

Fishbowl

Purpose

The Fishbowl is a peer-learning strategy in which some students are in an outer circle and one or more are in the center. In all Fishbowl activities, students in both the inner and outer circles have roles to fulfill. Students in the center model a particular practice or strategy. Students in the outer circle act as observers and may assess the interaction of the center group. Fishbowls can be used to assess comprehension, to assess group work, to encourage constructive peer assessment, to discuss issues in the classroom, or to model specific protocols such as literature circles or Socratic Seminars.

Materials

- Chairs or desks for each student arranged in two concentric circles
- Checklist or reflection questions for the outer circle students, depending on the instructional need

Procedure

1. Arrange chairs in the classroom in two concentric circles. The inner circle may be only a small group or even partners.
2. Explain the activity to the students and ensure that they understand the roles they will play.
3. You may either inform those who will be on the inside circle ahead of time, so they can be prepared, or just tell them as the activity begins. This way everyone will come better prepared.
4. The group in the inner circle interacts using a discussion protocol or the “script” of a role play.
5. Give each student in the outer circle a list of aspects of group interaction they should silently observe and comment on—for example, whether the group members use names to address each other, take turns, or let everyone’s voice be heard.
6. Make sure all students have turns being in both the inside and the outside circle at some point, though they don’t all have to be in both every time you do a Fishbowl activity.

Variations

- Each person in the outside circle can have one opportunity during the Fishbowl to freeze or stop the inside students. This person can then ask a question or share an insight.
- Have each student in the outer circle observe one student in the inner circle (you may have to double, triple, or quadruple up)—for example, tallying how many times the student participates or asks a question.