

Fishbowl



Brief Summary

Fishbowl is a classroom discussion technique that allows for a rich discussion of any given topic. It frequently builds community among students and demonstrates how different groups collaborate. Content to be discussed often comes from a current reading assignment or recent classroom experience. To conduct a fishbowl discussion, select a small group of students (up to half the class) and arrange them in a circle in the middle of the room. These students are said to be considered “in the fishbowl.” The remaining students should form around the fishbowl. Next, the students in the fishbowl discuss the previously read material. Providing a starting point or an engaging question can assist with beginning a discussion. The outer group of students listens to the discussion and takes notes to help pose questions and comments later about what they observed. After the small group in the fishbowl concludes its discussion, usually in a preset amount of time, the teacher invites students from the larger group to add their thoughts and opinions about their observations. The small group now listens and responds to comments and questions posed from the large group.

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.
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.