1. Gallery Walks/Chalk Talks

In some lessons, students may need to analyze multiple texts. Why not post those texts on the walls, and have students rotate through them in small groups? I have used this strategy with students analyzing primary and secondary documents for DBQ’s (document-based questions) in history classes. One colleague has students analyze magazine ads for rhetorical techniques in her English class.

Gallery walks can also feature student-created texts, even digital ones. A colleague who teaches earth science once had student groups create informational Animoto videos on different geographic formations. She then had students participate in a digital gallery walk where they watched the student-created videos on laptops, and took notes on each geographic formation.

Chalk Talks are gallery walks where students are asked to respond to texts. For example, quotes could be posted, and student could post their reactions to them. In a math class, students could solve a problem on chart paper, and explain their process. Other students could then use Post-Its to write comments or critiques of their solution and process.

2. White Board Meetings

White Board Meetings are a strategy I have seen two science teachers use often. Essentially, students will investigate a situation (often using a data set). Students will then make sense of the problem in a group. They will display their findings on a mini-whiteboard. Usually, students are required to show information in graphs, pictures, mathematics, and writing. Once students post their information on whiteboards, they present their findings. Students can then receive feedback and answer questions about their information.

3. North Pole-South Pole/Continuum

This strategy is great for formative assessment or assessing background knowledge. Essentially, one side of the room represents one idea, and the other side of the room represents an opposing idea.

For example, I used the strategy while teaching in a statistics class recently. My “North Pole” was “I feel extremely confident in how well I can comprehend and remember information in the statistics textbook.” My “South Pole” was “I feel NO confidence in how well I can comprehend and remember information in the statistics textbook.” Students were asked to align themselves with how they felt. If they had a more moderate response, they positioned themselves more closely to the center of the room, showing a continuum of student confidence. Their responses affected how I presented an array of note-taking strategies and which students I worked with more closely during the lesson.

4. Musical Mingle

This strategy works along the same lines as Musical Chairs, but you simply ask students to stand. I often develop a series of questions that I want to ask students before the lesson begins (to assess background knowledge) or after the lesson (to assess learning). I ask all of the students to stand. When I play the music, they will meander around. When the music stops, I announce a question and they will discuss responses with a person close to them. Once students have had the opportunity to talk, we then repeat the process.

One caveat to this strategy is limiting your questions. Generally, any more than three or four questions results in diminished focus. Once the activity is completed, students to share some of their discussion points with the whole class. Most students feel confident sharing in the whole class because they have had an opportunity to clarify their thinking with a partner earlier.

5. Stations

Most educators view stations as a staple of the elementary school classroom, but they are also extremely effective in middle and high schools. Stations can be utilized for differentiation. For example, based upon students’ current writing trends, a teacher could place students at stations based upon areas they need to practice. Activities can be on paper, or they can be embedded digitally using QR Codes. Other stations may be rotational, such as short writing prompts, differing math problems, selected poems to analyze, or different activities for new vocabulary or concepts.