



Chalk Talk

Developed by Hilton Smith, Foxfire Fund; adapted by Marylyn Wentworth.

Purpose

Chalk Talk is a silent way to reflect, generate ideas, check on learning, develop projects, or solve problems. It can be used productively with any group — students, faculty, workshop participants, or 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. Middle level students absolutely love it — it's the quietest they'll ever be!

Time

Varies according to need; can be from 5 minutes to an hour

Materials

Chalk board and chalk, white board and dry-erase markers, or large roll paper on the wall and chart 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 with words or graphics 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 finger to lips in a gesture of silence and simply begin with Step 2.
2. The facilitator writes a relevant question in a circle on the board.
Sample questions:
 - What did you learn today?
 - So What?, or Now What?
 - What do you think about social responsibility and schooling?
 - How can we involve the community in the school, and the school in community?
 - How can we keep the noise level down in this room?
 - What do you want to tell the scheduling committee?
 - What do you know about Croatia?
 - How are decimals used in the world?
3. The facilitator either hands a piece of chalk to everyone, or places many pieces of chalk at the board and hands several pieces to people at random.
4. People write as they feel moved. There are likely to be long silences — that is natural, so allow plenty of wait time before deciding it is over. Participants may write comments, ask questions, draw images/graphics, show connections between various comments.

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 her/his own reflections or ideas
 - Connecting 2 interesting ideas/comments together with a line and adding a question mark

Actively interacting invites participants to do the same kinds 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 without any verbal sparring.

6. When it's done, it's done.

7. The Chalk Talk can be considered complete at this point or it can become the basis for a further discussion. Questions to raise with the group might include:
 - What do you notice about what we wrote?
 - What do you wonder about now?
 - What was the Chalk Talk like for you?