

## ENTERGY Grant - End of Year Reflections

### Stacy Dawson

The 2015-2016 has been a busy and exciting year in my classroom. Our district uses the ELA and Math modules, which provide very little time for Science and Social Studies teaching and learning. I had to be very creative in incorporating hands on science into my schedule to provide students with 21<sup>st</sup> century learning experiences and exposure to technology.

There were actually two aspects of my project. One was Robotics and coding and the other was learning more about being mindful and incorporating it into my daily routine. My students enter at 8:45 and they have lunch at 1:00. I have them the entire time, which is a long time for 8-9 year olds. To help with transitions we use a website called Go Noodle. It is a site that provides students with many mindful experiences. There are different stations that teach various breathing techniques, stress relief, yoga, mind exercises and even Indoor Recess for those days the weather doesn't cooperate. I've learned how important to their overall health and to their learning that this activity is. After participating in a 2 minute break, students are able to refocus and it actually benefits me as a teacher. I have far fewer interruptions and behavior problems because the students settle and come ready to learn. Whenever I put up Go Noodle, they jump up excited to begin. They even become competitive with some of the crazy mind activities like rubbing your stomach one way and the top of your head the opposite way.

I participated in the Mindfulness activity that was at the college this past winter. I learned breathing techniques, yoga strategies and heart math. I enjoyed the activities and it broadened my understanding of the benefits of incorporating mindfulness into your life. I brought back the activities to use in my own classroom. The students have learned how to relieve stress and to calm their mind. Many students have terrible home lives and bring to school a lot of baggage. These techniques have taught them coping strategies that they can use in their difficult lives. It may make a difference in helping them to survive their chaotic world.

I began the year collaborating with my Library Media Specialist. We introduced students to computer coding and they participated in the Hour of Code. Students used apps on the library iPads to "play" games that required them to use and improve their coding skills.

From coding, students used the We Do LEGO kits to build animals. I incorporated a lot of our animal standards into the learning of the animals. Students built animals and used the coding program on the district computers to program them to move. In the spring, the school district supported us financially with busing as we went to The Wild Animal Park in Chittenango, NY. Students received a hands on experience as they fed and learned about many more wild animals. Also, my principal was very supportive and we found that many of the LEGO kits had missing pieces from being used so much. She purchased about \$150 worth of pieces to replenish the kits so that they could be usable in the classroom.

During the winter, students used the Romo robots. They continued their learning of coding as they programmed the Romo's to complete missions. Students were excited and eager to play with these each day. After using the Romo's for a few days, the app began to fail us. I provided the iPods with an update to try to fix the problem. When that happened I had to reinstall the Romo app and found that the company shut down and no longer supported the newest iOS software so we were unable to continue our explorations with Romo. The technology was frustrating us a great deal but we moved on!

In the spring I introduced students to our newest robots, Dot and Dash. Dot and Dash provided students with an exciting coding experience. Dot is the brains of the two and can be programmed to be different games. Students programmed Dot to become hot potato and to answer questions that they asked of him. The kids had fun with Dot as their coding knowledge grew.

What they really loved was Dash. Dash was a programmable robot that moved. They completed missions to learn how to use Dash. They then had Dash complete obstacle courses, raced each other and completed tasks that the website had online. There were many lessons posted on their website, which made introducing Dash easy to use as a teacher. I found that I didn't need to be an expert with Dot or Dash, I just needed to give students time to use them and they were able to figure out more than I ever could have!

Students continue to use the LEGO's and the robots even at the end of the year. They ask to play with them at recess. The best thing is that they think they are just playing when truly they are learning about a coding world that will help them with future careers.

Each year I try to make previous projects better and improve them. I try to always continue with my previous projects and build on them. I have put a lot of work into past and current projects and strive to complete them each year. Student in my class are engaged throughout the day. They know that they must complete all of their reading and math assignments so that they can use the robots and the technology that ENTERGY has so graciously supplied. The technology serves as a learning experience for students but also as a motivator to complete assignments. I have a student who has been absent 26 times and has been late 33 times. On the days she knows we are working with robots, she is here and is here on time. I believe that speaks a lot for the power these projects have on my students.

