



An Introduction to *Fluency, Originality, Flexibility, and Elaboration*

Fluency, originality, flexibility, and elaboration are creative thinking strategies and processes which help students brainstorm ideas, find connections among their ideas, and then organize their creative thoughts.

Fluent thinking encourages the generation of many ideas, possibilities and solutions. However, initial responses are seldom original. While fluency helps students generate many ideas, **original thinking** helps students combine existing ideas and create new and unusual ideas. We usually express many ordinary ideas before more novel responses occur to us.

Once a variety of ideas have been brainstormed, **flexible thinking** looks for connections between ideas and helps students go beyond the obvious to devise alternative situations or solutions. Flexibility leads to the production of different ideas and the consideration of alternatives. Unique ideas may not be readily recognized. Sometimes clarifying questions may be necessary to help students articulate and elaborate on their reasoning.

Elaboration is the process of embellishing an idea by adding details. It helps create new meanings and better understandings of things. Elaboration encourages students to expand their ideas and organize their thinking, as well as helping students clarify and articulate their thoughts.

ACTIVITY (time required: 20–30 minutes, followed by an application of the thinking process in a content-specific lesson)

1. Write the word FLUENT on the board and ask the students what it means. Accept all answers, and use questions to guide the students to the definition above.
2. Add the word ORIGINALITY and continue to guide discussion. Pose the question, “Why is originality in ideas important?” Help students understand the connection between fluency and originality.
3. Explain to the students that they will be practicing a creative thinking process to help with brainstorming, and pose the question, “Why is it important to come up with many different ideas?” Encourage students to be very **fluent** with their responses.
4. List students’ responses on the board. Once they have listed a variety of ideas, help them identify which ideas are ORIGINAL. If a student thinks an idea is original but the idea seems ordinary, ask clarifying questions (“Will you tell me why that is an original idea to you?”) to help students articulate why the idea is original. Students’ explanations (and **elaborations**) may be surprising!
5. Have the class look over the responses they have generated and identify connections between ideas. Help students go beyond the obvious. Explain that they are using the thinking process of FLEXIBILITY, and that this leads to the production of different ideas and the consideration of alternatives.
6. Ask students to ELABORATE on how their ideas fit together. This will help them to draw conclusions on the importance of coming up with different, original ideas.
7. This lesson could be concluded in several ways. Students could write a reflective response in a Thinking Journal, or the class could transition to a content-specific application of these creative thinking processes (please see examples in the second section of this book).