CHAPTER 3

Building a Classroom Community

In 1916, John Dewey shared provocative statements about the need for an educational shift to “a fostering, a nurturing, a cultivating, process” (Dewey, 1916). And here we are a hundred years later, still agreeing. Our students grow academically, interpersonally, intrapersonally, and as a community. Our role as educators has always been to help nurture their minds and souls. Creating a strong classroom community is an essential part of fostering our students. Our classroom community is the foundation of our classroom. So what creates a caring classroom?

- **Belonging**: Students feel that they are part of the classroom, that people really know them.
- **Peer Connections**: Students feel safe in their relationships with their peers, and feel safe building friendly relationships.
- **Autonomy**: Students feel a sense of ownership and act on their inner beliefs, even when following routines, if they are provided with choice. Ironically, when we give students space to be creative and empowered by their choices, they come together as a team and community more strongly when it is required. It is the balance between group, individual, and whole-class activities that helps them thrive in each one.
- **Competence**: Students feel driven to learn, comfortable making mistakes, and capable of success.

The aspects of belonging, connecting, autonomy, and competence are interconnected.

When our students feel cared for by their teachers and peers, they are comfortable taking risks, making mistakes, and moving forward. They feel competent and are willing to be creative in their space. The routines in this chapter are all about creating a classroom in which our students feel safe, cared for, and connected. They are routines that we can establish to nurture a community, as well as to help each individual grow emotional intelligence.

### Routines to Unify the Class

These routines are created to help bring the class together, to foster community spirit, to set up a learning and growing space, and to build a positive atmosphere.

“Striving to learn, to master one’s environment, is a basic human characteristic.” — S.H. Schwartz
What Stuck with Me

This routine was shared by teacher Steph Donovan.

- Create a public space; i.e., a piece of chart paper, bulletin board.
- Each time a student finds something he/she finds profound, inspiring, or motivating, he/she writes it on a sticky note and posts it to share on this space.

Debrief

The public space you set aside becomes a powerful tool for students to share ideas and express what is meaningful to them or influencing them. On the interactive whiteboard, students can use a sticky-note tool. They can be inspired by their peers’ posts of books, ideas, and perspectives.

High Fives

This routine was adapted from Paul Faggion’s Put-Up board, where students record positive put-ups for each other instead of negative put-downs.

- At the start of the year, begin modelling praise and high fives for students. Be explicit in your language: “Wow, Dylan, I want to give you a high five! You saw that I needed help with this math problem, and you came over to help me out.”
- Keep High Five slips in a prominent spot in the classroom. When students want to give a High Five, they can write the details on a slip and give it to their peer. It can be anonymous.
- At the start of the year, you might give each student the name of another classmate to observe and give a High Five to. This helps establish that High Fives are not reserved for friends.
- Hang a name chart by the High Five slips so students can check off the name of the person receiving the recognition.

Debrief

When you start, this routine can seem a bit silly and the High Fives are often not very authentic; e.g., High Fiving a student who lends you an eraser. However, with time and consistent modelling, High Fives become rich observations about classmates.

Team-Building Games

Create challenging and fun tasks that need to be completed by the whole class. Some examples:

- Half the students make paper airplanes and then the entire class has to keep them in the air.
• Students form a circle and whisper a message along (Broken Telephone).
• Students form a circle, hold hands, and send a pulse (hand squeeze) around. Time students to see if they can beat their best time by working as a team.
• Each student makes a web from a piece of string and then has to get out of it.
• Students draw a picture together on a large piece of paper. You can use this as an attendance option, so participation is staggered.

Debrief
An occasional team-building activity goes a long way toward getting the wiggles out, refocusing students, and strengthening their relationship as a class. By making the goal to beat time or some other arbitrary concept, you have students working together to achieve the results, instead of competing with each other.

In our Grade 1 classroom, Friday afternoon was Build It time. Students worked with partners, and partners and building materials were rotated each week. This gave each student a chance to work with everyone in the class at a few points throughout the year and to experience each type of building material. There are no objectives for Build It—it is free, creative time. However, an anchor chart was posted to define how to work together in partners.

Class Goals
This activity was created in collaboration with teacher Tina Jadgeo.

