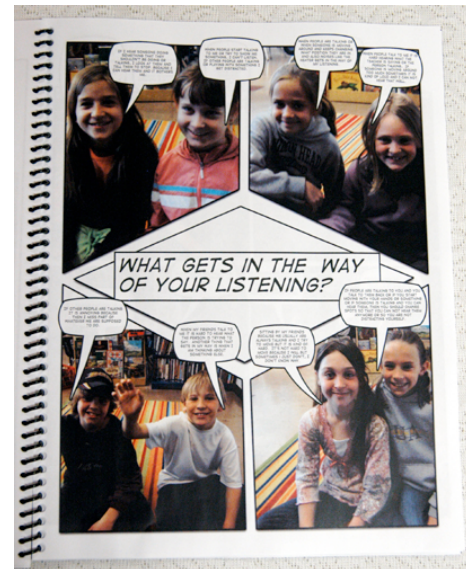


## MAKING STUDENTS' WORDS VISIBLE: SPEECH BUBBLES

- *Makes individual thinking visible and accessible to the group*
- *Helps the group revisit important moments in their learning and supports reflection*

- *Grade Level:* Early childhood through high school
- *Degree of Preparation:* Little except for making initial speech bubble(s) for each learner
- *Level of Interpretation Required:* Little
- *Possible Media Needs:* Computer, printer, and software OR paper and marker; camera; laminating machine
- *Participation of Learners:* Yes



Speech bubbles are just what they sound like. They usually take the form of a photograph or an image of a child's head with a bubble of words emanating from their mouths (see Figure 1 (forthcoming)).

Why: Speech bubbles can serve many purposes but they are primarily a way to provide a visible reference and reminder to learners of key ideas or moments in their learning. They make students' thinking visible to themselves or others, remind a class of key ideas, insights, or questions, and show multiple perspectives on a topic. They also celebrate and strengthen a group's identity as a learning group.

What: What goes inside the speech bubble? Listen for comments that reflect one or more of the following: insights that move thinking forward, misconceptions about key ideas, collaborative learning, important questions or disagreements, and voices that are seldom heard. Jot these down in a notebook or write them directly into the bubble itself. Speech bubbles are also a way to share multiple responses to a single prompt.

Who: The learners themselves are the most common audience for speech bubbles, but depending on the purpose, other audiences can include students, teachers, parents, and the wider community. Teachers or students can create the images and fill in the bubbles

Where and When: Speech bubbles are relatively easy to implement and do not require a lot of preparation. They can be posted on walls, bulletin boards, posters, or panels in or outside the

classroom. They can also be shared via newsletters or a Web site. Speech bubbles can be used before, during, or after a learning experience as a reminder of previous steps or key ideas.

How: Speech bubbles can take multiple forms. Typically, they include a photograph or other representation of a person or group whose words appear in the bubble. They can be laminated for re-use in or outside the classroom. They can be posted on walls, bulletin boards, student lockers, or cubbies, shared on-line or via powerpoint. The computer program, *Comic Life*, is inexpensive (~\$25) and an easy way for children and adults to create speech bubble “collages.” Post-it notes are another way to share back learners’ words.

### **Variations and Extensions**

Try...

- attaching speech bubbles to things that belong to children in the classroom like cubbies, lockers, and folders
- posting photographs and speech bubbles for the adults in the room
- using speech bubbles in your next parent-teacher conference
- including speech bubbles in student portfolios
- giving parents a blank speech bubble and asking them to fill in something surprising or provocative their child said and bring it back to the classroom
- including speech bubbles in your next newsletter
- making distinctions between speech and thought bubbles

### **If you only have 5 minutes...**

- Keep an ear out for noteworthy comments from students or adults, jot them down, and share them at the beginning of the next class
- Do the above but write the comments directly into laminated speech bubbles
- Ask students to do either of the above

### **Pictures of Practice**

Speech bubbles in...

- Kindergarten learning centers with activities described in children’s words
- A 4<sup>th</sup> grade classroom (post-its with students’ edits of their understanding of density)
- A 9<sup>th</sup> grade English class evaluating student reflections on a Shakespeare text
- Elementary student reflections on their interactions during recess