

# Intentional Instructional Moves

Strategic Steps to  
Accelerate Student  
Learning

## Companion Guide

Chapter 4: Cognitive Engagement  
Intentional Step Two



## Chapter 4

### **Intentional Step Two: Help Students Persevere through Higher-Order Questions and Tasks**

To help students become independent, self-driven learners, teachers should set reasonably high expectations and encourage productive struggle. Allow students adequate time and space to grapple with difficult questions. Create a safe learning environment that celebrates success and promotes a growth mindset. Rather than singling out particular assessments or tasks, praise students' effort and progress. Model positive self-talk and how to handle mistakes so students can develop resilience and perseverance.

#### Strategy 1: Stop and Reflect

This strategy is appropriate when the teacher notices that students are off-task or struggling with the content. The teacher pauses instruction, thanks the students who are on task, and asks the class to reflect on their current level of engagement and progress toward completing the task. Students will share their thoughts and the teacher then facilitates a discussion of students' assessments. Alternatively, if many students are struggling with the content, the teacher can similarly pause instruction and ask them to reflect on their learning that day. A quick mini-lesson can then follow to support student understanding. The Stop and Reflect strategy works best when incorporated for shorter periods—around one to five minutes—to allow for class reflection before proceeding with the lesson or task.

Stop and Reflect helps students regroup and refocus when they are off-task. It allows teachers to identify where students are struggling and apply interventions to ensure everyone is on the same page. In addition, students practice self-assessment and critical thinking as they

reflect on their behaviors and levels of engagement. This technique can help deepen students' understanding of the content and reinforce transfer strategies (.86).

### Strategy 2: Feedback

The teacher offers written or oral feedback on student work. For feedback to be successful, it should be timely, focused, and constructive. Remember to deliver feedback with compassion and respect, so students feel safe and supported in the learning environment. Teachers shouldn't shy away from discussing errors and mistakes, as this can tie into the culture of growth. They should also offer justification and support when indicating whether an answer is right or wrong. Feedback needs to be consistently linked to classroom standards and strategies for improvement.

The website Visible Learning (2013), which is based on Hattie's work, has further guidelines for tailoring student feedback:

1. Keep feedback focused on the task, not the student.
2. Provide detailed feedback that uses content-specific language.
3. Present detailed feedback in manageable chunks; calibrate feedback to a student's age.
4. Be specific and clear in your feedback.
5. Take care to ensure that feedback is unbiased and objective.
6. Keep feedback as simple as possible but not overly simplified.
7. Use feedback to help students cultivate a growth mindset.
8. Ensure that the student clearly grasps the learning intentions and how the student's performance can help meet those goals.
9. Give feedback after students have attempted a solution or the completion of a task.

Strategic comments can help students deepen their learning. Even some of the earliest educational research affirms that "feedback facilitates learning" (Thorndike, 1931, as cited in Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, para. 189). Furthermore, discussing errors helps students become more resilient, persevere through challenging tasks, and develop a growth mindset. When delivered properly, feedback has an effect size of .70. For a more detailed discussion of student feedback, see Chapter 9.