• Start with the big question, What can we do to learn this year?
• On the board, create three categories, for example:
  - Concrete Goals: goals that students can see happening; e.g., extra practice with a concept
  - Lofty Goals: goals that are a bigger step; e.g., teacher mentoring a student on a concept
  - BOGs, or Big Out-of-the-box Goals: goals that show the big idea; e.g., finding a new way to solve a problem or learn a concept
• Brainstorm goals to place in categories. You can also use concept attainment by having students come up with the category titles as you sort the goals.
• Work together to connect the goals and show how one leads to the other.
• Post the goals as an anchor chart and refer to it when a goal is achieved.

Students who brainstormed these class goals were passionate to monetize the achievement of a goal in Brain Bucks, and they quickly started brainstorming ways to fine/tax for improper use of their brains. This led into a nice discussion about making mistakes to learn.
Debrief

To encourage goal-setting and follow-through, you can also link goals to a class reward system. Students can earn small, extrinsic rewards to build awareness of goal-setting and achievement.

Routines to Motivate the Class

Motivation is the desire or action toward a goal-directed behavior. In our classrooms, a student having the urge to do something shows a motivation.

- Extrinsic Motivation: the carrot on the stick; the urge to gain an external factor, such as a prize, bribery, or avoiding punishment.
- Intrinsic Motivation: a person’s own desire; the urge to complete a task because it is important to them.

Our goal is to create intrinsic motivation in our students. We want them to achieve because they are driven to do so. However, we are also aware that we need to teach them how to set, work on, and achieve goals. When we develop a system, model it, and recognize goal achievement extrinsically, we motivate our students. It is an important step in creating self-driven students. Just as we teach them sentence structure to write stories, we teach them goal-setting and reward them to help them transition from external motivation to internal drive.

Class Rewards

- At the start of the year, ask students what their favorite school activities are.
- As they brainstorm, give them parameters for the task. As these things will become incentives for the class, ensure that each activity can be managed within 20 minutes.
- Discuss how students can earn the chance to participate in these activities. Find a tool to track earned points toward these incentives (e.g., plastic toys, tokens). Students can earn points by doing various things in the classroom; e.g., lining up quietly, having no materials on their desks, asking an incredible question, getting a High Five from another teacher.
- Post the incentive list in a prominent place in your classroom. As the year progresses, remind students to add activities to the list.

Debrief

Discuss with students how many points are needed to earn an incentive activity. To maintain momentum, the number of points needed for each incentive should be low, and the ability to receive incentives should be frequent (weekly or bi-weekly).

Incentive Ideas

I make sure that incentives are not stickers or prizes; instead they are activities or special privileges. The whole class sharing the goal to earn an incentive motivates students to collaborate.

- Desk charms: random weird action figures that students can keep at their desks for a week
Routines to Motivate the Class

- 10 minutes of recess: a bonus add-on to the recess period
- YouTube screening: students submit appropriate clips for screening on the interactive whiteboard or computer projector.
- Select your desk partner for a day
- Eat lunch in the classroom with the teacher
- A class work period with music
- Auction tickets that can be used to purchase small prizes
- A picnic lunch outside
- Students can chew gum for one period.
- Night free from homework: parameters need to be in place; i.e., this pass applies to only routine work, like math sheets or reading
- 15 minutes of free time
- Sketchpad time or space to draw
- Access to special materials for indoor recess, such as paint or window markers
- Access to technology

From Extrinsic to Intrinsic

- Write goals for students on cards or pieces of paper: not individual goals, but goals that all students should be working on, such as, *hanging up our coats.* Post goals in public space.
- Create three categories for the goals: *Needs More Effort,* *Achieved By Most,* and *Intrinsic.*
- As part of the progression through the year, start to move goals from the first category to the second.
- Specifically teach intrinsic motivation. Explain that once we have mastered a goal, it gets moved to the *Intrinsic* category because we own it. It has become part of how we operate and we have grown because of it.
- Show that, as goals move to the *Intrinsic* category, then move, bigger goals enter the process in the *Needs More Effort* category. This a great platform to teach a growth mindset.

