Final Report for Teacher and Student Learning at Oswego Middle School with Chris Walsh

Project SMART Topics in Education: Social Emotional Learning in High Needs Schools

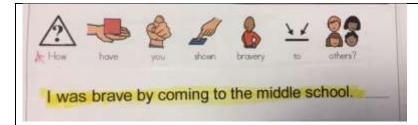<mark>Teacher Participant Name(s): Catherine Celeste and Amy Odell</mark>

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

While there are 24 leadership characteristics, we have only covered 16 of these to date. This is due to state testing, snow days, and spring break. Additionally, we did not write student initials on the stickers indicating who recognized another students' leadership characteristic. This was because the chart wasn't big enough for stickers that would accommodate initials as well as it being too time-consuming. Students were not given bonus points in class as an incentive to recognize others' leadership characteristics but instead were given 5 BUC's (to be used in PBIS school store). When our professor came to observe how the project was going in class, she made a couple of suggestions. One was to move the posters to the back of the room as where they were placed initially was beneath the Smart Board and difficult to see. In the back of the room, students would be able to see them as they enter, view who was lacking stickers and focus attention on those students. Our professor also suggested not interrupting class to have students recognize each other during the actual lesson as it was distracting and some students lost focus. Instead, she suggested we have students make a note of leadership characteristics they saw being displayed by their peers and we would review them at the end of the period. We implemented those suggestions but then decided to use the beginning of the class period to recognize students' leadership characteristics from the day prior. We found that we ran out of time at the end of a class period and we were unable to give the project the necessary time and attention it deserved. A final change made to our action plan is the implementation of the final survey. As we were only able to cover 16 out of the 24 leadership characteristics, we did not feel there were enough leadership characteristics covered since the first survey and the data would not show the expected increase in self-awareness.

Analysis of Data on Teacher Learning:

We determined that more class time and more consistent time spent on this leadership project would have greatly improved the results. We ended up spending about 15 minutes introducing each leadership characteristic, including an overview of the characteristic via Smart Notebook or PowerPoint (some with a video) and individual reflection. We also only had our students choose 2 out of the four questions, one of which had the students draw a picture demonstrating that characteristic. Once we introduced the posters which allowed students to recognize each other for their leadership characteristics, we spent about 3 – 5 minutes per day, but we were unable to allow time for this each day.

One of the findings we expected was that all students would become more self-aware of their own leadership capacity through doing this project. As evidence of this, one of our students with special needs wrote in her reflection on bravery, as shown below,

How have you shown bravery to others?

I was brave by coming to the middle school.

A regular education student wrote, "When I was going to fight another student, I walked away," demonstrating self-regulation.

Another evidence to support this finding of student self-awareness comes from the survey we gave out after ten leadership characteristics were discussed. After tallying the answer to the question, "Circle the one leadership characteristic that you realized you didn't have until now," we found that in total between the three classes, the two leadership characteristics that more students recognized now in themselves were open-mindedness (8 students) and appreciation of beauty (8 students). Open-mindedness and appreciation of beauty are leadership characteristics that might not be overt in the middle school setting and these findings show that more students now are aware that they do possess them. There were 68 students in total who took the survey, however, 23 of them did not follow the directions correctly. The leadership characteristic that the least number of students recognized in him/herself was citizenship and teamwork (1 student). This might imply that most students recognize citizenship and teamwork in a classroom setting already.

The third piece of evidence to support increased student self-awareness of leadership characteristics came from a letter of apology that I asked one of my classes to write to a substitute teacher that they collectively misbehaved for. In the letter, I asked them to list three leadership characteristics that they were NOT displaying that would have helped prevent a disruptive classroom. In the student letters, one student wrote, "Self-regulation is knowing your boundaries and knowing to stop when you cross the line." Another student wrote," If I was braver I would have told some kids next to me to be quiet." Understanding the consequences of not showing leadership characteristics in the classroom is an important step in self-awareness.

Analysis of Data on Student Learning:

In addition to the theme of our action plan of helping students become more self-aware of their own leadership potentials, we observed that students also developed a better social awareness of their peers.

