**﻿Fishbowl Think Aloud**

**﻿Description:**

The *Fishbowl Think Aloud* is a technique used to listen in on the thinking of a sampling of students in the class. Four or five students are selected to be in a "fishbowl", sitting in a cluster or the front of the room. The rest of the class and teacher face or surround the students who are in the "fishbowl" and listen attentively to their conversation. The conversation is a response to a prompt in which the students "think aloud," discussing and defending their ideas as the teacher and other students listen in and reconcile their own thinking with that of their peers in the "fishbowl."

**﻿How this FACT Promotes Student Learning:**

This FACT requires the students in the "fishbowl" to think out loud, describe their thinking, and explain the reasons for their ideas. While the students in the "fishbowl" are thinking through and talking about their ideas, the other students are mentally comparing their ideas to what they are hearing in the "fishbowl". This continuous reflection on learning helps students think about their own ideas, strive to put them together in a coherent way, and compare their thinking with that of ideas of other students.

**﻿How this FACT Informs Instruction:**

The students selected to sit in the "fishbowl" represent a sample of the class. The sample may surface some of the ideas and ways of thinking that are indicative of the group as a whole. As the teacher listens in on the conversation, understandings and misconceptions can be noted that may need to be addressed in subsequent instruction. The FACT also provides an opportunity for the teacher to see how well students can engage in "content talk" that is supported by evidence and explanation. If students have difficulty engaging in discussions that require them to justify their ideas with various forms of evidence, it indicates the need to further develop this hallmark skill. The observing students are allowed to ask questions and make comments at the end of the fishbowl discussion. This provides another opportunity to see how well students understand a concept, including their ability to identify inaccuracies and challenge statements that may conflict with their own thinking.

**﻿Design and Administration:**

This FACT can be used during the elicitation or formal concept-development stage on the learning cycle. Choose students for the fishbowl who, as a group, are representative of the class as a whole. Seat them so they can see each other and so that the class can see them. These are the only students who can talk. Remind the other students that they are to listen during the fishbowl and note any questions or comments they want to make at the end.  
  
Provide the students in the fishbowl with an interesting open-ended prompt for discussion to begin the thinking process. For example, "Is air necessary for gravity to act on an object?" One student will begin the process of thinking out loud, sharing his or her answer and the reasoning behind it. Other students join in, agreeing or disagreeing, building on each others' ideas. If students have not experienced techniques such as *Volleyball*-*Not Ping-Pong!* the teacher may have to help facilitate the conversation the first time the strategy is used. It is important to encourage all students in the fishbowl to participate and focus on each other, not the students who are watching and listening to them. After the fishbowl conversation ends, the students who have been listening and processing what they heard have an opportunity to share whether they agree or disagree with any of the ideas discussed in the fishbowl.

**﻿General Implementation Attributes**

Ease of Use: Low Time Demand: Medium Cognitive Demand: Medium/High

**﻿Modifications:**

Students outside the circle can come up with the questions for the fishbowl, in addition to the prompt provided by the teacher. Students can also ask a queston of the fishbowl group after they finish their fishbowl conversation. Each questioner then takes the seat of the student in the fishbowl who answered and becomes part of the fishbowl responses while the fishbowl student joins the rest of the class. This can be repeated several times, encouraging students to question each other and widening the opportunity for other students to participate.

**﻿Caveats:**

It is important to set norms before this FACT is used so that students in the fishbowl feel comfortable with the public display of their thinking.

**﻿Disciplines to use this FACT with:**

This FACT can be used in science, math, social studies, language arts, and health.  
  
  
Keeley, Paige. (2008) *Science Formative Assessment: 75 Practical Strategies for Linking Assessment, Instruction, and Learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press

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