Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

THE BEAUTY OF COLLECTIVE EFFERVESCENCE

"Find a group of people who challenge and inspire you, spend a lot of time with them, and it will change your life."

–Amy Poehler

OVERVIEW

Students learn about collective effervescence, and either reflect on a time they experienced it or try it in the classroom.

LEVELS

- PreK/Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- At the start of the school year
- To help foster greater cooperation
- Before assigning a group project

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤15 minutes

MATERIALS

- Option #1 may require the ability to show a video from the internet

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Identify collective movement that inspires or moves them in some way

- Reflect on various aspects of the collective movement OR try moving in unison
- Reflect on their emotional experience

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- Making Practices Culturally Responsive
- Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs
- Making a Practice Trauma-Informed
- Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Awe
- Kindness and Compassion
- Cooperation

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Focused Attention
- Open Awareness

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Take a moment to identify an example of coordinated movement(s) of a collective system that you feel moved by in some way (e.g., school choir, rhythmic swaying of the hands at a concert, flock of birds flying in unison, human wave at a sporting event, graduation, etc.).
- What are the elements of this system? How are they working together? How would you describe their shared goal or aim? What about this system moves you? How do you feel after thinking about this system?

INSTRUCTIONS

- Studies on movement suggest that humans are wired to move in unison with others—what some scientists call “collective effervescence”. For instance, researchers have found that 4-month-olds have a tendency to mirror adult facial gestures, and older children have a tendency to mirror the postures and gestures of teachers, parents, athletes, and musical artists. Moving in unison can help people work together more effectively and increase people’s sense of compassion and cooperation. This practice offers students the opportunity to either recall or experience a moment of collective effervescence.

INTRODUCING “COLLECTIVE EFFERVESCENCE”

- Explain to students:
    - *Researchers have discovered that moving together in unison, or "collective effervescence," can be a powerful source of awe—the feeling we get in the presence of something vast that challenges our understanding of the world at that moment. Awe can help us feel more connected to one another and the world, and can inspire us to be curious and creative.*
    - *Moving in unison can also help people work together more effectively and increase people's sense of compassion and cooperation.*
    - *Some examples of collective effervescence are a human wave at a sporting event, dancing with others, and a marching band. We even see examples in nature. [You might show students a video (2:11) of starling murmuration.]*

OPTION #1

Note: This can be done repeatedly, when students need a brain break, an energy boost, or to increase their sense of connectedness.

- Invite students to experience a moment of collective effervescence in the classroom. Here are some ideas:
    - Tap! Have one student start tapping their fingers and then have the rest of the students join in one by one. Researchers have discovered that something as simple as finger tapping can increase a sense of connection between people.
    - Sing! Ask students to suggest a song to sing in unison or in rounds.
    - Dance! Move the desks aside, turn on a dance video or ask students to teach a simple dance routine. Or, like this principal, teach them to shuffle dance!
    - Human wave! Go row by row, or move in a circle. Or check out this amazing take on the wave and challenge students to try it.
    - Walk—inside or outside! Invite students to first walk out of step with each other, and then switch to walking in unison. Ask them whether they felt a difference. Scientists have found that walking together can help resolve conflicts and increase prosocial behavior.
    - Qigong! Try this ancient movement practice that balances, calms, and improves well-being. Here is an easy-to-follow video (7:00) for students.
    - Get creative! Invite students to come up with a way to experience collective effervescence.

OPTION #2

- In pairs, invite students to come up with an example of coordinated movement(s) of a collective system they feel moved by in some way (e.g., school choir, graduation, playing sports, protest marches, etc.).
- Ask them to consider the following questions:
    - What are the elements of this system?
    - How are they working together?
    - How would you describe their shared goal or aim?

    - What about this system moves you?
- Invite several pairs to share with the whole class their example of collective effervescence.
- Optional: If you have time, take a few minutes to engage in collective movement as a class (see Option #1 above).

CLOSURE

- Invite students to share how it felt to either experience or discuss examples of collective effervescence. Did it shift how they feel or think? Do they feel a stronger connection with other students or to greater humanity? How can they bring more of this kind of experience into their lives?

SOURCE

Dacher Keltner, Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Do your students show a greater willingness to collaborate with each other? Are they better able to work in groups?
- Do you notice any differences in students' expressions of compassion or other forms of prosocial behavior?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A study of 172 adults from New Zealand found that those who walked in sync with others at a fast pace (versus walking in sync at a slow pace or just walking with others at a slow or fast pace) increased their cooperation.

Another study with two internationally-recognized professional music ensembles found that when the musicians swayed their bodies more in unison, they reported having a higher quality performance.

An additional study compared people who attended a month-long Hindu festival in north India (the *Magh Mela*) that included group singing, chanting, and bathing in the Ganges, to people who did not. The study found that one month after the event, those who participated reported greater social identification as a Hindu and increased frequency of prayer rituals, suggesting that collective movement helps individuals feel more connected to their social groups.

Furthermore, a study of 111 Spanish university students found that participants who took part in a mindful-dancing program (versus a control group) that included a synchronous movement activity led to higher levels of compassion.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Experiences of collective movement can inspire awe in students, helping them to feel more connected, and encouraging greater and more effective collaboration. Thus, teachers who offer

students the opportunity to “move together” help create learning environments in which all students feel welcome—a critical component of academic success.

Furthermore, encouraging collective movement among students might contribute to their physical well-being, as well, by fostering compassion and thus reducing the risk of heart disease by helping to slow the heart rate.

TERMS OF USE