Growth Mindset

Researcher Carol Dweck explains that people can be placed on a continuum, based on where they think intelligence resides. People who believe that you are born smart or have innate abilities are considered to have a fixed mindset; they believe that you cannot change who you are. The term *growth mindset* applies to people who believe that success is a result of hard work. By teaching students a growth mindset, we empower them to learn; i.e., to make mistakes and to persevere. They understand that the process of learning is more important than the goal.
Debrief

The continuous movement of goals from extrinsic to intrinsic shows development in a big, visual way. To start the process successfully, create goals you know will be achieved in the first few weeks, such as hanging coats, putting lunch boxes away, or tidying up books. As part of the dialogue, make sure students understand the difference between equal and fair; i.e., putting away our lunches is an equal class goal but to be fair, and to help those who need it to succeed, we need to support our peers. Creating an anchor chart of *Words We Can Use to Help Our Friends* can help create a positive classroom atmosphere, in which students are working together to grow.

Routines to Consider Different Perspectives

Encouraging our students to consider different perspectives is a challenging task. It often begins with modelling as, during our class conversations, we share different ideas and points of view. Many teachers use literature as a base for opening up conversations about different perspectives. Building routines that encourage (and occasionally demand) students to think of a new perspective can help make class conversations richer and can nurture a more empathetic classroom, as we all understand that not everyone is going to agree with our point of view.

Breaking It Down

- Share a story, event, or scenario.
- With your students, identify the key events. Use sticky notes or chart paper to record these key events.
- Use prompts to spark conversation as your class looks at each of the key events:
  - What choices were there?
  - If a different choice was made, would the outcome have changed?
  - Who or what inspired the direction of the events?
  - What other factors could have changed the events?
  - What do you think the author was intending when he/she wrote this part?
  - Whose perspective are you thinking from?
  - Do you have any questions from that perspective?

Debrief

Students often find considering different perspectives challenging because they do not have a grasp of all the information, or because a story might be too big to fully grasp in its entirety. By chunking the story, students can identify perspective from the smaller, and sometimes clearer, moments.
A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Perspectives

- Collect a number of compelling artworks. You might begin with artworks that represent a certain time period or a historical event. These pieces are usually rich in detail and inspire many questions about the individuals portrayed in the works. You can introduce a piece of artwork at the start of a unit to inspire conversation or at the beginning of a creative writing lesson.
- Ask students to answer the same series of questions: What do you see? What is happening here? What would it be like to be a part of this artwork?
- Give students a chance to share their observations and ideas. Be impartial and remind the class that everyone might see something different when they look at a piece of art.

Debrief

Avoid sharing the story behind the artwork with students, as you do not want to train them to think they are guessing to find one right answer. Agree that every observation is a valid one.

Artful Thinking is a program developed by Harvard Project Zero. Its aim is to encourage teachers to use artworks in their classroom to strengthen and inspire student listening and thinking. See http://www.pzartfulthinking.org/atp_palette.php for resources on how to use art within your regular teaching program.

More Than One Option

- Using the More Options graphic organizer on page 37, have students identify the problem and the steps that led to a situation becoming a problem.
- If the students are willing, have them fill out the organizer together. If they are still having a hard time seeing the different perspectives, they can each fill out an organizer to share with you and each other.
- After filling out the chart, have them share the situation from the other’s perspective, if you feel they are emotionally ready to do so.

Debrief

I began using this method of problem-solving after dealing with irate students after recess. I realized that, for almost every problem, none of the “victims” or “culprits” consider any perspective other than their own. This method helps us have more caring conversations in class and it encourages students to be more active in solving their own problems.

Chart It Out

- Provide students with a T chart of Pros and Cons; see sample.
- Provide space and time (e.g., during recess, after school) for students fill in the chart with their argument and then list the pros and the cons.
Sample Argument Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I feel passionate about:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pros</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show reasons why your argument is a good one.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Debrief

Often students have strong views and want to be heard. Providing them with space to think about their perspective and an opportunity to see another can create a more constructive conversation. They might need reflective quiet time to process what has happened.

Word Choice

- Write and share a note or e-mail detailing a situation that models poor word choice. The word choice can be rude, demanding, offensive, or just presumptuous.
- Use the e-mail or note as a basis to discuss the impact of word choice on a reader: What does this word choice tell you? What would the reaction be to this e-mail or note?
- Together, brainstorm the important aspects of communicating: tone, word choice, details.

