According to Philip J. Hanlon, President of Dartmouth College, communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaboration are the 'power' skills that students must develop to be successful in the 21st century. One strategy for promoting these 'power' skills with gifted learners is through the use of responsive, student-led Harkness discussions.

The Harkness method is a constructivist strategy for organizing and evaluating group discussion which began at Phillips Exeter Academy in 1930. The teacher sets the focus for the discussion, including any reading or guided student preparation; during the student-led discussion, the teacher's role is to provide feedback on the quality of students' individual contributions as well as the effectiveness of their collaboration.

Students learn how to move a discussion forward, how to ground their claims in evidence, how to open up space for reluctant participants, and how to monitor their own thinking. The Harkness method provides a heuristic framework where gifted students can reflect on and develop their learning agility -- their curiosity and motivation to continuously learn new skills. Goals are self-directed and self-developed, allowing for the iterative acquisition of 'power' skills like critical thinking, public speaking, collaboration, persuasion, overcoming problems, and demonstrating originality.

Gifted learners can engage deeply with their own scholarship, using the Harkness discussion as a springboard for their own writing or bringing in background knowledge in related areas. This platform allows space to practice reasoning, analysis, and argument while simultaneously developing impulse control, taking risks, negotiating conflict, managing time, and practicing flexibility. The Harkness method provides a foundation for gifted learners to maintain their sense of agency and purpose while keeping the goals of the larger community in mind.

In this session, attendees will receive an overview of the Harkness method and listen to samples of student-led discussions before delving into how to manage conflicts, how to foster the depth and complexity of contributions, and how to support struggling students. Sample rubrics, student reflections, and feedback strategies will be provided. Attendees have the option to participate in a sample Harkness discussion at the end of the workshop.