

FISHBOWL PROTOCOL

This protocol is used during equity visits to support the host team in beginning to consider the patterns and wonderings that are shared by the small groups. It allows the full group to “listen in on” this discussion. The discussion is not intended to resolve the issues that have arisen in the patterns and wonderings or develop an action plan, but rather initiate discussions and planning that will continue within the school/district.

Space should be organized so that fishbowl participants are sitting in a circle/oval and can easily see and hear one another; reflectors sit outside the circle but should be able to hear the fishbowl participants’ discussion. Completed chart paper with patterns and wonderings from teams should be visible to fishbowl participants. Typically, this takes 35–45 minutes.

PURPOSES

To support host team in:

- Reflecting on patterns and wonderings shared by observation teams.
- Thinking through initial ideas, hypotheses, and questions related to the equity focus and problem of practice to be explored in more depth in subsequent meetings and activities.

ROLES

- *Facilitator*—Supports the group’s process, including reviewing purposes, reminding group of roles, and keeping time. Does not participate in discussion itself, but may intervene to refocus group on purposes for fishbowl.
- *Fishbowl Leader*—*typically the host superintendent or principal.* Briefly initiates the discussion within the fishbowl and ensures that all participants within the fishbowl share their perspectives.
- *Fishbowl Participants*—Members of the host leadership team.
- *Recorder*—One fishbowl participant takes notes for future reference (typically, not on chart paper).
- *Reflectors*—Participants on visiting teams.

MATERIALS

- Copies of the protocol

STEPS

- ***Review purpose, roles, and steps (by facilitator)—2–3 min.***
- ***Initiation of fishbowl discussion—1 min.***
 - Fishbowl leader asks fishbowl participants to reflect on patterns and observations that are most urgent or compelling for them—and why.
- ***Fishbowl discussion—25–30 min.***
 - Fishbowl participants take turns reflecting on patterns and wonderings. This may be done in a go-round (i.e., in order) or “popcorn” style (i.e., as participants choose to speak).
 - Fishbowl leader (or anyone inside the fishbowl group) may ask clarifying questions.
 - In the final 5–10 minutes of the protocol, fishbowl leader may synthesize some of the questions or issues for further discussion.
 - Recorder keeps track of emerging questions, issues, and ideas.

Notes:

- Reflectors do not interrupt or interact with participants during discussion.
- Facilitator may remind fishbowl leader and participants of the purpose if the fishbowl discussion appears to becoming largely explanatory (i.e., for reflectors’ benefit) or defensive.
- ***Debrief process—3–5 min.***
 - Facilitator leads brief reflection on how process of protocol worked for group, including suggestions for using it in the future.