

## Team Final Report on Teacher and Student Learning Yoga Team

EDU 525 - Cultivating Learning Communities through Mindful Language and Literacy

School: (CARE ALTERNATIVE high school ) SUNY OSWEGO

Participant Name: Alicia Mitchelson

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

I decided to meet with my students every week instead of bi-weekly for quarters 3 & 4. It was extremely beneficial for me to meet with them weekly. The group as a whole is very stressed, and anxious. Meeting with my group of students weekly allowed for less anxiety in the classroom. Each person practiced mindfulness in their own way (without being pushed/forced) that felt important to them.

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

The students were more energized, calm, and ready to learn after mindfulness. The teachers, also participated in teaching regular breathing exercises on days I was not there.

The teachers let me know that less students got in trouble, and arguments as mindfulness became a weekly class.

We practiced breathing before NYS Regents'. The students were able to test take in a non-stressful manner, and pass all their exams.

I learned there is always room for improvement. I have new activities for teachers and students, and ways to go about things for the next school year. The CARE alternative high school program started with 7 students, and by next school year will have 22 students.

The hardest part of the mindfulness program was when new students would arrive half way through the school year. It was a setback, but with time those new students adjusted with their new surroundings and became comfortable with me, and their peers.

Slowing down, disconnecting from digital devices, and breathing helped the students with their strengths, and creativity. A lot of students (people in general) are addicted to their smart phones. It was nice to see the students breathing, and being creative. The students could still "play." That I feel is hard to find now a days, with the obsession with electronics.

It was a success for all involved. I was there each week to support the students academically, acknowledge anxiety without getting caught up in negativity, accept the present moment, manage stress, and anger, and live with compassion, and happiness.

The classroom went from being chaos and filled with tension in the beginning of the year to a calm, and more collective group of students.

### **Analysis of Data on Student Learning:** We examined \_\_\_\_\_ and found the following:

I began each class with breathing exercises. Each week we practiced a new breath. (Breath counting, ujjayi breath, 4-7-8 breath). I arrive to school at the same time the students do. I would ask everyday how students are feeling before, and after. The majority of the students were tired, and stressed before mindfulness began. The students wrote down to me how they felt after our practice. A lot of their answers were; happy, relaxed, calm, comfortable, and grateful.

A young male that I have in class is an outdoorsmen, and loves to hunt. Hunting frustrates him, but with the help of mindfulness he is able to breathe, and be patient. A young female that I have in the class is open to mindfulness because it is important to live in the present moment, and feel gratitude, as she almost lost her life this year.

The videos that the students loved were;

Mindfulness: youth voices. <https://youtu.be/kk7IBwuhXWM>

Learning to breathe: a mindfulness curriculum. <https://youtu.be/qpDBusFB9zI>

Mindfulness in teens by Dr. Dzong vo. <https://youtu.be/07MGBFWB7dw>

“I don’t have time to meditate.” <https://youtu.be/avAfWEtsdfI>

4-7-8 breath: go ZEN. <https://youtu.be/Uxbdx-SeOOo>

The students also liked the exercises involving mindful eating. We practiced with fruit.

Relaxation techniques I found to be the most helpful and beneficial for my high school students are; vivid guided meditations. We did a lot of nature walks, beach, forest, secret sanctuary, clouds. THEY LOVE IMAGES. Also, body scans. Connecting us to our bodies, and practicing the art of letting go, surrender. Themes that were used through Quarter 3, and 4 are; surrender, live in the moment, open heart/gratitude, concentration, and loving-kindness.

The closing I ended our practice with in 4<sup>th</sup> quarter that the students liked was;  
SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE--  
SOMETHING TO LET GO--  
SOMETHING NEW TO BRING INTO YOUR LIFE--

School: Oswego Alternative School, Sheridan Prep, Van Duyn, Oswego Middle School and Statewide

Participant Name: Rosh Mishra

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

Rosh Mishra: No changes were made in my part of the action plan.

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

Rosh Mishra: I have learned that while students report “snapshots” of improved emotional mindset, they are still young children within a stage of developmental growth that requires a lot of re-teaching and refocusing even with mindfulness embedded within their class period. It is not a cure-all, of course, but I think that it shows me that it allows students to have moments of control and calmness in their school day. This is surely beneficial to the student overall.

**Analysis of Data on Student Learning:** Rosh Mishra examined 110 students, 58, 8th graders and 52, 7<sup>th</sup> graders, and found the following:

Students report some changes in the way they looked at coping with challenges of school including stress. Some of the vocabulary of mindfulness such as the term such as “Letting be”. Majority of student participant indicated that they use mindful focused breathing to help them sleep, to reduce the self-reported anxiety and stress they are facing as they try to sleep. One student reported: “ I do apply this component before I go to bed actually” “I do mindful breathing”. Some in yoga study hall reported that they felt that they had more “stamina”.

