

Chalk Talk

Method	Chalk Talk
Introduction	
<p>Making thinking visible¹ is a method that seeks to elaborate different thinking processes in education in order to obtain deeper understanding. At the heart of the method is making thinking processes visible. Charts present students' thinking during an exploration of ideas/topics/questions. Prior knowledge, ideas, experiences, insights and/or questions are made visible. These can remain visible for the rest of the course input with respect to the subject or subject theme for which it is used. The method asks learners to discuss these ideas, questions or problems by silently responding in writing to the remarks/ideas/suggestions/links of fellow learners. They don't have to speak or write their name anywhere. It is a kind of a silent conversation which lowers the threshold for discussing and asking questions often experienced among students in higher education classes. It creates flexibility to move from an idea to another in a nonlinear way.</p>	
Aim	To explore ideas in the introduction of new content in order to build understanding in a collaborative way.
Target group	Different disciplines and topics of disciplines. It can be at the beginning of a subject.
Intended learning outcomes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students learn to express ideas, opinions, feelings, insights and/or prior knowledge on a topic • students formulate questions on the topic and/or on ideas, opinions, insights of fellow students • students link ideas, opinions, insights and questions on a topic 	
Description	
<p>Write a topic or question in the middle of a large sheet of paper (you can do this for 4 or 5 sheets of papers or even more depending on the size of your class). Use a pen that differs clearly from the pens used by students.</p> <p>It can be a single word or phrase or a quote of a text, all related to a topic of study: the outcome will be more about what they know and questions they have.</p> <p>Questions generate often a richer level of discussions: the outcome will be multiple perspectives and reactions</p> <p>Organise the furniture in the classroom in a way that allows students to comfortably move around.</p> <p>Present the Chalk Talk prompt: invite learners to move around, to read and adding ideas, questions, connexions, make it very clear that they are not supposed to talk to one another during this exercise.</p> <p>Explain the system of rotation if there is any. It can be completely free or organised in a systematic way with students moving from one point to another. Make sure they remember the chart they started with. State that there are no right or wrong answers and whatever pops up in their head is</p>	

interesting to link it to the questions/phrase/topic on the chart as long as it is more than a word or line.

Facilitate: ask them to consider different types of responses such as connecting ideas (and describing the connection), elaborating ideas, to add details, commenting on each other's input, to draw if it supports them in expressing themselves. Encourage them to write more than one or two words but rather phrases/questions. Encourage them to hold nothing back and to use all the space available on the charts.

Share the thinking: after rotating students go back to their initial charts and read what others have written on 'their' chart. Ask them what themes they notice emerging. Discuss what surprises them.

Final reflection: reflect with the whole group on the Chalk Talk digging into the thinking process asking how their thinking developed.

You can participate as a facilitator.

Students can take pictures with their mobile phone of the charts and have this digitally to add to their course materials.

When you use this as part of an introduction to a subject or subject theme, you can stimulate students' thinking in the subject area by bringing back their attention to the chart(s) at the end of the classes. Ask students to add in another colour comments/questions/connections/... to 'their' chart (and other charts if preferably) and reflect upon what has changed in their thinking or what they observe in their learning process of this topic. Get them to question what has influenced changes in their thinking?

Assessment of this exercise could focus on the relevance of the contributions, the ability to put forward their own ideas and original thinking, the ability to elaborate and to describe connections.

Thinking about thinking is not always easy for students and is something that must be learned.

Preparation	It is important for the teaching staff member to be familiar with the approach of Making Thinking Visible and creating a culture of thinking in the classroom.
Required resources and equipment	Charts and pens (students can use their own pens). Optional : tape or other materials to hang the charts at the wall to make them visible when discussing and learning further.
Success factors	Timing for reading, thinking and commenting is very important in this method, so the success of this method can depend on how well you have considered this beforehand. 5 minutes per chart is a reasonable time for adults to spend before they become bored.
Advantages	Its open ended and exploratory nature makes it very accessible to students. It is a kind of a silent conversation which lowers the threshold for discussing and asking questions often experienced among students in higher education classes. It creates flexibility to move from one idea to another in a nonlinear way

Disadvantages	Students tend to write words and lines for connections without describing the nature or refine the connection or question. Questions/phrases/quotes/topics can be too narrow and therefore stilt or halt students' thinking.
Additional information	On this website you will find many examples of a chalk talk. This method is a way of making thinking visible. On this website you will find a lot of information about the importance of this and how to organise it.

ⁱ Richhart, R., Church, M., & Morrison K. (2011). *Making Thinking Visible. How to promote Engagement, Understanding and Independence for All Learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. (p. 78)