This was evident in the activity whereby students would recognize leadership potential in another student and we would record it on the wall chart. As students became more familiar with models of good leadership characteristics they became more efficient in recognizing them in others. Leadership characteristics that were most easily recognized by the students about their peers were teamwork/citizenship, followed by curiosity and perseverance. In fact, 21 out of 76 students were recognized for their teamwork leadership characteristic. Eighteen students were recognized for their curiosity and 18 also for perseverance. It seems evident that teamwork would be easy to recognize in the science classroom, as labs and activities are done together in groups. The seats are arranged to facilitate such cooperative learning. Curiosity was a popular characteristic to recognize in each other as we modeled how to exemplify a student for curiosity. We took the initiative to recognize a student for asking a good question in class as a good example of curiosity. From that point on, many students recognized each other whenever they asked a question in class. Perseverance was a characteristic we talked about at the end of the quarter when some students

might feel like not putting in the necessary efforts but would be recognized for starting the new quarter ready to learn, showing perseverance.

In conclusion, we, as teachers, recognize the need to help students identify their own leadership potential and practice using those skills. We also recognize that students when observing other students' leadership characteristics become better able to identify and then practice using these skills themselves.

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

I decided to analyze my 3rd marking period class averages as well as my 1st and 2nd marking period class averages.

Analysis of Data on Teacher Learning: I examined my written reflections and found the following:

1) I am a better teacher when using the Interactive Student Notebooks (ISN's). I have learned to better deconstruct my lessons and prioritize the essential outcomes. I have learned to arrange the content in a more logical way so my students may better interact it. An example is taking a learning standard on integer operations that I broke into 4 separate pages/lessons. Each lesson is organized with a foldable note sheet as well as a set of practice examples.

2) My students are more organized. In the past, my students would have some notes in a notebook and some in a folder or binder and were often misplaced. Now with an ISN, each lesson title gets recorded in the table of contents and the notes get taped into the appropriate pages. I spent much time at the beginning of the year explaining, modeling, and monitoring students as they completed these steps. Now, students are independently completing these steps without my prompting.

3) My students frequently use their ISN as a resource. I am observing students being more independent learners by using their table of contents to look up topics for questions on a review assignment or warm up question that they are stuck on. In the past, students couldn't find their notes so they would immediately ask for help.

4) Class averages did not change significantly this year as a result of using ISN's. My math 8 class averages were 74.4 last year and 73.4 this year. My math 7 class averages were 77.3 last year and 78.6 this year. I am disappointed that I did not see any improvements in math achievement, but this is only one measure that I looked at.

Analysis of Data on Student Learning:

I examined my student surveys and found the following:

1) My students agreed that using the Interactive Student Notebook (ISN) helped them to understand and learn math well (3.6 score out of 5) and helped them stay organized (3.7 score out of 5). They responded similarly when asked about the fairness of grading (4.1 out of 5) and about liking the structure of the ISN (3.8 out of 5). The highest rated was when asked if they liked being able to use their ISN as a resource on an assignment or quiz (4.4 out of 5).

2) Overall, my students did not respond as positively as I had hoped about feeling more confident in math. The question "How much does having an ISN help make you feel more confident as a math student?" only rated 3.1 out of 5 on a scale from 1 being "not at all" and 5 being "very well". This concerns me and I wonder if their feelings about math were developed much earlier in elementary school when more of the fundamental concepts of mathematics are taught. Without a solid foundation in mathematics I find that many students find the abstract concepts in higher mathematics very difficult and feel less confident in their abilities.

3) Using an ISN has had some positive effects on many of my student's social emotional learning in math. I followed up my question about confidence in math class with "How has your attitude toward math class changed due to using the ISN?" Individual comments from my students were very interesting and ranged from "hasn't changed" and "not that much i always struggle" to:
   - "I am more confident with my answers because I can look up stuff in the isn"
   - "yes, the ISN helps me with math putting me in a better state of mind towards math"
   - "it helps me find stuff easier so it makes problems understandable"
   - "less stressed about figuring out how to do something"

4) An overwhelming majority of my students recommended using ISN's again with my future classes. When asked if I should continue using ISN's with my students next year, 83% replied "yes" on the student survey.

Teacher Participant Name: Alison Anderson

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

Part A - My project paired literacy and social-emotional learning by using a platform of excerpts from contenders for *The Battle of the Kids' Books (BOB)* for 2016 and a NY state required 7th grade text, *A Long Walk to Water*. We read excerpts from *The Sun is Also a Star, Anna and the Swallow Man, Ghost,* and *The Lie Tree.* All of these books have a main character who has suffered from an emotional trauma and features traveling or movement as an aspect of their healing and survival process. We looked for small shifts in the characters' thinking, watching for times when they faced situations that lead to shifts in their thinking and coping mechanisms, eventually leading to self-awareness, thoughtfulness, sympathy, courage, and remorse. We did not address all of the originally targeted discussion topics, however. Students did complete writing pieces on the attributes and hallmarks of personality and how they affect your life. Excerpts from student work samples can be found in the **Data on Student Learning** section of this report. My reflections on their learning can be found in the **Data on Teacher Learning** section of this report.

Part B - Students were personally invited during their lunch period to attend the River's End Bookstore's BOB book discussion on Thursday evenings at 6pm with their guardians, parents, and families. A book competition bracket graphic was put up in the cafeteria so that all students were able to keep updated during their lunch periods on the competition and the contenders. Three students consistently came to the book discussions. Comments from an interview with one of the students can be found in the **Data on Student Learning** section of this report.

Part C - I intended to implement a monthly social gathering for our building ELA teachers to promote a space for conversation with colleagues. While I was able to gather all of our ELA teachers together for one afternoon of discussions, we were not able to do this on a monthly basis. In fact, only once was I able to gather all ELA teachers for afterschool discussion. Comments from the discussion can be found in the **Data on Teacher Learning** section of this report.

Part D - I grew two personal friendships with teachers on my team and in my grade level in order to provide us a safe space to discuss our work, students, accomplishments, and struggles. Comments on these friendships can be found in the **Data on Teacher Learning** section of this report.

Analysis of Data on Teacher Learning:

Part A – In our readings and discussions, I often prompted students to identify the attitudes and personality attributes of characters and compare them to their own. Through identifying character attitudes and personality attributes from our chosen texts, and identifying their own attitudes and personality attributes, students became more open to thinking about how their own actions and reactions affected their lives and relationships with others. Several students came to me after completing writing pieces on our texts and

compared their own experiences to that of the characters. This lead them to 'ah ha moments,' including how their behaviors 'triggered' conflict and how this could be avoided in the future, as well as how their positive traits allowed them to support their friends or siblings. I will incorporate these readings and discussions into all of my future curriculums. I saw real growth in several students who took these tasks seriously and deeply reflected on their responsibility and role in the trajectory of their learning and lives.

Part C – On February 6th of this year, all four of my fellow ELA teachers at Oswego Middle School were able to attend an after school gathering from 2:30 until 4. While one teacher left at 3:20, this was the first after school social gathering he had attended – ever. The five of us ate pizza while discussing our curriculums, the BOB books and book discussions, and general challenges and successes of the teaching profession – specific to English. We swapped ideas and suggestions on grading essays, how to teach figurative language, and independent reading time. We had the space and time to have a safe collegial conversation, without having pressure to stay on task with a specific agenda or to achieve an outcome. It was extremely nice to be able to laugh with and enjoy the truly amazing people I work with.

Part D – I became much closer with two teachers on my team and in my grade level. Both of these teachers were also taking the EDU 525 class along with me. We were able to talk about how our students' lives and needs affected us as people, as well as educators. We were "in the zone" – three upstairs brains working together to make connections. We self-acknowledged these conversations to honor ourselves for making these connections. We've formed a lasting bond that will benefit us for years to come.

Analysis of Data on Student Learning:

Part A - Students made lists of personality traits that they possessed and how they have been helped and harmed by these traits. Then, students identified character's attitudes and personality attributes from our chosen texts that allowed survival and growth. Students wrote reports identifying three factors that allowed the main characters to flourish in a harsh environment and showed proof of when the attitude or attribute was shown by the character. Students identified the harsh reality of character's existences and how they rose to the challenge in order to survive. Several books characters made choices to help others improve their lives, as well. Students seemed especially interested in those books.

Excerpts from students' writings:

Student A: Have you ever had to fight for a cause you didn't believe in? Salva Dut had to fight for his life in a war he did not believe in. A book that explores this issue and how some people survived is *A Long Walk To Water* by Linda Sue Park. The author talks about Salva's useful personality traits in the book, and how he used these personality traits to help survive the war and journey he was involved in. Without Salva being self-regulated, mature, and challenging, he would not have survived the war.

