

Fishbowl Tap-Out



Brief Summary

This strategy is a modification of the fishbowl discussion technique. Only select four or five students to begin in the fishbowl; they remain responsible for the initial discussion about the topic. If a student in the outside circle wants to speak, they must tap the shoulder of a fishbowl member and switch places. Setting a stipulation that no one can be “tapped-out” within two minutes of entering the fishbowl allows students time to participate in the discussion and also provides opportunities for all students to enter the fishbowl.

Note

Ground rules for any class discussions typically make for a smooth activity. Some rules might include the following: taking turns, building on a previous student’s comments, asking questions to extend thinking, and no one speaking a second time until everyone has had an opportunity. Typically, teachers stay out of the fishbowl to manage time and monitor participation by all members. The fishbowl discussion strategy is often also called Inner Circle/Outer Circle.

Example Use in STEM EDA

Suggested articles and reading materials are provided throughout all STEM EDA modules and are often located in Step 2: Research the Problem of the Engineering Design Process. Utilizing any of the reading materials as foundation content to a fishbowl discussion can be beneficial and assist students in Step 3 when they brainstorm solutions. Also, consider using a Fishbowl discussion at the conclusion of Step 6: Test and Evaluate the Prototype. Arrange the small group in the fishbowl to include at least one student from each design team, who should share aspects and elements of his/her team’s prototype that worked well as well as areas for improvement. The outer group can then provide observations and additional suggestions for improvement which could be used during Step 7: Improve and Redesign.

Ideas on Implementation

1. Monitor all students in both groups and require every student to contribute to the discussion at least once, or to be a part of the fishbowl.
2. To minimize students dominating the discussion, provide each student with a few tokens or markers. Each time a student contributes to the discussion he/she should place a marker in front of him/herself. When all of their markers are exhausted, that student can no longer contribute until all members in the group have spoken.
3. Provide ample time for both groups to participate in the class discussion. Setting a classroom timer that can be displayed in the room is helpful for students to manage their time.