

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Chalk Talk</b>
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### **Definition/Gist**

Chalk Talk is a silent way to generate ideas, develop projects, check on learning, solve problems, or reflect. Because it is done completely in silence, Chalk Talk allows students to interact visibly and directly with ideas and silently with each other. It encourages thoughtful contemplation, generates questions and ideas, and gives students a change of pace. 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 with no verbal sparring.

Chalk Talk can be used in democratic learning to:

- Generate ideas
- Develop projects
- Check on learning
- Solve problems
- Reflect

Chalk Talk can also be used as a documentation tool to capture the collective thought processes of the participants. Chalk Talk can be extended for various purposes. For example, participants can use the results of the Chalk Talk to help categorize ideas, prioritize tasks, and allocate responsibilities.

### **Steps or Procedures**

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 as they please. Participants can comment on each other's ideas by drawing a connecting line to the comment.
2. The facilitator writes a relevant question, term, or topic in a circle on the board or newsprint taped to the wall.
3. The facilitator places several markers or pieces of chalk at the board or paper and then hands some out to a few members of the group, *or* the facilitator provides chalk/markers for everyone. With large groups, it can be helpful to limit the number of people who are writing on the board/paper at the same time. Those who aren't at the board/paper should stand or sit in a position that allows them to see what's being written.
4. Participants write, as they feel moved to write. Allow plenty of wait time before deciding the Chalk Talk is over.
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 participants' thinking by:
  - Circling interesting ideas to invite comments or note a theme emerging
  - Writing questions about a participant's comment
  - Adding his/her own reflections or ideas
  - Connecting two interesting ideas/comments together with a line and adding a question mark.

Active facilitator interaction encourages participants to do the same.
6. Time frame for a Chalk Talk is dependent upon the question, attention span of the participants, and group size. Generally, if no one adds anything to the Chalk Talk in a period of one to two minutes, then the activity should draw to a close, though

the facilitator should say, “Are there any more additions?” before closing. Chalk Talks typically last no more than 10-15 minutes.

7. The facilitator, a participant, or the group as a whole briefly summarizes the results of the Chalk Talk, noting significant themes, connections, and questions.
8. In a possible extension of Chalk Talk, the facilitator or group can re-format the results into a list or categories to guide future work.

### **Example for Democratic Learning**

In a 6<sup>th</sup> grade science classroom, students were learning about watersheds. They participated in a Chalk Talk with the stem: *What can our class do to solve our watershed problems?*

Examples of questions to start a Chalk Talk include:

- What are the needs in our community?
- What community could our learning about \_\_\_\_\_ serve?
- In what ways might we solve the problem of \_\_\_\_\_?
- What state/local standards/objectives did we address in this project?
- What are ways we can share what we’ve learned with our collaborators?
- What do you know about \_\_\_\_\_?
- How can we involve the community in our school?
- How can we involve the school in the community?

### **Applicability**

Chalk Talk is applicable for students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. For example, first grade students might draw pictures connected to the central question or idea.

### **Resources**

White board and markers or chalkboard and chalk. Newsprint or chart paper may be used in place of boards.

### **References**

National School Reform Faculty. (March 2002). Techniques for reflective dialogue. In National School Reform Faculty, *Critical Friends Coaches Institute*, p. 53.  
Pate, P.E., Thompson, K.F. (May 2002). Instructional strategies for democratic learning. Paper presented at the Spring Conference of the League of Professional Schools, Athens, GA.