Debrief

In an era of digital technology, where our students struggle to realize their digital footprint and how the ability to send a message instantly affects others, taking time to teach tone and word choice is important. We need to explicitly teach perspective and how it affects others’ feelings. We also need to show students how to communicate politely and appropriately.

This e-mail prompted a conversation on approach and perspective:

May I postpone my math homework (MJ pg 1–2) and study links to friday. Thanks, [student name]

We discussed the etiquette of requesting information, and what the reaction of the teacher might be upon receiving this. We agreed that the letter should address the reader, provide detail as to why an assignment is not completed, and politely request a delay— without assuming it would be granted.

Objective:
To help students understand the impact of their words and how they influence perspective.

Key Words: reflection, empathy

Suggested Grades: Junior/Middle
More Options

What’s the situation?

___________________________________________________________________________

Use three words to describe how you feel right now

___________________________________________________________________________

Fill out the chart below and, if possible, think of alternative choices that would have helped the situation have a positive outcome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What actually happened?</th>
<th>What were my other choices?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First…</td>
<td>I could have…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After that…</td>
<td>I could have…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then…</td>
<td>I could have…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It ended…</td>
<td>If you chose the other choices, how would the situation have ended?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Share this sheet with your teacher and talk about your other options.

Signed __________________________ Date __________________________
Routines for Celebrating the Individual

These routines are intended to endure through the school year—buzzing fresh in September and October, trudging through the dreary mid-year months, and pulling the class back into shape when the end is in sight. In a gentle, subtle way, these routines unite the class because they provide each student with what they need: recognition and celebration. And when we need it most, these routines direct our class back onto the positive track.

For celebrations of the individual, we need to ensure that all students are recognized. Keeping track on a class list goes a long way toward making sure no one is forgotten or that someone is not celebrated more frequently than others.

Understanding the Individual

- Have students reflect on themselves and how they act in various situations.
- Introduce the survey, explaining the various types of results.
- Have each student complete the survey or have them identify the traits on it they recognize as their own.
- Give students a moment to reflect on the results. Do they agree? Disagree?
- Talk about the strengths and how they might be used in situations?
- Use the traits as a springboard to talk about passions and learning.

There are a variety of online surveys for students that will give them a sense of their strengths. We have always used the VIA Institute Character Survey because it accounts for cultural differences.
http://www.viacharacter.org/www/

Debrief

There are many online tools and resources available to assess character traits. The trick is to really talk with students so that they understand they are not categorizing themselves or depicting themselves as one-dimensional. They need to understand that learning about their personality or learning styles can enhance their understanding of how they act in situations, how they respond to others, and how they learn. This is information that they will use to help them develop their passions and grow.

Filling the Emotional Bank

This routine was inspired by Have You Filled Your Bucket Today: A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids by Carol McCloud.

- Have a short conversation with students about how the banking system works, with deposits and withdrawals.
- Create a space for each student’s “bank” on a central bulletin board, beside each desk, or in class mailboxes.
• Print off Emotional Deposit Slips (see sample) and place them in a central location close to the buckets.
• Explain to students that when they share positive feedback in the classroom community they make others, and themselves, happy. By sharing kind thoughts and words, they are filling their Emotional Banks. When they feel down, they can remember all the deposits in their Emotional Bank, and make a withdrawal to feel better.
• Provide students with Emotional Deposit Slips. Ask them to fill out a slip for a peer. They need to give a positive anecdote about the peer or talk about a positive attribute they have noticed in the peer. Encourage them to be specific in their examples.
• Create a routine for reflecting on positive feedback after coming in from recess or before going home at the end of the day. Celebrate deposits in the Emotional Banks and encourage this activity by writing them yourself.

Sample Emotional Deposit Slip

Deposit Slip

To: ________________________________________________
You ________________________________________________
Sincerely, __________________________________________

Adapted from Have You Filled Your Bucket Today: A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids by Carol McCloud

Debrief

Emotional Banks can be shared within and outside the classroom. They embrace academic skills, such as typing, writing, summarizing, editing. More importantly, they support and nurture the classroom community.

