

**Getting Started**

Our research allowed us to tap into teachers’ experience as they experimented with this new way of teaching. Here are some of insights and suggestions about how to get started, based on our observations and their comments:

* Don't try to do it all at once. Start small. Find some good meaning-making activities, and then practice one or two of the Teacher Moves to build your confidence.
* Find a partner to work with. Sharing the initial load of finding or developing meaning-making activities for your subject area can be a big help, as can having someone to check in with as you attempt new strategies.
* “I had my students working on something I thought was pretty simple, but it turned out they needed 20 minutes to figure it out together. It just about killed me to give that much time to something ‘so simple’, but in the end, it was the right thing. They needed time to think it through. I was wrong--it wasn’t really simple--and now they understand it.” – seventh-grade teacher
* If you’ve got a curriculum pacing guide to follow, try to build in some flexibility. We can’t really know how long it will take students to work through something challenging, but we do know that quickly teaching definitions or formulas doesn’t lead to understanding, so build in time for genuine meaning-making opportunities.
* Don’t be afraid to let your students struggle a bit. Productive struggle is actually good for them. It can be hard to watch, and you don’t want them to go beyond the frustration point, but it helps them in the long run to learn how to figure things out.  Reassure your students that making their brains work hard makes them better thinkers!
* It’s important that you understand the ideas deeply yourself. Opening the door to wide-ranging student ideas, giving those ideas respectful consideration, and then helping students weave all those threads into a new understanding is challenging. Be sure you understand the lesson well, so you can see multiple connections and ways to deepen students’ understanding.
* “Letting go of control is hard--I’m a control freak! Letting go of my idea of the right way or the right answer was hard, but I stuck with it, because I saw how it was helping students.”-seventh-grade teacher
* “Ask yourself, occasionally, ‘What was the most interesting student idea I heard today?’ It can be so easy to get caught up in the ideas in the textbook or the curriculum guide that we forget that it’s their ideas that are the foundation of whatever gets built. So, when I ask myself this question, it reminds me to pay more attention to their ideas and less to my own.” – fourth-grade teacher