

## Setting Up and Managing Small Group Work

### Overview of setting up and managing small group work

Teachers use small group work when the learning goals benefit 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 the ways they position 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 support respectful collective work. Teachers must actively support the interruption of harmful discourse patterns and interactions.



## Decomposition of setting up and managing small group work

*Table 1: Areas of Work and Techniques for Setting Up and Managing Small Group Work*

| Areas of work for setting up and managing small group work | Techniques for setting up and managing small group work                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
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| Planning for small group work                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm that small group work is appropriate for your learning goal(s).</li> <li>• Design a task appropriate for small group work (e.g., specifying students' tasks, specifying outcomes and products, etc.).</li> <li>• Select effective group structures for work on the task (e.g., group roles, etc.).</li> <li>• Determine how groups will be formed.</li> <li>• Consider patterns of interaction that privilege some students or groups over others, and design strategies to intervene on these patterns.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                 |
| Teaching and/or reinforcing small group roles and routines | <p>Always:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clear directions.</li> <li>• Name task and outcomes for group work.</li> <li>• Explain how time will be used.</li> <li>• Name the structure (roles and routines) to be used for the work.</li> </ul> <p>When appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and justify roles and routines specific to small group work.</li> <li>• Model and explain roles and routines.</li> <li>• Provide feedback on students' use of the roles and routines.</li> <li>• Provide students options for what to do if they finish early.</li> <li>• Coach students on what to do if they need help.</li> </ul> |



| Areas of work for setting up and managing small group work | Techniques for setting up and managing small group work                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Monitoring and adjusting small group work                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor student talk, participation, and interactions, and involve students in learning to do this themselves.</li> <li>• Attend to progress toward learning goal within and across groups.</li> <li>• Check in with groups or individuals.</li> <li>• Elicit and interpret the thinking of individuals or small groups.</li> <li>• Recognize individual students' competence and position them relative to their peers in order to interrupt status hierarchies.</li> </ul> |

