed'. There was a lot of tearfulness and quick defensiveness, within about 2 minutes of the conversation starting, and things stayed both 'hot' and 'personal' - giving personal examples rather than thinking about the bigger picture/historical or structural issues. On reflection and through discussion, I think it might have helped to just name some of the 'hazards' of going into a conversation like that - the painfulness and discomfort of it, especially for white people who dont generally need to think or speak about racism,; about the issue of 'white fragility' - the pattern of going

into a collapse of guilt or overwhelm or making things really personal - and the intention to listen and learn from each other, especially if there are perspectives which surprise us. I think it would have been easier to name these before the discussion started so they weren't felt to be personal if said in response to what people were saying.



Kathy Butt-Ellwand Thanks for writing this out again [Ali A Very](#)....that's so annoying to lose a long comment!!! Really interesting case study and I like the idea of naming the 'hazards' beforehand when going into territory with a group where you know you can expect tensions.....would you ask everyone to do this collectively, or in separate groups, or would you name it as a facilitator?

Ali A Very Ooh good question! I'd thought of it as part of framing the discussion as a facilitator, but I think getting some small groups generating a sense of the 'hazards' to be aware of would be much richer and help folk feel they're creating the circle of understanding that they're then speaking within. If a conversation comes up unexpectedly which goes 'hot' in this way, I think it can be useful to do a kind of similar thing by taking a moment just to 'check the temperature' - for example, naming that this is a 'hot topic' which is really important but one where we might want to slow down or go a bit carefully to support each other.

Kathy Butt-Ellwand Thanks [Ali A Very](#)....very interesting...I think talking about 'hot topics and 'hazards' helps people to step back from their emotions and reactions and consider the bigger picture, it's a great tool!

Bunty Cumberpants Years ago I had a situation where two women I work with who live in supported living together continued a disagreement that had been simmering for days before our monthly session. This erupted half way through our meeting and fortunately, I was able to diffuse the situation and take the woman who was most distressed outside the room and to sit with her as she calmed down. It was such a dilemma, as the other people in the group were understandably upset too, but I knew that things would escalate physically if the two women involved remained in the same room. As they are all adults with learning disabilities, I can't ask one of them to leave because I have a duty of care. Fortunately I could see the rest of the participants from outside the room and once her support staff arrived, I could go back in and we all talked about how it had felt for each of them. This sharing felt really cathartic, as all of those present lived in close proximity in the same supported living scheme. Since then the charity I work for has at least adopted a policy of having a co-facilitator in the meeting

Kathy Butt-Ellwand [Bunty Cumberpants](#) that sounds really tough, I bet you felt you wanted to split yourself into more people to deal with that moment...sounds like you helped your group very effectively



given that you were only one person, and that the organisation learned from the incident to have 2 facilitators.

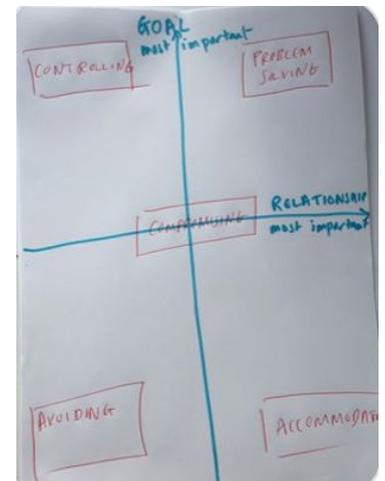
Bunty Cumberpants [Kathy Butt-Ellwand](#) yes thanks, I really did want to split into two ... I'm glad that we have changed things up since then!

DISCUSSION QUESTION #3

KATHY BUTT-ELLWAND

Discussion Question #3: What are your top tips for working with resistance or conflict in a group? Do you have any activities or tools that you could share here?

Kathy Butt-Ellwand Here is a model of conflict resolution styles....(sorry for the handwriting in the drawing....) it is a graph with two axes...there are 5 main styles: controlling where goal is most important and relationships are least important - useful where the controlling party has expert knowledge (e.g. parent helping a toddler cross the road); Problem solving which is a 'win win' solution where both goal and relationships are important, compromising where solution is not ideal but relationships are cared for so all parties get something; Avoiding where you avoid the conflict because neither goal or relationships are important; accommodating where relationships are more important than the goal. All styles have advantages and disadvantages, and can be good in different situations. Can be used for group activities where you mark out this diagram on the floor with bits of paper, and people can move and stand by their usual 'style'. You can call out case study scenarios and ask people to move to the style they'd use, and ask them to share their example solutions.





