

Elaboration

Peers work as partners to listen and discuss ideas by extending responses of a partner as they consider a focus question provided by the teacher. The teacher encourages sharing out of the discussion, often asking which part of the response each partner added.



What It Is

Elaboration is an oral language support strategy that allows students to listen carefully to both the teacher and peers and, through oral interaction, respond to and extend what the teacher or partner said. It increases student listening and discussion abilities and builds a thread of reasoning in a discussion. There is a tighter focus on the listening and speaking exchanges during interactions. Students also will understand the information better and that will support recall of content.

How It Works

After the teacher provides a focus question, students will use elaboration to practice this strategy in their discussions. At the basic level, students can simply restate what they heard from the teacher or another student, and add a phrase to extend the comment.

Students are expected to listen carefully, stay on topic, keep focused and build on previous comments. Occasionally students will start by repeating what another student said but this should lessen over time. The use of elaboration is key to facilitating listening in the classroom and develops more focused responding by all students. Responding by elaborating on both peer comments and questions from the teacher supports recall and deepens understanding of content. The use of elaboration is a component of demonstrating understanding in social conversation as well as in content discussions.

Considerations for Use

Several classroom routines need to be set in place to facilitate the use of the Elaboration strategy:

1. Decide on which children would work in small groups or pairs effectively and assign groups or partners. Students can work both in the whole or small group experience with their group or pre-selected partner. In this strategy, it is helpful to match students by talk alike abilities.
2. Set up a signal for the timing of the response.
3. Rehearse how to elaborate on a comment made both by the teacher and a peer.

4. When students work in small groups and pairs for discussion, observe the various groups and listen for what they are saying and how they use elaboration.
5. Sharing both during discussion led by the teacher and after the partner work is essential to model both listening and discussion techniques and encourage focused responding.
6. When using Elaboration, it is helpful to occasionally chart the thread of the discussion in front of the students using a simple recording of ideas or some simple graphic organizer.
7. Be willing to change groups or partners based on observations as well as normal events such as the absence of one member of a pair. Another reason to change partners would be that one partner overwhelms a groups or peer. When doing group work, sometimes the teacher will need to stay with one group for a longer period of time to do more modeling or facilitate use of elaboration techniques.

Why It Works

When classroom participation structures are used, they foster oral language development with peer talk. The Elaboration participation structure gives students opportunities to listen more carefully, and examine the vocabulary, and examine the thinking of peers and the teacher. This listening to and recognizing the threads of a discussion is a scaffold for peers to examine their own thinking. It also provides a degree of classroom management but the key goal is oral language development with peer-supported listening and speaking.

When this structure is used, almost all students have an opportunity to share a range of ideas. Elaboration supports students to move out from a receptive or passive mode, but it also helps support how to listen and what to listen for in a conversation or other forms of interaction in the classroom. Sharing out ideas requires students to listen carefully and stay focused on the discussion in order to add to it. By listening to each other's elaborations, students greatly expand their listening skills and build reasoning skills.

Things To Keep In Mind

This participation structure is more difficult to establish but is key for use in the full range of settings in classroom instruction in all content areas. Elaboration provides for focused listening and clear connections in thinking, and should become part of the regular classroom procedures.

Observing during the times students are engaged in classroom discussions, small group and peer talk is an excellent way for the teacher to notice, which students are talking, how reasoning of the students is evidenced in their replies and conversation, and quickly assess their learning. This structure usually requires more modeling by the teacher and more whole group or teacher led small group practice opportunities.