Intentional Instructional Moves

Strategic Steps to Accelerate Student Learning

Companion Guide

Chapter 4: Cognitive Engagement
Intentional Step One

Chapter 4

Intentional Step One: Encourage Students to Think More Deeply About the Content.

Let's say the teacher observes students answering lower-level rigor questions. The students are engaged and actively participating, but the teacher wants to promote higher levels of thinking and higher-level tasks. For this intention, the goal is to encourage students to progress to deeper levels of thinking, as described in Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, while also promoting higher levels of engagement (Yang, 2020). Students should be practicing mental skills that allow them to demonstrate their knowledge and depth of learning.

Strategy 1: High-Quality Work Samples

The teacher gives students several high-quality samples of student work to illustrate how they might approach the task. For instance, the teacher can provide an example of how Student A solved the problem. Then, they can share Student B's approach and Student C's idea. After, the students form groups and have an academic discussion analyzing the three choices. As they explore each one, students will ask high-level questions and decide which option they think is best and why.

This strategy helps students think through the problem and compare and contrast potential solutions. They must analyze and evaluate the different options and provide reasoning to justify their choices. Academic discussions have a high effect size of .82 and promote active learning strategies, self-management, critical thinking, and social awareness skills. This strategy also works for rigor.

Strategy 2: Instructional Conversations

The teacher intentionally designs questions that scaffold to higher or lower levels of thinking, with the ultimate goal of reaching higher levels. The teacher adjusts the level of questions as needed, depending on the context and student preparedness. Note that intentionally designing instructional questions ahead of time better prepares teachers to refer to those questions during class.

The teacher might begin by asking a higher-level question and then invite students to reflect: *What content do we need to support this question, and why? Where can I find that information? And how can I justify it?* Working through these reflections will bring students back to some lower-level questions, which the teacher can use to scaffold back up to the higher question. Ultimately, this will help students understand the relevance of what they're learning. For more tips on elevating student discourse, see Chapter 17.

Instructional Conversations are a form of active learning which has been shown to increase student learning and understanding to a greater degree than lectures alone (Reuell, 2019). When teachers ask a series of questions, students have fewer opportunities to become disengaged. This type of learning also stimulates motivation by introducing peer-to-peer conversations, which require students to rely more on each other than the teacher for answers. Students must also dig into the content to find justification for their responses. The teacher can direct them to resources and tools if they need help answering higher-level questions. For instance, if students are struggling, the teacher might say, "Okay, let's look at chapter three, paragraph two. What does it tell us?" This kind of modeling promotes students doing more of the work and thinking, thereby increasing their cognitive engagement. This strategy works for increasing rigor as well.