The first personality trait that Salva shows that helped him survive is self-regulation. Salva was self-regulated because he knows what's best for him. This is shown on page fifty-three when he had to take little sips of water at a time so he didn't waste it all, when this happens in the book, it states "Uncle cautioned him to make the water in his gourd last as long as possible." (53) Salva used his personality trait of self-regulation to keep him from wasting all of his resources so he can survive.

The second trait that Salva possessed that helped him survive is maturity. An example of when Salva is mature is when Salva had to grow up fast and only at age twenty-one had to lead fifteen-hundred people through a desert to a refugee camp in Kenya. This is shown in the book when it states "He organized the group, giving everyone a job" (82) and also when it states "More than twelve-hundred boys arrived safely." (82) Salva used his personality trait of maturity to lead fifteen-hundred boys through a desert to a refugee camp in Kenya.
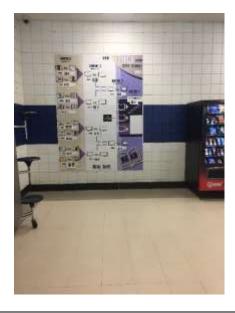
The last personality trait that Salva possessed that helped him survive is his ability to be challenging. Salva remains challenging by being able to handle all of his challenges in a good way. This shows in the book when it states "There is no one left to help me. They think I am weak and useless. Salva lifted his head proudly. They are wrong and I will prove it." (66)

In conclusion, by using his personality traits, Salva proved that he is self-regulated by taking little sips of water from his gourd at a time, mature for growing up fast and leading fifteen-hundred boys through a desert to a refugee camp in Kenya, and able to be challenging when he was able to prove to the rest of his group that he was strong and useful in the book *A Long Walk To Water* by: Linda Sue Park. Salva survives his war and journey by using his personality traits of self-regulation,maturity, and his ability to be challenging. If Salva had not possessed all three of these personality traits, would he be an alive, successful human being today?

Student B: *Anna and the Swallow Man* reminded me a lot of *A Long Walk to Water*. It seemed like one decision changed the entire outcome in each book. In *A Long Walk to Water*, Salva's choice to run away from the fighting started all of the action. He didn't go home. He ran and didn't look back. The same happened in *Anna and the Swallow Man* when Anna decided to join the Swallow Man on his trip. From there the action rose until the very end when the book just left the reader with a heavy impact. Anna survived, but the Swallow Man had to give his life to save her. Salva survived, but so many other boys did not. For me, with both books, I felt upset afterwards and continued to imagine what my life would be like if I had been in one of those conflicts. I tried to imagine what would I do in the situation if I was either Anna or Salva and how I would handle having other people sacrifice for me because of my choices.

I think a valuable lesson can be learned from both book. I still do not know how I would have handled myself. I would like to think that I would stick up for what I believed was right and not stay quiet or that I would save someone else's life, like Anna did with Reb Herschel. I think that I would probably try to find others who agreed with my opinion and have them help me to make a difference.

Part B – During 4 lunch periods, I visited each lunch table with a cart of the 2017 BOB book contenders. I explained what the BOB was and gave a quick book talk on 3 different contenders. I personally invited over 400 students to come to River's End Bookstore for the book discussions. I put up BOB book competition bracket graphics in the cafeteria to promote conversation about the competition. Out of the 400 students, I had three students who showed up the first week and came consistently throughout the 8 weeks that we held the book discussions. One of the 3 students sat down and discussed the experience afterwards. She enjoyed the deeper discussions about the books that happened during the meetings. She felt it added another level to her reading. She found herself discussing books with friends more often. She found that she gained a greater variety of reading materials and choices because of the book discussions. She found more connection between books, also. She connected to the characters, but not necessarily more than she normally would have. She loved the snacks and the people she met during the book discussions. She also enjoyed the location of the book discussions being at a bookstore, as it allowed her time to become more familiar with the bookstore and its materials.

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

Our team decided to make minor changes to our initial plan. One change was that we decided to buy pizza for the Lunch Bunch eight of the ten meeting dates. After meeting with the students the first time and witnessing their enjoyment of being asked to have pizza with their teachers, we decided having pizza more often would not only encourage attendance but also help to build relationships quicker, having them feel appreciated and special.

