

Intentional Instructional Moves

Strategic Steps to
Accelerate Student
Learning

Companion Guide

Chapter 4: Emotional Engagement
Intentional Step Three



Chapter 4

Intentional Step Three: Build Authentic Connections to the Content

For this intention, we're distinguishing between building connections with students and helping students build connections with the content. Relating to the content includes recognizing its relevance and how students will utilize it in their lives. Do they have a genuine interest in the topic? How might it benefit them in their future careers? The strategies below will help boost students' connections to the content and get them thinking about how to engage with it.

Strategy 1: Journaling

While it's probably a familiar technique, the journal is an opportunity for teachers to build in questions or small tasks that allow students to connect to the content. To begin, the teacher asks students to write in their journals about the content being covered that day. For instance, they might ask: *What is the most interesting thing you've learned this week and why does it interest you? What is something new you'd like to learn or try and how will you pursue it? What is one thing that helps you when you're worried or stressed?* The teacher ensures that students have adequate time to respond, then respectfully offers feedback. It's crucial to ensure that students receive feedback on their responses so they recognize that someone will actually read and respond to their thoughts.

This strategy aims to help students write about the connections they can see with the content. The written portion of the activity also helps with literacy skills, creativity, self-expression, and critical thinking. Additionally, offering timely, constructive, and strategic feedback has an effect size of .70.

Strategy 2: Choice Board

The Choice Board is a strategy that offers students choices for completing a task. To clarify, this doesn't mean that students have complete freedom to do anything they want; instead, the teacher controls the range of options. They might display a Choice Board in the classroom to offer students choices when they get stuck. For instance, students can write about the task, create a piece of artwork, or work on a hands-on project that demonstrates the content. For additional ideas for creating Choice Boards, see Chapters 12 and 13.

The Choice Board is a way to motivate students through their own learning styles. As Daniel Pink discusses, motivation is driven by autonomy and the natural desire to direct our lives (2009). Relatedly, this strategy helps promote self-efficacy (.92), originality, and student agency.