**Fishbowl Method**

The ‘Fishbowl method’ is a discussion tool used to facilitate dialogue between different groups of people. This strategy was one I was unfamiliar with and came across when attempting to find new approaches to conducting seminar groups. This method could be successfully applied to seminar teaching as a means to accelerate group discussion and debates as well as teaching a variety of social skills.   
  
**How the Fishbowl works**:

The Fishbowl method involves rearranging the class so that one small ‘inside’ group (of three to four) are arranged in a circle whilst the rest of the class act as ‘outside’ observers. The group in the centre are given a topic or question to debate and the larger group of students remains silent whilst the discussion takes place. Once the centre group has had a designated time period for their discussion, a new group takes its place or alternatively the outside group then discusses the ideas the inside group has raised.

**Advantages of a Fishbowl:**

* Allows for an ‘inclusive approach’ to the seminar as all students will be able to voice their opinions and ideas
* Promotes ‘active listening’ by students as well as improving their ability to communicate in a group setting
* Encourages students to listen to alternative viewpoints
* Supports the development of peer social skills – students can encourage and prompt their peers to develop ideas further
* Can allow the tutor or seminar leader to take more of a secondary role in the session, allowing the students more control over their discussion and facilitating a deep-approach to learning
* By observing a small group of students in their discussion, more students may feel able to contribute once the whole class is back together to talk about what has been discussed
* Observations by the outside group can be useful in conveying what makes a discussion effective

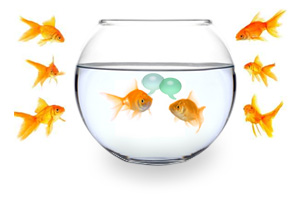
**Variations of the Fishbowl Method:**

**Role-play:**

Role-play within the Fishbowl can be a useful way to begin the exercise. Each student is assigned a particular role within the Fishbowl group and this is also discussed once the inside group has re-joined the rest of the class.

**Multiple Fishbowls**:

Using multiple fishbowls at once time could be useful for bigger groups by dividing the class into two big groups and then forming two fishbowls in each. This could also be a useful exercise if there are language barriers between participants. The seminar tutor could then oversee these groups by moving around the room and listening to each fishbowl group before bringing both back together for a debrief of the discussions.



Reference:

McCloskey, A. (2013) *Using fishbowl discussions to encourage post-formal thinking.* American Psychological Association. http://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/ptn/2013/02/fishbowl-discussions.aspx