One thing I wasn't able to continue this year were my stations in the morning. This was a project that I did a few years ago. The technology is outdated, iPads are not holding charges and need to be updated. I am hopeful that I will be able to update this in the future to so that I can put this full year project back into place.

### Nicole Freebern

The ENTERGY grant has given me the opportunity to provide my students with mindfulness practices throughout the day. These practices can help my students focus and relax in a classroom setting. The grant has also allowed for me to build a classroom community that support learning. This year I took a course "Staying Present: Mindfulness for Better Teaching and Learning". This course taught me the purpose of mindfulness teaching and also provided me with strategies that I can easily implement in my classroom. The course allowed for me to provide direct explicit instruction that truly changed the way I was teaching.

My rational for implementing this project is that students are entering the classroom with outside stressors that are affecting their ability to learn. Students are also facing increased demands from the Common Core Curriculum and students need to learn helpful strategies to deal with these demands. Academically my students are performing below grade level than other students in the district. In my classroom 0 out of 20 students have conducted science experiments in kindergarten or first grade. In September my STAR reading data showed that 17 out of 20 students are reading at below grade level. In September STAR math data showed 0 out of 19 have mastered addition and subtraction math facts. When

I surveyed my students 1 out of 20 students have every used breathing techniques to relax and refocus their thoughts. This project also allowed for me to provide engaging hands on science to my second graders. In my district we do not teach hands on science to our second grade students. Students learn the science and social studies curriculum through the listening and learning curriculum. This project will allow me to conduct science experiments with my students and engage them in hands on activities. My ultimate goal is to get my students to love science and to be motivated to learn the new common core science.

This year I took the mindfulness practices and incorporated them throughout my day. I have seen a positive change in my students' attitudes and academic performance by using mindfulness practices. I am using mindfulness activities to build students' social and emotional skills. My students enter the classroom with stressors from home that make it very hard for my students to focus on academic tasks. Each morning I start the day of with a community meeting. Our community meeting is started by a whole class breathing activity. After the breathing activity we do a whole class stretching. This allows for use to get our body and mind ready for learning. I end my community meeting with a share out. Students are allowed to share one thing about their night, morning, good news, or any other concerns they want. I found that this is a perfect way to build a classroom community and show the students that I truly care about them. This time helps my students reduce stressors and also start their day in a positive way. During my transitions in the day I use the website [gonoodle.com](http://gonoodle.com) to help build in mindfulness practice. Students enjoy this time to get up and move and recharge and refocus. "GoNoodle.com has hundreds of movement games and videos that get kids dancing, running, jumping, stretching, deep breathing, and more. After the kids take a quick activity break with GoNoodle, they're able to really focus on learning." ([gonoodle.com](http://gonoodle.com))

The other part of my project is to build in hands on science. This year I have been providing engaging learning activities through STEM activities for students to learn and grow from. Students used coding to make their Romo robots move and computer technology with the Lego kits. I also incorporated an extension in robotics and programming with the addition of Dot and Dash. This was all made possibly by the funding of ENTERGY and the help of our sixth grade mentors. My goal is to make our students leaders and to be in charge of their learning. Students need to know how to use technology to promote the 21st century skills. I need to take advantage to integrate science into all content area, since my district has removed hands on science from our daily schedule. I feel that this grant helped me develop new ideas to infuse mindfulness into my classroom. It also provided me with multiple opportunities for my students to use technology in the classroom.

As an educator, this grant has allowed me to further my own learning and improve my instructional practices. By incorporating mindfulness practices into my classroom I have provided my students with strategies they can use in their daily life to overcome any obstacle. By bringing real science into my classroom I have motivated my students and helped them develop a passion for science. My students enjoy and look forward to learning in my classroom. I see students that are eager for science time and talk about what they have learned outside the classroom. Overall I have seen an amazing transformation in my students' social and emotional well-being by incorporating mindfulness practices in my classroom.

This year I also continued to use all the other material that I have created and received from the grant in past years. My students are using the iPads on a daily basis during math and ELA centers. They are using the iPads apps to help master addition and subtraction facts and also practice the new common core math. Students are using the iPads apps during ELA centers to practice spelling, grammar, writing, and reading eBooks. iPads are also being used for research. Students are using the leapfrog reader and writers during ELA centers. These are being used as a center for students to practice fluency and master

comprehension. The centers that have the iPads and leapfrog readers and writer are my students' favorite centers. Technology helps my students' become excited about learning and I am seeing tremendous growth in their reading and math skills.

