



Session 11

Childhood is the time when we learn most and when our brains as well as our minds are most open to new experience.

-The Scientist in the Crib (Gopnik et al., 1999)

Teaching Narrative Using the Eliciting Strategy

Learning Objectives

- ◇ **Review** the terms narrative, personal narrative, fictional narrative, event cast, setting, characters, and high-support strategy, and **define** the term eliciting strategy.
- ◇ **Demonstrate** use of the eliciting strategy when teaching narrative.
- ◇ **Analyze** children's responses to the eliciting strategy in a narrative activity.
- ◇ **Reflect** on how the eliciting strategy can be used in your classroom to improve children's narrative ability.
- ◇ **Describe** how the eliciting strategy can be used to address all four *Read It Again–PreK!* domains.

Overview

Narrative is one of the most important areas of literacy development for young children. We discussed in Session 1 the following points about narrative:

1. Narrative is one's account of an experience or event that unfolds over time. A narrative may be short or long and it may describe a real event or a fictional event.
2. Children begin to produce narratives very early in life. Gradually, these narratives become longer and more sophisticated. By the time a child is four years of age, the narrative may include clear cause-and-effect relationships between events.
3. There are three types of narratives. A **personal narrative** is an account of real-life, personal experiences. A **fictional narrative** is an account of a made-up, make-believe event. An **event cast** is an account of something occurring right now, such as a sports broadcast.

4. Narratives are a critical language skill since children use them to: follow directions, talk about their experiences, communicate how they feel about something, share with friends things they've learned, engage in creative play with others, and comprehend stories and books.

5. In order to produce a narrative, a child must use good pitch, loudness, and pauses; select the correct words to convey precise information; organize words and phrases into sentences that follow a coherent, logical order; and be creative so that the narrative is interesting.

As we discussed in earlier sessions, some children may encounter difficulties acquiring the skills necessary to produce a strong narrative composed of the features discussed above. For these children, high-support strategies are crucial to help them achieve success.

In this session, we focus our attention on how to support children who have a difficult time with narrative activities because they have limited skills in this area. As we discussed in Session 5, we can think of this support as gentle nudges we give to a child who is climbing up a ladder. These gentle nudges are called high-support strategies because they are designed to give a high level of support to children who find particular tasks challenging. **High-support strategies** help children to successfully participate in activities that might otherwise be too difficult for them. As teachers use high-support strategies over time, children improve their skills and progress towards the top of the ladder.

The Eliciting Strategy

The high-support strategy we describe in this session is **eliciting**.

The eliciting strategy involves giving a child the correct response to a task that is difficult for him or her and then eliciting that response from the child.

By using this strategy, the child is able to participate in an activity that would otherwise be too challenging. Let's look at an example:

Teacher: At the end of our story, we found out that Mean Jean the Recess Queen wasn't as mean as we thought, right? When did we find out that Mean Jean wasn't really all that mean?

Child: At the end!

Teacher: Yep, we found out at the end of our story that Mean Jean was actually pretty nice.

In this example, the teacher provides the fact that the reader doesn't learn that Mean Jean was really nice until the end of the story. The teacher provides an exact model of the ideal response, which helps the children to successfully complete the task. As you can see, this strategy is easy to use: Eliciting the answer is simply providing the child the ideal response and then asking him or her to repeat that response.

Let's look at another example:

Teacher: We can tell from the pictures of the palm trees and vines that our story, *The Very Sleepy Sloth*, takes place in the jungle. The jungle is the setting for our story. Who can tell me the setting for our story?

Children: The jungle.

Teacher: That's exactly right. The jungle is the setting for our story. We know this because of the pictures of vines and palm trees. How do we know what the setting is for our story?

Children: Trees and vines.

Teacher: Right again. We see vines and a special kind of tree called a palm tree.

In this example, the same format is followed as in the previous example. Since the children were so successful in answering the first question when the eliciting strategy was used (concerning the setting of the story), the teacher elicited a second response involving a more difficult "how" question. First the teacher provides the answer and then she asks the children how they know the story takes place in the jungle. Their response is generally correct, but the teacher does clarify what kind of trees are in the jungle, providing more specific information about the setting of the story. As these examples illustrate, the teacher's use of the eliciting strategy provides children the tools they need to participate in complex narrative tasks that otherwise might be too difficult for them.

