

Handout for the Therapro webinar  
**Polyvagal in Schools: From Science to Application in Clinics and Classrooms**  
 presented by Dr. Debra Em Wilson - April 25, 2023




**POLYVAGAL IN SCHOOLS: FROM SCIENCE TO APPLICATION IN CLINICS AND CLASSROOMS**  
 presented by **Dr. Debra Em Wilson** author of *The Polyvagal Path To Joyful Learning*

[www.schoolmoves.com](http://www.schoolmoves.com) and  
[www.polyvagalpath.com](http://www.polyvagalpath.com)  
 info@polyvagalpath.com  
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**A bit about myself...**

- Educator for 35 years with teaching credentials in biology, reading and language specialist, K-8 multiple subjects, and physical education
- Taught at the college, high school, and elementary levels
- Specialty training in Futures Studies
- Educational consultant providing training to schools and organizations for over 23 years
- Founder of S'cool Moves, Inc.
- Parent of twenty something son and daughter, with the daughter having a constellation of neurodevelopmental challenges
- Certified color consultant focusing on the role of color in regulation (for learning, school design, home interior design, and personal palettes)
- Love to laugh, read, swim, and dodge rattlesnakes while riding my bike through the Sonoran Desert in Tucson, AZ.



**A FUTURIST ASKS,**  
 "What can I do today to create the future I want tomorrow?"

Writing these two Polyvagal Path books is my response to this question. Start with understanding your nervous system. Why?

Release date  
 October 17, 2023  
 on preorder now.

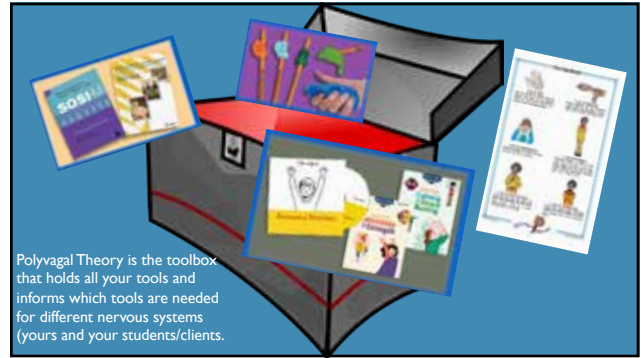
Purchase now through Therapro and get my free course/book club invitation, 4 weeks, starting June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023.



[www.schoolmoves.com/www.polyvagalpath.com](http://www.schoolmoves.com/www.polyvagalpath.com)



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Objective for This Presentation

- Know how to befriend your nervous system
- Activities aligned with ANS states
- Introduce the Polyvagal Learning Hub

Subliminal message

Acknowledgments  
 Foreword  
 Preface

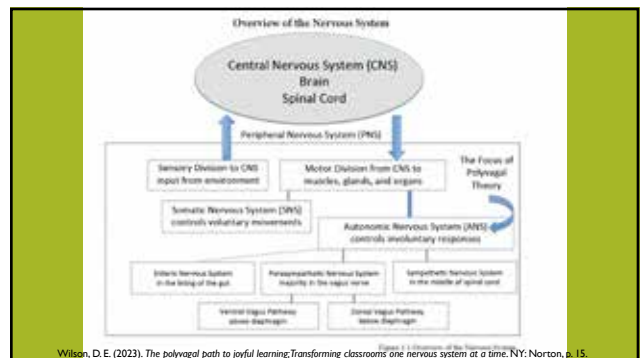
Introduction

Chapter 1: The Friendship That Begins Within  
 Chapter 2: The Learning Foundation of Safety and Connection  
 Chapter 3: Regulation Through a Polyvagal Lens  
 Chapter 4: Resilience, Relationships, and Reality  
 Chapter 5: Anchored and Adaptable Learners  
 Chapter 6: The Visceral Path to Joyful Learning  
 Chapter 7: The Seven Polyvagal Principles for the Classroom

Afterword: Closing Full Circle  
 References  
 Index

Bringing Dr. Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory and Deb Dana's mental health application into busy, time-crunched classrooms with a focus on an educational model rather than a mental health model.


Moving from trauma-informed to all-informed with focus on academic success using neurodevelopmental movement.



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### The Science

...80% of vagus nerve fibers are sensory and relay messages to the brain, while only 20% of vagus nerve fibers are motor, sending action information from the brain to the body (Dana, 2018; Porges 2017). This means the vagus nerve, with its unique ratio of sensory to motor fibers, is primarily wired to receive sensory information related to your well being.



