

Reflective Piece
By: Carol Carroll

Project SMART provided the funds so that I could continue my education on SEL and mindfulness by taking
EDU 525: SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) IN HIGH NEEDS SCHOOLS

- \$689 camera equipment for photography enrichment program.
- 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 SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) IN HIGH NEEDS SCHOOLS. I learned that self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making are key components in SEL components. Through the readings I learned how to implement SEL activities into my daily life and classroom to promote social and emotional development. Last year I took a class on mindfulness and attended a yoga class provided by the college. This helped to develop my own mindfulness and guided my practice of mindfulness into my 6th grade classroom. It involved forming intention, paying attention, and adjusting your attitude. I was able to help my students focus their attention on the present moment using strategies and techniques that I learned from Project SMART and from the college course. This year's course worked well with mindfulness and helped me to infuse SEL components that promoted and developed students' physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being. I feel that last year's course and this year's course provided the foundation that I needed to support my students in creating a balance in their lives.

I know for myself that the past two years have helped me be more patient and understanding with others. I have applied what I learned about mindfulness in my daily life both in and out of school. I continue to practice yoga class twice a week and this helps to promote a calming environment, as well as a balance life. I continue to use mindfulness activities found on Gonoodle, such as breathing techniques and yoga. These activities help students be more focused and aware of what is happening in the school environment. The students love Gonoodle activities and I noticed it created a more relaxed classroom environment. The yoga classes, mindfulness techniques, as well as the SEL components helped to prepare me for the rigor of the school day.

I know that my project was targeting students that lacked social skills and students that have spent time both at in-school suspension or were suspended out of school multiple times. My observations showed me that many of my students just didn't know how to get along with their classmates. They're coming from homes that are dysfunctional and they struggle in the school setting. These students have a hard time getting along with their peers and will often bully other students. Working with students both in school and after school helped me promote social skills as well as improving their self-awareness.

I really like how I began my sessions with self-awareness. I realized that many of my students need to understand their own emotions, goals, and values. I modeled this for them by writing out mine and sharing it with them. I found that by sharing my personal goals and having a positive mindset helps me stay well-grounded both in and out of school. I found that students also liked to share their personal goals with me after I shared mine.

Looking back, I realized that having my students write their strengths and limitations at the beginning of the project and looking at how this changed over the months was powerful. It helped my students see how our feelings and actions are all interconnected.

I always like to have my students reflect on what they learned at the end of the after-school sessions and how they have grown both academically and socially this year. I was really pleased to see that there wasn't one student that didn't enjoy the photography enrichment program. I knew this action plan made a positive impact on my students not only by what they were saying, but also noting that I did not have any suspensions since I

implemented my action plan.

The after-school project began on November 15th and ran to Spring Break. Sessions were on Tuesday and Thursday till 4:30 PM. Our school provided the bus transportation which allowed many of the students the opportunity to be part of this program. I think that the time frame was perfect and I wouldn't change a thing.

The students created two wall photo murals and they are hung on the main floor walls. The students were in charge of the design, photos, and creation. I was very proud of their work. The students wanted to add color to our walls and designed two murals.

The elimination of suspensions and the increase in students' STAR scores, along with having the support of my principal, Ms. Simmons and SUNY Oswego made this project a success.

Stacy Dawson

ENTERGY Grant – End of Year Reflection

The 2016-2017 has been a busy and exciting year in my classroom. It has by far, been my most challenging year as a teacher. I began the year with 20 students, 6 of the students have an IEP, 3 of the students were autistic, 5 students needed AIS reading support, and 9 received AIS math support. The students needed a lot of academic support, but on top of that one of the IEP students was a severe behavior challenge, one of the autistic students was a behavior challenge, and a student who did not have an IEP was also a huge behavior challenge. It was a very needy classroom to say the least.

The behaviors in my classroom needed to be addressed, I found this out the first week of school. I had to clear out my classroom numerous times this year to keep the other students' safe from a few. I had students trashing the room, throwing pencils, books, chairs and anything else they could get their hands on. They were tipping desks, yelling, screaming, having temper tantrums, hiding under desks and tables and running out of the room and through the building. Students were kicking, hitting, swearing and biting me. This was happening daily. It was unusual to make it through a 30-minute lesson without some kind of interruption.

These behaviors led me to look at the design of my classroom and the need for a big change. I knew I needed to find a way to help all of the students in my classroom. I needed to redesign the layout of my room and also the way that I instructed. These students were fidgety and needed to get their energy out. They also needed to learn how to get along with one another.

Mindfulness was the first thing that I incorporated into the day. I taught students exercises to help them when they felt stressed or anxious. This helped all students, because the behaviors of certain students were brining on a lot of stress and anxiety for the typical students. It also helped those with behaviors because I was teaching them alternative behaviors that were more positive than screaming, hitting, throwing, running or yelling.

Mindfulness also helped a lot during our coding unit. I worked with the library media specialist in my building. Together we taught a coding unit. Students learned how to code and learned to write their own. They used their coding strategies to complete tasks and also when we did our LEGO unit. Coding can be very frustrating to students and we found that using the mindfulness exercises helped them tremendously. They could take a break, do some mindfulness exercises and come back to take a fresh look at things.

Next, I looked into flexible seating. My principal was willing to order tables for my classroom. I used the money from ENTERGY to buy a variety of seating to meet the needs of the very needy students in my classroom. I researched the types of seating and ordered balance discs and rockers for seating at the rug. I ordered wobble stools, regular stools and ball chairs for the tables. I also have 2 big pink comfy chairs that students used. I taught the students that we are all different and learn differently. They learned that they needed to first try out different seating to see what types of seating help them to focus and do their best work. Some students loved certain seating and hated others. They are free to choose their own seating each day. The ball chairs are the most popular and there are only two of them so we rotate.

Once the seating and tables came, I began to incorporate a lot more cooperative learning activities. We were starting to get some of the behaviors more under control, the mindfulness activities were benefitting students and I began explicitly teaching students how to work together. They learned to listen, share their ideas, work together and take turns. Group facilitators led activities and they completed assignments, projects and activities together. I redesigned the lessons that I taught so that students were working together daily in all subject areas: ELA, Math, Science and Social Studies.

Students had a great time doing inquiry-based Science activities. They did design challenges that involved spaghetti and marshmallows. They also participated in the Silly Straw challenge in which they had to purchase materials to build a stand to sell Silly Straws. Through the design challenges the biggest things the students learned was that they could never be perfect! No matter what their design, they could always do more to improve it. This was a huge learning experience for my students. Many want the right answer, and expect to get it. I've tried to explain that very few things are invented right the first time. Usually it takes multiple tries and fixing it up to make it better each time. Many students had difficulty accepting this idea!

