



Chalk Talk¹

Chalk talk is a silent way to do reflection, generate ideas, check on learning, develop projects or solve problems. It can be used productively with any group – leaders, community members, workshop participants, and committees. Because it is done completely in silence, it gives groups a change of pace and encourages thoughtful contemplation. It can be an unforgettable experience.

Time: Varies according to need, can be from 5 minutes to an hour.

Materials: Chalk board and chalk or paper roll on the wall and markers.

Process:

1. The facilitator explains VERY BRIEFLY that chalk talk is a silent activity. No one may talk at all and anyone may add to the chalk talk as they please. You can comment on other people's ideas simply by drawing a connecting line to the comment. It can also be very effective to say nothing at all except to put your finger to lips in a gesture of silence and simply begin with #2.
2. The facilitator writes a relevant question in a circle on the board. Sample questions:
 - a) What makes a leader?
 - b) How do we create equitable structures for management?
 - c) What is community engagement?
3. The facilitator hands a marker to everyone, or places many markers at the board.
4. People write as they feel moved. There is likely to be long silences – that is natural, so allow plenty of wait time before deciding it is over.
5. How the facilitator chooses to interact with the Chalk Talk influences its outcome. The facilitator can stand back and let it unfold or expand thinking by:
 - circling other interesting ideas, thereby inviting comments to broaden
 - writing questions about a participant comment
 - adding his/her own reflections or ideas
 - connecting two interesting ideas/comments together with a line and adding a question mark

Actively listening invites participants to do the same kind of expansions. A Chalk Talk can be an uncomplicated silent reflection or a spirited, but silent, exchange of ideas. It has been known to solve vexing problems, surprise everyone with how much is collectively known about something, get an entire project planned, or give a committee everything it needs to know with no verbal sparring.

When it's done, it's done.

¹ Adapted from Looking at Student Work Colloquium, 2001 and Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools.



Debrief

At times, the debrief can focus on the experience as well as the content. It's usually helpful to "talk about talking about it." It's helpful to set up that the debrief will follow the form of describing, interpreting and then evaluating the experience and participants, in addition to what was written. For example:

Describe:

- What do you see?
- Describe the "interactions" that were happening.

Interpret:

- What do you think was going on?
- What does this mean?

Evaluate

- What does this say about the people participating?
- What's their readiness to take on the question more deeply?