

'FISHBOWL' DISCUSSION

The 'fishbowl' discussion strategy is a good alternative to open-ended discussion. It promotes focused discussion and participation by every student.

Step 1.

Randomly select 5-7 students to form the discussion panel at the front of the room.

Step 2.

Introduce the topic. It needs to be well defined and limited to allow for a focused 15-20 minute discussion. The focus of the discussion has to relate directly to the content area of the course --- a recent class session, a reading assignment, etc.

Possible foci:

- Philosophical issues
- Applications of theory
- Brainstorming preferred solutions to a problem
- Relating content to students' own experience

Step 3.

The rest of the students can serve as observers and recorders. Their role is to take notes of the panel discussion and to be prepared to report, in writing, about the essence of the discussion, various point of view, relevant questions not satisfactorily answered, and suggestions for other relevant topics that need to be addressed. They need to pay attention to both the process of the discussion and its content.

Step 4.

The teacher moderates the panel discussion, making sure that everyone has a fair chance to participate, that no one person dominates the discussion, and that as many as possible relevant issues are raised and addressed. The teacher or an observing student serves as timekeeper.

Step 5.

Observers, after turning in their notes, are asked to offer comments on process and content, as outlined above.

Step 6.

Panelists receive credit for participation; observers receive credit for written reports.

Benefits of this Strategy:

- It provides a break in routine;
- It is interactive;
- It maximizes participation by all students;
- It develops critical thinking skills;
- It provides a setting in which theoretical or textbook content can be discussed in an applied context.