

Team Final Report on Teacher and Student Learning at Oswego Middle School

with Tania Ramalho & R Deb Davis

EDU 525 - Cultivating Learning Communities through Mindful Language and Literacy

Teacher Participant Names: Melissa Wilber

Please update us on any changes you made to your team action plan:

There were no changes on the action plan that I submitted in December, but with me focusing on myself first with the workbook had slowed my body down and I am much calmer person. The workbook had me do many exercises and I was able to focus on myself and slow down so my anxiety is down to a minimal.

Analysis of Data on Teacher Learning: We examined our reflections and found the following:

On October 16, 2015 I started with my first exercise (watching baking soda sizzle down) and found that I kept getting distracting by thinking about what needs to be down. I felt that the baking soda was not dissolving fast enough and I kept wishing for it to go down. I repeated the same exercise on February 19 and found the exercise to be relaxing and felt that it dissolved to fast and I added more baking soda. That showed me that the exercise is worth it and I am able to catch on to mindful thinking to pass it on.

On November 25, 2015 There was an upsetting incident between two families at a church function. In the past, I would walk out and not express myself. Since I was getting comfortable with breathing I started to breath. A young adult at the table saw what I was doing and he joined in. When everything was calm down, he looked over at me and said "thank you Ms. Missy I feel a lot better. It was good." I responded with "It share was". This incident showed me that breathing will calm the nerves down.

On April 28, 2016 I received some bad news at the doctors. I would usually cry and get antsy and worry. I decided to take deep breaths and meditate which allowed me to stay calm and get through it.

Analysis of Data on Student Learning: We examined _____ and found the following

With me able to slowdown I showed the students in the classroom the same way. The students are able to stay quiet (with their eyes close) for one minute.

On March 3, 2016 one of the students got upset and started to throw papers around the room. I said "you need to take a deep breath" and he did three times. He was calm and said "I am ready to clean up the papers" and he did. On May 20, 2016 this child was getting upset and he took it upon himself to take deep breaths. This helped me to see that he was able to retain the purpose of breathing.

Teacher Participant Names: Tomoko Stultz

Please update us on any changes you made to your team action plan:

I originally picked two students, E (boy) and T(girl) for this project. This has not been changed. I was not sure in the beginning about a breathing technique but I was able to use it on all the students during "Second Step" (a program which is to help the students handle their emotions more effectively). While I was counting to 10, the students had to close their eyes and then breath a couple of times. Gradually I increased the number up to 30 and the students would still close their eyes and breath.

Analysis of Data on Teacher Learning: We examined our reflections and found the following:

1. Tone of voice

A soft and quite voice is more effective. My voice is naturally loud and I have to be mindful and intentional to use a soft and quite voice especially when I give students directions. Talking to the students slowly or slower is also effective as well.

2. Eye level

When I talked to students, I tried to sit on a student's chair, so my eye level is the same as their eyes. Keeping eye level to theirs makes students feel less frightened.

3. Using props

When working with small children, one of the challenges is time limit. 4 or 5 year-old-children do not have time concept and do not know what 3 minutes means. We use a 3 minute and 5 minute sand clock quite often. The children can see how long 3 or 5 minutes are and this visual helps them to understand the time limit.

Another prop I utilize from time to time is a puppet that I use for "Second Step" Instead of me talking, when the puppet talks to the students, they sometimes listen better.

4. Give options

Giving options is extremely effective and important. When students can decide or choose what they want, they feel like they can take their own initiative. Instead of saying "No", giving them different options helps allow students to make better choices. In other words, I have to be more mindful to provide two right options so whichever a student chooses, he or she is still making a good choice and I can tell that to the student!

5. Warning & consequence and consistency & reputation

Giving students a warning is very essential but giving consequences is more important. The warning and consequence should be clear and simple, and this should be also consistent and repeatable. However, this could be the most challenging aspect when there is more than one teacher in the classroom and they don't set standard expectations. In my classroom, there are usually three staff members, so we often discuss how to handle a specific student in a particular situation.

6. Time interval

When a student starts acting up, he or she is not usually ready to listen but I still say, "Stop!" or "You are not making good choices right now." However, keeping those statements does not seem effective. I learned that a student needs time to calm herself/himself down so I usually wait without saying any words for a few minutes.

7. Third person's intervention

I find this extremely helpful at most times when a student keeps acting up badly.

