Fishbowl Conversations with Victoria Treadway & Tracey Pratchett

What is a fishbowl conversation?

"The fishbowl works with two concentric circles of chairs in the room. One small inner circle (4-6 chairs) where the speakers sit and drive the conversation and an outer circle (many people) where the audience sits, listens and thinks about new ideas." (van Hove, 2016)
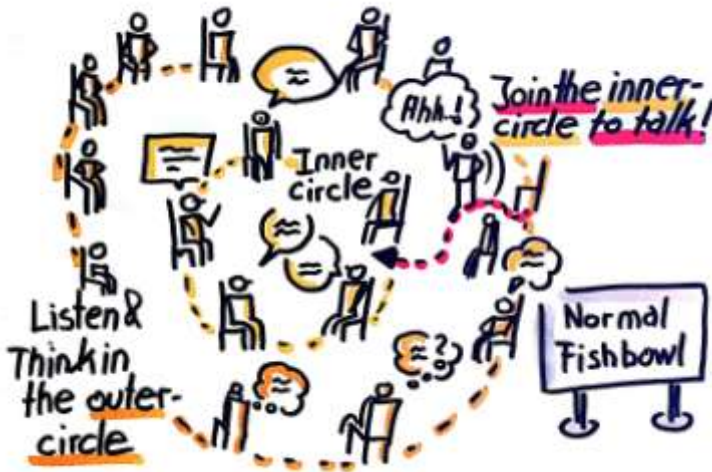

Illustration courtesy of (van Hove, 2016)
http://www.marcelvanhove.com/visual-facilitation-fishbowl/

The conversation takes place in the inner circle, and those seated in the outer circle observe. If the observers want to join the inner circle they may occupy the empty chair and one of the inner circle attendees leaves. Sometimes a prop can be used to manage the conversation, for example, the person holding the fish will be the speaker. Fishbowl conversations can either be closed (where the inner circle contains experts, and don't change) or open, (where people from the outer circle join the inner circle).

Fishbowls are useful for debating "hot topics" or sharing ideas or information from a variety of perspectives.

Basic rules:

1. The following topic is proposed for the discussion:

   "NHS libraries should provide library services direct to patients"

2. The inner circle: the conversation will be started by Dominic Gilroy; Tracey Roberts Cuffin and Paula Elliott.
3. The outer circle: If you want to join the conversation, or would like to pose a question, join the inner circle.
4. When a new person joins the inner circle, someone should leave.
5. We will try using a fish to manage the conversation – when you have the fish, you have the floor.
6. Outer circle: if you don't want to join in, you might want to take notes.
7. The facilitators will capture the conversation and will make room in the inner circle if needed.

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Discussion topic: After observing or participating in the conversation, we will have a group discussion about how we might use this approach for Knowledge Management activities?

References & further reading

Better Evaluation (2015) Fishbowl Technique Available at http://betterevaluation.org/en/evaluation-options/fishbowltechnique

Knowledge Sharing Toolkit (2016) Fish bowl Available at http://www.kstoolkit.org/Fish+Bowl

van Hove, Marcel (2016) The visual facilitation fishbowl Available at http://www.marcelvanhove.com/visual-facilitation-fishbowl/