This year we continued to have the sixth graders mentor my second grade class. My students love going to the sixth grade classroom and working with their sixth grade buddy. The friendship that they have form with their buddy is amazing. The sixth graders are the teachers and more learning is taking place than a classroom teacher could plan. The sixth graders and second graders did the Wedo legos and also worked with the ROMO robots.

My September 2015 Assessment showed the following results:

- Star Reading data shows that 17 out of 20 students are reading at below grade level.
- This work is important because I have 17 out of 20 students that are reading below grade level according to the STAR data. I have the inclusion classroom this year. My students are very low. The new CCLS requires all students to read the same text for our skills strands. This year more than half of my class cannot read the required text from the state. By continuing to using these reading and writing systems I will increase my students' fluency and comprehension. I need to close the gap in my reading levels within my classroom and get my students reading on grade level.
- 3 out of 20 students were on or above grade level
- 5 out of 20 students were on watch.
- 4 out of 20 students were on intervention
- 8 out of 20 students were urgent.
- Out of my 20 students that I analyzed 10 students receive title 1 reading.
- Star Math data shows that 14 out of 20 students are performing below grade level.
- 6 out of 20 students were on or above grade level
- 4 out of 20 students were on watch.
- 2 out of 20 students were on intervention
- 8 out of 20 students were urgent.

My May 2016 Assessment showed the following results:

- The Star Reading data shows that 7 out of 20 students are reading below grade level. In September 85% of my class was reading below grade level based on the Star Reading Data and in May 2016 35% of my class is reading below grade level based on the Star Reading Data.
- Based on the Star Reading Data 100% of my class increased on their reading levels from September to June. This means that all of my students reading fluency and comprehension improved throughout the year.
- 9 out of 20 students were on or above grade level
- 2 out of 20 students were on watch.
- 1 out of 20 students were on intervention
- 6 out of 20 students were urgent.
- When I surveyed my class 20 out of 20 students said they did hands on science activity this year.
- Through teacher reflection and monitoring I have noticed that my students are more excited about STEM and reading more now than in September. Students ask to read nonfiction text for independent reading time and look forward to getting new books. When my students come to reading group they are excited about the books that we are reading and can answer comprehension question that are asked. It is nice to see my students eager and motivated to read. Students are eager to engage in hands on science activities. My students are starting to think like scientists.
- When I surveyed my class 20 out of 20 students said they knew how to using mindfulness techniques.

My goal for my action plan of incorporating mindfulness into my curriculum and hands on science has been met. This grant has helped me realize the importance of teaching our students life skill strategies to help them be in control of their mind and bodies. Mindfulness practices will help my students be successful in all areas of life. This grant allowed for me to grow as a teacher and mindfulness become part of my daily routine. My students and I both benefit greatly from using mindfulness practices in our life.

#### Carol Carroll

- *Project SMART provided the funds so that I could continue my education on mindfulness by taking EDU 525 Cultivating Learning Communities through Mindfulness, a college course with Advancement Courses and the purchase of an ipad air2 to upgrade technology in my classroom.*
- *Fostering student success in academics*
- *Preparing students for the future using STEM.*

I have learned a great deal this year as part of the Entergy grant in which I was enrolled in a college course on mindfulness. I learned that something as simple as breathing can relax and refocus your thoughts. It can help you be more patient and gentle with yourself and others. Mindfulness is about direct experience of

what's happening in and around you. It is about training your attention and awareness to what is happening. Mindfulness involves forming intention, paying attention, and adjusting your attitude. Developing my own mindfulness helped my students focus their attention on the present moment using strategies and techniques that I learned from the training I received from Project SMART and from the college course. I guided my students to use mindfulness to train their attention and awareness in the current moment. I promoted and developed their physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being, so that they have the skills to live a balanced life both in and out of school. Every morning we began the day using GoNoodle, which is an online program that had activities involving breathing techniques and yoga. The students loved it and I noticed it created a relaxed classroom environment that helped my students thrive throughout the school year. It also helped me prepare for the rigor of the school day.

