**Using the Matrix in Education**

The stance is one of learning alongside the students. NOT ‘I’m the expert and I’m going to show you how it is’, more ‘I’m not sure what’s going on here, but lets take a look at this together and see where it takes us’ sort of thing. We are moving away from our urge to fix things, towards creating a space for students to create and develop their own new behaviours, in response to inevitable internal chatter/feelings.

Goal is to encourage psychological flexibility ie to increase our behavioural repertoire in response to internal processes (thoughts / feelings). Prosocial behaviours tend to emerge during this process.

**Introducing the Matrix**

Introduce the matrix by doing the psychological flexibility warm up:

1. An exercise in 5-senses experiencing
2. An exercise in mental experiencing
3. Noticing the difference between 1. And 2.
4. Recalling how it feels to move towards something that’s important
5. Recalling how it feels to move away from unwanted mental experiencing
6. Noticing the difference between how ‘towards’ and ‘away’ moves feel

**Taking a loop around the matrix**

Do this exercise with the class, having everyone draw up their own matrix on a blank piece of paper. Alternatively, given them a template with the 2 lines drawn.

1. Who or what is important to you? (lower right)
2. What shows up inside you that can get in the way of moving towards who/what is important to you? (lower left)
3. What behaviours do you do to move away from or lessen unwanted internal experiencing? (top left)
4. What behaviours could you do to move toward who or what is important to you? (top right)

Tips on exploring the matrix with students:

* Be open to ‘not knowing’ and being willing to explore
* Whilst they are doing their own matrix, you could do a matrix up on the board, and either put some of your own stuff up on there, or after each student has explored it a bit on their own, get them to share some things, and put these up. You will find there are lots of things they will have in common eg family, friends, doing well, sports, pets etc.
* If some students really struggle to think of anything at all, try to normalize this – it can be really hard if this is the first time someone has ever asked this question, and so it can take some time to come up with things. You could give some common examples to help people get going eg. being kind, connecting with others, helping people, having fun.
* You can do the matrix box by box as outlined above, or do it in a more responsive way. The latter is easier when working in a small group or 1:1. With a classroom it may be easier to go round each box.
* Encourage students to notice the ‘workability’ of their behaviours
* Keep asking the question ‘and where are you’ to encourage the idea of ‘I’m over here, noticing…” …each of the boxes. This will encourage them to position themselves as an observer of their thoughts and feelings. You can put a big circle in the middle of the matrix with ‘ME- noticing’ written in it, overlapping each of the 4 boxes.
* You can use some simple exercises to encourage them to get into the present moment – to ‘unhook’ themselves. Essentially, anything that encourages 5-senses awareness will help with this. (see separate sheet).
* Ask ‘is it possible to have that thought (eg. this is impossible) and still do the towards move (eg do your homework)?
* Sometimes things can seem like ‘towards’ and ‘away’ moves at the same time. For example, coming in late to school can be ‘away’ from some values at school, but may be ‘towards’ the value of caring for a parent or sibling if things are going on at home. Don’t be afraid of things like this – just acknowledge it – perhaps work out the percentage towards/away, to help them work it out. And sometimes it just isn’t clear – that’s ok too. Encourage them to keep asking – when I do that, does it get me where I want to go’.

Ideas for the classroom:

* Write up key words on the board to encourage flexibility eg NOTICING, FLEXIBILITY, CHOICES
* Encourage and reward students when they share internal experiences, and sort them as such.
* Ask questions like ‘What do you want to do with it?’ when they do share an internal barrier, like anxiety, or a thought like ‘I can’t do this’, or ‘I’m really stupid/tired/bored’.
* Keep asking ‘who is noticing this’ when they do move around the matrix, to encourage the observer position
* Name any ‘towards’ or ‘away’ moves that show up in class.
* Encourage the idea of choice – can you have that thought/feeling, and still do the work/complete the homework/stop talking.?
* Use 5-senses experiencing (mindfulness) to centre/ground the child, and then ask about choice – in this moment, as you going to choose away or towards
* Ask ‘Is what you’re doing getting you where you want to go?’ – the response should help you focus on a part of the matrix and continue to sort from there
* Encourage the students themselves to generate the new behaviours

**Taking a 2nd loop around the matrix – with the class/group**

This is when we start to explore difficult emotions and mental experiences that show up during group life. Everyone will have these, and most people will then engage in some sort of behaviour which ultimately doesn’t work for the group’s shared purpose. Using the matrix can facilitate the sharing of these things, and of normalizing them.

So – these are the steps for looking at the matrix with a group:

1. Look around the room and take a look at your fellow group members – taking them in through your 5 senses.
2. Close your eyes and experience your group in your minds (mental experiencing)
3. Notice the difference between 5-senses experiencing and mental experiencing.
4. Remember a time when you moved towards shared group purposes – either with this group or another group you have belonged to. Eg a sports team, a class assembly.
5. Remember a time when you moved away from unwanted feelings that have shown up in this or another group. Eg fear of speaking up in class.
6. Notice the difference between how if feels to move towards a shared group purpose, and how it feels to move away from unwanted internal feelings in a group.
7. So – what is the purpose of this group? (you can get them to chat in small groups first, or just get them to offer ideas. It’s really important that you end up with a shared purpose / set of values.) Write them in the bottom right box on the board. Eg. getting good grades, being kind, helping others.
8. What might show up inside each of you that could get in the way of moving toward the shared purpose of this group? (again – all members discuss and participate, and any answers go in the lower left box.) Eg. envy, fear, anger, tiredness.
9. What kind of behaviours might you do in the group that would move you away from everything in the lower left box? (again – brainstorm and write in top left). Eg. Not participating, criticizing others, talking in class, staying up late, coming to school late, not coming to school, looking at your phone.
10. What kind of behaviours can group members do to move toward the shared purpose of the group? (put in top right).

The key stage in this is no.7 – it is worth spending time on this. You could ask – if you got to choose what sort of student/class member you were, what qualities would you have? Try to get as many students as possible making a contribution – have them own this. Be as open as you can, although clearly in a school setting, there will be some limits. Fundamentally the school is about providing a safe environment in which to learn – you can’t deviate too far from this!

PROSOCIAL is a platform on which you can explore things further from here, through the implementation of Ostrom’s 8 principles for successful groups. We can explore that further another time if this is the direction we want to go in, but they include agreeing sanctions as a group for certain ‘away’ moves, rewards for ‘towards’ moves, swift conflict resolution, collaborative decision making etc.

See: <https://www.prosocialgroups.org/home>

**Using the matrix personally**

Before doing the matrix with the class, it’s probably a good idea to go round the loop yourself. You can do this with life in general (as above), or look specifically on what’s important in the context of the school/teacher role. So you might ask:

* Who/What is important to me in this role / in education?
* What are my own hooks? (eg. kid yawning, looking bored, kids asking too many questions, feeling panicky, being tired, thoughts like “this kid can’t control himself”, or “this is not going to work”, or “what’s the point”, or “I have to do something”, or “I can’t do this – the other teacher is so much better than me”.)
* What behaviours emerge from these hooks?
* Do these behaviours work?
* Is what I’m doing getting me where I want to go?

GOOD LUCK!

**Further reading/videos:**

<http://www.philtenaglia.com/matrix-education/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyDE0cm_7gY> (the psychological flexibility warmup)

Lots of videos on Youtube – look out for Kevin Polk who is the person who developed the matrix.