8. Same vocabulary

We decided to say "Make a good choice" instead of "Do" or "Don't". When all the staff(teachers) use the same vocabulary, students better understand what they mean and get less confused.

*I have noticed that the students can tell what my mood is. In other words, when I am frustrated or in a bad mood, they immediately sense it and react accordingly. When I am in a bad mood, their reactions are also negative. On the other hand, when I am patient and willing to spend time with them, they react very positively. As a teacher, it is important that I am emotionally ready and prepared every day and leave my personal issues behind once I get into the classroom. When I am not in a mindful manner, I use more command words instead of giving students choices.

*I found that the breathing technique helps the students calm down. Sitting quietly with their eyes closed is also very effective and the students actually enjoyed doing it very much. I think this activity will be a good one to do in the morning to set the tone or during the middle of the day when the students become more active and sometimes out of control.

Analysis of Data on Student Learning: We examined E(boy) and T(girl) and found the following:

1. E is 4 years old and extremely immature and self-centered, but he does very well academically. After examining E's behavior for a couple months, I found that he brews up when he can't get what he wants or someone tries to take the toys he is playing with. He immediately starts acting up by throwing things and leaving the classroom or circle place where all the students sit for learning, crying. So I emphasize;

1) It's okay to get upset, but it is NOT okay to throw or break things or leave the place(classroom)

2) Use words. I would encourage him to explain why he gets upset. However, I often found that he could not explain with words why he was upset. When he can't explain, I lead by asking, "Do you get upset because.....?" or "because?"

3) I use breathing technique a lot with E. I also tell him to look up first before breathing. After doing these, he started telling himself, "Look up! and then breath" when someone else gets upset! At this point, he normally stopped crying and calmed down. When he could not calm down, I waited for a few more minutes before talking to him.

The most effective way for E was just to tell him what to do in a very firm voice and serious facial expression without asking any questions. For example, when he started acting up because he did not want to come inside after playing in the playground, the most effective way was simply to say, "Time to go inside. Wait in line!" "If you don't line up right now, we are leaving!"

2. T is all about getting attention and T wants to be in charge. T almost always does what she is told not to do. Transition was definitely the most difficult time for her, and she usually started acting up by screaming, throwing, hitting and kicking. She often spits on the floor. Our team had "Behavior Plans" for T, and I was assigned to be sit with her during meals and circle times. In addition, T became my lunch helper. T and I go to the cafeteria everyday to get lunch.

1) T learned that if she did follow the directions or listen to the teachers, I would not sit with her. T is

very competitive with a few of the other girls. If I sit with one of them, T really minds it and immediately does what she is told.

2) When T is simply told to do one thing, she usually expresses she wants to do another thing. For example, when I say to her, "I will help you." , she usually tells me, "No, I don't want you to help me!" Then when I say, "Okay. I'll help someone else.", her reactions is always, "No, no, no! I want you to help me." T eventually learns that what she says is what she gets.

3) It took much longer for T to calm down last year. I had to take her out of the classroom to take a walk but she can turn around fairly quickly for the last few months. Whatever she does when she gets upset, we always tell her to make a good choice. Throwing, screaming, hitting or kicking are NOT good choices. She often tells us that she wants to make good choices and to have a good day. T knows what good choices are and what our expectations are.

4) T helps me to get lunch ready, and she knows that that is a privilege. We didn't make this as a reward. I ask T everyday if she wants to help me for lunch or not, and her answer is always "yes". Then I emphasize what a good helper she is (positive reinforcement without a reward). I often shared her good and helpful behavior with other staff intentionally as well so she could hear the encouragements.

Teacher Participant Names: Maura Titus

Please update us on any changes you made to your team action plan:

I needed to make some adjustments to my original action plan due to the limited amount of sessions I worked with my two small groups. I was unable to complete all of the lessons I had planned to cover as outlined in my action plan and made modifications to fit the lessons into a shorter block of time. This was disappointing, but necessary due to the number of days available to work with the two groups after intervention lessons were complete.

