

# Relational Microstructures

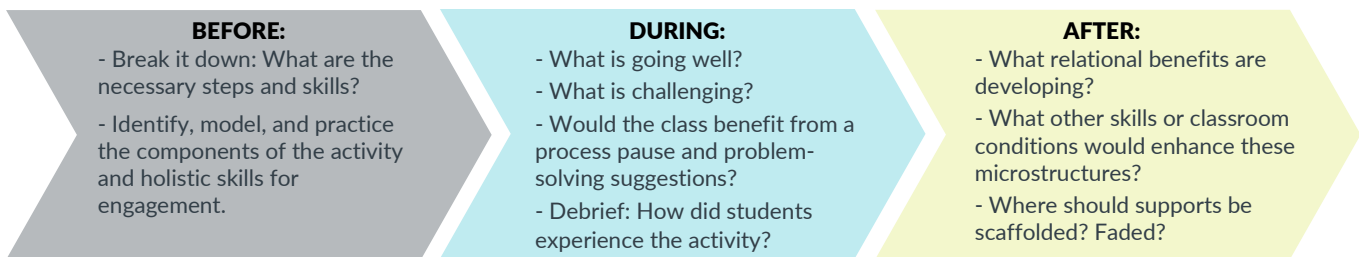
## PURPOSE

These relationally based, easy-to-implement “micro” structures are an example of an integrated approach to realizing a whole-child purpose. They function to increase opportunities for students to interact directly, build trust, share insights, and develop holistic skills (e.g., *interpersonal skills, perspective taking, etc.*).

## DIRECTIONS:

Use the following list as starter ideas for relational microstructures that can be incorporated throughout a student’s day. Prompts are included to support planning, implementation, and refinements to the structures. Educators may find it necessary to adapt aspects of each structure to the developmental range of their students.

Even microstructures take time and intentionality to develop. As you implement a structure, center yourself in a learning stance and use these prompts to make small, continuous improvements and build student skills:



## TO EMBED IN DAILY ACTIVITIES:

### ❑ Turn and Talk Variations:

Give think time and then signal for student pairs to turn to each other and share their thinking. Mix it up with different pairings (e.g., *North/South pairs, East/West pairs, trios, etc.*) or movement and choice opportunities (e.g., *Stand Up, Hands Up, Pair Up; Classroom Mingle; Clock Buddies; Concentric Circles*).

### ❑ Snowball Discussion

Start with an individual reflection or partner discussion on a particular topic, then create progressively larger conversational groups (e.g., *two pairs create a group of 4, then a group of 8*) until reaching the point of a whole-group discussion.

### ❑ Give One, Get One

Students write down several ideas or important learnings in response to a prompt, then circulate the classroom to “give” or share one of their ideas while the other partner listens to “get” and record the idea. After several partner changes, the class discusses key ideas that they learned from one another.

### ❑ Peer Review

Use this structure for students to give each other constructive feedback to help improve their process or work products. Peers might offer a “praise” and a “push” or pose a question or wondering.

### ❑ Chat Stations

A relational take on the concept of learning stations—use discussion prompts as stations and have students visit in small groups to have rounds of conversation.

### ❑ Support Center

Create a space, such as a whiteboard, for students to sign up to give or receive support. From this list, a teacher might assign an early finisher to support a peer or small group of students who are stuck, while the teacher also circulates to provide direction and supports.

### ❑ Student Teacher

Peer-to-peer teaching exchanges can provide different entry points to learning for students, as well as build student leadership and self-efficacy. Students might lead the class in content review, share a problem-solving strategy, engage in a think-aloud about the use of a holistic skill, or share a talent or skill.

### ❑ Reciprocal Teaching

Often used to support reading comprehension, this approach involves the release of power to students, as they each take on a role within a small-group discussion (commonly: summarizer, questioner, clarifier, predictor). Expand this strategy and build skills for interpersonal work, such as: facilitator, project manager, process observer, encourager, flexible thinker, mediator, inclusion specialist, etc.

### Gallery Walk

Artifacts, work products, or discussion prompts are posted throughout the room for groups of students to visit and respond to. Groups add to the responses at each new station, then return to the start to review all that was added to their initial response. A full-group discussion and process reflection can conclude the activity.

### FOR GROUP BELONGING:

#### Establish a Team Identity

As students engage in consistent groupings, such as table groups, project teams, homerooms, etc., create ways for students to get to know each other and establish their own unique team identities (*e.g., a team name; banner; a role in the classroom; a team-generated playlist for transitions or independent work; creating a class or team cheer, chant, or call and response*).

#### Consultancy

Use a simple structure for peers to share dilemmas and solicit advice: “What’s up?” (share the problem), “What to do” (peers offer insights and advice), and “What’s next?” (reflect on any group or individual actions to take).

### FOR CELEBRATIONS AND APPRECIATIONS:

#### Shout-outs:

Create the space during daily activities to build classroom community by recognizing: acts of kindness, positive behaviors, teamwork, growth, effort or perseverance, innovative ideas, initiation of necessary conversations, helpful feedback etc. Model and find ample opportunities for student contributions (*e.g., student shout-outs within small groups, verbal and written shout-outs, etc.*).

#### Process Observer:

Ask a student to be a process observer during a given time (*e.g., during group work, a class discussion, a hallway transition, recess, while listening to a guest speaker*) and at the end, have the student share examples of peers who were upholding group norms, helping each other, pushing the conversation, working hard, trying a new strategy, etc.

### FOR TRANSITIONS:

#### Warm Start

Begin each class or subject period in a humanizing way. Engage in a greeting, conversation starter, team builder, musical transition, or small-group work on a warm-up task, or create space for students to take care of a need (*e.g., share something with the teacher, grab a drink of water, engage in a self-regulatory routine, sharpen a pencil, etc.*).

#### Proverb of the Day

Share a proverb as a way for the class to connect with oral traditions from around the world. This routine can be used to introduce a concept, connect to a main idea of a lesson, or relate to group discussions of culture and norms (inside or outside the school). In addition to strengthening relational connections to each other, this routine encourages multicultural perspectives, teaches how words can have multiple meanings, and enhances intuition—seeing beyond what is obvious and noticing the unseen.

#### Begin with a Buddy

Use a relational transition into independent work time by allowing students to partner with a classmate as they gather materials, review the directions, and ask any clarifying questions. This can also be used to support end-of-class transitions, to catch up a classmate who was absent or is new to the class, or for students who may need additional support with transitions.

#### Relational Close

Create a moment of connection at the end of a class period or school day by offering whole- or small-group opportunities to share a personal reflection with the community. This might be an emotional temperature check, an appreciation, an apology, an “a-ha” moment, something that they are proud of, a curiosity, or something that they are looking forward to next time.

#### + Add your own:

