

Intentional Instructional Moves

Strategic Steps to
Accelerate Student
Learning

Companion Guide

Chapter 3: Intentional Step One



Chapter 3

Intentional Step One: Build Meaningful Relationships with Students

Building positive relationships between teachers and students, and student-to-student can have a major impact on behavior. Marzano considers this to be the foundation of effective classroom management. Based on his meta-analyses, teachers who take the time to develop meaningful relationships with their students have 31 percent fewer disruptions and behavior challenges in the classroom (Marzano & Marzano, 2003).

Start building rapport with students at the beginning of the year and maintain this practice throughout. Interact with students regularly, show interest in their lives, listen to them, and get to know them. Create a classroom culture and environment where students feel welcome, respected, and supported. Establish a level of trust so that when conflicts do arise, teachers and students can successfully handle them and move on.

Note that high-quality relationships don't require teachers to be the most outgoing or "likable." Rather, these relationships are based on mutual trust, respect, and civility.

Teacher Reflection Questions:

- How will I introduce myself?
- How will I get to know my students?
- How will I check in with my students regularly?
- How will I create space for small talk?
- How will I practice active and empathic listening?
- How will I be open and vulnerable with students?

Strategy 1: Start Early

Teachers can begin cultivating meaningful relationships with students from the first day of class. Greet each student as they enter the classroom, using verbal greetings (“Good morning, Ben!” “How was your weekend, Nadia?”) or gestures (wave, thumbs up, air high five, smiling, eye contact). Learn students’ names right away using mnemonic devices or other memorization techniques. Teachers can invite students to participate in ice breakers, such as sharing Two Truths and a Lie about themselves, inviting them to arrange themselves in a line according to their birth dates. Teachers can also hand out a Student Interest Survey, which asks questions about students’ personal lives and interests.

When teachers regularly greet their students and take time to learn their names, students feel seen and valued. Welcoming them into the classroom community helps them develop a sense of belonging, which can deter potential behavior problems. Additionally, getting to know students on a personal level helps establish meaningful teacher-student relationships (.52 effect size) and lets students know that teachers care about them and their lives. Again, this level of understanding can help build more resilient, flexible, and productive students who can practice self-regulation techniques (.52 effect size) and reduce potential disruptions.

Strategy 2: Revisit Often

Once teachers get to know their students, they should continue building these relationships throughout the year. Chat with students for a few minutes before or after class. These can be casual conversations about current events, sports, interests, or extracurriculars. Teachers can also respond to and praise student comments during lessons and activities. When students share thoughts or respond to questions, teachers can listen actively and offer meaningful

responses. They can offer regular check-ins, both formally or informally, where they ask students how they're doing. For more tips on developing relationships and fostering a successful classroom community, see Chapter 18.

Another more systematic tactic for ongoing relationship building is **Five by Five**. For this strategy, the teacher thinks deeply about five students for five minutes each day. During this reflection time, the teacher considers the students' recent behavior and what this might suggest about their values, struggles, and accomplishments. The teacher then initiates conversations with the focus students throughout the day using these reflections as a starting place (Nguyen, 2021). For instance, the teacher might ask Student A, who plays baseball, how the game went or to describe a new skill the student is practicing.

Classrooms are made up of teachers and students with diverse interests and experiences, whose lives are constantly in flux. Making the effort to get to know our students and maintaining those relationships (.52) through regular check-ins lets students know teachers care for and value them. These meaningful connections help foster a more cohesive classroom (.44) where students are more inclined to be kind and considerate.