NYS recently adopted the Next Generation Science Standards. My district supported my participation in Science Network Meetings, held 4 times this year at BOCES. They provided substitutes for me and paid for me to go. I tried out some new units this year that align to the new standards. I did a new unit on Force and Motion that aligned to the new standards. The biggest learning for me came from the way lessons should now be taught. Students should be given time to explore and try out and then the teaching of the why should happen. My students enjoyed these types of activities.

Overall, my year was very successful, despite the behavior challenges. The student that was the most challenging behaviorally was placed in an alternate program in mid-April. The dynamics of my classroom changed tremendously after he left. Overall, the behaviors decreased with the new design of my classroom space and the way that I taught the lessons. Because of the changes that I made, more students were successful this year. I had to really focus on the social and emotional wellbeing of all students in my classroom this year, because it was a difficult year for everyone.

I appreciate the generous donation from ENTERGY and the support of my district, which made this possible.

Entergy Reflection by Brad DePoint

This year has been a great learning experience for our entire team. We were fortunate to have the support of members of SUNY Oswego and Project Smart to make this year's experiences possible. We also would like to give a special thanks to Entergy for their generosity throughout the years.

This year started out right on schedule. We rolled out an SEL time from 12:40-1:00 each day with a mixed approach of teaching using Second Steps and the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens. We quickly found that the majority of the content in Second Steps was not appropriate for the setting we had in elementary school. Because most of the lessons were geared for a M.S. or Jr. High setting we quickly modified to just using 7 Habits and once in a while used some of the role playing lessons from Second Steps. Once we were done with the 7 habits we moved into using the book "I am Here Now". Before we started the "I am Here Now" a survey was given to students about their views on how they perceive themselves within nature and their daily lives. The initial survey (Fig. 1) below shows the results from the students. After that, we focused on many lessons and activities that would get students to recognize their space around them and find peace and relaxation within an often-chaotic world.

In February Dr. Parisian came in to give a little science and math background on why deep breathing and "meditation" works. The students had many doubts and questions about if it actually did so. Dr. Parisian brought his heart rate monitor and was going to demonstrate to them "real-time" how deep breathing works. Unfortunately, his pulse monitor did not work and we were unable to arrange another meeting time. Overall, I think that very few students were convinced that deep breathing helped, most thought it was still something that their bodies just did. We then started with a daily routine of meditation before and after lunch. This was

only for 5-7 minutes before lunch and 3 minutes after lunch, before students would go to SGI (small group instruction). Most students immediately said that they felt calm, tired, or relaxed. This continued for 3-4 days per week in each of the 6th grade classrooms. Students became accustomed to this routine and most of them enjoyed the peace and quiet.

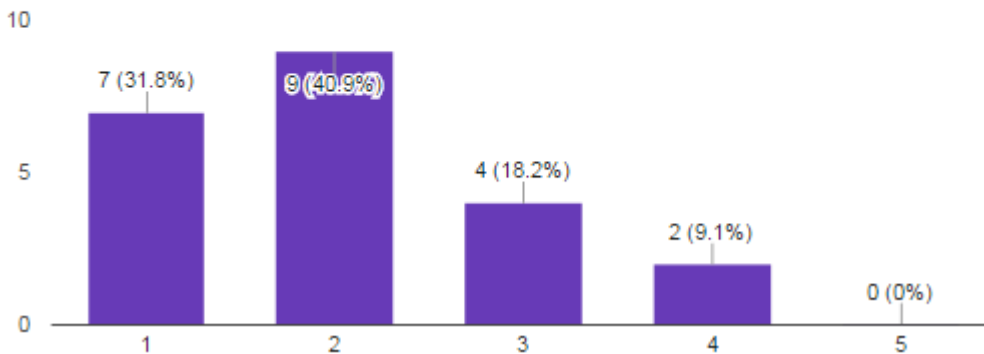
While the winter months passed we also used our Aquaponics set-up to do many experiments and activities during math class. Concepts surrounding measurement, conversion, rate, and volume were applied to many lessons and tracked throughout the winter months. We grew approximately 2 ½ lbs of lettuce for the first picking of the year. Students enjoyed the 5 different varieties of lettuce and were excited to plant another batch that would be later transplanted to the outdoor garden at the end of April. During the second round of growing we tracked the evaporation and absorption rate every four days over the course of 16 days. Students had to convert the cubic inches to gallons and determine the amount of water loss. Eventually in the last week of April we were able to transplant the plants outside and started comparing the growth rate of the aquaponics grown plants to the soil grown plants. We are still currently tracking their growth and it seems like the aquaponics plants are growing at a faster rate.

Before we went to SUNY Oswego students were prepared with what the expectations were when we went to Rice Creek Field Station. We also discussed how being quiet and respectful to the nature that is there would result in the most fulfilling experience with nature they would have. I truly believe as a result of the meditation and activities with the “I am Here Now” book that students were able to observe more wildlife than any other group of students ever before. Students were so excited to see deer, snakes, water snakes, turtles, herons, and trout in the stream. I was extremely impressed with their enthusiasm but even more impressed with their ability to remain quiet and in tune with nature.

Finally, we gave an end-of-year survey with the same questions as shown in figure 1. The results clearly show that in Figure 1.

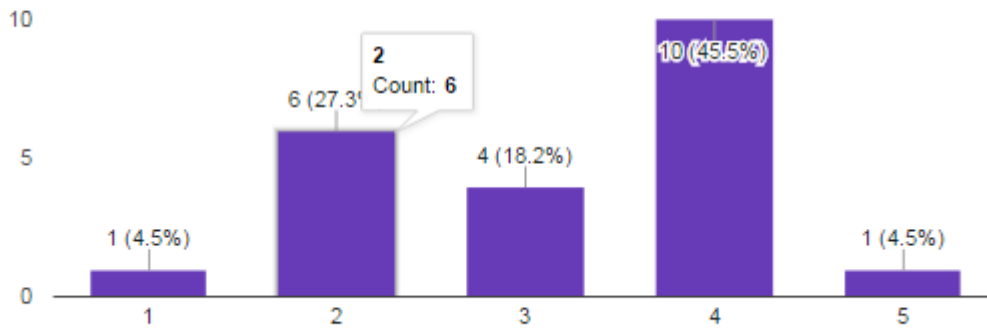
#1 When I'm walking somewhere and pass a flower along the way, I stop to smell it.

