

# Intentional Instructional Moves

Strategic Steps to  
Accelerate Student  
Learning

## Companion Guide

Chapter 4: Behavioral Engagement  
Intentional Step Three



## Chapter 4

### **Intentional Step Three: Ensure All Students Remain Actively Engaged**

There's plenty of evidence that actively engaged students achieve better educational outcomes across all grade levels. However, a recent study at Harvard indicates that students aren't always aware of this connection. The study found that students believed they learned best from lectures, but in fact, they performed better on assessments after engaging in more active learning tasks. The authors of this study argue that "Actual learning and feeling of learning were strongly anticorrelated" (Reuell, 2019, para. 12). The results tell us two things: one, that it's important to share effective learning strategies with students so they're more cognizant of the process; and two, knowing the power of active engagement and its effects on student outcomes, teachers can make incremental changes in the classroom to encourage this behavior.

Remember that there's a difference between low to moderate levels of engagement and total student engagement. Teachers should aim for a hundred percent engagement, rather than twenty or fifty percent. When all students are invested in the material and/or task, the incidence of behavioral challenges notably decreases and student learning and retention significantly increases.

#### Strategy 1: Active Student Participation

Teachers can try various participation strategies that utilize movement, such as Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down; whiteboards; Turn and Talk; Quick Writes; or Fist-to-Five. These quick checks let the teacher efficiently scan the room and assess students' level of participation. They can be performed multiple times throughout a lesson or task, and teachers can try different

strategies depending on the class's needs. The goal is to ensure all students have the opportunity to participate and the teacher can see every student's response.

For instance, when presenting new content, a teacher might ask students to give a thumbs up if they agree with a statement connected to the content. The teacher can then observe students' responses, support those who didn't give a thumbs up, and ask those that did agree to support their answer with evidence. Or, if students are doing a read-aloud, the teacher might scan the room as they read, looking for signs students are following along, like using their fingers to track lines or turning the page at the right time.

Creating opportunities for students to actively participate helps teachers identify levels of engagement and apply appropriate feedback and interventions in a timely manner. These techniques ensure that all students can participate and have opportunities to share their reactions to the content. Furthermore, quick checks help keep students focused on the task at hand and promote self-regulation (.52), self-efficacy (.92), and active learning.

### Strategy 2: Thinking Cards

The teacher gives students different colored cards to keep on their desks. Each color corresponds to a question or concept the teacher has mapped out for them. For example, if a teacher is conducting a read-aloud, the teacher might tell students to hold up a blue card when they hear a fact or hold up a yellow card when they encounter an unfamiliar vocabulary word. This activity works best when the number of cards is limited, so students aren't constantly shuffling through them. Instead, teachers should provide a handful of response options students can use to show their thinking as they review content.

Thinking Cards can be used during lectures, read-alouds, or any other oral activity where teachers would like to evaluate students' thinking. If the teacher finds that students look around at each other to determine which card to hold up, they can ask students to hold the card in front of their chest so they can't see each other's responses. Alternatively, the teacher might say, "On the count of three, everyone hold up your card."

This strategy invites all students to actively participate in tasks and creates a safe environment for them to communicate their levels of engagement. It also gives teachers a sense of which students are on-task and following along and which ones might need additional support. Thinking cards can help foster self-awareness, initiative, and help-seeking behaviors (.72).

#### **Chapter 4 Handouts**

1. My Goals
2. Trade a Thought
3. Group Roles and Responsibilities
4. Group Guidelines