



SYSTEMS THAT SUPPORT SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION

In order for small group instruction to be an effective learning environment, teachers should make sure to consider the systems and policies necessary to keep the students *not* in small group learning on task, engaged and also learning at their own pace. This includes students at computer learning stations, students working at a center independently or collaboratively, and any other learning environment or station in the classroom. This ensures the teacher’s focus remains on his or her small group, and providing the more intimate instruction intended. Below are some common problems teachers face to smooth small group work, the underlying reasons why and suggested systems and policies to fix those problems.

Obstacle/Problem: Students are not engaged with and completing independent center work			
<i>Possible Reasons Why</i>	(1) <i>The work is too easy or too hard</i>	(2) <i>Students don't know what to do or how to do it</i>	(3) <i>Teacher has not set clear enough expectations</i>
<i>Systems to Fix It:</i>	<p>Make sure the activity is challenging enough to keep students interested, but easy enough for students to achieve success (with effort) in the time allotted.</p> <p>Scaffold parts of the activity for different groups of students (Provide more or less direction, example problems).</p> <p>Check student data from content providers and other assessments to gauge student readiness for the topic or skill in the activity.</p> <p>Have students work in pairs to increase engagement.</p>	<p>Model the steps to complete the activity during the whole group instruction.</p> <p>Post directions, key points, steps near the independent stations.</p> <p>Ask a student to repeat or announce key directions before rotating.</p> <p>Make sure any resources needed when students struggle are available (calculators, dictionary, reference books).</p> <p>Remind students of skills from previous lessons, or “where they left off yesterday.”</p>	<p>Let students know if the work will be graded, when and to what extent.</p> <p>State MVP behavior expectations at least twice before students rotate to independent stations.</p> <p>Praise and reward students who are modeling expectations.</p>



Obstacle: Students interrupt small group time with questions and requests.			
<i>Possible Reasons Why</i>	(1) Students are asking for help on the assignment, or announcing that they are done.	(2) Students are asking to go to the bathroom or get water.	(3) Students are complaining or tattling on the behavior of other students
<i>Systems To Fix It:</i>	<p>Create and practice a policy for students who need help such as: Parking Lot, “Ask 3 Before Me”, or circling problems and questions they don’t understand to bring to the small group or another time.</p> <p>If most students have questions, reflect on your directions and if the assignment is too challenging.</p> <p>Set a permanent “When I am Done” policy such as: getting a book from the library, extension/enrichment worksheet pile, a classroom job, a designated place to turn in work. This is a good opportunity to give student’s choice in their flex time.</p>	<p>Make sure there is a specific, non-intrusive bathroom policy for during blended learning time. This could be a hand signal or other visual signal from their seat (flipping the color of a note card, cup, popsicle stick, etc).</p> <p>Remind students to utilize the bathroom during blocks of time before blended learning so their time is not interrupted.</p> <p>For older students, create an independent sign-out system near the door, but within your view.</p>	<p>Set a policy for how students can respond if someone is bothering them - a quiet corner for reflection, using headphones, moving seats, or writing a note.</p> <p>Create a Open/Closed sign to display near the small group table to indicate to students when you are available to talk with them,</p>
Obstacle: The classroom is chaotic, loud or students demonstrate poor behavior during computer or independent learning.			
<i>Possible Reasons Why</i>	(1) Students in a small group do not get along with each other, or get along TOO well.	(2) Technical issues on a computer frustrate students.	(3) Students are not experiencing positive praise or consequences.
<i>Systems to Fix It:</i>	Take into consideration every student’s socio-emotional needs when making groups.	Post common tech issues and the steps to troubleshoot at every computer station.	Build a culture in which blended learning time is “sacred” because students know it is the time when their personal needs are most met.



	<p>Use student conferences, morning meetings and other informal instructional times to build relationships with and between students.</p> <p>Create physical space in the classroom for students on computers or at an independent station to “earn” the right to use (bean bag chairs, carpet, couches).</p>	<p>Create a policy for students who cannot solve a tech issue, such as signaling to go to a tech coordinator office, filling out a “tech slip” for you.</p> <p>Make sure students know where to get extra work or a backup computer if one is failing.</p>	<p>Utilize the same narration and praise and consequences as you do during whole group instruction.</p> <p>Have ClassDojo, LiveSchool or other systems visible to all students and quickly award or deduct points.</p> <p>Track “praise points” in a similar fashion to student growth.</p>
Obstacle/Problem: Small groups get off track and off task during unplanned interruptions (phone rings, classroom visitor, etc)			
<i>Possible Reasons Why</i>	(1) <i>Students see small interruptions as opportunities to engage in ways that are not allowed otherwise.</i>	(2) <i>The teacher addresses all interruptions.</i>	
How do I fix it?	<p>Consider adjusting the expected voice level for students working independently so they can converse quietly.</p> <p>Praise and reinforce students who stay on task during interruptions more than usual.</p> <p>Build brain breaks into each rotation for students to express themselves.</p>	<p>Train students to answer phone calls, greet visitors, communicate with the office. Make this role a rotating incentive.</p> <p>If a teacher must handle an interruption, shift responsibility for small group tasks to a trusted student.</p> <p>Practice expected behaviors during initial procedure practice ie “What happens if” protocols.</p>	



Obstacle: Student independent or online work does not demonstrate mastery, or indicates a lack of effort			
Possible Reasons Why	<i>(1) Students do not know what success looks like on the assignment or content provider.</i>	<i>(2) Students do not feel capable or are discouraged by challenging work.</i>	
How do I fix it?	<p>Provide students with a rubric with the criteria for success and mastery beforehand.</p> <p>Make sure students know whether their work - online or independent work - is being graded or simply checked for completion.</p> <p>Present an exemplary model for students to refer to.</p> <p>Reassess the rigor of the assignment.</p>	<p>Build in time during student conferences to discuss growth mindset and ask students to reflect on their own effort.</p> <p>Leave space for students to mark or write what they don't understand and address in whole groups.</p> <p>Award students points - either on the assignment, for participation, or on ClassDojo or LiveSchool for attempts, even if they are incorrect.</p>	