22 responses



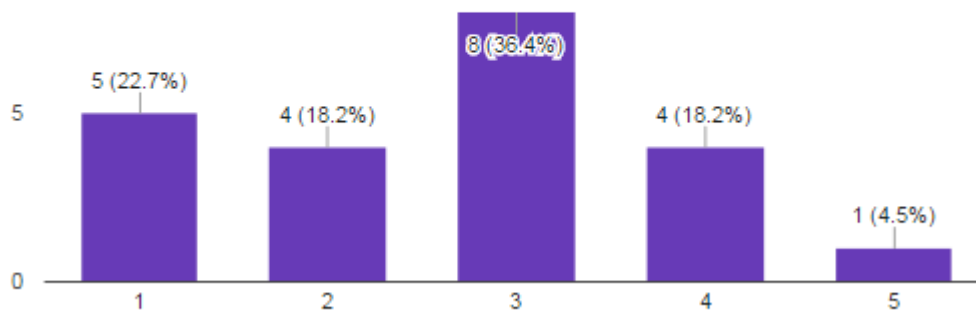
#2 Tend to worry about the future and/or regret things from the past.

22 responses



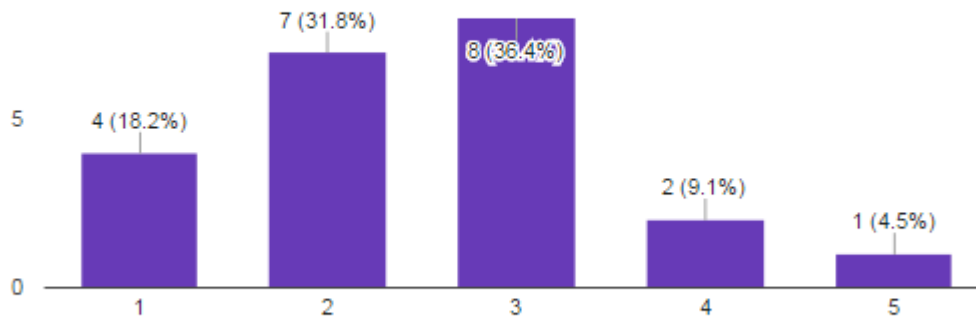
#3 Take time to really savor my food.

22 responses



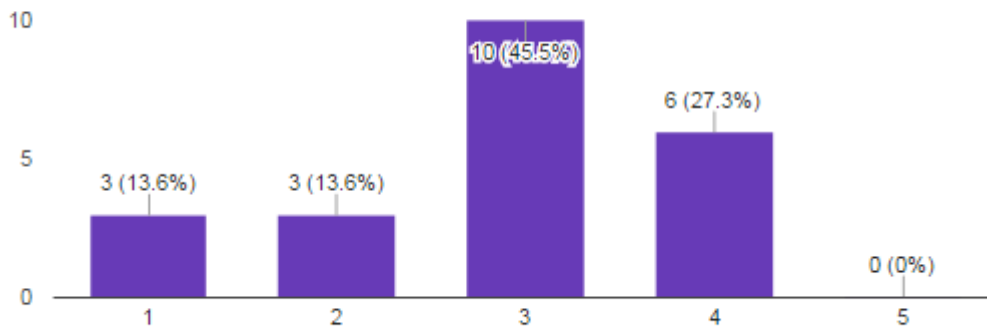
#4 Race from one place to the next without noticing what's along the way

22 responses



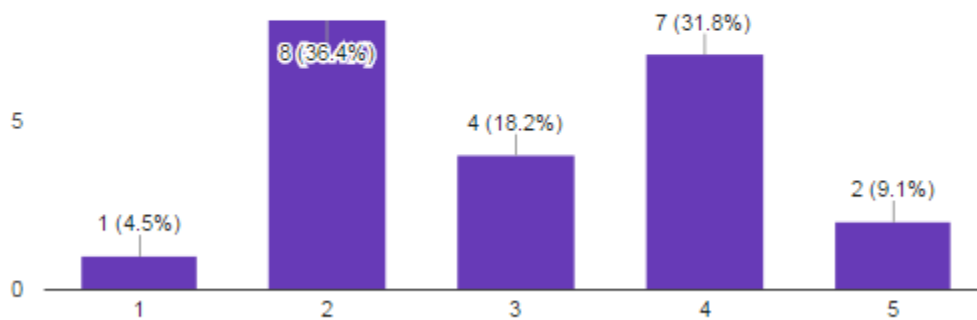
#5 Get caught up in my own thoughts while someone else is speaking.

22 responses



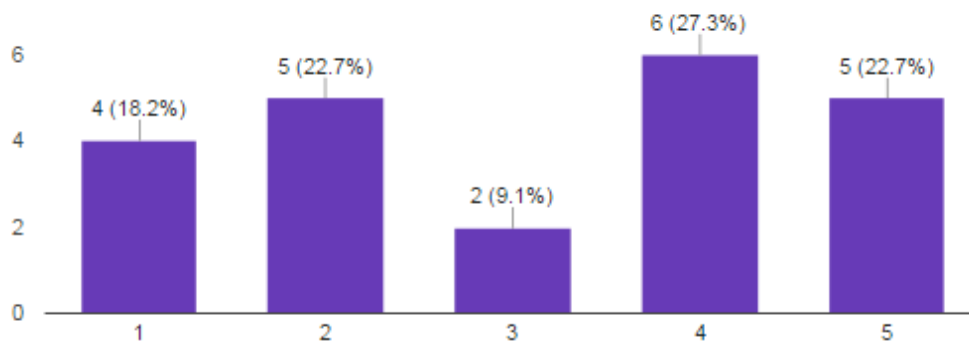
#6 Notice What happens in my body when I'm stressed (e.g. fast heartbeat, muscle tension).

22 responses



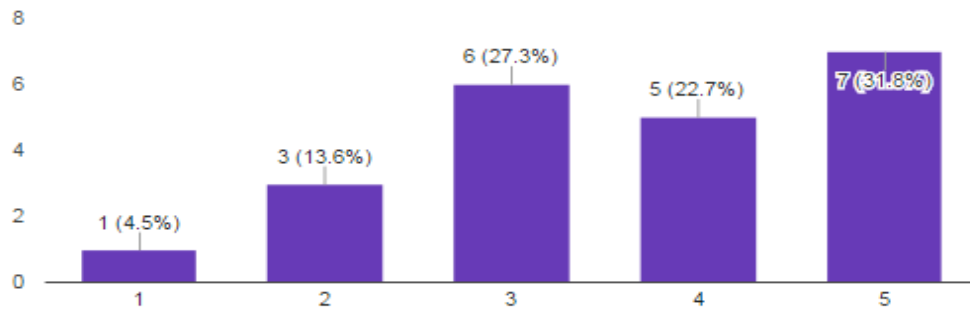
#7 Can be comfortable just sitting and watching a sunset.