I worked together with my Oswego team in the fall to plan out our action plan and in the beginning of November I sent Sue our Team Action Plan. I had the support of my principal, Ms. Simmons, and I let her know that I was again part of the Entergy grant with SUNY Oswego.

Nicole, Stacy, and I met several times during the months of September and October. While we waited to find out if the Entergy grant would be funded we began planning, using the STAR Data reports that we brought for both ELA and math. Stacy and I had our NYS ELA and Math data for grades 3 and 6. Most of the students that we would be working with had not passed either state test. Again we looked at all of the students' strengths and weaknesses and identified the needs of our students. We discussed where we could interweave the units we have developed over the years and which ones would enhance existing curriculum. We brainstormed and came up with several plans that we could use this year. We are knowledgeable in common core and the curriculum that we teach. We know the value of infusing technology into our lessons and in preparing our students to be proficient with the 21st century skills. After looking at my student data, including STAR, I noticed that my students lacked STEM.

During my Christmas break I purchased an iPad air2 that I would use in my classroom. I began looking at free apps and found replay which is an editing app for video. This was used with my students when they created their crayon commercials. I loved this app as much as my students. I used it with all the sixth graders, so approximately 55 students had the opportunity to use the editing app. I shared the commercials with parents during parent/teacher conferences and they were amazed at what their child could do. It was very exciting.

My students continued to use the materials that have been provided through the grant. Students learned computer programming and design using Romo robots and Wedo Legos. This year I helped my students understand what mindfulness is and the positive effects that it can have on them. We practiced deep breathing techniques to improve their self-awareness. My students participated in mindfulness exercises during the morning meeting to increase their focus, emotional calm, and body control. I feel that my students applied their practice of mindfulness awareness to become kinder and more resilient in and out of school.

As I began my action plan I used my student data to look at my students and their academic needs. My classroom environment consists of nineteen sixth graders that are between eleven and twelve years old. I normally have twenty-three students, but this year our numbers were lower. My class has six above average readers, eight average readers, and five below-average readers, who receive extra support in reading through our Title program. Our student population is one of the most diverse of the five elementary schools in the city because of social economic factors. Approximately 430 students attend

Fitzhugh Park School, and out of 430 students 70 % of them receive free or reduced lunch. About one fourth of my students come from middle class families, one-fourth upper-middle class, and the remaining two-fourths come from low-income families. Many of my students come from a one-parent family. Students in my class have extra curriculum activities, such as chorus, strings, band, chess club and art club. Sixth graders are young adolescents that are developing academically as well as socially during this time. I'm preparing them to move out of the elementary school and into the next phase of their academic life, middle school. Mindfulness can benefit my students by training them to be more focused in school and more aware of their social and emotional well-being. These are skills for lifelong learning.

Introduction of mindfulness began as soon as I began the college course. I explained what mindfulness means and did several informal activities with my students. I began with the greeting of the day, modeling positivity with my students. I had my students practice this with their peers and other staff members. I really liked the "casting an intention" activity. What a simple, yet great way to set your intention. Again, this will be done by teacher modeling and having the students practice this strategy. I began breathing techniques with "Take 5 for a Month". This provided a framework for taking five minutes to practice mindful breathing each day.

I personally prepare for my mindfulness week by setting my intention each day, greeting my students and staff members with positivity, and taking 5 minutes each day to breathe. I used the breathing throughout the day to control any negative emotions. I took a breath and relaxed, prior to starting a lesson or dealing with any student conflicts that might arise. I also provided reflection journals for each student.

I prepared my students by first practicing mindfulness in my own life. I needed to practice mindfulness in my own life, so that it will be infused in my life, work, and relationships. I wanted to be proficient, so that I can teach and model mindfulness. I began the school year with mindfulness in my classroom and conducted formal instructions and informal activities throughout the school year. Informal activities, such as greeting the day, intentions, and mini mindfulness activities in the morning that focus on mindful breathing will promote mindfulness.

My goal of interweaving mindfulness into my curriculum and into my classroom has been met. I realize the importance of providing a supportive classroom environment that is data driven, and technology can help in providing this. Students used mindfulness techniques to enhance their growth and helped them prepare for mindful living. This was a great learning experience for both my students and myself.