Analysis of Data on Teacher Learning: We examined our reflections and found the following:

As I worked on my project I needed to find a way to incorporate the *Mind Up Curriculum* lessons into a short block of time. Each group of students met with me for less than 30 minutes /2 times per week. This was challenging due to the need of meeting with them for intervention and other scheduling factors. Based on each lesson, I saw how much the students knew about their own actions to various situations, but they did not have the background knowledge to express what it meant to be mindful. Once we had discussions, they were able to make connections to how the brain functions and how that affects how we process and store information. The fourth graders seemed to be less focused and had less buy in throughout the lessons, which may have been affected by their classroom culture and less exposure to mindfulness. The fifth graders had a higher level of engagement 90%-100% throughout the lessons. I feel this may be due to their classroom cultures including some mindful activities using *Go Noodle*. I had relationships with all 12 students since I worked with them since October, but I feel the buy in was more prominent with the fifth graders due to that factor.

In teaching mindfulness, I felt like I had a better understanding through re-reading the book *Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness*. My level of comfort with teaching it to the students fluctuated because I had to digest the new information and design a way to make it relevant for the students. I truly believe the consistency with mindful practices and will instill the skills in the students and adults as well. Jacoby Ballard's visits allowed me to see the yoga and mindful breathing in action. I was able to observe

the students in my fourth grade group making an effort to try the poses and breathing exercises, as well as, their responses to the session. Through my observation and participation I was able to gather more data about mindfulness.

Analysis of Data on Student Learning: We examined _____ and found the following:

The fourth grade group was comprised of four girls and two boys. We were able to complete three modified lessons for Unit 1. The first lesson provided an overview of the three important brain parts and their functions (Amygdala, Pre-Frontal Cortex, and Hippocampus) involved with thinking and reacting to happenings in our life. I filled a 1 liter water bottle with sand, confetti, glitter, and water to show the students a model of how the brain functions before and after being in a calm state. I felt this was a concrete example for the students. This was a recommendation from the *Mind Up* Curriculum that I chose to support my teaching. The students were given the Unit 1 lesson template (Brain Power!) and were asked to label the 3 parts of the brain and tell how it helps us, without the aid of the poster (Getting to Know and Love Your Brain) used for my lesson. One of the female students (S.B.) labeled the parts, but shut down and scribbled on her paper for the written explanation of how each part helps us. Of the remaining students: two students (one male (K.S.)/one female (M.I.) labeled and attempted a response for all parts; two students (one male (A.P.)/one female (H.H.) labeled and attempted an explanation for two parts; and one female student (S.R.) labeled and attempted an explanation for one part. At the beginning of lesson 2, I asked the two students about how they felt completing the activity without the use of the poster. The students felt that it wasn't fair and caused them to panic because they could not remember everything. They were relieved when I put up the poster and allowed them to review as a group and share their original responses. The female student who originally scribbled was given a new paper and she chose to re-label and write an explanation for each brain part.

For my second lesson, the students recorded everything they heard after they had their eyes closed and voices off for 30 seconds. They shared their lists and were amazed at how much they could hear when being mindful.

The third lesson was a two-column list of "Mindful or Unmindful" actions. We read through them and the students starred the ones they have chosen to engage in at one time in their life. They were then asked to choose one way they can become mindful and begin applying it to that situation. Four of the six students (3 female/1 male) were present for this lesson. One girl (S.R.) wrote "Start to be more interested in different types of food and start listening to people more." Another girl (M.I.): "I can stop zoning out in class. Also, I can go to sleep early instead of late." The third girl (H.H.): "To try new things; help out; be nice, respectful, safe to others, and encourage them to do things and always be mindful." The male student (K.S.): "To pay attention when someone is talking."

My fifth grade group included three girls and three boys. We were able to complete three modified lessons for Unit 1. The first lesson provided an overview of the three important brain parts and their functions (Amygdala, Prefrontal Cortex, and Hippocampus) involved with thinking and reacting to happenings in our life. The students were given the Unit 1 lesson template (Brain Power!) and were asked to label the 3 parts of the brain and tell how it helps us, without the aid of the poster (Getting to Know and Love Your Brain) used for my lesson. Two of the students (one female (L.O.)/one male (R.B.) labeled and attempted an explanation of how each part helps us. One male student (E.P.) partially labeled and attempted an explanation for each part; one female student (K.C.) labeled and attempted an explanation for two brain parts; one female student (A.M.) labeled and attempted an explanation for one part; one male student (N.L.) partially labeled and did not attempt any explanations. The fifth graders were also asked to write down a reflection or something they learned. One male student (N.L.) wrote: "The brain is a great tool.

