

Setting up and managing small group work

Teachers use small group work when the learning goals profit from interaction and collaboration among students. To do this, they choose tasks that require and foster collaborative work, provide clear directions that enable groups to work independently, and hold students accountable for collective and individual learning. Teachers use their own time strategically, deliberately choosing which groups to work with, when, and on what. Teachers work to ensure students are positioned as competent among their peers, that patterns of interaction are respectful, and that the collective work of the group uses the strengths of and benefits each student.

Advancing justice through setting up and managing small group work

During small group work, students' relationships, identities, and perceptions of one another affect their learning opportunities. In particular, biases related to race, gender, and other social identities, as well as stereotypes about subject matter competence, are all part of small group dynamics. Teachers must work carefully to ensure that group tasks and structures allow students to see one another as capable contributors to their learning. Teachers must actively support the interruption of problematic discourse patterns and interactions.

Draft decomposition of setting up and managing small group work

Planning for small group work	Teaching and/or reinforcing small group roles and routines	Monitoring and adjusting small group work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirming that small group work is appropriate for your learning goal(s) • Designing a task appropriate for small group work (e.g., specifying students' tasks, specifying outcomes and products, etc.) • Selecting effective group structures for work on the task (e.g., group roles, etc.) • Determining how groups will be formed • Considering patterns of interaction that privilege some students or groups over others, and designing strategies to intervene on these patterns 	<p>This always includes...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing clear directions • Naming task and outcomes for group work • Explaining how time will be used • Naming the structure (roles and routines) to be used for the work <p>This may include...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and justifying roles and routines specific to small group work • Modeling and explaining roles and routines • Providing feedback on students' use of the roles and routines • Providing students options for what to do if they finish early • Coaching students on what to do if they need help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring student talk, participation, and interactions, and involving students in learning to do this themselves • Attending to progress toward learning goal within and across groups • Checking in with groups or individuals • Eliciting and interpreting the thinking of individuals or small groups • Recognizing individual students' competence and positioning them relative to their peers in order to interrupt status hierarchies