I was introduced to this idea by my son’s Grade 1 teacher, Ms Shona. Although my son was a reluctant writer, he enthusiastically wrote notes for his peers. At home, he became more aware of the positive actions of his siblings and commented on them. During class meetings or parent nights, Ms Shona reminded parents to participate in filling the buckets, making us a part of the classroom community. Of all the Grade 1 materials, projects, and notebooks that came home in June, these are the only slips of paper we still read and dare not lose.
Go, You!

- In rotation, select a student a week.
- The class brainstorms positive words to describe the student, justifying the description with an action that they have witnessed: e.g., Julien is caring because he helped Patrick when he was hurt at recess.
- The list of positive words and actions are recorded and sent home with the student.

Make Go, You! a job on the Job Board, so that students can choose to lead this routine when they feel ready for it.

Debrief

Celebrating each student is important; coming together as a class to celebrate a student helps each child feel like an important part of the community. However, it is the justifying of the words that is the behavior changer. As the year progresses, students become more aware of their actions and how they affect others positively. These positive actions will become more frequent in their interactions and play. Older students can e-mail you a few words to explain why the student is being celebrated. These words can be fashioned into a word cloud to create a powerful image for the student.

Weekly Badge

- Assess the classroom and pinpoint two or three important behaviors that need reinforcing; e.g., active listening, transitioning, organizing materials.
- Create a badge to symbolize each of these traits; e.g., Most Improved Active Listener.
- At the beginning of the week, gather students and share who earned a badge the preceding week. Debrief with the class what the individual did to earn the badge. That student can proudly wear the badge or keep it on his/her desk for the week.

Debrief

Positive reinforcement is vital to any classroom and for all students. However, it is useless if falsely earned. If no one has earned a badge, then no one should get it. But if you witness and want to encourage an unexpected behavior, you can create a badge for it, define it for students, and celebrate it. By being flexible about the traits you support, you create a space in which students can help define what makes a positive impact. This will encourage more positive behavior, allowing students to be creative about how they contribute to the classroom community.

Leave a Note

- Observe your students, looking for positive behavior.
- At the end of the day, or the beginning of the next day, leave a note for a student, describing his/her positive action. The note can be a sticky note on
the student’s desk, written in the student’s agenda (so they can celebrate with their parents), or a brightly decorated piece of paper on the student’s desk.

- Keep track of who you are writing notes to and how frequently, as this can act as valuable modelling of fairness.
- As the year progresses, open up this activity to all students and encourage them to send their own notes to each other.

Debrief

I am constantly surprised at how effective positive reinforcement is. These little notes go a long way toward encouraging positive behavior and building rapport between you and your students.

Name Spelling Bee

- Close to the start of the year, give each student a class list. Include one or two student names in each weekly spelling list.
- With younger children, use first names only. Encourage older students to learn last names as well.
- I usually don’t ask the students to memorize last names, but to know them by sight.

Debrief

This activity is very simple but effective, especially for students whose names are not very familiar or easy to spell. Being able to spell a peer’s name is a small but powerful way to build respect and community in a classroom. It has many extensions, too; e.g., graphing two-syllable names in the class, organizing names alphabetically.
Objective:
To give students a chance to share something about themselves or their work with the class.

Key Words: critical thinking, motivation

Suggested Grades: Junior/Middle

Tweet It!

- At points during the school week, ask students to “Tweet” aloud.
- Remind them that they only have 140 characters; get them thinking about approximately how many words that is.
- Give students a topic: e.g., How did you feel about the activity we just did? or What did you do this weekend? or Who is your hero and why?
- Give students a few moments to think about the topic, before saying their Tweet aloud.

Debrief

This activity became very popular in my Grade 4 classroom, with some students counting the characters. It helps students to think about their class contributions more critically and to focus their ideas on essential information.

Routines for Refocusing

John Medina, a developmental molecular biologist, researched how the brain works and how to learn effectively (Medina, 2008). When he discovered that the brain loses focus after ten minutes, he designed his 50-minute lectures around ten-minute intervals. Each interval explored one main concept and was finished with a “hook,” an emotional trigger that related to the topic and showed closure. If our brains lose focus after ten minutes, how can we possibly sustain our students’ attention for longer? These routines are tricks that help young brains refocus so that they can succeed.

Calming Down

- Create a Calm Down anchor chart, with visuals for younger students, and post it in a calming area.
- The calming area can be a separate part of the room, or the anchor chart can be integrated into a whole-class routine after recess or an intensely busy period.

