Dialogue Structures

Talking Cards

Talking cards allows everyone to participate anonymously in a group. Each member of a group is given an index card and a marker that is the same color. Someone poses a question, and each member records their response (one idea per card). A participant can contribute as many responses as they want, but each is on a separate card. Cards are then collected and laid out so everyone can see the responses. Members of the group then sort the cards into themes or clusters as a way to make sense of all the ideas presented and label each one. This process promotes lots of invaluable conversation among the participants. If there are multiple questions to be addressed, use different-colored index cards for each (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, Montie, 2006, pp. 187–188).

Video Club

Video club (Wallace, 1991, p. 8, cited in Bailey, Curtis, & Nunam, 1998, p. 553) provides an opportunity for teachers to review and reflect on what actually goes on in their classrooms. Groups of four teachers gather monthly to review and reflect on short segments of videotapes of themselves teaching (approximately 10 minutes). The value here is that the teachers do not have to attend to the whole class but only to the dynamics that are taking place on the video. The intent is not to evaluate but to provide an opportunity for the teacher (whose video is being watched) to reflect on how they responded, why they responded the way they did, and what they might want to change in the future. It also provides an opportunity to pay more attention to student responses during instruction (York-Barr et al., 2006, p. 192).

Synectics

Synectics is a specific type of metaphor that elicits higher-order thinking and application. Have each group write down four nouns—for example, *dog, window, truck, fence.* Then ask them to select one of their nouns and complete a given sentence using the format *X is like Y because . . .* Here is an example: "Teaching is like a window because it allows you to see things more clearly and opens your mind to many possibilities." Other words like *discipline, standards, mission, knowledge,* and *professional,* to name just a few, promote higher-level thinking about participants' experiences as teachers. It also enhances their understanding of the professional life of colleagues.

Another way to use metaphors in groups is to reflect on how the group members view something currently, and how they hope to view it at the end of the year. When the individual results are shared, it provides insight not only into themselves but also into others who are traveling the same road. Teachers rarely talk with one another about their profession in such a reflective way (York-Barr et al., 2006, pp. 186–187).

One-Minute Papers (or Half-Sheet Response)

One-minute papers (also known as the half-sheet response) focus on the content of a day and provide feedback to the leader as well the rest of the group. There are two questions that need to be answered, "What was the most important or useful thing you learned today? What important question do you still have?" (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 148). The participants are given one minute and are timed. Answers can be written on index cards or half-sheets of scrap paper. These can be used to begin the next day's discussion, to facilitate discussion within a group, or provide the leaders feedback on the participants' understanding (Angelo & Cross, 1993, pp. 148–153).

Muddiest Point

Muddiest point is a very simple technique to use. It is also very efficient, as it provides a high information return for a very low investment of time and energy. This strategy consists of asking participants to jot down a quick response to the following question: "What was the muddiest point in _____?" (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 154). A procedure that could be used is to reserve a few minutes at the end of the presentation. Have index cards at each table for each member to write their responses on. Allow each person time to respond, and then have them put the cards in the center of the table. Give the group a short break; when they return, have them discuss what each person wrote. If further clarification is needed, perhaps the presenter or members of other groups could provide input. Depending on the organization and schedule, muddiest points might have to be addressed the next day. However, immediate feedback would be better (Angelo & Cross, 1993, pp. 154–158).

One-Sentence Summary

One-sentence summary is a simple strategy that allows participants to answer the questions, "'Who does what to whom, when,

where, how, and why?' (represented by the letters WDWWWWHW) about a given topic'" (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 183). Next, members need to synthesize their answers into a grammatical sentence that follows the WDWWWWHW pattern. If the group is small enough, have members share orally with one another, and have someone record the responses. These could then be shared in a whole-group setting (Angelo & Cross, 1993, pp. 183–187).

Pro and Con Grid

A pro and con grid has probably been used by all of us at one time or another as individuals or in groups in an effort to clarify our thoughts about a question, issue, decision, or dilemma that has important implications for a particular situation. Given a prompt, asking groups to come up with a minimum number of pros and cons might be suggested as well was trying to view the problem from more than one viewpoint—such as those of an administrator, teacher, parent, and school board member. Prior to beginning, it should be determined if phrases are adequate, or if the pros and cons should be expressed in complete sentences.