22 responses



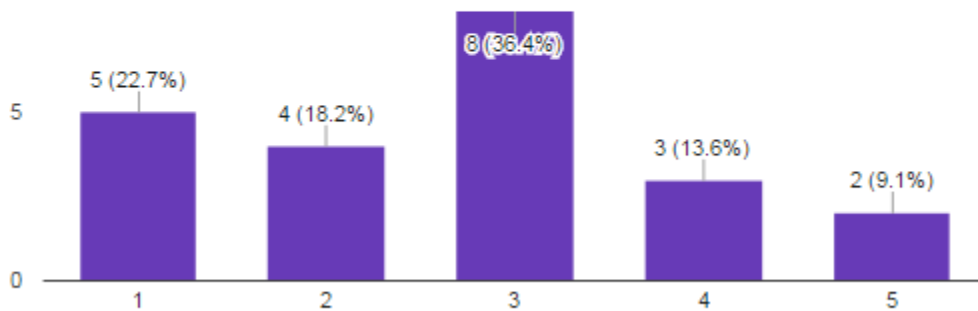
#8 After an argument I carry on thinking of all the things I could have said to prove my point.

22 responses



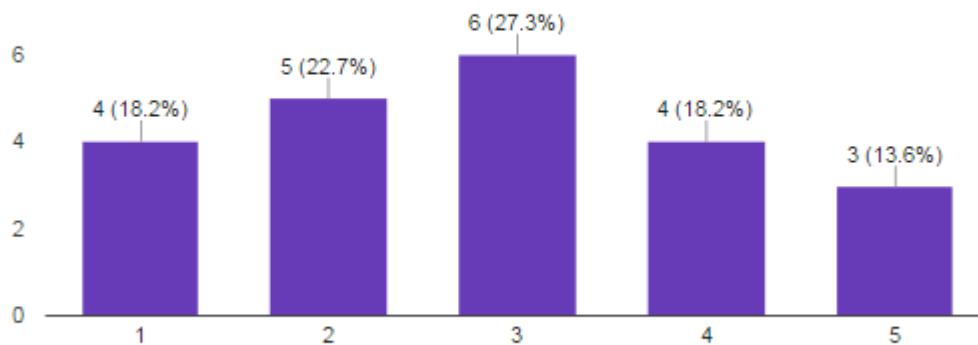
#9 Am lost in thought when I could be enjoying a sensory experience, like a back rub

22 responses



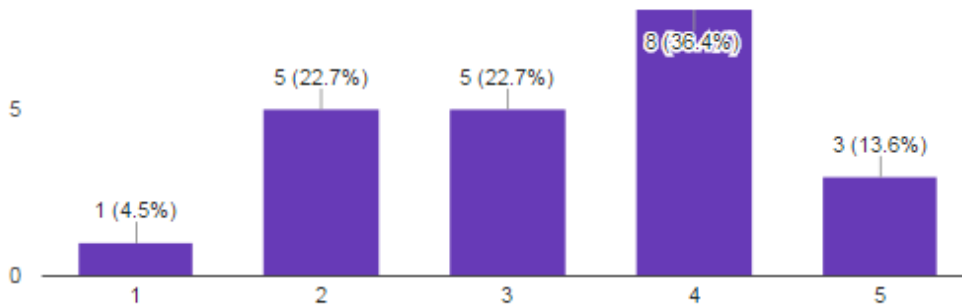
#10 Get impatient while waiting in line, at a red light, or for lunch.

22 responses



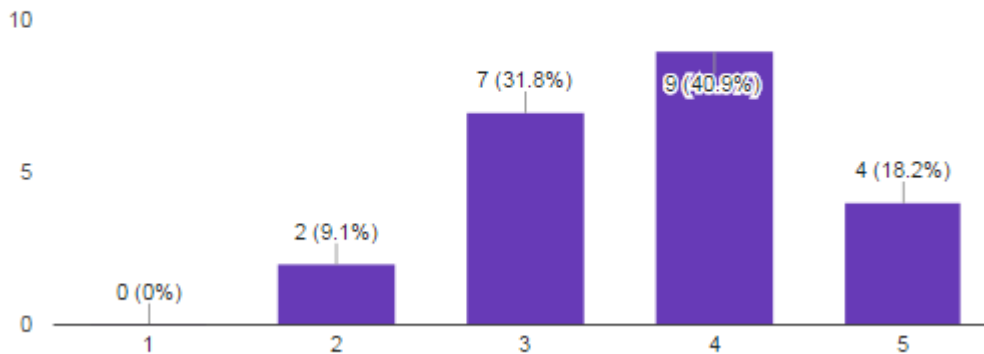
#11 Take time to pause and feel grateful for the things I have going for me.

22 responses



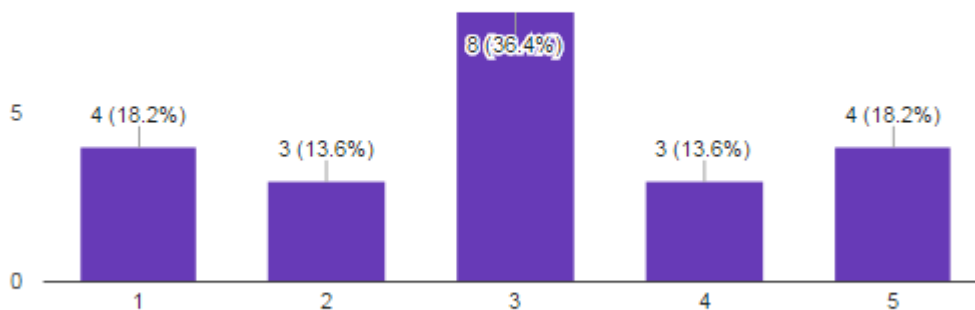
#12 Am hard on myself when I've made a mistake.

22 responses



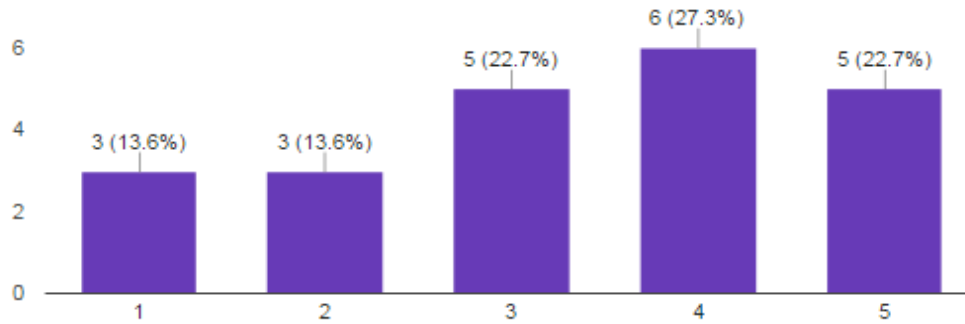
#13 Often try to "think myself out of" problems and situations.