Most students discovered that their participation in mindful breathing was a benefit to reducing their negative emotions. Some quotes from the participants express this analysis:

“I use it [mindfulness breathing] when I am mad and need to calm down.”  
“At night when I am stressed about something with school I breath[e] in and slowly.”  
“I apply this component to my own life once in a while, when I am stressed out or frustrated or even depressed I use this to calm my mind and let go.”  
“Mindfulness have helped me concentrate cause I get distracted easily. I get distracted easily when people talk out of turn.”  
“I use it to fall asleep.”  
“I have a hard time sleeping due to thinking about the next day of school. If you are trying to sleep and can’t because of thinking about the test try to let it go until tomorrow so you can get some sleep.”  
When asked if they use the mindful breathing in their own lives, a student reported: “Yes I do because it calms me down and helps me to remember questions on a test.”

School: Van Duyn Elementary

Teacher Participant Name(s): Jacoby Ballard

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

In classes with students, I have guided them into postures and then asked them about sensation and emotion, develop a somatic and emotional vocabulary and awareness. I ask them how they feel at the beginning of our session, and how they feel at the end as a way to reiterate the impact of mindfulness practices on their minds and emotions.

I have worked to interrupt negative self talk, or commentary on other’s postures or experience by asking about what *is* possible, or what they are feeling.

I have also tried to design a practice that *feels* good-joyful, restful, stress-reducing, and students have noticed the impact. One fourth grade student even asked, “when would you do this stuff?” I said, “well, you could do it at the start or end of the day to help you feel calm and interested in school, or you could do these movements before a test so that you feel good within yourself, and can take a test from that place.”

In working with teachers, we discussed their self-care practices and aspirations, and focused on compassion-how to bring attention and tenderness to suffering-their own, or their students. The teachers reported that when they take time to do their practice, the students notice, and are more interested in breathing, meditation, or yoga. Thus, the teachers lead by example, and are modeling the practice to the students, as well as guiding the students at different moments. Another lovely impact of the work with teachers was the development of *sangha*, or beloved community, with the after-school group. They were able to develop connections and support each other, not only around mindfulness practices, but around showing up as their best self to teach the children.

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

We did not conduct written reflections with the children, unless the teachers involved in Project SMART did that on their own.

I found that teachers are hard-pressed to do self care practices, but when it’s part of an academic course for credit, that provides a necessary incentive. Additionally, the support of one another is important, in having a sense that they are a part of changing school culture, to create a culture of wellness and vibrance, that their self-care is not only about themselves.

I have also found in the work around compassion, that compassion is embedded in the teacher's desire to teach in the first place, and that exploring the wounds or inspiration about *why* they teach is compelling to keep them motivated, to keep their 'eyes on the prize.' Most 'continuing education' credit courses or even classes for a Masters in Education do not explore the personal reasons that lead someone to teach, and I saw it be of great benefit to the Van Duyn teachers, to be aware of their own purpose and also that of each other in the after-school group. This led to greater trust, cohesion, and compassion between teachers as well as in the classrooms with their students.

**Analysis of Data on Student Learning:** We examined \_\_\_\_\_ and found the following:

In guiding students through postures, I found that students often did not have the skill to notice sensations, only noticing 'this feels good' or 'ouch this hurts', but nothing in between. Thus, I think, in the pursuit of mindfulness in schools, it would be useful to have more regular contact with students (many students I saw 1-2 times during the year), and to develop a greater vocabulary of physical sensation as well as emotional experience. This would help students identify what is happening within them before they act or speak, and thus to act and speak with greater purpose, or to simply notice the impact of another child's words or actions on their own emotional landscape, regardless of response. I would advocate for not just postures, breath work, and meditation at Van Duyn, but weekly discussion about mindfulness as it relates to a student's home, family, the classroom, and efficacy at anything that they are doing.

In guiding students through breath work, I found that just one minute of different styles of breathing can vastly impact a student's mood, engagement, and interest. It would be quite impactful for all teachers at a school to learn breathwork and to teach it in their classes, as a way to support their students in excelling and reducing their stress from home and societal pressures.

Teacher(s)/School: Sheridan Preparatory Academy, Albany

Teacher Participant Names: Elizabeth Russell

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

Based on experiences this year, next year I plan to work in each classroom for a number of consecutive weeks. I think this will help the students have a clearer understanding of the material presented as well as have more of a consistent impact and aid in meaningful retention.

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

I observed differences in teachers; some really participated and engaged when I was in the class and some were less interested/involved. It seemed like in the classrooms where the teacher engaged, the students were more attentive and focused.

**Analysis of Data on Student Learning:** We examined \_\_\_\_\_ and found the following:

I found that despite my plan going into any given class, flexibility is always required. Being able to observe the class' energy and mood and subsequently modify the lesson accordingly was essential in delivering a lesson (which sometimes differed from my "plan") that was engaging to the students.