Pros and cons listed by each group can be compared in a whole-group setting to see if they have some in common. This provides an excellent opportunity for looking objectively at something and then being able to look at the value of competing ideas (Angelo & Cross, 1993, pp. 168–171).

Stickies

Stickies is similar to a technique called "chalk talk" (Sullivan & Glanz, 2006, p. 131) except that the ideas and comments of the group leader are written on large pieces of chart paper that are taped to the wall. Small pads of sticky notes are made available, so participants can add their ideas, comments, questions, and so forth, to those statements or questions written on the large sheets of chart paper. These can be left on the wall for a while, so people can continue to add comments. A way to share all the input with everyone is to have each main topic or question and the accompanying comments typed up and shared with the whole group (Sullivan & Glanz, 2006, p. 132).

Application Cards

Application cards provides an opportunity for a small group to think about something they have just learned or from a prompt given.

If a prompt is used, make sure everyone is responding to the same prompt. Index cards or sticky notes are passed out, and each person is asked to write at least one real-world application for their particular prompt or what they just learned. Group members then share their ideas among themselves. All ideas can then be posted on a large chart tablet or other space for the whole group to view. Given time, particular items of interest can be discussed in a whole-group setting, or small groups could select their favorite idea in their particular group and then share it with the whole group (Cross & Angelo, 1993, pp. 236–239).

Nominal Group Process

Nominal (in name only) group process involves groups of four to six. Everyone involved will be working on a written statement of the problem to be addressed. Each person spends about five minutes writing out ideas about or responses to the problem. Once everyone has done this, small groups are formed, and each member contributes one idea to be put on a chalkboard or chart tablet. The process continues around the group until all the ideas are on the chart. No ideas are eliminated at this point, but clarification may be asked for. If there are time constraints, this whole process can take place in a group setting, going round robin. Participants then rank their top three choices, and the facilitator circles the ideas with the most votes.

This process is very democratic. Everyone's ideas are recognized and validated, and individual members are more likely to accept the group's preferences (Sullivan & Glanz, 2006, pp. 130–131).

Post-Up

Post-Up, using sticky notes, is a great way to collect all kinds of pieces of information about a problem situation or question. It enables a group to collect all this information in one place and actively involves everyone, as each individual probably has pertinent information. Because everyone is involved, rather than a mere few, focus on solutions to the problem is increased. It is also a more efficient way than conventional brainstorming to generate lots of ideas.

Each person, without talking, has their own pad of sticky notes on which they write statements or ideas that help solve the question or problem. Since ideas may be considered as facts, opinions, or guesses, each person should indicate which they think applies by putting an F, O, or G in the lower right-hand corner of each sticky note. Different-colored notes can be used for each letter as well. When everyone is

done, leave the notes in place for a while. New and useful information might appear later. At the appropriate time, the group can then evaluate the usefulness of items posted (Straker, 1997, pp. 27–34).

Swap Sort

The swap sort, using sticky notes, is a way to help you prioritize a list of items generated by a group, all of which relate to a specific problem or objective. They are usually not organized and need to be sorted into order of importance. The goal may be to rank all the items in order of importance, perhaps choosing only one or two to address. A list of 10 or fewer items is suggested, as sorting a longer list can be very time consuming. It is also helpful to see if there are notes that can be combined or that repeat one another. Another way to shorten a longer list is to select a given number of notes (five, for example), and transfer them to a shorter list.

Before shortening a list or prioritizing a final list, the group needs to decide what criteria make one item more important than another. This is an important step so that there is a consistent way of judging each item. After putting all notes selected vertically above one another, begin at the top of the list, and compare the first two. If the second one is determined to be more important than the first, swap them. Compare the next two and follow the same procedure. Continue this process until there are no more pairs that need to be swapped, and the group is satisfied with the final list (Straker, 1997, pp. 35–37).

Keynote Review

Keynote review requires chart paper and colored markers—one color per group. The following is a modified version of the original. Following a presentation at a conference, inservice, or seminar, participants are divided into groups. Each group is given a piece of chart tablet paper and a colored marker. A recorder in each group records 5 to 10 points members gleaned from the session, and each group either shares their information orally, or the sheets are posted on the wall for other participants to review on their own. If charts are going to be posted for others to view, provide time for members to circulate and view the items identified by each group (Solem & Pike, 1998).