



THREE SIGNATURE SEL PRACTICES for the **CLASSROOM***

Creating the Conditions for Student Learning

“With compassion, we can help remove students’ triggers by providing smoother transitions and safe, predictable classrooms.”

-*The Heart of Teaching and Learning: Compassion, Resilience and Academic Success*
<http://www.k12.wa.us/compassionateschools/pubdocs/TheHeartofLearningandTeaching>

Dr. Richard Davidson, a neuroscientist at the University of Wisconsin, speaks about “every behavioral intervention being a biological intervention.” A student’s repeated experiences in school can be a powerful influence for the rewiring of the neural pathways necessary for habits to be built and sustained. Having routines and rituals in our classrooms and school communities is beneficial for every child, and absolutely essential for some.

Three main categories of carefully chosen, effectively facilitated and thoughtfully debriefed teaching practices work together to build a solid foundation of safety, consistency and joy in classrooms across the school day:

WELCOMING ROUTINES & RITUALS • Activities for Inclusion

ENGAGING PEDAGOGY • Sense Making, Transitions, Brain Breaks

OPTIMISTIC CLOSURE • Reflections and Looking Forward

When used consistently, these signature SEL practices create conditions for growth and learning across all five SEL competencies, as a foundation for culturally responsive teaching strategies, to help develop collaborative classrooms.

By providing repetitive and engaging learning opportunities, they help students improve the skills and habits of:

- *Self-awareness and social awareness through noticing and naming feelings, and seeing how they are connected to what is happening within and around us.*
- *Self-management and relationship building, by interacting with people and with content in ways that intentionally strengthen our skillset of being aware of and in control of our thoughts, emotions, actions and interactions.*
- *Focusing and persevering by balancing novelty with routines and rituals; we are internally soothed by sameness, while paradoxically, our brains need freshness too!*



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WELCOMING RITUAL (2-10 minutes)

Activities for Inclusion

Ritual openings establish safety and predictability, support contribution by all voices, set norms for respectful listening, allow students to connect with one another and create a sense of belonging. To be successful these activities must be: carefully chosen, **connected to the learning of the day**, and engagingly facilitated.

EXAMPLES FROM THE CLASSROOM:

- “Do Now” / Homework Helpers
- Class circles
- Name games / Greet warmly by name
- Morning Meeting
- Writing Prompts / Partner Discussions

SCHOOL-WIDE:

- Adults express joy in seeing students.
- Stack of breakfast items on office counter = glad to see late arrivals.
- Morning announcements include student voice.

ENGAGING PEDAGOGY (1-15 minutes)

Sense-Making & “Brain Breaks”

Engaging practices are brain-compatible strategies that can foster: relationships, cultural humility and responsiveness, empowerment, and collaboration. They intentionally build student SEL skills. These practices include opportunities for brain breaks that provide time for integrating new information into long-term memory, otherwise it is soon forgotten. Balance opportunities for quiet reflection and writing with more active movement activities.

EXAMPLES FROM THE CLASSROOM

- **Directly teach** SEL skills through evidence-based programs.
- **Turn-To-Your-Partner:** Sharing and listening to make sense of new input.
- **Co-create** working agreements with your students.
- **Brain Break - Stand and Stretch:** Refresh and reset the brain; include movement and making connections.
- **Opportunities for Interaction:** Cultivate practices that involve interactions in partnerships, triads, small groups and as a whole group.

OPTIMISTIC CLOSURE (3-5 minutes)

Reflections and Looking Forward

End the day by having students reflect on, and then name something that helps them leave on an optimistic note. This provides positive closure, reinforces learning, can connect school to home, and create a moment of looking forward to returning tomorrow.

EXAMPLES FROM THE CLASSROOM:

Reflect and Share...

- Something I learned today.
- Someone I was able to help.
- Something I want to share with my grown-up.
- Something I'm looking forward to doing tomorrow.
- Something I enjoyed about the day.
- Someone who was kind/helpful to me.

Adapted from the work of Ann McKay Bryson, CASEL Consultant