 Modified Fishbowl Strategy

Comments,

Questions,

Notes

1. Provide a common reading and background on an unresolved or controversial issue to the class. Utilize a reading strategy to help students to access the text and force them to choose quotes or facts from the text pertaining to the issue. Have students write down their interesting facts and quotes on post-it notes or small pieces of paper.
2. Make two to three circles in your classroom with +/- 5 chairs in each. The chairs will face inwards. Outside of each circle, make another circle of chairs.
   1. The inner circle of chairs is the fishbowl and students in these chairs are very talkative, intelligent and scholarly fish.
   2. The outer circle represents people who love to learn from their fish and provide them “fish food for thought.”
   3. The teacher will choose one person from the outside circle to be the “fish trainer.” This person interjects only if the conversation gets off track. This person will rephrase the question and ask the fish to go back to their discussion.
3. RULE: Only students in the fishbowl (inner circle) are allowed to speak during this activity.
   1. Students in the fishbowl engage in deliberation of an issue presented, as an open-ended question, by the teacher.
   2. All participants must abide by the rules of civic discussion and common courtesy.
4. The outside circle has a responsibility of providing “food for thought” (strip of paper/post-it) with relevant information that can be used by the fish. For this reason, it can be very positive to pair students on the inside/outside of the circle so that someone with great confidence is on the outside helping the less confident “fish” on the inside.
5. Once a student in the circle has spoken twice, a student from outside the circle may tap that student on the shoulder and switch places with the student. The student on the outside MUST TAP IN after their inside partner has spoken four times. The student in the circle will exit to the outside observation seats. This process can continue throughout the discussion.
6. The teacher does not participate in the discussion except to provide a new question or to terminate an irrelevant, or inappropriate, line of discussion. 

Don’t inadvertently do this!

1. It is highly effective to have two separate (but related) discussion questions. After you have completed a fishbowl on one question, you can begin the next question by reversing the original groups. Fish become fish feeders and feeders become fish.
2. Including a written reflection piece is a great way to assess student learning.
3. Allowing small groups to bring all of their post-its to a table and co-write a piece demonstrating their understanding is also a great assessment and instructional tool.

Basic Discussion Rubric

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Discussion Rubric | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Substantive |  |  |  |  |
| States and identifies issues. | Accurately states and identifies issues. | Accurately states an issue. | States a relevant factual, ethical, or definitional issue as a question. | Does not state any issues. |
| Uses foundational knowledge. | Accurately and expresses completely relevant foundational knowledge pertaining to the issues raised during the discussion. | Accurately expresses mostly relevant foundational knowledge pertaining to issues raised during the discussion. | Accurately expresses somewhat relevant foundational knowledge pertaining to an issue raised by someone else. | Does not express any relevant foundational knowledge. |
| Elaborates statements with explanations, reasons, or evidence. | Pursues an issue with more than one elaborated statements. | Pursues an issue with one elaborated statement. | Elaborates a statement with an explanation, reasons, or evidence. | Does not elaborate any issues. |
| Procedural |  |  |  |  |
| Invites contributions from, and acknowledges statements of, others. | Engages others in the discussion by inviting their contributions and acknowledging their contributions. | Invites comments from others and does not acknowledge their statements. | Does not invite comments from others but allows others to speak. Does not acknowledge contributions from others. | Does not invite comments from others nor acknowledge their statements. |
| Challenges the accuracy, logic, relevance, or clarity of statements. | Constructively challenges the accuracy, clarity, relevance, or logic of statements made. | Responds in a civil manner to a statement made by someone else by challenging its accuracy, clarity, relevance, or logic. | Responds in a civil manner but does not challenge the accuracy, clarity, relevance, or logic of statements. | Does not respond in a civil manner in all conversations. Does not challenge the accuracy, clarity, relevance, or logic of statements. |