**﻿Chain Notes**

**﻿Description**

*Chain Notes* begin with a question printed at the top of a paper. This paper is then circulated from student to student. Each student responds with one to two sentences related to the question and passes it on to the next student. Upon receiving the previous "chain of responses," a student adds a new thought or builds on a prior statement.

**﻿How this FACT promotes student learning**

*Chain Notes* provide an opportunity for students to examine others' ideas and compare them to their own thinking. In the process of examining others' ideas, students build upon them or add new ideas of their own. The FACT encourages students to move beyond recall since they must first synthesize and evaluate what others have recorded before adding their own ideas. *Chain Notes* provide an opportunity for students to draw upon various levels of knowledge, including facts, definitions, specific ideas, big ideas, analogies, illustrative examples, and evidence from their own or class experiences to contribute to building the chain.

**﻿How this FACT informs instruction**

*Chain Notes* elicit different ideas students have about concepts they encounter during or after a lesson or sequence of lessons. They are best used as a check for understanding after students have had sufficient opportunities to explore and learn about the concept addressed by the question in the note. Analysis of the notes reveals the extent to which students draw upon formal definitions and ideas presented and discussed in class as well as the hands-on experiences they have had. The notes reveal students' level of sophistication and accuracy in thinking about the concept, the terminology they use, and common misconceptions. Examining the chain of responses can indicate to the teacher whether the lessons students engaged in allowed them to make sufficient connections to the concept and whether they should be modified or revisited. Varied information about students' ideas related to the concept in question can be gathered using this FACT.

**﻿Design and administration**

Select a broad, open-ended question focused on a particular concept relevant to the curriculum. Write the question at the top of a long sheet of paper. In addition, post the question somewhere in the room so that every one *can* see it. Pass the note around the class from student to student having each student add a short sentence that relates to the question and builds upon, extends, or disagrees with others' comments. Make sure students know they should read all prior responses before adding their own "note." Encourage students to build upon the last note made so that it connects with the idea they are adding. Have students turn the sheet over when they run out of space on the first page. The notes can be passed around as students are engaged in other tasks. It should take no more than one to two minutes per student to respond and pass on. Notes should be brief--only one to two sentences in length. When completed, the *Chain Notes* can be read aloud or projected from an overhead, allowing students to give feedback on the statements made by their peers. Students discuss whether they agree or disagree with the statements on the paper and defend their reasoning.

**﻿General implementation attributes**

Ease of use: HIgh Time Demand: Medium Cognitive Demand: Medium

**﻿Modifications**

Have students accordion-fold their paper each time they respond so only the last note or last two notes appear when they pass it on. The next student writes a note and then accordion-folds it again so that only his or her response appears when passing it on to the next student, and so on. This way, teachers can analyze how students consider and build upon the ideas of their peers without being distracted by all the previous comments.

**﻿Caveats**

This FACT should be explicitly taught and modeled the first time it is used. Make sure students are not influenced by other students' ideas or merely parroting back what others have written.

**﻿Disciplines to be use in**

This FACT can be used in all content areas.  
  
Keeley, Paige. (2008) *Science Formative Assessment: 75 Practical Strategies for Linking Assessment, Instruction, and Learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press