**Paula McKenney-Myers and Josh Russell**

Leighton Elementary, Oswego

Answering machine project:

**Description-** Students write scripts, create sound effects, create background music.

**Process-** Students write scripts, background music lesson, students create background music, sound effects lesson, students create sound effects, audio suite lesson, students edit sound effects with audio suite, mixing lesson, finish the projects.

**New things-**

- 1- Altered script writing. Students complete form on the computer. Remove some of the info required. Students don't need to write down what they used in audio suite. I want them to go

through the planning process of writing down their sound sources. Audio suite editing is more of a trial and error process as they don't have prior knowledge of the software in this section. This project is meant to be an introduction for their 6<sup>th</sup> grade sound story project which is more in depth.

- 2- Background music first. Normally I have students record the background music last. This time I had them do it first. We had a lesson about background music and students were able to work with a smart notebook presentation document about the musical characteristics of each mood. Once BG was done, the track was muted and students were able to work with sound effects. At the end of the project, the track was unmuted and student could listen to everything together to adjust volumes.
- 3- Progress check. The progress check is a little late in the process at the moment. I would like to do this a couple of classes sooner. I like how students are rotating to each workstation to hear what their peers are doing. The intended result is being met- students are seeing examples of really good work and not so good work. The comparisons are either making them feel really good about what they are doing or motivating them to work harder. Unfortunately, they have 1 class to finish their work after the progress check at this time. If I move the progress check sooner, they will be able to implement changes based on student feedback.
- 4- Self evaluation form done earlier. On the last work day, I gave students their self evaluation form. As they finish their project, they are completing this form. Normally I have them do this on presentation day. This gives them more time with the form and they can listen to their project in private to put their thoughts on paper. I also showed examples of good and bad evaluation forms- this helped with quality of responses.

### Singing in the microphone

**Description-** Students sing or speak in the microphone. I will ask questions or offer up a song for sing along.

#### **New things-**

- 1- Talent show practice. Students participating in the school talent show were given the opportunity to perform with a mic during music class.
- 2- Artsfest recording. I used different types of microphones to record students in preparation for this school wide event. Students were really excited about being recorded. Behaviors were not a problem during times of rehearsal and recording. Students wanted to come to music extra to work on these class recordings.

### Deep Listening Activities

**Description-** Instrument identification, sound editing (using ProTools), sorting sound sources. The MindUp warmup of listening to a sound source fade away and listening to your breathing will develop students' sound awareness and hopefully balance their emotional and physical wellbeing as they practice this de-stress strategy.

**Process-** All things happen year round as parts of lessons or lessons in themselves.

#### **New things-**

- 1- Instrument identification. Instrument pictures taped to the floor. Students know what instrument they sit on in class. For kindergarten, I created a word doc with all the pictures on it. Instead of calling out instruments, I will point to a picture for the students to identify. "if you're sitting on



this picture, stand up”. Most can’t identify instruments by name except for keyboards, guitar, and drum set.

- 2- Sorting sound sources. Using percussion instruments, students will sort themselves out based on criteria I set. “sort yourselves into wood and metal instruments” for example. They also got to create their own sort criteria which we then executed. This was a great exercise. The new music series by McGraw-Hill that our district adopted has something called virtual instruments. Using ipads, we could have students use virtual instruments for their instrument sound sorting. “sort yourselves into wood and metal sounds”
- 3- Fading sound sources. Using table chimes, I play one and have students raise their hands when they hear it. They keep their hands up as long as they hear the sound. The students love it when I walk around with the chimes so they can hear it up close. They realize that the sound is still going even though they can’t hear it from their seats. This has been really helpful in getting quiet in the room. It also gives students something to focus on as they are lining up to leave the room. This can be a chaotic time for them. K & 1 grades are too many in number and too varied in skill level to be able to breathe and listen to the fading sound source. Grade 4 was the best at the breathe and listen. The classes are smaller so the activity works better. Grades 5 & 6 have smaller classes as we see them in half groups but the students are a very chatty group. If we had them first thing in the morning, this activity might work better. I anticipate that as the younger students advance in grade level, they will be more receptive to these activities.

### Anchor Breathing

**Description-** This was first introduced last year. A student holds up a stop sign (visual cue) and the rest of the class is supposed to quiet down and do their anchor breathing. They may count their breaths or listen to the sound of their breaths.