22 responses



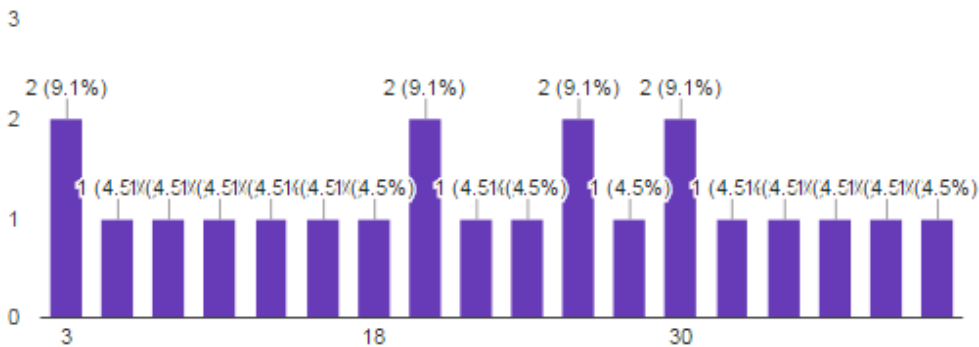
#14 Pay attention to sounds like the wind blowing through the trees, cars passing by, or rain falling.

22 responses



Sum of answers 1,3,6,7,11,14 THEN ADD 34...SUBTRACT the sum of answers 2,4,5,8,9,10,12,13 to get the total score_____

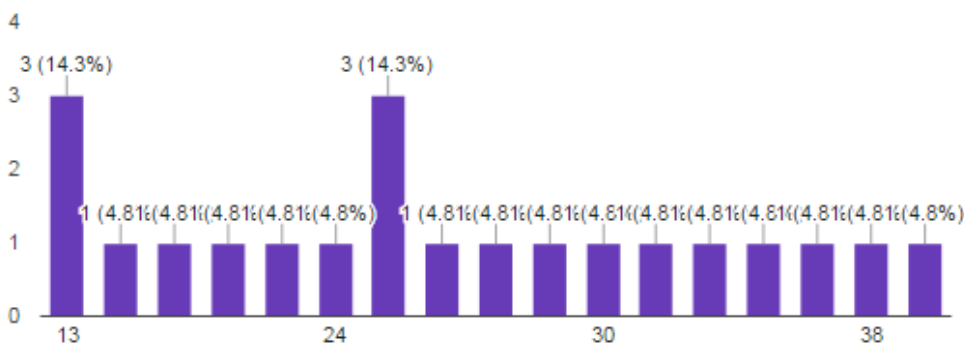
22 responses



Final Survey Results

Sum of answers 1,3,6,7,11,14 THEN ADD 34...SUBTRACT the sum of answers 2,4,5,8,9,10,12,13 to get the total score_____

21 responses



In conclusion, based on the beginning and end-of-year data, I was pleasantly surprised with the results. In the first survey the majority of the students fell between 3- 22. This was essentially “beginner status” (1-18) Many of the students needed to work on recognizing the environment in which they live, and also be aware of their bodies, surroundings, and mind. The end of year survey showed that the scale started at 13 as the lowest total, which was amazing that the low end increased by 10 points! I was also interested in that the high end of the scale increased dramatically also. Forming the mindset of self-awareness is a process that takes time and practice. Students throughout this year have developed strategies that are life-long skills. I observed students using them during NYS testing, assemblies, and even on field trips. I am very proud of how this year’s project turned out.

My hours for this project are as follows:

12 hours of planning w/teachers/students for how to effectively use meditation in the classroom.

6 hours of development of surveys, analyzing data, preparation of activities.

10-15 hours of extension activities, creating videos and audio for students.

10 hours of reading/research (heartmath, mindfulness articles, meditation for kids

2 hours of creating follow-up surveys and activities from field trips and visits from professors

2 hours of STEM related work on hydroponics activities.

Reflective Piece
By: Nicole Freebern

The ENTERGY grant has given me the opportunity to provide my students with flexible seating and mindfulness practices throughout the day. These seating options help my students focus, calm, and relax in a classroom setting. Students are given choice and the opportunity to use the seating that with help engage them in classroom learning. The grant has also allowed for me to take my classroom from the traditional classroom to a classroom that supports the learning of students and incorporate best teaching practices. This course taught me that we need to get to know our students in the classroom and I need to provide direct explicit practices.

My rationale for implementing this project is that students no longer fit into the structures of traditional classroom. They need flexible seating, choice, and the tools to help them have a successful day. Research says flexible seating engages the core and stimulates learning! Students are entering the classroom with outside stressors that are affecting their ability to learn. Fitzhugh Park School is a very exciting place to be and go to school. When you enter our building, you embrace the feeling of a community. As you stroll down the hallways you see images of students, murals painted by the students, quotes, and bulletin boards that display leadership. Students in the building feels valued and part of the school community. This year our school has adapted the Stephen Covey’s Seven Habits of Leadership. Our school has become a light house school and we are creating leaders of the future. We started our year by creating a classroom motto and a classroom mission statement. Our classroom mission statement is to be proactive in work or play, be friendly, to never give up, have open ears, to make FPS a fun learning place. Be a LEADER at ALL times! My students are excited and willing to learn and are becoming leaders at FPS. All of the second-grade team in implementing flexible seating and have received support from Entergy. This project has helped to actively engage and affect 62 second graders at Fitzhugh Park School. “Research supports flexible seating by use of alternate work areas and seating options (wobble stools, floor space, etc); it helps students strengthen their bodies and improve their coordination so they can actively engage in their learning.”

The second-grade team at Fitzhugh Park Elementary has had a positive impact since we have implemented flexible seating with our students! Flexible seating has allowed us to nurture different learning styles in our newly designed classrooms. As teachers, we want to empower our students to choose seating that helps them to be the most successful. Now, in all THREE second-grade classrooms, students have a

variety of seating options that help them be their most successful. Our new seating options include wobble stools, student-sized couches, yoga mats, rocking seats, stability chairs, scoop chairs, and yoga balls. Some students choose to work at standing height while others prefer to remain at tables and chairs. Tailoring our classroom learning environment has been a challenge that has brought an increase in student engagement, a culture of mindfulness, and student independence.

Flexible seating was a complete paradigm shift for teachers, teaching assistants, and students. I found that the students needed a lot of direct instruction on how to properly use the seating, how to pick the correct seating, and what to do if something wasn't working. The teacher started to introduce flexible seating to the students by setting ground rules, sharing all the new chairs, and modeling the appropriate way to sit on the chairs. In the beginning all students got to try out all the seating to see what they liked best. After two weeks of this process, the teacher set up a chart for students to choose their own seating. Students were then allowed to start making their own choices on what seating they thought they would work best at. This was very exciting to watch what the students picked.

The other concept that I wrote into my proposal was creating a weekly board game activity center. In this center students are taught how to play each of the board games. They are learning to develop social skills while playing. I had intended implementing these board game centers into our recess at the end of the day. This changed because my principal decided to implement a recess built into our lunch. She developed a schedule where the students have a 30-minute lunch and then a 20-minute recess following. Students that are being leaders and making good choices go to recess with the teaching assistant in our classroom. The students that are making bad choices and need re-teaching go with the teacher to reteach and correct behavior. The principal's philosophy was that in time this extra recess would improve student behavior and promote a positive school environment. Her philosophy was correct. This provided me the perfect opportunity to implement my board games centers. When the weather is rainy, snowy, or cold board game centers are set up. Students select a board game and play the game with their peers. Adults even get this time to play a board game with different students. The board games have provided my students with the opportunity to problem solve, work together, share, communicate, to lose graciously, and have fun. These are skills that many students do not get at home. I was shocked at the number of students that do not play board games at home. I am so happy that my principal has built this time into our schedule and that ENTERGY provided me with the funds to purchase new board games that the kids to enjoy.

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 iPad apps to help master addition and subtraction facts and also practice the new common core math. Students are using the iPad 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.

My September 2016 Assessment showed the following results:

- I have 10 out of 22 students that have had significant traumas in their lives that have increased their social and emotion needs. These needs are impacting their academic learning.
- The data showed that 17 out of 22 students did not have appropriate grade level social skills when interacting with peers.
- 100% of students should be able to focus on a task for at least 20 minutes.
- Create a safe learning environment for all students, but especially trauma students. Data shows that 86% of the students can't focus on a task for 5 minutes.
- I have 15 out of 22 that lack grade level appropriate social skills.
- I have 2 out of 22 students that have to be removed daily from my classroom for behavioral reasons.
- I have had to clear my classroom at least once a week in the month of September and October for the safest of my students.
- Star Math data shows that 0 out of 22 have mastered addition and subtraction math facts.
- Star Reading data shows that 16 out of 22 students are reading at below grade level.

This work is important because I have 16 out of 22 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.

6 out of 22 students were on or above grade level

3 out of 22 students were on watch.

1 out of 22 students were on intervention

12 out of 22 students were on urgent intervention

Out of my 22 students that I analyzed 12 students receive title 1 reading.

Star Math data shows that 12 out of 22 students are performing below grade level.

10 out of 22 students were on or above grade level

3 out of 22 students were on watch.

2 out of 22 students were on intervention

7 out of 22 students were urgent.

My May 2017 Assessments showed the following results:

- I have 10 out of 22 students that have had significant traumas in their lives that have increased their social and emotion needs. These needs are impacting their academic learning.
- The data showed that 5 out of 20 students did not have appropriate grade level social skills when interacting with peers.
- 100% of students should be able to focus on a task for at least 20 minutes.
- Create a safe learning environment for all students, but especially trauma students. Data shows that 20% of the students can't focus on a task for 5 minutes.
- I have 4 out of 20 that lack grade level appropriate social skills.
- I have 0 out of 20 students that have to be removed daily from my classroom for behavioral reasons. I have 1 out of 20 students that have to be removed bi-weekly from my classroom for behavioral reasons. This amount decreased from every day to bi-weekly.
- I have had to clear my classroom at least once a week in the month of September and October for the safest of my students. I have only had to clear the classroom twice in the last 10 weeks.
- Star Math data shows that 17 out of 20 have mastered addition and subtraction math facts.
- Star Reading data shows that 7 out of 20 students are reading at below grade level.

ELA Star Results

13 out of 20 students were on or above grade level

0 out of 20 students were on watch.

1 out of 20 students were on intervention

7 out of 22 students were on urgent intervention

Out of my 20 students that I analyzed 9 students receive title 1 reading.

Math Start Results

Star Math data shows that 6 out of 20 students are performing below grade level.

14 out of 20 students were on or above grade level

0 out of 20 students were on watch.

3 out of 20 students were on intervention

3 out of 20 students were urgent.

I had 2 students move mid-year

In September in May in ELA I had 16 out of 22 students reading below grade level. In May In ELA I have 8 students out of 20 reading below grade level. In September 72 % of my classroom was reading below grade level. In May only 40% of my class is reading below grade level.

In September in Math I had 12 out of 22 students below grade level. In May I have 6 out of 20 students below grade level. In September 54% of my class was below grade level. In May 30% of my class is below grade level.

My goal for my action plan of incorporating flexible seating and board game centers 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 learning. This grant allowed for me to grow as a teacher and allowed for my students to become leaders at Fitzhugh Park School. My students and I both benefit greatly from this project. The following are statements my students made:

“ The wobbly stool allows me to focus because I can move in my seat without getting in trouble”

“I love laying on the yoga mats during writing because I can get more writing done.”

“I love the bean bags during reading because I have my own space to read quietly.”

“I love flexible seating because it helps me focus and allows me to learn.”

“I love the peanut ball because it helps me focus better so I can be a smarter person as I grow.”

“I really like it because it helps me concentrate.”

We have LOVED this change in our classroom and it has worked out wonderfully for everyone. Thank you for believing in us and showing us another way to be mindful learners. We couldn't be more grateful.

James Hefti

EDU 525 - SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) IN HIGH NEEDS SCHOOLS: Pulaski High School
Recycling Program
2016-17 Project Reflection

Part 1 - Reflection

Here is what I did and what I learned this year:

I worked with kids to design my project. With the goal of developing a recycling program for my high school I wanted to include the thoughts and ideas of the students in my school in crafting it and publicizing it. I brought together a task force of a dozen ambitious students with the mindset that we can make this happen. Our group starting meeting in February after I personally investigated the state of affairs in regards to recycling at Pulaski High School.

My investigations were definitely eye-opening experiences. I would discreetly stay behind at school on strategic days in January in order to do some undercover work. I wanted to find out what happens to the trash after it leaves my classroom! What I found out was extremely disheartening. My clandestine observation points revealed almost all of the recyclable materials placed in bins marked “Recyclables” being mixed with trash slated for landfill. My mission became clear!

In the name of social and emotional learning, I decided the best way for my students to work with biology concepts and scientific principles but also extracting their concern for others was through the development of a recycling program. Students did not do this to earn a grade – simply to show they care. I wanted them to show they care about one another enough to reduce their waste and separate their trash. Because what they consider trash is not always material that needs to go to a permanent home at the dump. It could possibly be reused! My objective became to show kids how to recycle properly and then inspire them to want to continue to do it beyond the school day. I wanted them to show others how to do it and to inspire them. By doing so we can reach an awful lot of people with our recycling message. Most people understand the need to recycle – they may even know it is the law. But what people oftentimes don't realize is that recycling protects our environment. We reduce our consumption of resources by reusing whatever materials we can recycle.

I enjoyed working with students to develop and implement this program. We had a number of set-backs but we didn't let those slow us down or force us to give up on our collective goal. Social and emotional learning occurred as students took ownership of this process and worked together to restructure their ideas even when we were not enjoying the level of success in promoting our program we had hope for. It was a great learning experience for all of the people involved and will serve as a starting point for our district-wide recycling plan.

Reflection Essay: SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) IN HIGH NEEDS SCHOOLS

Connecting students to their emotions while learning can enhance the connections made by the brain and in theory allow learning to be longer lasting. Allowing for more positive affects to occur during the school day is one way to engage students with mindfulness. My project this year was emotionally engaging for my students as well as myself. When I applied for this year's class I wrote that this work was critically important for me as well as my student's emotional and mindful stance. I wrote that it was extremely important in assisting with a paradigm shift that needs to happen in communities such as in my school district. The reason for this is that as populations of diversity moves into this community, people need to learn how to engage, interact and communicate with each other. I wanted to see if focusing on ways to recognize trauma, using mindfulness and tools of SEL we (my students and myself) could find common ground. My hope was to incorporate SEL frameworks into my classroom by cultivating more SEL for myself, the teacher.

The ways that I included more SEL in my own life was to attend workshops that taught me how to recognize trauma and how to approach or teach with trauma in mind. I attended the workshops of Hala Khouri who focuses on trauma approaches in yoga and mindfulness classes. I attended the workshop of Bessel van der Kolk, who pioneered the approaches for trauma in group settings. I attended the work shop of Jack Kornfield who specializes in understanding our own stance of trauma to increase mindfulness and SEL. When I think of these experts and how to approach trauma in a group setting, I could readily see the applications to the group setting of a classroom.

Often times if a teacher does not have the means or method by which to self-regulate or redirect focus, it becomes difficult at best or impossible at worst to have the skills to bring SEL into the classroom. As the only non-white teacher in the building I often find that if I say anything to my students, even in a calm and pleasant voice using polite words, students will react in a way that is unexpected compared to when the same words or actions are taken by my white peer-teachers. Anecdotally, I have noticed that living in a white close-knit community that does not want outsiders, I have felt that I was an "other" since I arrived in 1990. Working in the school as a teacher, I was given the authority of a teacher but my standing in the community never changed. Anecdotally, I believe that bigotry is taught first at home and possibly these children who later became students in my classroom already had formed ideas about people who do not look like them.

So as a teacher, I have noticed over the past 19 years that in a mostly white community, I am seen by my students differently than their white teachers. This leads to a lot of anguish and negative emotions on my part. I wanted to focus on promoting more SEL on my own part so that I can be better prepared for being a teacher within a community that views me as the other. Ways that I made that happen was through my learning about communities in trauma through the workshops that I attended. As my district continues to adjust to changes in racial, SES and ethnic diversity, using tools learned from mindfulness training, trauma-informed learning and SEL could help to assist and enhance the understanding we have for each other. Including a Peace corner where students could go to calm down and look at plants and pictures of heroes, may redirect the problems that they were facing which lead to a disruption in the learning in the classroom. Currently my only recourse to these problems was to write up a student. I would rather build bridges with these students and help them to understand that I am really not too different from themselves. I hope to learn tools to create more compassion and this way I will choose the use of my singing bowl and Peace corner when possible instead of discipline reports. Building bridges requires connections with students. Connections requires an understanding that we all share basic desires to be seen and heard. This is why I chose to focus on scientists who should be seen as heroes but are often unknown to us since we tend to focus on athletes and celebrities in our culture. I cannot say for sure that I accomplished any of my goals. I can say that we started to move in the direction of greater understanding using empathy and mindfulness.

Things I did and results I saw:

I did not write many referrals this year. For the seventh graders, this year I did not write any referrals for any incidences that occurred in my classroom. Instead we had conversations so that we could come to an understanding of each person's point of view. Students reported that the use of the peace corner and seeing the heroes' board was "nice" to look at.



They enjoyed our conversations about the plants, especially the Venus flytrap that managed to bloom many



flowers throughout the school year.

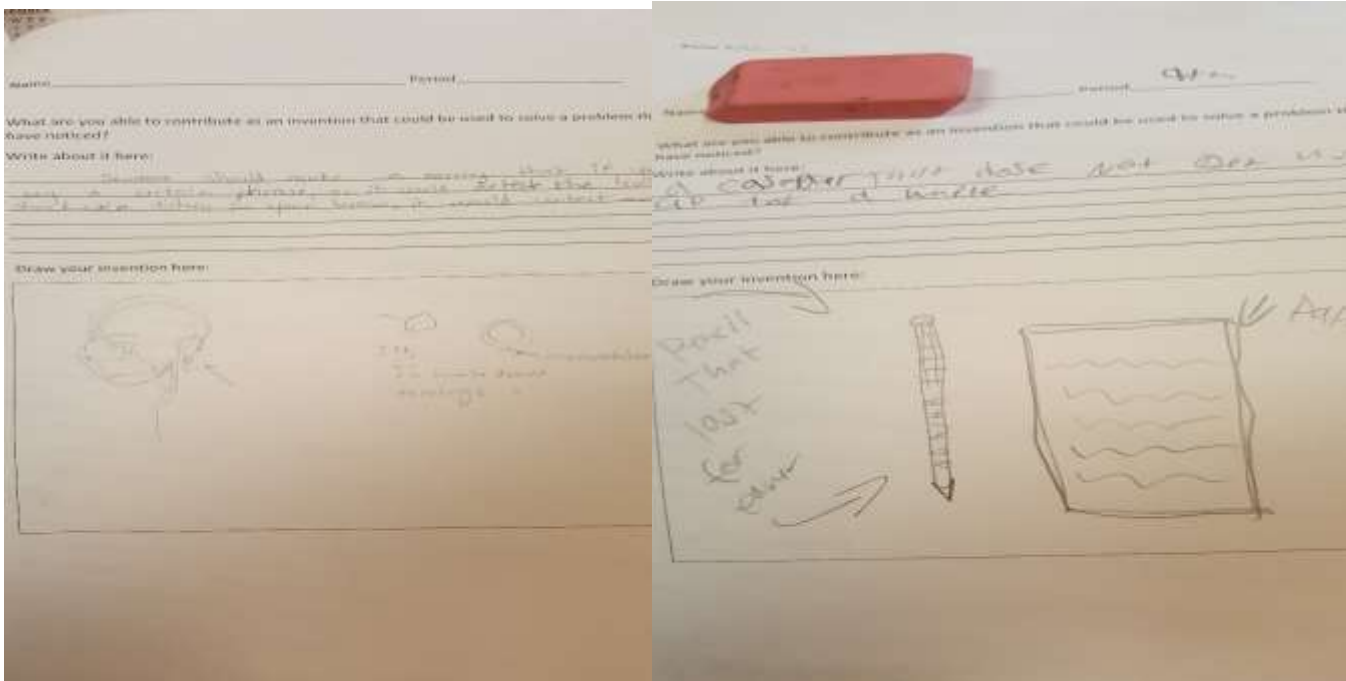
I let them know that every time in the past that I have tried to grow these plants, they usually don't survive. We had conversations about resilience both on the part of the person to keep trying to grow these plants and on the plant that is trying to survive!

I used mindful activities for each of my seventh-grade classes. We used various breathing activities from the internet, my own knowledge of yoga and books about mindfulness, including Daniel Rechtschaffen's

book. We used this as a bell ringer and sometimes in the middle of class if the students were not focused. I did not have any opportunities to work with students who made racially charged comments in my classroom as they were removed from my class and not returned.

The science heroes reading and reflective writing provided the bulk of my data for this report. Most students agreed that we tend to appreciate celebrities and athletes more than scientists. They were impressed by the hardships and perseverance that the scientist faced. They were able to see that success is really about not quitting even when there is some failure. I tried to help them make the connection between that and how they need to accept and embrace failure as an opportunity to keep going. When they read about the contribution of women, people of color as well as that of children, they were impressed by the perseverance it takes to be successful.

The students reported that Dr Jennifer Doudna showed “a bad thing can be useful” when they spoke about how she overcame bullying and feeling different. The students saw that Dr Doudna used these hardships to motivate her. Now Doudna is allowing scientists to help people with her invention of the C.R.I.S.P.E.R. which edits genomes and can one day be used to correct mutations in a gene sequence before the offspring is developed. The students were amazed at how poorly Garrett Morgan was treated because he was a black man, even though he had invented many useful things, such as a gas mask and the traffic light signal. It helped them to see that injustice exists, but to motivate them not to let bullying or injustice stop them from achieving great things in their own lives. Students reported that they had been treated unfairly like Doudna and like Morgan. They reported that sometimes it was simply because of their physical size or about the fact that girls are made to feel less strong or capable. One student wrote “I was mad that I was told I cannot lift something and it was because I am a girl”. She also reported that she was happy when she “proved them wrong”. One student wrote that “because I have an IEP, people don’t think I can use my brain”. She said that she faces this stereotype from anyone who knows about her special education status. She also said it “kind of makes me mad when they find out that I am smart”. She alluded that there is a low expectation for her, which is frustrating to her. When the students read about children scientist and inventors, they had an opportunity to invent something for a problem that they are noticing. One student invented a finger swipe that allowed lockers to open. Most students in this building struggle to open their lockers. Another invented a pencil that lasts forever! There were many ideas concerning video games and smart phones. This included an app for helping students with their math homework. Two students talked about inventions for personal safety. One invented an erring that would alert the authorities if the wearer said a particular phrase. Another one invented a chair that would become a safe room if an intruder entered his home.



Things I reflected on:

I think racism, and gender stereotypes will not go away anytime soon. Schools are a wonderful microcosm of the diversity that can be available within communities. It is also one of the last places that children can learn to engage with people who are different from themselves. When I had students specifically think about successful people who had been treated unfairly but succeeded, along with making a connection to how this can be a tool for the students to persist and become successful, I found that the engagement we had with each other in class was more pleasant. I wrote no referrals, we instead enjoyed time in the peace corner and a conversation to help us see each other's point of view.

My opportunities to go to learn about trauma and mindfulness with Dr Bessel van der Kolk and Jack Kornfield, helped me to figure out how to approach my students more gently. It also helped me to decide to offer free yoga in my building for faculty and staff. Most of us feel isolated and stressed out with school buildings. Finding a way to discharge some of the stress as well as build a community with teachers that I don't often work with or interact with increased my SEL which followed me into the classroom.

Activities we did to increase our mindfulness was, focused breathing using the singing bowl to start our class. Using mindful movements (yoga) to wake us up or to calm us down. Students also took turns leading these sessions. They were usually in the beginning of class but sometimes if we were in a mental slump, we would do them during the class or to end class.

The five students that were taken out of my classroom due to sexist, racist or bigoted comments made about me in the classroom, never returned to my class. One of these students did eventually apologize and seemed to want to reach out to make amends. For the others, they struggled in other classes and they struggled with school in general. I don't think bigotry is limited to students who struggle with school, but I did see that bigotry shows up when they are frustrated with a teacher or adult and need leverage of power, this is when these same students reach for rude, bigoted comments to protect their position. Keeping these same students in the classroom may not be a good idea since it could continue to lead to further and more frequent disruptions. Finding a Peace corner or environment where they could calm down, take a breather and eventually learn what they are doing is not correct, could help them. Maybe schools do need a place of respite for these students rather than just punishment. In my classroom that was the purpose of the Peace corner. During my last Superintendent conference, we were taught about trauma sensitive schools. The presenter, Jackie Yusko, a trauma support specialist stated that



*We Cannot Hope to Change
Students Readiness to Learn,
If We Cannot Change the
Environments in Which
Education Takes Place*



Overall students reported a sense of calm, relaxation and positive feelings just being in the room with the plants as well as sitting in the peace corner to read a book.

My hope is to add a sense of calm and serenity of nature in my classroom. As diversity increases, I hope to keep adding representation of this diversity into my classroom.



These are some of the comments from my students about the Peace corner of the room:
"It feels like we are in nature". "We learned more about scientist and its funner [sic] and we get too [sic] see plants that we wouldn't be able too [sic] normally see in a classroom".

"I liked the science heroes because it helps use learn more about people in history and it incorporates literacy in our science. I like the plants because they make the room feel more alive and relaxed". "I like the science heroes. It is a fun activity that is for a grade. I think personally I like the plants because it is nice and peaceful and I feel more alive". I like the Venus fly trap the best, they are cool". "I liked that with the science heroes' assignments, it helped me to realize how much science is actually in the world. I like the plant corner because it helps show me how peaceful a classroom can be".



"I thought the plant corner was very beautiful and made me feel relaxed". "What I liked was that the corner of the classroom is very comfortable and bright and the plants really help with that. The science heroes really was a fun thing to learn about. It amazed me the things people have lived through and were still successful". "I enjoyed using the plant corner to read a book. It was very relaxing. I really enjoyed learning about the female scientists from Hidden Figures". "The science hero activities improved our literacy and since there are no plants in my other classrooms, I really noticed them. I think all classrooms need plants in them."

Students had nothing negative to say about this space or this activity.

Reference:

Yusko, 2017, Impact of Trauma on the Student: Creating Trauma Informed Classrooms