Understanding How Our Feelings Impact Greetings

Consider the Vignette Below

Setting: A 4th grade classroom

Characters: Mr. Fabio (Teacher), Alex (Student)

Context:

Mr. Fabio and Alex have had a difficult morning. Alex struggled to stay on task and share materials with other students, and Mr. Fabio had to give Alex corrective feedback several times.

Later, when Alex did not line up quietly to transition to art class, Mr. Fabio said, "Alex you are making us late, please line up." Alex responded in a very disrespectful tone, "I am! You only yell at me, no one else." Mr. Fabio was hurt and angered by this comment but did not have time to address it, as he needed to transition the students to get them to art on time.

After art class, the students returned to Mr. Fabio's classroom for the last academic period of the day. Mr. Fabio noticed that Alex walked into the classroom with his shoulders hunched and a downcast expression, still seemingly affected by their earlier interaction.

Consider the two scenarios below for how Mr. Fabio could greet Alex upon his return.

- **Scenario 1:** Mr. Fabio greets several students in front of Alex but does not make eye contact or offer any specific acknowledgment to Alex.

- **Scenario 2:** Mr. Fabio greets each student personally as they enter the classroom. When Alex walks in, Mr. Fabio recognizes the need to reset the tone, so makes sure to smile warmly and say, "Welcome back, Alex! I hope you had a great time in art. I know we will have a strong finish to the day!"

Remember, feelings are a natural part of being human, and it's normal to feel a range of emotions in response to negative interactions. As a teacher, it's important to be aware of and move through these emotions so that they don't negatively impact your students, your relationship with them, their sense of belonging, and their behavior in the classroom. How might you do this?

After the Negative Interaction…
- *Stop and take a deep, slow breath.*
- *Redirect your energy toward other tasks.*
- *If needed, express your frustration about the interaction with a trusted coworker.*
- *Try to put yourself in Alex's shoes – why might he have reacted that way? Consider if his emotions are related to something other than your interactions.*
- *Brainstorm ways to respond upon Alex's return, then consider how you might advise a fellow teacher to respond.*

By taking a moment to regulate your emotions after a negative interaction with a student (e.g., pause, take a deep breath), and to consider alternative perspectives (talk to someone, consider the student's experiences), you can offer a more compassionate and/or productive response. Doing so will ultimately contribute to a supportive and welcoming environment for everyone, including yourself!

Consider the following outcomes of scenarios 1 and 2.

In **Scenario 1**, the interaction could produce the following for Alex:

Mr. Fabio greets several students in front of Alex but does not make eye contact or offer any specific acknowledgment to Alex.	**Feelings:**	Alex feels neglected and dismissed.
	Behavior:	Alex disengages during the group discussion, is reluctant to participate, and remains quiet.
	Outcome:	The lack of a positive greeting impacts Alex's interest in or willingness to engage in the lesson with Mr. Fabio, affecting his overall mood and ability to focus on class work.

In **Scenario 2**, the interaction could produce the following for Alex:

Mr. Fabio greets each student personally as they enter the classroom. When Alex walks in, Mr. Fabio recognizes the need to reset the tone, so makes sure to smile warmly and say, *"Welcome back, Alex! I hope you had a great time in art. I know we will have a strong finish to the day!"*	**Feelings:**	Alex feels seen and appreciated, which helps alleviate some of the lingering negativity from the earlier interaction.
	Behavior:	Alex has stronger engagement and participation during the last academic period.
	Outcome:	The positive greeting helps Alex feel more connected and valued, and demonstrates that Mr. Fabio remains invested in their relationship, regardless of previous conflicts.

Other Ways to Leverage a Greeting to Reset the Tone

- Don't draw too much attention to the student: Try a quiet smile, or a subtle fist or elbow bump.
- Keep it light and humorous: "You left me hanging the first time! Let's try again!"
- Redirect greeting into a question: "How was art class? What did you create?"
- Try affection: "Hi, dear friend! I'm happy to see you! Welcome back!"

Strategies for Building Self-Awareness

- **Reflect and envision:** Ask yourself – how do I want students to feel when they walk into my classroom, and what can I do to try to foster that feeling?
- **Take your own "temperature":** After a challenging interaction with a student, pause and ask yourself – what emotion am I feeling and why? Remind yourself that feelings are normal, and do your best to move through that feeling.

- **Put yourself in the student's "shoes":** Ask yourself – what might the student be feeling and why? Would it be helpful for both of us to start with a clean slate? How would I feel if someone did that for me?
- **Talk to yourself like you would a fellow teacher:** Ask yourself – what would I advise another teacher to do in this situation? Remember to give yourself grace, like you would a co-worker, and to consider a range of reasonable responses.
- **Remember:** Even if you can't be positive, you can still be neutral.

Greetings are an important part of our daily interactions. They set the tone for our interactions with others and can have a significant impact on how we communicate and connect with one another. Sometimes, our feelings from previous interactions can influence how we greet others, especially after a challenging experience. Through self-reflection, teachers can learn to recognize how past challenging interactions with students may influence their feelings and how, with self-awareness, they can leverage greetings after an interaction to improve student engagement and their relationships with them.

Activities for Considering Emotions:

- **Think-Pair-Share:** Reflect on a time when your feelings influenced how you greeted someone. Discuss with a partner how you could handle similar situations in the future to maintain positive interactions.

- **Role-Playing:** In pairs, practice greeting each other after a hypothetical challenging interaction. Focus on maintaining a positive and welcoming tone regardless of previous conflicts.

By recognizing the impact of their feelings on greetings, teachers can foster a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment, helping all students feel valued and ready to engage.

Activity 1: Reflecting on Emotions

1. Start by discussing with students the concept of emotions. Ask questions such as:
   • What are emotions?
   • Can you name some different emotions you've felt before?
   • How do you think emotions can affect how we interact with others?
2. Use visual aids or examples to help students identify different emotions and understand how they might feel in different situations.

Activity 2: Brainstorming Positive Greetings

1. After the role-playing activity, reconvene as a class and discuss the different emotions students explored.
2. Brainstorm together some positive ways to greet others, even after experiencing challenging interactions. Encourage students to think about how they can show kindness, empathy, and respect in their greetings, regardless of their feelings.

3. Create a list of positive greetings as a class and display it in the classroom as a reminder.

Activity 2: Role-Playing Scenarios

4. Divide the class into small groups and provide each group with a scenario involving a challenging interaction. For example:
- Scenario 1: You were playing with a friend, and they accidentally broke your favorite toy.
- Scenario 2: You were working on a group project, and one of your classmates wasn't cooperating.
- Scenario 3: You got into an argument with your sibling before coming to school.
5. Have each group role-play the scenario, focusing on how the characters in the situation might be feeling and how those feelings could influence their greetings to others.

Students and families can then record and upload video responses to share their perspectives. This interactive approach encourages active participation and provides a platform for everyone to contribute their ideas and feedback.

Additional Resources on Maximize Platform in addition to:

- Books about emotions and empathy for children
- Online videos and activities on social-emotional learning
- Classroom discussions and activities on kindness and respect.