**Reflection-** Having done this for a year, the students are much better at the activity. I need to continue to teach the procedures and include a discussion portion. I would like students to experience the calm and quiet and then reflect on what they felt and/or thought of during the activity. Using this as a quiet signal is definitely helping but doing more of the reflection piece will help the older students become more committed to the activity. If the students had a better understanding of the benefits of this relaxation/focus technique, they might be more inclined to use it outside of music class. I also plan to search for a more kid friendly visual cue for this activity.

### Notation Activities

**Description-** Students will be working with rhythmic patterns of varying difficulty as a transition and calming activity during music class. Students in grades K-4 will be working on notation activities to identify and perform melodic patterns. This will increase their focus and deep listening abilities. The following ipad apps will be used: Music cubes, Melody Cats, Rhythm Cats, GarageBand, flashnote derby, MSOLearn, Forscore, Meow music, Starmaker, Synth, and Freddy the frog.

**Process-** All things happen year round as parts of lessons or lessons in themselves.

### **New Things-**

- 1- PBIS day activities- Students have more ipads to use for their musical activities. The ipad minis are great for smaller hands.
- 2- Music text book series- Spotlight on music by McGraw-Hill. Students would use the ipad like a text book, viewing the music. The ipads were also used for the virtual instrument feature.

Students could play simulated instruments not found in the music classroom like guitars. This was a bit cumbersome to set up ahead of time but worth it in application.

- 3- Ipad apps- use as a transition activity and assessment tool. The ipads would circulate in the classroom while I was conducting a lesson. This would work better if all students could be on the ipads at the same time so we could all work together. Those waiting for the ipads would not focus on my lesson and often be off task.

## Roshmi Mishra

### Enterpy Final Assessment report and reflective essay

Assessment/evaluation :. I used a series of writing prompts that served as a vehicle to frame the participant's reflective writing. The questions that I asked will be about the use of mindfulness breathing techniques and the understanding of some of the *seven* attitudinal vocabulary from Jon Kabat-Zinn's interpretation of mindfulness: 1) Non-judging; 2) patience; 3) beginner's mind; 4) trust; 5) non-striving; 6) acceptance; 7) letting-go/letting be.

### Reflection essay

#### *Introduction*

This is my first year working with Project Smart in a more self-paced setting. It is my second year working with Project Smart's mindfulness in education program. Being more on my own, it was in some ways easier, since I did not have to rely on other folks and the scheduling of monthly meetings for us to share the work. The other side of this experience was that I did not get to "check-in" as often as I had become accustomed to doing with my previous experience in year 1 of the mindfulness in education program.

I did volunteer my time with Chris Walsh, by going into Central Square high school to do a short presentation and demonstration of my application of yoga and mindfulness in my classrooms. The teachers at Central Square seemed receptive to me being there and to Chris' program of engaging them in the use of mindfulness. I have also had the great fortune to work with Chris Walsh in Rochester at Nazareth College. There we engaged staff, administrator and teachers from local city schools with the application and techniques of mindfulness. For the purpose of the action research, I used a series of writing prompts that served as a vehicle to frame the participant's reflective writing. The questions that I asked will be about the use of mindfulness breathing techniques and the understanding of some of the *seven* attitudinal vocabulary from Jon Kabat-Zinn's interpretation of mindfulness: 1) Non-judging; 2) patience; 3) beginner's mind; 4) trust; 5) non-striving; 6) acceptance; 7) letting-go/letting be. (Kabat-Zinn, 2009, p. 32)

#### *Reflections on Teacher's Learning*

There were many moments that I gained insight or became more aware of the influence of mindfulness and yoga during this school year. In particular this happened most often when I would read the reflective narratives about once a month. The information that my students shared with me gave me insight into how much mindfulness was influencing their abilities to pause, refocus or make sense of events in their own lives both in and out of school. For example I learned that most students agreed that focused breathing techniques helped them to "sett[e] down and become aware of [their] surroundings." As the classroom teacher, I could use the reference of the focused breathing techniques as a way to reunite us as a class whenever we need to refocus. I could ask everyone to pause what they were doing and start to breathe, allowing them and myself to a moment to become aware of the chaos and move from the chaos to a peaceful stillness. I use this breathing technique throughout the school day to help me not feel overwhelmed or stressed when I start to panic that I have too much to do and just not enough time or resources to make it happen. It became my automatic response whenever I felt

the feeling over being overwhelmed creeping into my teaching day. My students would also ask to breathe if they felt anxiety or overwhelmed. I would introduce the focused breathing before a test/quiz was administered to the class. In my own classroom, it expanded my knowledge base of mindfulness.

