

Intentional Instructional Moves

Strategic Steps to
Accelerate Student
Learning

Companion Guide

Chapter 3: Intentional Step Five



Chapter 3

Intentional Step Five: Include Meaningful Tasks

Occasionally, new teachers enter the classroom believing that every student is going to be excited about their content. When they encounter students who are less enthusiastic, sometimes these teachers keep plowing through the content because they aren't sure what else to do. But this approach doesn't engage all learners. To help students connect to the content and remain focused on the task, teachers need to try different approaches and provide additional support.

To engage all learners, teachers should design tasks that are challenging but achievable and relevant to students' lives. Active learning tasks that have real-world applications can help keep students engaged, which in turn can curb many behavior issues.

Teachers can make tasks more engaging by conveying passion for the topic and getting students excited to learn. They can also arouse curiosity by presenting engaging questions, previewing the content, and using technology to enhance the lesson. Challenge students to complete tasks that are achievable but push them to engage in productive struggle. Connect lessons and tasks to students' interests, backgrounds, and real-world scenarios. Teachers can also offer students choices in how they complete the task, differentiate the task, and be available to support them as needed (Center for Excellence, n.d.). For more tips on creating engaging, rigorous, and relevant tasks, see Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Reflection Questions:

- Is the task rigorous, relevant, and engaging?
- Does the task require students to learn and/or practice a new skill?
- How will they apply their learning and/or new skills?

- How will you respond if students get distracted or off-task?
- How will you respond if students struggle?
- How will you encourage productive struggle?

Strategy 1: Preview Content

Begin class by previewing what students will learn or do that day: *Later today, we're going to...Have you ever wondered why...? Later, we'll explore...* Teachers can also use pictures, videos, objects, or other interactive tools to preview content.

This strategy gets students interested in the topic and builds anticipation for what's to come, which can deter challenging behavior (Finley, 2017). Students might not always be interested in or excited about the content, but the teacher can still build anticipation and help students develop self-efficacy (.92), resilience, and flexibility.

Strategy 2: Active Learning Strategies

Use active learning strategies during lessons and activities:

- ❖ Offer hands-on activities that incorporate relevant tools. Ex. Ask students to draw a plan for recycling water in a garden. Students will then explain their plans (what they drew and why) to a peer. Group members can discuss their ideas and give feedback.
- ❖ Break up the lecture with interactive components, like small group work or class discussions, and include accountability. Ex. After the teacher presents a lesson, students break into small groups to answer questions about the lesson. When

they're finished, students can answer polling questions, turn in their graphic organizer, or respond to a short writing prompt.

- ❖ Presenting real-world problems and scenarios that require students to think deeply about topics. Ex. After introducing the issue of food insecurity in their community, the teacher invites students to work in small groups to come up with potential solutions.
- ❖ Invite students to use technology to create, design, or evaluate something. Ex. students can create and share video journals describing what they've learned.

Hands-on, interactive learning tasks capture students' interest and directly involve them in the learning process. Students who are actively engaged are less likely to disrupt class or exhibit undesirable behaviors. Many of these strategies also enable students to practice higher-order skills such as reasoning, problem-solving, and creativity. For more ideas on designing active learning tasks, see Chapter 4.

Strategy 3: Offer Extension Work

Create a folder, bin, bulletin board, or digital resource with various extension activities students can complete. If students finish their work early, they can go to the bulletin board and complete one of the extension tasks. These tasks might include: reading a book, designing a project, teaching other students, or completing an independent study. Teachers can also design a Choice Board that offers students different options for extending their work. Remember to select options that are engaging, rigorous, and relevant to students' lives (see Chapters 4-6).

Most classrooms will have a diversity of levels and abilities, so it's important to plan ahead for students who are ready to extend their learning. This teaches students where to go if

they finish early and limits disruptions while other students are still working (Sager, 2023). It also gives early finishers opportunities to challenge themselves and grow as learners, cultivating self-efficacy.