Terms and Background Knowledge

Vocabulary

Narrative – An account of an experience or event that unfolds over time. There are three major types: personal narrative, fictional narrative, and event cast.

Personal narrative – An individual's account of a personal, real experience or event.

Fictional narrative – An individual’s account of a made-up, make-believe experience or event.

Event cast – An individual’s account of what is happening right now, such as a sports broadcast.

Setting – The part of a narrative that provides information about where and when events take place.

Characters – The “actors” in a narrative; these may be proper names (Socks) or common names (the cat) and they may be people or things.

High-support strategy – A strategy that teachers use for tasks that are very difficult for a child—tasks that he or she is far from being able to do on his or her own.

Eliciting strategy – A high-support strategy in which the teacher provides a child with the correct answer to a task by providing an exact model of the ideal response, and then elicits that correct answer from the child.



Activity 1. Teacher Implementation of the Eliciting Strategy

As we think about using the eliciting strategy, let’s first consider how we might support children’s narrative skills by providing exact models of some ideal responses during narrative tasks. Remember, with the eliciting strategy, the teacher provides a child with the ideal (or correct) answer to a task and then elicits that correct response from the child. Read this transcript of a classroom conversation.

Teacher: Clifford was really good at learning how to sit and stay. What was Clifford really good at learning?

Child: He liked to eat and play.

Teacher: The other dog, Sandy, in our book liked to eat. He ate all the dog food that fell out of the truck, but he didn’t sit and stay like he should have. Clifford was the one who was good at learning how to sit and stay. What was Clifford good at learning?

Child: He was good at sitting!

Teacher: He was good at sitting and staying, right. What else was he good at?

Child: He liked to play!

Activity 1. Teacher Implementation of the Eliciting Strategy

Now, answer these questions about the preceding exchange.

In this narrative task the teacher is trying to elicit some action verbs from a child (such as *sitting* and *staying*). She asks the child a question *after* providing the correct response. What was the question and what was the correct response?

The child did not provide the correct response to the teacher's question. Rather, the child provided an incorrect response. What was that response?

After the child provided an incorrect response, the teacher used the eliciting strategy for a second time in this excerpt. What, exactly, did the teacher say when she used this strategy?

Describe the child's response to the teacher's use of the eliciting strategy. Was the child able to successfully complete the task?



Activity 2. Learners' Ladders

Review the strategy of eliciting addressed in four *Read It Again-PreK!* Learners' Ladder Narrative Lessons. These lessons are:

- Learners' Ladder Lesson 4
- Learners' Ladder Lesson 12
- Learners' Ladder Lesson 24
- Learners' Ladder Lesson 48

Of the examples provided in these lessons, which ones do you feel you use often in your daily instruction?

Next, review these two examples of the eliciting strategy taken from Learners' Ladder Lesson 24.

Example 1:

Teacher: A problem is usually solved in the end of the story. What often happens at the end of a story?

Example 2:

Teacher: First, Nicki's grandmother gave him a mitten. What happened first in the story?

Reflect on these questions:

In each of these examples, the teacher provides children the ideal response to a question that she then asks. These are excellent examples of the eliciting strategy. But, what if a child still cannot successfully answer these questions? How should the teacher respond if the child provides an incorrect answer to her question?

Activity 2. Learners' Ladders

Rewrite each of these examples so that the teacher does not use the eliciting strategy. Predict how a child with limited narrative skills would perform given these revised examples.

Listen and Learn



Activity 3.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 11, Activity 3** from the RIA DVD menu. You will see a teacher reading a book to a group of children. Complete the activity as described below.

Watch this teacher use the eliciting strategy to discuss narrative concepts with the children in her classroom while reading *Clifford Goes to Dog School* by Norman Bridwell. Then answer these questions:

Which narrative skill was the teacher trying to target?

Describe the exact words the teacher used when applying the eliciting strategy.

Describe how the children responded to this strategy. Did the teacher's use of the eliciting strategy seem to encourage children's participation and success?

Now, listen to what we have to say.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 11, Activity 3 Discussion** from the RIA DVD menu.