I had the great fortune to go to NYC and learn more about mindfulness in communication. The workshop, Conflict Communication is an introduction to Nonviolent Communication (NVC). This is a way to be mindful of what we say and how we interpret what others are saying to us. I have already applied much of what I have learned from this workshop as I engage with my students, administration, colleagues and parents. It has helped me reduce misunderstandings that often lead to unnecessary conflict and negative emotions. I was so impressed with this that I plan to incorporate this in my college classes as I teach pre-service teachers. How we communicate, needs to be mindful in order to be the best teachers that we can be.

### *Reflections on Students' Learning*

I applied the technique of focused breathing at the start of all of my classes, both for my 7<sup>th</sup> graders as well as my 8<sup>th</sup> graders. It took less than 5 minutes at the start of class. I believe it was one of the best use of my time in class. My students' seemed more focused, more engaged and more aware of how they were feeling. I also gave the students reflective writing prompts once a month during our literacy Friday classes. They were asked to engage in reflection about a few mindful vocabulary I introduced at the start of a new month. The vocabulary term was from Jon Kabat-Zinn's work with the 7 attitudinal factors. I asked them to write about:

What do you think you are learning by doing focused breathing?

How can you use mindfulness to speak differently to your peers and adults?

One of the Mindfulness vocabulary word is Trust. What does trust mean to you?

Read this quote below. It defines Trust, as a mindfulness term.

“Learning to trust one's own experience, feelings and intuition — loosening oneself from the tyranny of authority and inner harsh judgement — has the ‘taste of freedom’, a key hallmark of a genuine practice and essential for individual development.” What is the message of this quote by using an example of a freedom you have due to trust? Then the term Letting Be was used for reflective writing: Allowing things to be as they are and not as we want them to be is a form of letting be.

“Letting go is not such a foreign experience. We do it every single night when we go to sleep. We lie down on a padded surface, with the lights out, in a quiet place, and we let go of our mind and body. If you can't let go, you can't go to sleep” Please write what you think this means to you. Please write if you do or do not apply this component into your own life since you have participated in mindfulness this school year. Give an example if you can.

The reflective writing for my yoga Study Hall students was: Please reflect on your yoga practice this year. Can you think of ways that this practice has benefitted you as a student? Can you think of ways that this practice has benefitted you outside of school?

Students reported a range of experiences from no benefits to some benefits. None of the students reported any negative effects from the participation of mindfulness or yoga this school year. Students generally reported that they felt less distracted, more able to calm down and better able to sleep. My students did not make enough connections with the vocabulary terms and how they are able to cultivate them using mindfulness. Those that did, saw the application of the terms to their school work. For example, an 8<sup>th</sup> grade physical science student wrote that for him, the mindful term, non-striving, means that “I have to accept that I have to do my homework to get good grades”. This same student was able to apply the term non-striving from mindfulness to the scientific method, by stating that both are observable. “Non-striving fits into scientific method because when you make an observation you accept what you see”. I also sampled the students to see their understanding of the mindful term “trust”, which they all reported was important, but none reported that trust begins with

being mindful or even the ability to trust oneself first. This is the meaning that Kabat-Zinn shares when trust is defined in terms of mindfulness.

### *Conclusion*

I believe that mindfulness and literacy are wonderful partners. Self-reflection is an opportunity that most students do not get to have during the course of an average school day. Self-reflection is a wonderful tool to help students use meta-cognition as a means to understand their own choices. I believe that this experience will benefit both the teacher and the student. It aides the teacher by allowing them to access an awareness of their emotional state before they make decisions that can impact the learning relationship between the student and the teacher. I believe that this experience will benefit the students as they continue their educational careers into adulthood, although we may never get data to confirm this.

### References:

Kabat-Zinn, J., & Hanh, T. N. (2009). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. Delta.