Wilson, D.E. (2023). *The polyvagal path to joyful learning: Transforming classrooms one nervous system at a time*. NY: Norton.


The I.O.B. nervous system formula for where signals of safety or danger come from

Signals from **Inside ourselves**  
 Signals from **Outside in the environment**  
 Signals from **Between others in relationships**

Modified from Dana, D. (2018). *The polyvagal theory in therapy: The rhythm of regulation*. NY: Norton.

### The Safety Scale


To regulate our nervous systems, we must increase feelings of safety and reduce feelings of danger. It's like balancing a nervous system math equation.




Wilson, D.E. (2023). *The polyvagal path to joyful learning: Transforming classrooms one nervous system at a time*. NY: Norton, p. 36.

### ANS Three Main States


Ventral Vagal





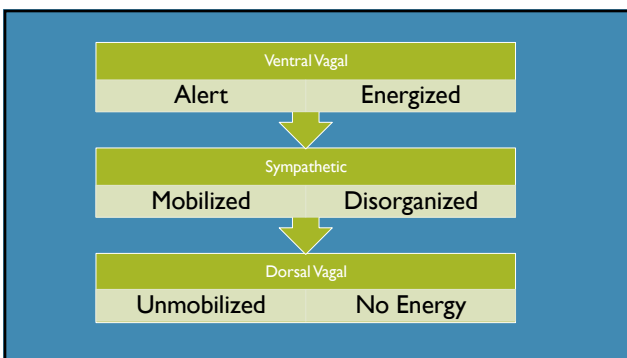
Sympathetic to your plight

Dorsal Vagal




Sympathetic to your plight, the body responds with fight or flight.

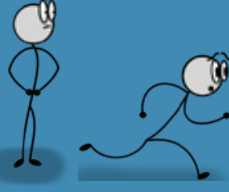
Wilson, D.E. (2023). *The polyvagal backpack: Activities for focused, joyful learning*. NY: Norton.




### Check in...What state are you in right now?



Ventral Vagal  
Ready to learn



Sympathetic: Not ready to learn...yet



Dorsal Vagal  
Unable to learn effectively

Wilson, D.E. (2023). *The polyvagal backpack: Activities for focused, joyful learning*. NY: Norton.




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**Emotions Related to ANS States**




|               |   |   |
|---------------|---|---|
| Ventral Vagal | → | confident, eager, curious, engaged, safe to take risks            |
| Sympathetic   | → | frustrated, irritated, fearful, anxious, angry, worried, stressed |
| Dorsal Vagal  | → | helpless, hopeless, shutdown, ashamed, foggy, disengaged          |

Wilson, D.E. (2023). The polyvagal path to joyful learning: Transforming classrooms one nervous system at a time. NY: Norton, p. 58.

**Personalizing Your Nervous System States**

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Ventral Vagal</b>   | <b>Sympathetic</b>  | <b>Dorsal Vagal</b>   |
|  |  |  |

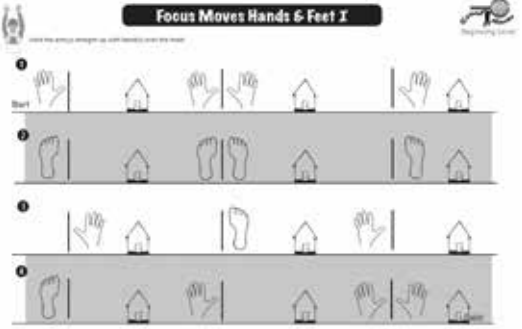
**Personalizing Your Nervous System States**

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Ventral Vagal</b>   | <b>Sympathetic</b>  | <b>Dorsal Vagal</b>   |
|  |  |  |

For those of you in sympathetic disorganized mobilization...let's bring in some focused ventral energy.

The view of the world from sympathetic is one of danger and people are not our friends. It's an unfriendly world requiring a protective response of disconnection from others. We create disconnection through anger or getting away from the person.

**Focus Moves Hands & Feet I**



**Case Study**

A student is frequently out of the seat and in constant motion but the movement is chaotic. The student's Go to Place Within is the \_\_\_\_\_ ANS state.

How can you help the student organize their mobilization without taking time away from academics?

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Integrate Academics with Movement

rat      bat      cat

Create a Push

neuroception

Co-regulation

neuroception      neuroception

For those of you in dorsal vagal shutdown or close to shutting down...