Activity 3.

Activity 4.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 11, Activity 4** from the RIA DVD menu. You will see a teacher reading a book to a group of children. Complete the activity as described below.

Watch this teacher use the eliciting strategy to engage her children in a narrative task while reading the book *Rumble in the Jungle* by Giles Andreae and David Wojtowycz. After watching the video, look at your copy of the book and complete the following activities.

Choose another target from among the *Read It Again-PreK!* narrative objectives that you could address using this book.

Write down the exact words you could use to implement the eliciting strategy when trying to address this objective with the children in your classroom.

Now, listen to what we have to say.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 11, Activity 4 Discussion** from the RIA DVD menu.

Activity 4.





Activity 5.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 11, Activity 5** from the RIA DVD menu. You will see a teacher reading a book to a group of children. Complete the activity as described below.

Watch this teacher use the eliciting strategy to discuss a different domain than that of narrative, namely print knowledge. She addresses this domain with her students while reading the text *Red Leaf, Yellow Leaf* by Lois Ehlert. Answer the following questions.

What was the teacher trying to teach the children in this activity?

What words, specifically, did the teacher use to deliver the eliciting strategy?

How did the children respond to this strategy? Were they able to successfully answer the questions she was asking?

Now, listen to what we have to say.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 11, Activity 5 Discussion** from the RIA DVD menu.

Activity 5.

Reflect and Apply

Reflect

1. Think about a child in your classroom who has difficulty answering questions about events that happen in stories.

Write that child's name here: _____.

How often do you currently use the eliciting strategy with this child when asking him or her questions about narrative events?

To what extent do you think this child would benefit from more exposure to this strategy?

2. Look again at the eliciting strategies discussed in *Read It Again–PreK! Learners' Ladders*. What are some classroom activities that occur regularly during which you could use the eliciting strategy to facilitate participation?

3. Read over this excerpt from the book *The Very Sleepy Sloth* by Andrew Murray.

Sloth slowly opened one eye.
“Monkey,” he said. “If you’re so hard-working,
you try lifting Elephant’s weights.”

Next reflect on these questions:

How could you use this excerpt to teach children the concept of characters in a story? Give a specific example of what you might say or do to teach children what characters are using this excerpt.

Are there children in your classroom who may have difficulty following what you say or do when teaching this concept?

If there are children who may have a difficult time following what you say or do to teach this concept, describe how you could use the strategy of eliciting to support their performance.

Apply

1. Find a storybook in your classroom library that has a clear beginning, middle, and end. Select a child in your classroom and read the entire storybook to that child in a one-on-one reading session. After the storybook is read, ask the child to retell the events in the story, including those from the beginning, middle, and end. Practice using the eliciting strategy to help the child identify specific things that happened. To what extent did your use of the eliciting strategy help this child produce a better story retelling? Is there a different strategy that you feel might have been more useful?

2. Gather a small group of children in your classroom who have difficulty producing coherent and clear narratives. Tell the children that you are going to write a story together. (You can write what the children say on a whiteboard or white sheet of paper as they dictate.) Explain that the first part of writing a story is identifying the characters and the setting. Help the children generate information about characters and setting using the high-support strategy of eliciting. Try to use this strategy at least three times. Note here some examples:

Consider how the children performed. Were they able to produce information about characters and setting on their own, or did they require the high-support strategy of eliciting to be successful? Share your observations in the space below:

3. Gather a small group of children in your classroom who have difficulty with one or more of the *Read It Again–PreK!* objectives in the domain of print knowledge. Pick one of these objectives to address during a small group reading session. Choose a storybook from your classroom library and read it to the children. As you read the book, pause to ask children questions that target the objective you selected. Deliver some of the questions without using the eliciting strategy (e.g., *Where is the name of the author on the cover of this book?*). Deliver some of the questions using the eliciting strategy (e.g., *This is the name of the author of this book* (pointing to the author’s name on the book’s cover). *Show me where the name of the author is on the cover of this book.*). Think about how the children perform when you do and do not use the eliciting strategy. Are there certain children who you feel needed this strategy and others who did not? If so, which children seemed to most need this strategy and why?

Resources

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