Sample Calm Down Anchor Chart

- Take several deep breaths
- Count backward from 10 slowly
- Use self talk: “I am calming down,” or “I can do it.”
- Think calm thoughts

Debrief

This routine can be modelled to the whole class, especially after recess or a busy period. Once implemented, it can help individuals who need to self-calm.
Gentle Reminders

- Spot a student who is beginning to distract others or needs a reminder to refocus.
- Take an indirect route to that student's desk, so that others do not get further distracted.
- Offer a small physical strategy to refocus the student: e.g., a tap on the desk, a gentle touch on the shoulder, putting the pencil down on the sheet of paper.

Debrief

Refocusing a student in a non-confrontational manner helps him/her save face with peers and keeps the distraction to a minimum. If you respect students’ emotional needs, they respect you and are keen to get back on task.

Teacher Elaine Rowlands uses a hand signal, putting up a finger for each distraction. Her students know that when she gets to three, they will have a conversation about their behavior. This helps students track their choices and it also makes them aware of the impact they are having on others.

Brain Break

- Assess the needs of the class; are there some students who have been sitting or focusing for too long? Are pencils being sharpened when they are already sharp? Are many students asking for a water break? Does everyone need a chance to refocus?
- Call students to their feet. If you use a consistent phrase, such as “Brain Break,” then students will become accustomed to the routine of starting and stopping.
- Play a repeat-after-me game in which students copy your movements and sounds. Make the movements and sounds progressively more challenging.
- Shake it off and send students back to task.

Debrief

Some assigned tasks are just too long. Brain breaks are essential and effective when having young children complete a longer task. They enjoy the break, giggling while copying silly actions. Once this activity becomes routine, students who struggle with focusing will begin to come to you and request Brain Breaks, demonstrating self-regulation of their needs.

John Ratey, the author of *SPARK: The Revolutionary new Science of Exercise and the Brain*, suggests that even a few minutes of exercise a day can offer physical and mental health benefits. A routine that encourages active movement is a simple way to get students moving and help them refocus their attention and energy.
Coping Toolbox

- Brainstorm with students items that help them calm down, based on sensory needs:
  - feel (soft, smooth)
  - smell (candles, lotions)
  - see (snowglobes, happy pictures)
  - hear (rainsticks, music)
- As a class, fill a box with de-stressors and place it in a quiet space or close to the door.
- Explain to students that these are intended for stressful moments, when they need help calming down.

Debrief

As much as these items will help students feel comforted when they need to de-stress, you also need to ensure they do not become just toys in the classroom. Placement of the box will determine if it becomes forgotten or overused, or if you find the balance to meet students’ needs.

Routines for Transition Time

Our days are filled with transitions, as we change from math to language or from guided reading to inquiry. These transitions require the movement of many bodies and materials. They are also times when we lose our students and have to use “teacher voices” to gain back control. These routines keep the flow through transitions smooth and calm.

Musical Interlude

This routine was shared by teacher Guillaume Dupre.

- Prepare by outlining the expectations for the next subject in a consistent manner and space, so students know where to look for this information.
- When it is time to transition to the next subject, play a song that sets that mood.
- Ensure that the song is long enough to allow students to put away current materials and prepare for the next class.

Debrief

Music has that wonderful way of shifting the feeling in the classroom. It sets a mood and students instantly recognize that the atmosphere has changed. If you allow students to create a class list of songs and use some of their choices, you empower them and make transition time a bit more flexible, while still maintaining the same routine.
Eyes on Me, One–Two–Three

This routine was shared by teacher Elaine Rowlands.

- Get the attention of students; see box for ideas.
- Popping up one finger at a time, show three fingers, each representing one instruction.
- Let students know how long they have to complete the transition.

