Setting Up Successful Guided Practice (Practicing Instructional Phase)

In addition to the strategies of open-ended questioning, inquiry methods, responding with respect, and working in cooperative groups, here are some additional strategies that are essential for effective skills practice:

Adequate time The lessons must allow adequate time for quality practice sessions. Depending on the actual situation in the classroom, the facilitator may need to adjust the activity to fit into a time frame that supports quality practice. This means enough time to set up guided practice and have students practice the skill, debrief the practice session, and reflect on what worked, what could be improved, and what they would take into consideration next time.

Purpose of guided practice The facilitator makes clear that the purpose of guided practice is to work toward mastering a skill, not talking, misusing the group opportunity, or modeling negative behavior.

Practice not perfection A climate of safety is accompanied by encouragement to take risks, practice new behaviors, and learn something new.

Reinforcing Shared Agreements and Cooperative Groupwork Norms At this stage in the lesson, the facilitator reinforces the Shared Agreements so that students encourage each other and do not laugh or put each other down. The Cooperative Groupwork Norms ensure that all students have a role in the group activity and contribute fully to the activity and final product.

Monitoring guided practice In most cases, the curriculum will provide appropriate situations with which students practice their new skills. In cases when the facilitator asks students to contribute ideas, the facilitator looks them over to make sure they are appropriate.

When necessary, negative behavior demonstrated only by the facilitator Sometimes a role play or skit requires a negative behavior for the students to respond to positively. In that case, the facilitator always plays the negative role. Students practice and demonstrate only the positive skills so they are not reinforcing negative behaviors or being put on the spot to behave inappropriately in front of classmates.

Student feedback first, then facilitator feedback Because the program is a skill-building program, students need immediate feedback on their skill practice. To keep with the student-centered philosophy, students critique their own practice session first. Then the facilitator points out general examples of effective skills practice and areas for improvement. This method creates safety by giving feedback to the group as whole and not singling students out who may be struggling to learn new skills.