

Intentional Instructional Moves

Strategic Steps to
Accelerate Student
Learning

Companion Guide

Chapter 17: Intentional Step Three



Chapter 17

Intentional Step Three: Invite Students to Share Ideas with Their Peers

As students progress in their abilities to engage in productive discussions, teachers should encourage them to respond to their peers more often. The teacher can gradually step back as facilitator and allow students to direct the conversation. Giving students more autonomy during discourse activities helps increase their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. It also teaches them how to become self-motivated and take ownership of their learning (Jabari, 2014).

Incorporating more student-to-student conversations in the classroom doesn't have to be complicated. Informal partner and small group discussions can be slotted into most lessons plans and activities, and might only take 5-10 minutes. These peer-to-peer discussions allow students to explore content, develop their language skills, engage in critical thinking and analysis, and explore diverse ideas and perspectives (Grifenhagen & Barnes, 2022). Students can also direct the conversation in larger groups or whole-class discussions. In these scenarios, especially if students are accustomed to relying on the teacher as a facilitator, they will likely need guidance and prompting as they learn how to talk to each other more autonomously.

Strategy 1: Reasoning and Adding On

In small groups or whole class discussions, the teacher can prompt students to analyze a peer's idea, apply their own reasoning, and add on to the idea. For example, the teacher might say:

- Thumbs up if you agree with this idea/strategy. Thumbs sideways if you respectfully disagree or have a different idea/strategy.
- Can you say more about this idea?

- Can you explain why this is a good idea/strategy?
- What does your group think about this idea?

This strategy helps students think beyond their own ideas and build connections between their reasoning and their peers (Blanke, 2023). It also prompts students to respond directly to a peer rather than waiting for the teacher to call on them or move on to the next question.

Intentional peer-to-peer conversations promote critical thinking, ideation, collaboration, and open-mindedness. Students will practice summarizing the thoughts of their peers (.79) and learn how to build on those ideas.

Strategy 2: Four Corners

The teacher writes a statement or problem on the board that requires students to take a position: strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Students must choose a position and be able to explain why they have done so. The teacher then hangs placards in the four corners of the room representing each position. Students move to the placard that represents their stance and share their ideas with the group. Together, the group must decide on the best reasoning and evidence to defend their position. Each corner will then share their ideas with the class and try to convince others to join their corner. If students' opinions change, they may move to a different corner. At the end of the activity, students will review and evaluate the discussion.

This technique elicits student opinions and encourages them to share those opinions with others. It also helps them formulate academic arguments by taking a stance on a controversial topic and defending it with evidence. Students must listen to a diverse range of perspectives and be open minded about changing their opinion if they hear a better argument. In this kind of

discussion, students will practice self-regulation techniques (.52) and learn how to navigate challenging conversations respectfully.