**﻿Agreement Circles**

**﻿Description**

*Agreement Circles* provide a kinesthetic way to activate thinking and engage students in scientific argumentation. Students stand in a circle as the teacher reads a statement. The students who agree with the statement step to the center of the circle. They face their peers still standing in the circle and then match themselves up in small groups of students who agree and disagree. The small groups engage in discussion to defend their thinking. After discussions, the students are given an opportunity to reposition themselves with those who now agree standing in the center of the circle and those who disagree standing on the outer regions of the circle. This is repeated with several rounds of statements relating to the same topic, each time with students starting by standing along the circumference of a large circle.

**﻿How this FACT (Formative Assessment Classroom Technique) Promotes Student Learning**

*Agreement Circles* activate students' thinking about ideas related to a topic they are studying. As the statements are made, students access their existing knowledge. They must justify their thinking to their peers about why they agree or disagree with the statement. As they engage in a cordial argument with their "opposing partners" still standing on the circle, students may modify their ideas as new information convinces them that their original ideas may need adjustment and either step into or onto the circle.

**﻿How this FACT Informs Instruction**

This FACT can be used prior to instruction or during the concept development stage when formally introduced concepts may need reinforcement. The teacher can get a quick visual sense of students'understanding according to which part of the circle they are in. As the teacher circulates and listens to students' arguments, information about students' thinking is revealed that can be used to design further learning experiences or revisit prior experiences aimed at developing conceptual understanding. Giving students an opportunity to change their position after discussion indicates the extent to which the small group discussions may have changed some students' initial thinking.

**﻿Design and Administration**

**Develop a set of three to five conceptually challenging statements related to the topic of instruction. Statements should be a combination of true and false. False statements can be developed based on examining the research on students' commonly held ideas. For example, a set of eighth-grade statements used to elicit students' ideas about energy might be as follows:**

1. Energy is a material that is stored in an object.  
2. When energy changes from one form to another, heat is usually given off.  
3. Energy can never be created or destroyed.  
4. Something has to move in order to have energy.  
5. Energy is a type of fuel.  
Begin by having students form a large circle. Read the first statement, then give students five to ten seconds of think time. Ask students to move to the center of the circle if they agree with the statement and stay on the outside if they disagree. Match students up 1:2, 1:3, 1:4, 1:5, or whatever the proportion of agree/disagree indicates and give them a few minutes to defend their ideas in small groups. Call time,read the statement again, and have students reposition themselves according to whether their ideas have changed or stayed the same. Students who agree with the statement move to the inside of the circle. Students who disagree stay on the outside. Note any changes and then have students go back to the circle for another round. When finished with all rounds, the next step depends on the stage of instruction. If the FACT was used to activate and elicit student thinking, then the next step is to plan and provide lessons that will help students to explore their ideas further and formulate understandings. If the FACT was used during concept development stage provide an opportunity for a whole-class discussion to resolve conceptual conflicts, formalize development of the key ideas, and solidify understanding.

**﻿General Implementation Attributes**

Ease of use: High Time Demand: Medium  
  
Cognitive Demand: Medium/High

**﻿Modifications**

Limit the number of statements for younger students. If all students end up in either the middle or outside the circle, have them pair up to explain why they agree or disagree. Often there are d  
ifferences in the justification of their ideas, even if both students agree or disagree with the statement.

**﻿Caveats**

Students need to be confident in their thinking when using this strategy. Encourage students to refrain from changing their answer because they see a majority of students move to the inside or outside of the circle.

**﻿Disciplines to Use this FACT with**

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