The view of the world from dorsal vagal is one of isolation and disconnection from a world that feels to unsafe to be in it. It can also feel like nothing you do matters, so why bother?

Case Study

A student frequently finds the world too hard and shuts down easily. The student's Go to Place Within is the \_\_\_\_\_ ANS state.

What does this student's nervous system state tell you about what is needed to move through sympathetic to ventral vagal?

Spaggy Spark Word Popping

One of you will read the words in the blue boxes, and one of you will read the words in the red boxes. Take turns with your partner, like a game of ping pong, keeping each of your words as fast as you can until you come to the end of the words. Don't forget to let your partner see their word before you move on! How fast can you go!

|                 |              |               |
|-----------------|--------------|---------------|
| neuroception    | retuning     | ventral vagal |
| vagal brake     | dorsal vagal | micromoments  |
| sympathetic     | glimmers     | resilience    |
| microconnection | buoyancy     | polyvagal     |
| befriending     | theory       | anchors       |

For even more fun, when you finish this side of the card, flip it over and use those words for Speedy Spelling Spots!

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Inside: Notice how the body feels before, during, and after doing this routine

Outside: Hang the poster in quiet centers, sensory rooms, or classroom for a visual reminder to use the routine

Between: Invite students to co-regulate together by sharing nervous systems if a regulated student is open to supporting a dysregulated student



Concerns about over-reliance on others...valid concern!

Ask, "Is this enough time with another student? Are you ready to work on your own now?"

## Interactive Regulation

We move in and out of nervous system states. The key is to not stay in a dysregulated state for too long and find our way back to ventral vagal. We do this by knowing where our ventral resources are from inside ourselves, outside in the environment, and between others in relationships.

I call this "interactive regulation." We never truly regulate on our own. Self-regulation just may be a myth! Dare I say it?

Wilson, D.E. (2023). The polyvagal path to joyful learning: Transforming classrooms one nervous system at a time. NY: Norton.

## Cultivation of Skills

Think of a regulated nervous system as the prepared soil, and the skills as the plants that grow in the tended soil through nourishing relationships and experiences. It's the cultivation of skills that helps retune the nervous system, leading to increased resilience.



Wilson, D.E. (2023). The polyvagal path to joyful learning: Transforming classrooms one nervous system at a time. NY: Norton, p. 73.

## The Polyvagal Learning Hub

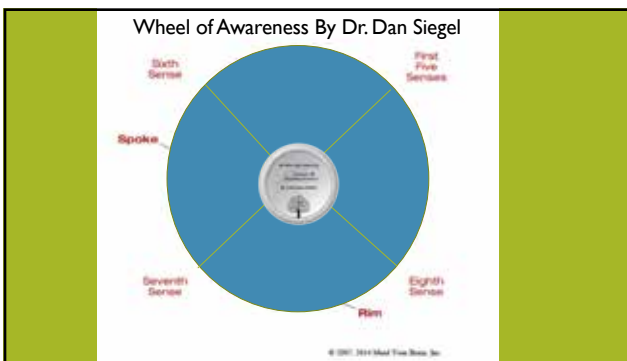
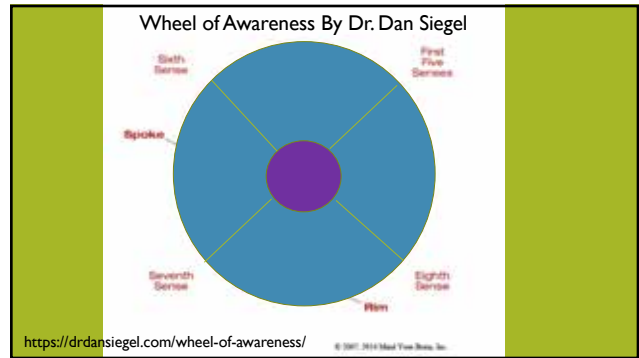


