



INTERACTIVE LEARNING STRUCTURES - WHO THEY SUPPORT, HOW AND WHY





Interactive Learning Promotes Cooperation

Interactive learning structures (ILS) are easy-to-use, hands-on activities where students collaboratively engage with their learning. These structures provide students opportunities to positively interact with each other and deepen their exploration of their SEL skills. As students actively engage throughout the lesson sessions, they strengthen crucial social and emotional skills while building a strong classroom community. ILSs help to make the most of lesson time, as they result in improved motivation and better learning outcomes.



Interactive learning structures allow students to stretch their thinking, exchange ideas freely, practice problem solving, and leverage their logic and imagination to explore open-ended questions (Middle School Motivators, 2016; Scholastic, n.d.). The active and interactive nature of these activities fosters cooperation and teaches students how to work successfully with others, crucial skills for life in and out of the classroom. Some examples of interactive learning structures are:

- **Gallery Walk.** Students display completed small group work on the walls of the classroom and walk around to look at the items. The teacher provides a focus for the walk, such as determining what they find surprising about each group's work. Students take notes as they walk, and then discuss in small groups or as a class
- **Snowball.** Students form a circle. The teacher presents a topic or question and then gives each student a piece of blank paper. Students write their response on the paper, crumple it up, and toss it into the middle of the circle, making a "snowball." Each student chooses a snowball and reads the response aloud to the class (Middle School Motivators, 2016).





To implement interactive learning structures in the classroom, start by planning ahead. Consider your learning goal for your students and how an ILS can help them to achieve that goal. Once you have an ILS in mind, prepare students to participate meaningfully in the activity. Be sure that they have the social and academic skills necessary to succeed and clearly communicate what they will be doing and why. What is the ILS called, what does it entail, and what will students gain from participating in the activity?



When organizing students into pairs or groups, do so with purpose and intention. Keeping the learning goal in mind, reflect on students' abilities and interests and group them in a way that is conducive to achieving the learning goal. Would it best to group students together who have similar interests and abilities, or different? Depending upon the age and stage of students, they can also take responsibility to group themselves in a respectful and inclusive manner (Middle School Motivators, 2016).

Finally, when students are in their groups, ensure that everyone has a clear role. Take into consideration what roles the activity requires. Does the group need a facilitator? A presenter? A recorder? If an activity is leaderless, be sure that students understand it will be a very collaborative activity that requires each student to be actively engaged.

Interactive learning structures are a valuable tool for fostering collaboration and critical thinking. As students purposefully exchange ideas and opinions and contribute positively to group work, they will be actively engaged in constructing their learning and building a positive, dynamic classroom community.



References

Middle school motivators: 22 interactive learning structures. (2016). Center for Responsive Schools.

Scholastic Parents. (n.d.). Understanding interactive learning. <https://www.scholastic.com/parents/family-life/social-emotional-learning/technology-and-kids/understanding-interactive-learning.html>