### Ideas for Attention-Getters

- Sing the first part of a song or phrase and have the students finish it.
- Use a noisemaker or a musical instrument.
- Flick the lights off and on.
- Post a visual timer (see Countdown Timer on page 64).
- Call out, “Voices!” in a loud voice; have students reply with “Sssh”; continue calling out “Voices” with your voice getting quieter each time and with students copying your tone and volume.
- Call out, “Rock!” and have students freeze as they say, “Star” back to you; let them freeze like rock stars! Change it up by letting them freeze like Mona Lisa (quietly, with hands on lap), Harry Potter (poised with wand in hand), Wayne Gretzky (taking a shot on net), or other well-known characters.
- Create a pattern of hand claps and have students repeat it.
- Bring your voice to a whisper until everyone is listening.
- Have students create a hand signal when you say a specific word.
- Provide a series of movement instructions, waiting until all are participating.

**Debrief**

Calling the class to attention and providing instruction is a timeless teaching strategy. However, restricting the instruction to three key points and providing them with an outlined time to complete them complements current brain research. We are not overloading our students with too many steps or rushing them to do it right away.

### Routines for Solving Problems

When I think about problem-solving routines, I picture a traffic light with red to stop, yellow to slow down, and green to go ahead. My only problem is that I live in a major city, where most cars race through the yellow light in an attempt to not stop. This is the behavior that adults model. In the classroom, students race away to avoid stopping. They are not dealing with the problem.

There are two ways to deal with problems: proactively and reactively. The routines on shifting perspective and building a classroom community attempt to unify the class and proactively solve problems. That said, we are all human and emotions are always going to get into the way of a good routine. So how do we deal with problems reactively? What routines can we establish?
Solve the Feeling

- Have students with a conflict share their stories, one after the other.
- When both have shared their own stories, it is their job to think about the other person’s story and identify the main emotion that person may be feeling.
- Students need to work backward and help find a way to solve the concern and the emotion—not the issue.

Debrief

By taking away the highest moment of conflict and focusing on emotions, students develop their empathy.

Break a Glass

- In front of the whole class, break a glass object to create a dramatic effect.
- Approach the broken object and say, “I’m sorry.”
- Give a moment for students to process what you have done.
- Discuss with students:
  - What just happened?
  - Did I solve the problem?
  - Is the glass fixed?
  - What does the glass represent?
  - Is “I’m sorry” enough? Does it solve the problem?
  - What can be done to solve problems that affect people’s feelings?

Debrief

Keeping the broken glass in a visible space reminds students that feelings are important and can be fragile. Referring to the broken glass during conflict-resolution discussions makes this an ongoing routine.

Pathways

- Using an interactive whiteboard or chart paper, write a common group or class problem in the centre.
- Around the problem, create brainstorm spokes; call them pathways.
- Challenge students to think of ways to solve the problem, both appropriate and inappropriate. The only caveat is that the suggestions must be realistic.
- After spending a few minutes gathering possible solutions, go through the brainstorm and sort out the ones that would negatively affect others or oneself.
- Circle the solutions that could be viable and discuss what actions would be needed to make these solutions realistic.
- Remind students that next time they encounter the problem, they need to visualize these solutions.

Debrief

We all get in a solution rut, but taking time to look at alternatives reminds everyone that we can solve problems differently. It empowers students to look at recurring problems through a different lens or viewpoint.
Routines for Solving Problems

Your Problem Has a Solution

- This routine is very simple. If a student comes to you with a problem, he/she must be able to provide a reasonable solution for his/her concerns.
- At the start of the year, encourage whole-class discussions around common problems and possible solutions.

Debrief

American author Norman Peale said that within every problem are seeds to its solution. Let students know that you are open to hearing about their problems, but they need to come up with a solution as well. It helps build responsibility, as students often realize that part of the solution is changing their own behaviors.

Solution and Resolution

- After a mildly chaotic event, bring students together.
- Explain the problem and ask them how they could resolve it. Brainstorm ideas.
- Step away and leave the problem for students to solve.

Debrief

Quite often we want to follow a checklist on how to solve problems and offer solutions. But some problems are not so easily solved. By creating the space for students to find their own solution, we also help them find closure.
In our classroom, an unidentified student experimented with a crayon in the only electric pencil sharpener. I had fixed the sharpener many, many times, but this time I looked to my class in defeat. I brought out a small handheld sharpener and offered it to them. This prompted a series of “heroes” to come to the electric sharpener to fix the problem. Days passed and many gave up. But one, a little boy who is easily distracted and always off task, stuck to the problem and fixed the sharpener. When I recognized the moment, he claimed it and shined.