Wilson, D.E. (2023). The polyvagal path to joyful learning: Transforming classrooms one nervous system at a time. NY: Norton, p. 91



https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/

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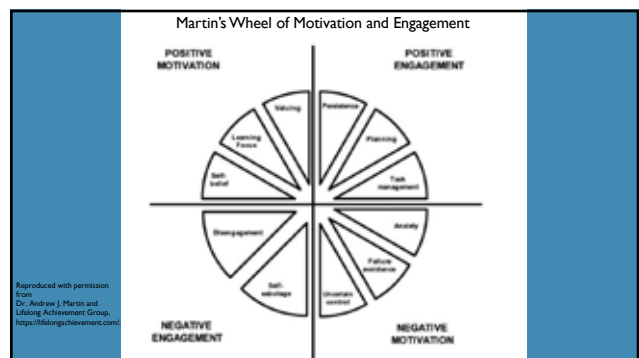
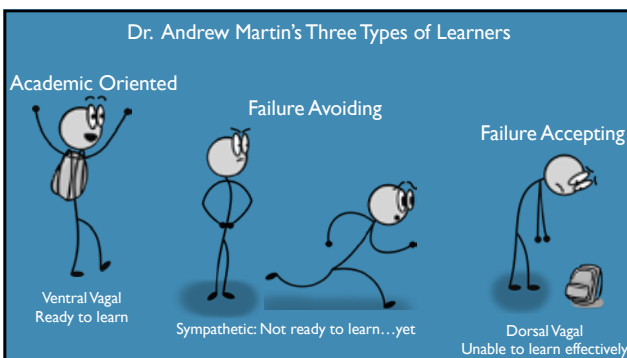


**Dr. Andrew Martin: Martin's Wheel of Motivation and Engagement**



Andrew Martin, BA (Hons), MEd (Hons), PhD, is Scientia Professor, Professor of Educational Psychology, and Chair of the Educational Psychology Research Group in the School of Education at the University of New South Wales, Australia. He is also Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Education at the University of Oxford. He specializes in motivation, engagement, achievement, and quantitative research methods.

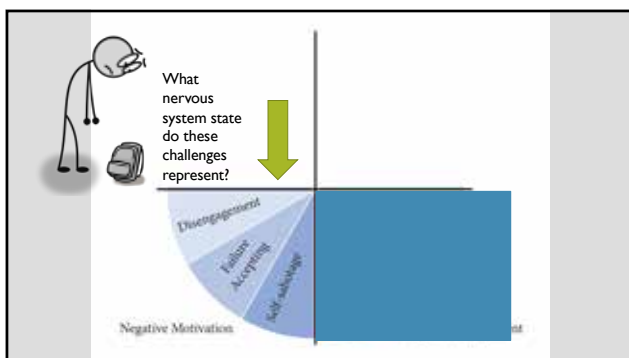
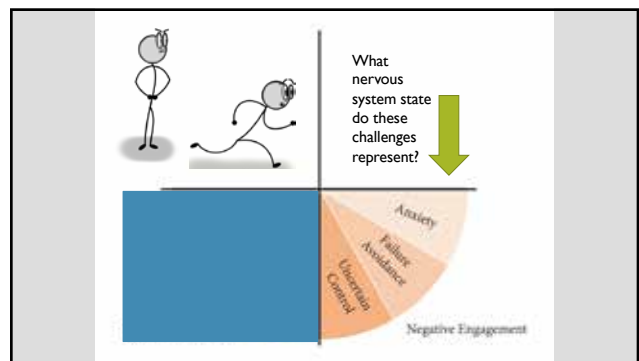
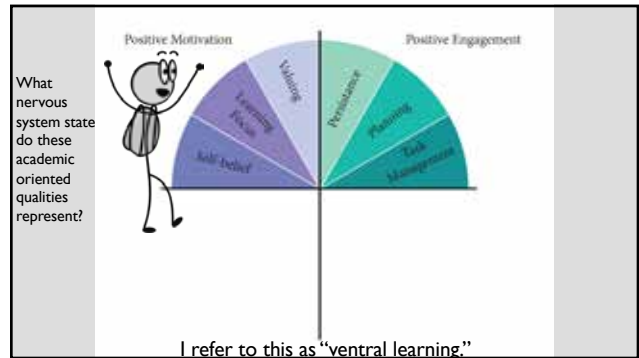
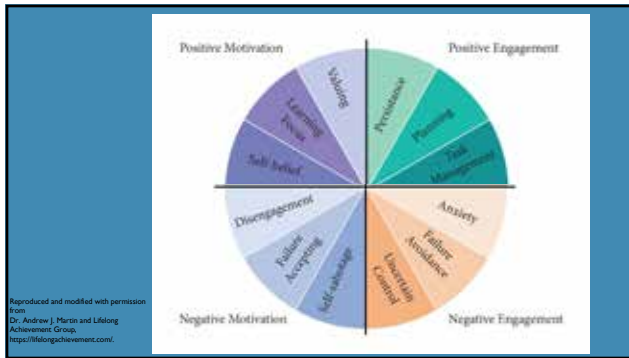
- Ranked top 5 in 5-yearly International Rankings of the Most Published Educational Psychologists
- National Research Field Leader for the "Educational Psychology and Counseling" discipline



