

Talking walls: dynamic feedback from diverse student groups

What is it?

Similar to a world café, learners are asked to record their thoughts and feelings in relation to a number of different topics. Noticeboards/whiteboards are located around the walls of a room and learners are invited to reflect on the issues and respond with comments. The walls can be paper or whiteboards or learners can use post-it notes which can be stuck onto a surface. The talking wall can be used as part of a short activity or left up for a longer period of time to elicit more feedback. The activity can take place physically or virtually using a discussion board or wiki format.

Strengths

- Can record experiences that learners might subsequently forget.
- Can elicit feedback on a number of different topics at the same time
- Learners can decide what they want to contribute and how without feeling pressured to join in
- Allows the researcher to personalise questions
- Minimal intrusion into learners' time.
- Maximises engagement by asking learners to contribute what they feel comfortable with

Weaknesses

- Time intensive for the researcher to type up findings if done physically
- Learner is subjectively involved in interpretation as they compose their responses
- Tool may be open to abuse/spamming if left unattended
- Questions need to be clear and unambiguous in order for all to understand
- Responses can sometimes be slow to appear – there is a fear of an empty wall
- Some comments may be inappropriate/irrelevant

Process

1. Learners are asked to reflect on the statements/questions and think about what they mean to them
2. When they are ready, learners approach the talking wall and write their answer/response to the statements
3. At the end of the process, the material generated is typed up and shared with the learners and research team. If the wall is a multi day activity it is a good idea to take a photo of the wall as it grows to make it easier to type up at a later stage and also to prevent against possible vandalism/tampering with
4. Where possible, issues that have been raised are addressed in an open forum to demonstrate commitment to making changes/learning from feedback

Examples from the Learner Experience projects

Bradford have used this approach as part of their work into listening to learners experiences of living and learning in the 21st century (Pathfinder, HEA e-Learning Research Observatory projects, HEFCE/Paul Hamlyn Trust HERE! project).

Recipe card provided by Rebecca Currant, University of Bradford