Stress is not a good thing.” A female student (A.M.) wrote: “When I am stressed I go to sleep.” Another female student (K.C.): “The Amygdala calms you down. I’m tired.” A male student (E.P.): “I feel dizzy and silly and class clownish. I think stress is a waste of time because you won’t accomplish anything.” Another male student (R.B.): “What I feel like right now is calm.” The last female student (L.O.): “What I feel right now is happy and annoyed. Happy because I feel smart and annoyed because they keep talking!”

As with the fourth grade group, they were given a chance to use the poster to review their original responses and fill in any gaps. They were relieved to have the second chance and felt very stressed when it was taken away during the original activity.

For my second lesson, the students recorded everything they heard after they had their eyes closed and voices off for 30 seconds. They shared their lists and didn’t realize how much they could hear when being mindful.

The third lesson was a two-column list of “Mindful or Unmindful” actions. We read through them and the students starred the ones they have chosen to engage in at one time in their life. They were then asked to choose one way they can become mindful and begin applying it to that situation. One boy (R.B.) wrote: “What I’m thinking about today is how to be mindful and unmindful which means to be like aware of your action. I will listen to people’s whole conversation and not speak when a person is talking.”

Another male student (E.P.): “We talked about mindful awareness. We learned a little bit about Prefrontal Cortex, Amygdala, and Hippocampus. I will stop doing too many things at a time; try new things/food; and be a better person.” Another male student (N.L.): “What I am thinking about what we talked about today is how interesting it is. I could respect others better and help out.”

A female student (K.C.): “Mindful and unmindful stuff like helping someone in need. I will stop doing random things; stop being perky; watch TV more, and eat new stuff.” Another female student (A.M.): “We talked about being mindful today. I will try new things other than new food. I will not do too much.”

Another female student (L.O.): “What we learned is being mindful and being unmindful. We also learned focused attention or not and mindful awareness; making judgments; and your brain parts.”

Teacher Participant Names: Leigh Skeele

Please update us on any changes you made to your team action plan:

Originally, I planned on incorporating mindfulness practices with visual thinking strategies throughout the class period in order to cultivate and support my art classroom learning community. I was aiming to give the students the skills needed to calm themselves in the classroom. Once I introduced mindfulness into my curriculum, I found that I needed to change my approach to target the beginning of class, as many students were coming from lunch or other chaotic activities. Focusing in on a particular part of the class period, allowed structure during a time when students were particularly difficult to teach.

Analysis of Data on Teacher Learning: We examined our reflections and found the following:

I didn’t realize how much mindfulness would impact my own life and teaching. I have grown as a teacher and a mentor after switching from visual thinking strategies to mindfulness learning. It helped me focus on my classroom management by establishing a routine with my K-2nd graders. I speak with a lower, calmer voice, and am smoother with my transitions too.

Currently, when my K-2nd grade students listen to a video about colors and shapes, I find myself singing along, happily because of the success of the student buy-in. I love using this particular video for this reason. My biggest fear was how my students would react. Would they like these videos? Would I succeed? As it turns out, this particular video was a great success had by all.

Analysis of Data on Student Learning: We examined *I'm a Square* and Go Noodle: *Rainbow Breath* and found the following:

K-2 Mindful sing-along video: I found a great video about shapes and colors, which is sung by a man with a very soothing voice, with a great visual component. I began playing this sing-along video at the beginning of my K-2 classes, where the students walked into my classroom with the lights off, and were directed to sit on the carpet. Keeping the lights off, while the video played, created a calming environment and the students actually reacted well. They hummed or sang along, softly. I was impressed, not knowing that the students would settle down so well. These K-2 students were often coming straight from lunch, and normally were too hyper to teach. Art class, which was once recess, turned into mindful learning art class. One of my students exclaimed, "I do feel more calm!" That was enough evidence for me.

Going off of my momentum, I showed a second meditation video, which was a video from Go Noodle, called *Rainbow Breath*. This time, I introduced the video to the first graders. The students sat in their assigned seats and we played the video from the smart board, with the lights on. It was a disaster. This test run differed from the video above in many ways. For example, the students were much more attentive to the smart board with the lights off and on the carpet, than this time in their assigned seats with the lights on. Similarly, the *Rainbow Breath* video incorporated an element which required the students to move their arms in a rainbow movement, whereas the sing-along video that I showed the week before, was less moving, and more humming and singing along. The *Rainbow Breath* video was more successful with the second graders on the carpet with the lights off. I learned that moving forward I can only do mindfulness activities and videos with the lights off, with the students sitting on my carpet.