

POP LEARNING

This processing tool was first shared in the book, *A Teachable Moment* (2005) by Cain, Cummings & Stanchfield. It was called, at the time, JARS. I initially used small slips of paper to write on but have since moved to popsicle sticks because it's easier to write on the rigid surface – and it's a much more tactile experience.

FACILITATED OBJECTIVES:

I use this reflection/processing tool to collect thoughts, ideas, and particular behaviors (things you can see and hear) related to a concept (or concepts) my group wants to explore.

The facilitated objective for me, which I also share with the group, is to record (write) the group's findings over the course of the program onto popsicle sticks (see picture). The end result is a collection of POP Learnings (bits) about the topic(s)/concept(s) we have discussed (briefly) after each activity in the program. Then, going into the closing portion of our program we pull out the "POPs" and put together the thoughts about each topic/concept to see what we learned and know about it. These POP prompts help us to better review and reflect on the experiences.

NEEDS & NUMBERS:

- One to three containers large enough to fit a bunch of larger popsicle sticks. (I use small "flavored" beverage containers that have a removable label – removable without Goo Gone! You just can't get the smell out of the plastic!)
- 10 to 12 popsicle sticks for each container. I get the larger "craft" sticks (stained in light colors like yellow and orange) at one of the big box hobby/craft stores. They measure about 1 inch wide and about 5 inches long.
- One permanent marker for each container.
- Some masking tape to put on the container so you can label it with the topic/concept that you are working on.
- For convenient transport you might also want a small bag to carry your containers.



Reflection/Processing

Activity Objective

The group collects "bits" of learning (written down on popsicle sticks) about particular concepts (e.g., trust or leadership) to be used at the end of a program to see what their overall learning was for one or more of the concepts.

TIME:

5 to 10 minutes after each (almost every) activity and then at least 20 to 30 minutes to review, reflect, and discuss the bits of learning captured for each topic/concept covered throughout the program.

PROCEDURE:

To give this description some context, notice the picture above. I used this tube of POPs with a group of new facilitators. We were exploring the concept of facilitation and what a facilitator does and what a facilitator is. As we worked through activities together I modeled, what I believe to be, positive facilitator behaviors. After each activity I opened up a discussion about the responsibilities of a facilitator – basically, what does it take to be a facilitator? You can see some of the initial thoughts and ideas my participants came up with after just a few activities.

To get ready for POP Learning I put together a tube of POPs for one to three topics/concepts I know my group is ready to explore. Here are a number of typical ones we all know and love:

- Teamwork
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Innovation
- Trust

I've worked with a lot of sports teams (for example), so "teamwork" is a popular topic. So is trust. With these two topics/concepts I can cover a lot of ground. When I work a short program I choose not to work on more than three of these topics/concepts because our brains can really only handle so much learning at one time. If I work with groups over a long period of time, say a classroom of 8th graders, we might be able to cover more ground.

After leading a few ice-breakers to get my group into the spirit of adventure, I gather them together to explain how I will capture some of the learnings throughout the day. If we're going to work on teamwork, for example, I might say:

After each of the challenges you will be participating in, I will be asking what you observed related to the idea of teamwork. For example, I might say, 'What did you see going on during the last activity that is part of a good team? Or, What did you hear that made you feel good about being on this team?' These are specific behaviors, things you can see and hear. The things that you notice about good teamwork will be written down on these popsicle sticks – I call them POPs – so that we can remember our learnings and review them at the end of the program. So, be mindful of the way you work together as a team and try to notice what is working for you. You might also want to talk about what's not working and see if there's a way to change those behaviors.

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I don't spend a lot of time explaining the idea about the POPs, I just want to get my group into the activities. Once they experience the process of talking about and sharing the behaviors they recognized about the topic/concept it's much easier to understand how it works.

After each activity (or, almost every activity – you don't have to process after every activity) I don't take a lot of time collecting the observations. The idea is to get out what's most apparent to the participants and then get them going into the next activity. Save the longer discussion for the closing session.

When I reach the end of my program I want to save at least 20 minutes for a good closing discussion. I open up my POP tube(s) and remind the group about the topic(s)/concept(s) we were working on. Then, one topic/concept at a time I read out what was written on each POP. After reading I ask my group to share any thoughts they have about the learning. Why is this "bit" of learning important? How will this information help you in the future? Then I move to the next POP, and so on. These POP prompts really help bring back the experiences the group had together and remind them of what they found important about the topic/concept they explored.

SAFETY:

Being a reflection/processing activity this one is relatively safe. However, there can be emotional safety issues with any discussion of our experiences. Be mindful of the energy and body language of your participants. Address any issues you might encounter. (I guess I have to say it – popsicle sticks can be considered weapons in some facilities. Know your group and what they can handle.)

FACILITATION:

Typically I use POP Learning for groups that want to focus on a high-energy program with little processing. They ask to focus mainly on the positive aspects of the group's behaviors. I will however, ask the question from time-to-time: What's not working for you? And then ask them how they want to change it and make it a POP instead of a POOP! (That's always a fun attention grabber.)

This reflection/processing tool gives us the opportunity to capture learnings quickly and then have a focused discussion to work in some transfer of knowledge from the experience. Of course you can take the POP Learnings deeper if this is appropriate for your group.

On a final note, the POPs are a great giveaway as well. Besides just having the sticks around to pull out and review the positive behaviors and ideas they learned, I've seen some pictures taken of the popsicle sticks mounted on plaques and inside picture frames to commemorate the learnings from their experiences.

OBSERVATIONS/QUESTIONS:

I don't tend to review or discuss this process with the groups going through a teambuilding program. But I do discuss it with facilitators or teachers going through facilitator training. Here are a few things I might discuss with these groups:

- What are the advantages of breaking down the learnings into small chunks throughout a program? Are there any disadvantages to this process of collecting learnings?
- Notice the learnings (bits) we collected. How specific are they? Is it good to be more or less specific when capturing learnings? Why do you think so? Is it easier to repeat more general or more specific behaviors? Another way to say this: Is it easier to evaluate more general or more specific behaviors?
- How does the collection of learnings help with the closing process of reviewing the concepts you explore during a program?
- How can you use the learnings (POPs) beyond the program itself? In other words, how can you use the popsicle sticks after the program?

VARIATIONS:

- For super convenient transport, you can prepare small slips of paper to write the learnings upon and put all the papers in a small envelope. Be sure you have something solid to use as a "desk" when writing on the paper (e.g., a clipboard).
- Capture learnings on small wooden craft shapes (e.g., squares, ovals, or stars) to be mounted/glued onto a plaque for display in the classroom or office.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION GRADE LEVEL OUTCOMES:

(www.shapeamerica.org/standards/pe/)

- Middle School: S4.M1 – Exhibits responsible social behaviors by cooperating with classmates.
- High School: S4.H2 – Uses proper etiquette and respect for others; S4.H3 – Uses communication skills and strategies that promote team/group dynamics.

21st CENTURY LEARNING:

(www.p21.org)

- Creativity and Innovation: Be open and responsive to new diverse perspectives.
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving: Analyze and evaluate major alternative points of view; Reflect critically on learning experiences.
- Communication and Collaboration: Articulate thoughts and ideas effectively using oral and written communication; Communicate effectively in diverse environment.
- Social and Cross-Cultural Skills: Know when it is appropriate to listen and when to speak; Respond open-mindedly to different ideas.
- Leadership and Responsibility: Act responsibly with the interest of the larger community in mind.