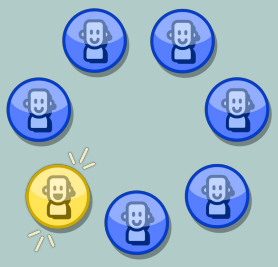
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES



Speak with a Specialist

This grouping strategy provides educators with an easy way to engage students in their own learning through peer-to-peer collaboration.

LEARN.K20CENTER.OU.EDU/STRATEGIES

SPEAK WITH A SPECIALIST

Summary

In this instructional strategy, students are strategically grouped so that each team includes one student with strong knowledge or understanding of a topic. In each group, the knowledgeable student guides conversations and thinking while other members collaborate to build understanding through questions, discussions, explanation, and shared decision-making. This instructional strategy is best used in the classroom at the end of a unit while reviewing for an assessment. This strategy is also useful in professional development sessions where there are multiple adults in the session who are already familiar with the presented information.

Procedure

1. Select the “specialists.” Specialists should be those with a strong grasp on the given subject matter. These specialists could be students who have tested highly on formative assessments during the current unit or participants who have more experience with the content. Organize groups so that each group contains one specialist.
    - One way to identify those with the most knowledge, especially in a setting with adult learners, is to ask participants to self-assess. Ask learners to rate their knowledge on a scale of 1–5, with 5 being the highest level of knowledge and 1 being the lowest level, and hold up their fingers to indicate their rating. Choose those that rated themselves at a 5 to be the specialists. Then have those specialists choose others that rated themselves at a 4, 3, 2, and 1 to join their groups.
2. Present the task or problem and have teams collaborate to discuss, analyze, and make decisions. Learning tasks could include review sheets, discussion questions related to content, a presentation, etc.
3. Establish roles and expectations. Ask the specialists to serve as conversation guides. Tell specialists that they should not simply give answers or do all of the work. Rather, they should guide their companions to solutions by asking prompting questions, clarifying ideas, and welcoming input from all members. All teammates should contribute effort, ideas, and reasoning.
4. Allow time for students or participants to engage in discussion, explanation, and problem-solving. As groups work, walk around the room and monitor progress, pause to answer questions, and redirect conversations if needed.
5. Invite students to share their conclusions with the class, then facilitate a brief reflection on what they learned.