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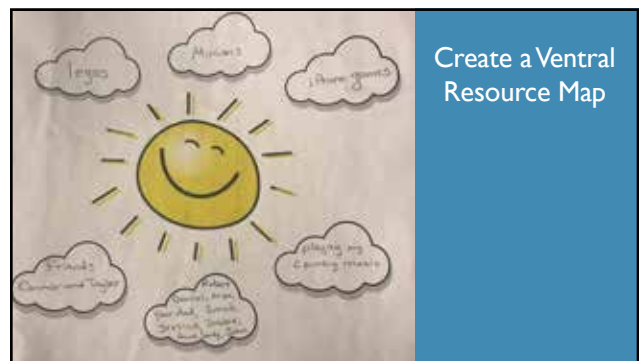
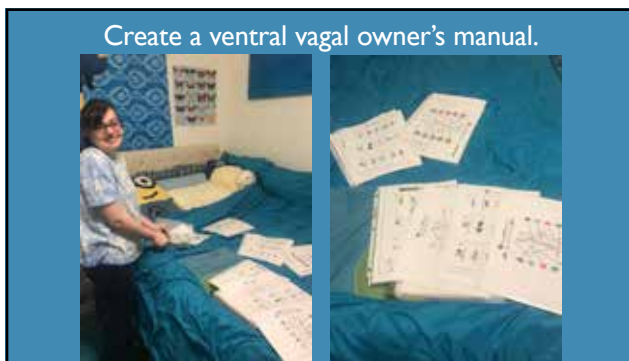


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Blended States for Motivation and Engagement  
 The nervous system needs active learning.  
 There's too much emphasis on quietly still state in schools.

Wilson, D.E. (2023). *The polyvagal path to joyful learning: Transforming classrooms one nervous system at a time*. NY: Norton, p. 81.



So back to the original question,  
**"What can I do today to create the future I want tomorrow?"**

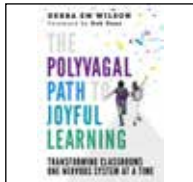
Think about being on a ventral path toward your preferred future. Who, what, or where helps you feel safe? What are your interactive resources? What skills do you need to cultivate? How can we all keep "one foot in ventral?"

Learn More: S'cool Moves YouTube Channel  
 Full online course of over 175 activities

Newsletter from home page at [www.schoolmoves.com](http://www.schoolmoves.com)

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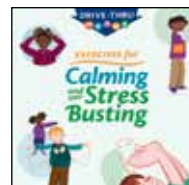
**The Polyvagal Path to Joyful Learning**  
From Debra Em Wilson. Every student and teacher is different, but there's one thing each has in common: a responsive nervous system ready for action.



**Drive Thru Menus for Preschool & Kindergarten**  
Designed to help teachers incorporate movement into the foundation skills of literacy, math, science and social studies.



**Minute Moves Bundle: An All-in-One Bundle**  
Great for whole class involvement and enhancing collaboration between support staff and teachers by everyone agreeing to implement the ten Minute Moves routine throughout the school day when needed.



**Drive Thru Menus: Calming & Stress Busting**  
Provides a program for daily exercise as a strategy to cope with stressors.



**Focus Moves Bundle: All-in-One Bundle**  
Improve postural stability, vision skills, proprioception, body awareness, midline skills, and regulation with these easy-to-implement, classroom friendly activities designed to support children with developmental gaps.



**Sensory Integration Inventory**  
Appropriate for all ages, this Inventory and accompanying User's Guide is a preliminary assessment for occupational therapists who serve people with developmental delays and disabilities.



**SOSI-M Complete Kit**  
A nationally standardized assessment of sensory-based motor skills, based on Ayres Clinical Observations, and developed by well-regarded experts in sensory integration.



**Fidget Kit**  
At the request of many parents we put together a kit of the most popular fidgets. Pick a new favorite everyday. It's a great value because they can be used over and over again and children never tire of them.



**Sensory Stories**  
Sensory Stories teach children with over-responsive sensory modulation to successfully engage in daily activities within the home, school, and community.



**Therapy Putty**  
Therapy Putty is available in 4 colors/firmness, and 4 different weights.