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Kathy Butt-Ellwand Also these activities for having participatory discussions can be useful in helping groups explore options and make decisions together...<https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/tools>

Bunty Cumberpants [Kathy Butt-Ellwand](#) love these, thanks so much would love to share them with our lovely facilitators...

Kathy Butt-Ellwand [Bunty Cumberpants](#) Please do, I learned the model drawn by hand from a programme I facilitated with volunteering charity VSO, don't have a reference for it sorry

Bunty Cumberpants [Kathy Butt-Ellwand](#) thanks very much!

Ramya Kumar Wow!! this is such powerful tool! thanks for sharing

CASE STUDY #1

KATHY BUTT-ELLWAND

Case Study #1: You are facilitating an after-school club for 12 – 13 year olds. You have just led a creative visualisation with the group, where everyone has made a drawing inspired by a meditation. You are leading the group in a self reflection exercise, but some of the young people are giggling and talking, and it's affecting the tone you are trying to create for the whole group. What options do you have as a facilitator? What would you do?

Ali A Very Hm. Is this after the meditation and drawing? I wonder if the giggling and talking are ways of managing awkwardness and self-consciousness, in which case I think I'd probably try naming that it can be quite a change in gear to do something like this and ask if anyone wanted to share something about how they found the process itself. This might change it a bit but if not



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I'd probably also try to 'go with' the energy rather than push against it, so maybe shift up for a short while to an activity that involves moving or making sound - either connected to the topic or as a kind of 'brain-break'. It sounds like some of the group might be much more engaged so I'd aim to offer a bit of a change in gear and then a way back into a reflection, but if some of the group are struggling they might be showing something which is going on for the group as a whole I guess?

CASE STUDY #2

KATHY BUTT-ELLWAND

Case Study #2: You are running a youth programme for 14 – 18 year olds. The group is diverse and includes young people from different economic backgrounds. The group has been working hard on a social enterprise project, and has been selling eco-products to learn enterprise skills. They have made a profit and you are facilitating a group meeting where they have to agree on what to spend their profit on. Some want to invest in more products to continue the project, some want to spend it on a meal out or a trip to an amusement park, and one person wants to give the profits to a local homeless shelter. A conflict arises because the discussion touches on issues in the group about wealth and privilege, and an argument begins that quickly gets personal, and one young person leaves in tears. What options do you have as a facilitator to empower your group to make a fair decision and keep the space safe? How can you help everyone to feel seen and heard and safe? What would you do?

Ali A Very Wow this is a great case study. Soooo complex all that's going on here. My hazard lights would be scanning for shame and exclusion - realising that this is really tricky territory. It sounds from this that that territory already got trodden on as someone left in tears and it all got personal! I wonder if there's something about managing things in the moment and also planning in something to revisit this with the group later. In the moment: I wonder if it might be worth just bringing together the young people who are there, slowing things down a bit and wondering if they can trace back how it might have got so hot. Maybe even trying to look back at the discussion from different viewpoint - eg what did I think and what in my experience might have



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led me to think like that, what might someone else have been thinking? what in their experience might have led them to think like that? I think I'd be wary though of having a big discussion in the absence of the upset person who left, who might then feel it's even harder to come back to the group. In coming back together (having checked in with the upset one) I'd maybe suggest that economic issues are sooo complex, out in the world and in our own group. But decisions about how we live, what we enjoy now and plan for in the future, what we expect or fear etc are diverse and its common to have different opinions on them, and there isn't a right and wrong way! (I like that story of the old fishermen enjoying the sunset and the american tourist who says 'mate, why dont you take a loan for another boat and you can get more fish, buy a whole fleet of boats, build a business in the city etc, and the fisherman asks why and the guy says 'so you can retire to look at the sunset' etc). I wonder if it could help to think about a similar example to their own but in a different setting, exploring different options and the 'rewards' and 'risks' in them across time. Ultimately I think this is an opportunity to learn about diversity and difference, noticing that all of us think and act based on our experience, expectations, values etc, and that these in a group are really different. That 'privilege walk' might be interesting here, but again I'd be a bit wary of shaming anyone. Hmm. I'd try to encourage them to find a solution by consensus rather than voting - to talk things through and think about different values and rewards in each. Would love to hear other ideas about this - think I'd want more time to consider but I know in the moment would have to think on my feet!

CASE STUDY #3

KATHY BUTT-ELLWAND

Case Study #3: You are running a professional development training course for school teachers to help them bring creativity and arts into the classroom. Some of the teachers are very resistant to the methodology, and others are triggered by being asked to take creative risks. You notice this especially when leading group singing, when one participant leaves the room, and others are mouthing the words but not feeling comfortable singing out loud. During the reflection on the singing activity, one teacher challenges you saying 'it's very nice doing some singing, but I teach Maths so what's the point of this for my students? I have such limited time in my lessons to teach the curriculum!' What can you do as a facilitator to create buy in from your group for the singing activities? How would you deal with participants who don't feel comfortable to participate? How would you deal with the challenging question from the Maths teacher?



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Kathy Butt- Ellwand [Sarah Lightfoot](#) this case study sounds relevant to your work from your introduction... :)

Sarah Lightfoot Apologies for getting pulled away from this discussion. I usually start with taking a poll of participants to gauge their comfort level with singing in the classroom. Music is definitely an area where many people feel vulnerable. I often start with a Follow the Leader/Tongue Twister Activity. We just warm up the voice saying the tongue twister in a lot of ways (loud, soft, angry, happy, and end singing it all on one pitch). This is a great way to get people using their voice and they get distracted by concentrating on the tongue twister. I acknowledge that it's ok to feel nervous and there are lots of ways to gradually get more comfortable singing with their students. Math is a big trigger for many students so it's really important for each student to feel value and have a voice in that space - singing is a great way to do this! :-)

Kathy Butt-Ellwand Awesome thanks for sharing this [Sarah](#)...and one of the great things of having these discussions on facebook is we keep the comments open until next month's session, so you can dip in and out and comment later :)

Cadence 陈心 Sarah Lightfoot I love this so much!

Bunty Cumberpants I am this person when it comes to singing!!! I wonder if it might be helpful to expand a little on the agreement around being asked to take creative risks at the beginning. I have found that often, particularly when working in our self-advocacy groups, that there can be some pretty comprehensive discussions about the agreements ... about what that might look like in practice, how it might play out. Something about the challenge with regards to singing and maths ... maybe the emphasis on creating the container for learning to take place, or a discussion along these lines about a variety of tools. Can maths even be sung? a combination of them both to engage the imagination ...

Ali A Very Love this. There's something risky and uncomfortable, and I think you're right that maths and singing are two of the main areas (maybe like drawing as well?) where people



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often have a pretty rigid idea that they can't do it. Permission to be wrong or sound/multiply terribly - to play with it and see how it goes? Also I used to sing the numbers doing my maths homework! I think I just found it kind of more fun, but I reckon it might have also stopped my spidery mind going off in different directions!

Bunty Cumberpants Yep - I come up again that one with the drawing a lot being a visual artist. It feels really risky for lots of people. Permission to be wrong is so important.

Sharon Trautwein I always tell teachers that I am teaching them new tools for their tool box, but they have to choose which tools best fit their projects and their teaching styles. A classroom project will not work unless the teacher fully understands the embraces it. But, for the math teacher, I would say that math and music very much belong together. There are a lot of songs that help with math curriculum. Music in general has been proven to help students do better in math.

Aida Gadallah we face this sometimes with teachers , i think it's related to their Prestige card So we can do as in Cf1 cut our cool card about Math we can tell them that kids love songs and it's a powerful tool you can use in teaching kids about rules , numbers and different aspects in Math , songs will make it easier to keep information in mind

Sarah Downey Aside from dealing with present situation I'd note to myself to have a stronger beginning next time. If the goals and agreements are solid and understood by all, the cool card ripped up, then this kind of situation doesn't ten