

# Intentional Instructional Moves

Strategic Steps to  
Accelerate Student  
Learning

## Companion Guide

Chapter 15: Intentional Step Two



## Chapter 15

### Intentional Step Two: Introduce the Activity

Once the groups have been formed, teachers should explain the task or activity and what students must do to complete it. This introduction should include the learning intentions and success criteria as well as guidelines for successful group work. What behaviors should students be exhibiting as they work together? How should they make decisions, work through the task, and promote constructive conversations? Many students will need support as they learn to work together effectively. Teachers should provide instruction that reinforces positive group behaviors, such as active listening, delegating, and peer feedback.

Teachers can also provide a list of Group Guidelines and assign specific roles and responsibilities within the groups, such as recorder, facilitator, and checker (See Chapter 4). A well-defined group structure helps keep students on task and ensures everyone has a meaningful role to play (Graduate School, 2017). Additionally, teachers can introduce various styles of group decision making, such as consensus (students keep discussing until they all agree), best answer (students vote on the best answer), compromise (students combine answers), or criteria (students use specific criteria to come up with an answer).

#### Strategy 1: Play a Game

One way to introduce group work is by playing a cooperative game, such as Wave Stretch. For this exercise, students form a circle and one student demonstrates a stretch. The student to the right repeats that stretch, then the next student, and so on, moving one by one around the circle. When the stretch gets back to the original student, the next student calls out a new stretch. Students hold the stretch until the next one comes along (Graduate School, 2017).

This can also be done with dance moves or movement in general.

Learning how to cooperate with their peers—as opposed to competing with them—has a positive effect on student learning (.53 effect size). Introducing group work with a game lowers the stakes and allows students to get to know one another and build up their confidence in group situations. In the process, they will also develop their social awareness, self-awareness, leadership, and relationship skills.

### Strategy 2: Show Me You Know

Another excellent group warm-up strategy is Show Me You Know. After introducing a group activity, the teacher can ask students to demonstrate their understanding of the expectations (rather than simply repeating instructions). For instance, the teacher might say: “Show me you know what the noise level should be during this activity.” The students would then chat with their neighbor at the appropriate volume. Or the teacher can ask students to show that they know who their partner is by pointing to them, or that they know where to find materials for the activity.

This strategy allows teachers to check in with students and offer feedback (.70) before the activity begins. Students must demonstrate their understanding of group expectations while also modeling social awareness, self-awareness, responsible decision making, and help-seeking skills (.72). As an add-on, teachers can also use role playing to help students practice appropriate behaviors.

### Strategy 3: Active Listening Skills

For group work to be successful, students need to be able to listen to and respond to their

group mates effectively. If one student dominates the discussion, or group members have trouble listening to each other's ideas, it will be challenging for the group to complete the task. Teachers can begin by assessing students' listening skills and/or inviting them to self-reflect. The teacher can then create a chart with guidelines for active listening. This chart can offer prompts, such as:

- Use friendly body language
- Focus on who's talking
- Make eye contact
- Ask clarifying questions
- Restate someone's idea
- Ask follow-up questions

The teacher might also create a checklist for students to refer to during group work:

- Do you listen when others are talking?
- Do you allow them to finish talking before adding your ideas?
- Do you ask questions when you don't understand something?
- Do you restate other people's ideas?
- Do you encourage others to talk?
- Do you make eye contact?

The teacher can then model what these behaviors should look like by acting them out. For instance, the teacher might demonstrate how to make eye contact with a person who is speaking. Or the teacher can ask students to evaluate the teacher's behavior using the checklist. In this instance, the teacher might invite a student to come demonstrate how to work with a partner. The teacher and the student will role play working together, modeling certain desirable (or undesirable) behaviors. What happens if one partner does all the work? What happens if one

partner talks over the other? What happens when they disagree, but work together to come to a compromise? Then the teacher will pause and ask the class: based on the checklist, what did they do well as partners, and how could they improve?

This strategy helps students visualize what's expected of them and how they can succeed. By setting clear expectations for group behavior and offering scaffolding for students to learn these behaviors, teachers can foster more welcoming and productive group learning. Students will recognize that they can draw on each other's strengths to solve problems. They will also learn how to offer and accept help from others. Establishing behavior guidelines can also create space for quieter students to participate during group work (Frey et al., 2009).

Knowing how they should behave and why it matters helps promote all of the major SEL competencies as well as many of the modern workforce skills, such as resilience, flexibility, reasoning, and self-awareness. On top of that, it encourages self-efficacy (.92), which can have a significant impact on student achievement.

### Strategy 3: Entry Ticket and Think-Pair Share

At the start of class, the teacher hands out Entry Tickets or writes a warm-up question on the board. First, students work independently to answer the questions (5 minutes or less). As students record their responses, the teacher circulates the room to check for common misunderstandings and answer questions. Students then turn to a partner and share their responses. If their answers are different, the teacher should direct them to find consensus. Students can discuss which idea is correct: is there only one answer, or can multiple answers be correct? Once they've reached an agreement, the teacher can collect student responses and/or lead a whole-group discussion.

This form of pre-assessment helps activate students' prior knowledge and assesses their current levels of understanding before group work begins. The teacher can use this information to support struggling students, address knowledge gaps, and construct more homogeneous groups. Warm-ups also help students engage more deeply with the activity. Classroom discussion (.82), even in small groups, is a highly effective strategy that promotes social and self-awareness, relationship and leadership skills, analytical thinking, creativity, and initiative.