Essential Practice: Facilitate An Opening Ritual

Why is this practice essential for instruction that meets the needs of student who have been marginalized?

People learn best in environments that feel physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy and safe. Ritual openings establish safety and predictability, support contribution by all voices, set norms for respectful listening, and allow people to connect with one another creating a sense of belonging.

“We usually talk about routines as a method of classroom management. In a culturally responsive classroom, routines are a way to make a space for the important affirmiting/communal activities that create social bonds among students.” According to Zaretta Hammond, overtime, routines become invisible and part of the classroom culture that help create a positive energy and the classroom’s ethos. When routines and procedures are carefully taught, modeled, and established in the classroom, students know what’s expected of them and how to do certain things on their own. Having predictable routines in place allow teachers to spend more time in meaningful instruction and aids in social cooperation in the classroom. Class rituals build a strong sense of community, and set students up for success socially and academically.

Safe, healthy, and sustaining learning environments support students in acquiring and applying inter-personal, intra-personal, and decision making skills. This practices create conditions for growth and learning across all four SEL competencies while using culturally responsive teaching strategies. They also build upon and are aligned with the principles of Restorative Justice (RJ), Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and trauma informed practices.

What could this practice look and sound like?

- **Community Building:** Using an open-ended question (e.g., from the Circle a Day cards), build community in a quick and lively way. Each participant shares their response with a partner. After sharing, ask for 2-3 comments from the whole group.

- **Check-In:** Begin with a sentence starter:
  - “A success I recently had ___.”
  - “One thing that’s new about ___.”
  - “One norm I will hold today is ___.”

- **Affirmations:** As a class, watch and respond to short, inspiring TED (Technology, Entertainment, and Design) talks or uplifting poetry, quotes, or songs that affirm common culture values, validate students’ experiences, or reinforced an academic mindset.

Considerations for Supporting Equity:
- Open the day with a centering activity versus a traditional morning meeting.
- Use music or call and response to facilitate transitions from one activity to another.
• Create after lunch transition routines to help students get their heads back into school work.

• Create routines for “parallel” independent work or sponge or anchor activities.

Connections to Frameworks for Effective Practice:
This practice contributes to proficient practice on the following elements of the MA Standards and Indicators of Effective Teaching Practice:

Standard I-A-2,3: Student Engagement and Meeting Diverse Needs
Standard II-B-1,2,3: Safe Learning Environment, Collaborative Learning Environment, Student Motivation
Standard II-C-1, 2: Respects Differences, Maintains Respectful Environment

This practice is most directly aligned to the Quality of Feedback Dimension of the Instructional Support Domain of the CLASS Observation Tool.

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