

Agreement Circle

Description

Agreement Circle is a kinesthetic way to activate thinking and engage students in academic debate.

Purpose

Agreement Circle is used with selected response questions to identify groups of students with similar responses to the question asked.

How it improves student learning

Agreement Circle 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 discussion with their "opposing partners," students may modify their ideas as new information convinces them that their original ideas may need adjustment and either step into the center or on the circumference of the circle. 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.

How it informs instruction

Agreement Circle can be used prior to instruction or during the concept development stage when formally introduced concepts may need reinforcement. A 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.

How it works

- Teacher develops 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 students' commonly held ideas or common misconceptions.
- Students form a large circle as the teacher reads the first statement.
- Give students think time. Then 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 up students 1:2, 1:3, 1:4 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 question 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 of the circle.
- Note any changes and then have student go back to the large circle for another true/false statement.
- When finished with all the statements, the next step depends on the stage of instruction. If this check for understanding 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 check for understanding was used during the concept development stage, provide an opportunity for a whole-class discussion to resolve conceptual conflicts, formalize development of the key ideas, and solidify understanding.
- Encourage students to refrain from changing their answer because they see a majority of students move to the inside or the outside of the circle.

Variations

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