

Talking The Talk Workshop Facilitated by Sonny Kelly

The Talk by Sonny Kelly: A Performance Based Approach to Equity

The Talk is a one-man performance that draws on the voices of ancestors, elders, youths, and intellectuals to engage in the difficult conversations that we must have with our children as we prepare them to survive and thrive in a racialized America. This eclectic theatrical experience weaves together interactive theater, literature, a dynamic embodied performance, and a multi-media production.

The Talk was born of a painful conversation that Sonny had with his son to prepare him to face a world that often condones and enacts violence against bodies like his. Sonny humanizes the often racialized politics of issues like “stop and frisk,” “zero tolerance” school policies, and the “School to Prison Pipeline.”

Sonny developed *The Talk*, with the hopes that it would accomplish three goals: to mobilize performance toward the end of developing a critical consciousness around race issues in America today; to move audiences in such a manner that it incites action toward more just, equitable, and honest interpersonal interactions in our society; and to *The Talk* to give voice to an anguish that parents of color endure daily in this country. In this sense, *The Talk* is an act of compassionate solidarity with all of those who have experienced criminalization, disenfranchisement, or marginalization in our society. By performing narratives that explore the trauma of marginalization and alienation that racism inflicts on human bodies and minds Sonny invite audience members to experience with him what Augusto Boal (1995) calls “the therapeutic stage,” where we are all encouraged to imagine new possibilities together.

Talking The Talk is an interactive workshop experience that Sonny has designed to complement performances of *The Talk*. Every performance includes a 30 to 45-minute post-show talk-back. Depending on the community, these talk-backs may be between Sonny and the audience, or they may include a panel of local stakeholders and a moderator who will pose and field poignant questions about racial equity, community building, social justice, stereotypes, conflict resolution, and cross-cultural communication. Sonny has designed a one-to-two-hour performance-based workshop that helps community members to further digest this experience and to engage these issues in a transformative way.

Why a Performance-Based Workshop?

Critical performance practitioner Augusto Boal (195) privileges performance spaces as “spaces of liberty where people can free their memories, emotions, imaginations, thinking of their past, in the present, and where they can invent their future instead of waiting for it” (p. 5). From the beginning, Sonny’s goal has been to actualized Augusto Boal’s belief that performance can become “revolution,” – positive collective change (Boal, 1979).

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The Talking The Talk Workshop Process (DURATION: 60 minutes to 120 minutes)

10 MINUTES: Sonny leads participants in a series of theater games and embodied warm-up exercises based upon Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* model and Sonny's 30-year experience with theatrical performance. Participants will get to know and see themselves and each other in new and dynamic ways.

10 MINUTES: Sonny leads participants in a brief period of personal reflection using haiku, creative writing, and speaking exercises.

15 MINUTES: Audience members share their creative writing and speaking and begin to discuss what matters most to them and why.

15 MINUTES: In pairs, participants will embody and voice the creative writing and speaking of their partners. Each partner will act as director as they seek to help their performance partner to best understand and perform their creative writing piece. We will address stereotypes, facts vs. truths, active listening, and assertive communication.

10 MINUTES: Participants will discuss how we can better listen to and learn about each other. The group will develop an action plan for future social engagements with people who are different from them. We will press into the embodied work of enacting reconciliation and relationship building.

30 MINUTES: In groups, members will discuss the social issues that matter to them most. They will each have a chance to sculpt an image of that issue using the bodies of their fellow group members. Group members will stop and digest each human sculpture – seeking first to understand the perspective of the sculptor. Then, Sonny will facilitate a process by which group members will share their human sculptures with the larger group. Members of the group will serve as a forum to re-sculpt the sculpture together, as we seek solutions to the social issue being addressed.

30 MINUTES: Now that we have expressed some of the most important issues to us in body and in word, we are ready to write an action plan! Participants will break into groups again. Each group will discuss actual actions that we can take as individuals and as members of community collectives to move toward positive and effective engagement with the issues that have come up. Each group will share their steps toward action with the larger group. These steps will be refined and informed by feedback from the larger group. The result will be a draft of some of the most pressing social issues in the community and viable steps that participants will take to address those issues going forward.

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Works Cited

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- Brook, Peter (1968/1996). *The empty space*. New York, NY: Touchstone
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