

Discussion Activities and Techniques

Fishbowl

Category

Discussion

Time

30 minutes to 1 hour

Groups or Individual

Group

Why do it?

During in-person sessions, encouraging students to participate, to listen carefully, and to be active leads to better comprehension of material.

Overview

The fishbowl strategy creates an incentive for multiple students to join in discussions by making the discussion space itself part of the focus. Additionally, the fishbowl reduces the likelihood that one or two students will dominate the discussion.

Directions

1. Place three chairs in the front of the room, with easy access for all class participants. You can put any space between the chairs.
2. Assign a topic for students to discuss or allow them to generate topics (see the Democratic Discussion card for a helpful way to generate discussion topics).
3. Select students to sit on two of the chairs and explain that they will start the discussion rolling. Then, tell the class that any one of them can fill the empty chair, but when they do, one of the original speakers will need to exit voluntarily, leaving their chair empty for someone else to fill.
4. Set a time limit for the discussion and begin.

Note: In a virtual space? No worries. Use a conferencing tool and set up a "stage" for your students there using raised hands or some other method of noting who is "in the fishbowl".

References

Pip Decks (2022). <https://pipdecks.com/fishbowl>

Democratic Discussion

Category

Discussion

Time

1 hour

Groups or Individual

Group

Why do it?

If all students have a say in the topics the class discusses, they are more likely to be invested in participation.

Overview

In addition to deciding upon what to discuss, participants are given the authority to decide the duration of various topics that they have agreed to cover.

Directions

1. At the beginning of class, place three columns on the whiteboard: To Discuss, Discussing, Discussed.
2. Ask all students to write down on stick notes topics that they would like to discuss during class and to place their notes in the "To Discuss" column.
3. Explain that every student has three votes to use any way they like. They can give one vote to three topics, all three votes to one topic, and so on. Ask them to write down their votes on a sticky note.
4. Collect the votes and arrange the topics in the order from most to least votes. Move the highest vote getter into the "Discussing" column.
5. Set a time for 10 minutes (or whatever time frame works for the subject) and tell students to begin their discussion.
6. When the time is up, have the students decide as a group whether to continue with the topic or place it in the "Discussed" column.
7. Pair this strategy with Fishbowl to spark wide participation.

Note: In a virtual space? No worries. Use a virtual whiteboard, slides, or a simple shared document to facilitate and gather ideas and a conferencing tool to facilitate synchronous conversation.

References

Pip Decks (2022). <https://pipdecks.com/discuss>

Think-Pair-Share

Category

Discussion

Time

5-15 minutes

Groups or Individual

Individual and Group

Why do it?

Learners need time to process questions and content before engaging in discussions. This helps them to access their prior knowledge and start connecting it with what they are currently learning. Active processing also impacts the learner's retention of information for future use and engagement in further discussion. An advantage of this method is that it allows students to process individually *and* cooperatively.

Overview

Think-Pair-Share (TPS) or Write-Pair-Share (WPS) is a cooperative learning strategy designed to help students process information individually before interacting with partners, in small groups, or in large class discussions. This strategy involves giving students time to **think** or write about their responses to content, problems, questions, etc. then giving them time to compare their ideas with others (in small groups or **pairs**), and finally having them **share** out a summary or synthesis of the conversation in a larger group or classroom setting.

Directions

1. Preparation and Facilitation

- a. Provide learners with some form of content such as an article, mini-lecture, short video, a problem, etc. or even a short experience such as a lab experiment, demonstration, or role-play.
- b. Select or create a method for how students will interact with the content or experience individually. It can be as simple as giving responses to questions or summarizing the main points of a text. It can also be more involved like creating a diagram or solving a problem.
- c. Select or create a method for how students will interact with a partner or group. Will they just share their responses or begin to create something together?
- d. Select or create questions to guide the large group discussion. Once they've had time to interact with the content and each other, determine what is most important for them to share with the class.

2. Think

- a. Give students or learners time (at least a few minutes) dedicated to processing the information or reflecting on the experience individually.
- b. Students can just sit quietly and reflect, but it is often helpful for them to write down their responses as it promotes independent thinking. They can also refer to their writing in later conversations.

- c. Note: Do not skip this first step of giving students individual time as it affects the quality of discussion in later steps.
3. Pair
- a. Give students or learners time (at least a few minutes) dedicated to further making sense of the information or the experience in pairs or small groups. Ideally, they should build on ideas and learn from each other.
 - b. It is often helpful to have them create a summary, insights, or a synthesis of their discussion that they could share with the class.
 - c. Sharing in pairs or small groups promotes safety and builds confidence to share in larger group discussions.
4. Share
- a. Give students or learners time dedicated to reflecting on the information or the experience in groups or as an entire class.
 - b. At this point, it is important to hear from several conversations.
 - c. Allow them to speak freely or select a designated voice for the groups.
 - d. The key is to encourage discussion and dialogue rather than just have each group or pair share what they said.
 - e. Encourage learners to ask questions, reflect, build on the ideas of others, etc.

Note: In a virtual space? No worries. Use a virtual whiteboard, slides, or a simple shared document to facilitate and gather ideas and a conferencing tool to facilitate synchronous conversation.

References

Pip Decks (2022). <https://pipdecks.com/discuss>