

OVERVIEW OF THE TEACHING PRACTICE

In addition to subject-area content knowledge, teachers today are also called upon to teach skills that prepare students for their future. These “future ready” skills are sometimes called 21st century skills or success skills, and they include things like critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, communication, and creativity. Building these skills will help students in school and college, in the workplace, or in their lives as citizens.

Some schools and districts have developed an “ideal graduate” profile that lists these kinds of goals, and perhaps others like “global citizenship” or “self management.”

Teachers should explicitly teach and assess future ready skills – we can’t just assume students will pick them up during their years in school. Project-based learning is one of the best ways to teach future ready skills, but you can also teach them in your regular day to day practice before you start using PBL. Future ready skills can be taught along with academic content or as stand-alone activities. Practicing these skills regularly will bring another benefit: once students have internalized a skill, it allows them to focus on learning new content.

One effective strategy for teaching a future ready skill is to use a “fishbowl” to model the skill for your students. This allows them to see and hear what it looks like before they try using it when they work.

EXPLANATION OF THE ACTIVITY

TITLE: Fishbowl Modeling

GRADES: K-12

TIME: 20-30 minutes

PURPOSE: To model the use of a future ready skill so students can learn about and practice it.

OVERVIEW

A fishbowl activity can be used to teach a variety of skills to your students, in any content area or grade level, with appropriate support. In the activity, a group of students sits in the “fishbowl”—the front of the room, or in the center of a circle of chairs, as the rest of the class observes. The group models the skill that is being focused on, while their classmates listen, watch, and perhaps take notes. As soon as possible after the fishbowl is done, the whole class should practice the skill, and debrief how it goes afterward. In this example we will focus on communication—specifically, discussion skills.

STEPS

1. Prepare for the activity.
 - Decide on the size of the group in the fishbowl. It could be as small as four, or as many as 10, depending on the type of skill being modeled and how it will be used by the class. For example, if the skill is going to be used by project teams of four students, model it with a group that small. If the skill is going to be used by a larger group, for example in a whole-class discussion, the fishbowl group should have 8-10 members.
 - Decide what will be discussed in the fishbowl. It should be something thought-provoking. It could be a simple prompt, such as a statement about a controversial issue or a debatable question. Or it could be a visual image or a piece of text, in which case you may need to give students time to read it before or during the activity.
 - Decide what the students observing the fishbowl will do. Will they simply listen and observe? Take notes? Refer to a rubric?
 - Depending on your students and the skill to be modeled, you may want to pre-select the students who will be in the group in the fishbowl. You may also want them to practice before they “go live” in front of their classmates.
2. With help from your students, set up the room for the fishbowl. Place the proper number of chairs in the center, with seating for the rest of the class around them. Be sure to consider: Can everyone see? Can everyone hear? Is there enough space between chairs?
3. Discuss the specific skill that will be modeled in the fishbowl. Keep the focus on just one or two skills. In this example, we will focus on two discussion skills: making sure all voices are heard, and listening for accuracy and understanding. Ask the class to describe what it looks and sounds like when those skills are being used. Write a list on the board or on chart paper—for example, “ask people who haven’t talked to say what they think” and “paraphrase someone’s idea to check if you understood.” Then agree on what the class will look and listen for when they observe the fishbowl group; it could be 1-2 things on the list, or all of it.
4. Ask the students who will be in the fishbowl to sit in the circle (and thank them for agreeing to play this role!) while the rest of the class sits around it. Remind the observers what they need to do.
5. Present students with the piece of text, image, problem, or question you have selected. If you have not already provided it, allow time for students to read, examine, or think about it.

6. Tell students how much time they will have, then start the activity. Monitor and facilitate as needed.

7. Call an end to the discussion and debrief the activity with the whole class. Start with the observers, then ask the fishbowl group for their thoughts. Remind students about being respectful and kind when giving feedback. Give prompts such as:

- What examples did we see of the skill we focused on?
- How could the skill have been used more, better, or differently?
- Did any issues or challenges arise?
- What have we learned?

NOTES

- You may want to consider having the two circles switch places after 5-10 minutes of discussion. This will allow all students the opportunity to speak. If you do not want to switch the entire circle, another idea is to have students from the outer circle tap-in to the inner circle. This will allow the students to get involved in the discussion as soon as they are ready with an idea.
- Follow up the fishbowl activity with one or more opportunities for all students to practice what was demonstrated. For example, the next day when students work in teams, have them try making sure all voices are heard, and listening for accuracy and understanding.
- Additional examples of aspects of communication that could be modeled in a fishbowl include:
 - How to disagree politely
 - How to build on each other's ideas
 - How to ask good questions
 - How to listen actively
 - How to interview someone
- Here are more examples of future ready skills that could be modeled in a fishbowl:
 - *Collaboration*: How to reach a decision by consensus in a team; How to divide up tasks in a team; How to give feedback to teammates.
 - *Critical thinking*: How to ask questions about a source of information; How to take different perspectives; How to use evidence to support a claim.
 - *Problem solving*: How to analyze a problem; How to follow steps for solving a problem.
 - *Creativity*: How to brainstorm ideas; how to evaluate ideas.