Another change made to the original plan was that we ended up inviting thirteen students. When reviewing our class lists we found more students who we thought would benefit. Of those thirteen students, nine showed up regularly. Six of those students had perfect attendance and eight attended nine of the ten lunches. Unfortunately, one of the original thirteen students had a different lunch, with class during our lunch, so his schedule would not allow him to attend.

In our action plan, we intended to have students log into Jupiter grades and review their grades during our Lunch Bunch time. Due to time constraints Jupiter Grades and report cards were pre-printed for students to review. We wanted to leave enough time for pizza and conversation.

Analysis of Data on Teacher Learning

Interestingly, all four teachers noticed that a project that began as an attempt to influence student attitudes and behavior, had a profound impact on teacher attitude and behavior.

Jeff - The most notable outcome for me was noticing my own shift toward becoming a more trauma sensitive teacher and team member. After just a few lunch bunch meetings, I noticed myself becoming more student centered and patient. I wrote zero referrals during this time (11 weeks), compared to 6 prior to the start of lunch bunch (19 weeks). That is not to say that I did not have conflicts with students, it is to say that the conflicts were resolved differently due to *a change in my reaction to student misbehavior.*

I distinctly recall four conflicts in class, and three instances in the hallway that could have easily escalated, but were instead diffused. After reflecting and journaling on these situations, the pattern began to emerge. Four times I journaled about (and still recall the feeling I had) noticing the change in my actions while they were happening! Two of these occurred in the classroom, and two in the hallway. All four times I was dealing with students who were not in lunch bunch, but I still took a more thoughtful approach that placed myself in a problem solving role, rather than a person wielding power. All four times students recognized their misbehavior, corrected it, apologized, and went on with their day without a referral. The change in my approach revolved around remaining non-aggressive, getting the students to recognize the effect of their behavior on others, reflecting on the appropriateness of the behavior in a school setting, and creating an opening for the student to move forward in a positive way. It led me to the conclusion that when students are able to calmly and rationally analyze the effects of their behavior on themselves and others while it's happening, they have the ability to shift their decision making into a more positive direction. The non-threatening approach seemed to keep the students in a rational, reflective state of mind instead of reactionary, combative state.

Another personal change that has evolved from this class, and specifically lunch bunch, has been a willingness on my part to eat lunch every day with a particular student on the team. Just from team meetings, I'm aware of two Adverse Childhood Experiences that he has already had to deal with. I haven't eaten lunch with students in 13 years (I had to look that up). It always seems like a kind thing to do, but there is always so much work to be done that I put my own needs ahead of those of my students. For the past 12 weeks, however, I've been allowing one student to eat in my room every day that we do not have lunch bunch. He has admitted to not liking the cafeteria, not having friends, and feeling out of place at school. Even though I often have work to do, we find some time to talk about his home life, books he reads, and video games he and his dad play.

The final observation for me, has been in terms of my daily interactions in the hallway and classroom with all students. I'm now using interactions with students as opportunities to show them that their teacher cares about them as a person, is happy they're here, and is somebody they can expect to have a positive relationship with. The shift has been very rewarding. There has certainly been more success with some students than others, but overall, there has been a noticeable, positive, change in the way I interact with students, and the way they interact with me. The number of smiles, "hellos," "thank yous," and even "sorrys" has increased incredibly. I've journaled about the support I'm getting during my lessons from students monitoring the behavior of other students. They have been using positive comments to direct their peers back on task "because Mr. Brown is trying to teach," "behave, it's Mr. Brown." Students who previously had walked our hallway with eyes down and a flat affect are now smiling and saying hello several times per day (interestingly, every single student from our lunch bunch group goes out of their way to have positive conversations with the teachers in the hall, in between classes, at lunch, or during study hall). Several students have asked us to attend their sporting events to cheer them on outside of school. I even have students cleaning papers off the hallway floor because they know that is something that I appreciate.

I've discovered that my dialogue has changed, also, when it comes to work completion. Rather than focusing on the student not completing the assignment in the past, I allow the student to figure out, and tell me, how they are going to complete the assignment moving forward. There's no sense chastising them for what they did not do. That puts us at odds. Helping them to see how they can be successful moving forward seems to put us both on the same team - both interested in their success.

Wendy-
The thing that I appreciated most about our Lunch Bunch experience was getting to know the students on a personal level. As the special education teacher on the team I spend much of my time assisting and supporting the students with special needs. I am helping them struggle through difficult work or redirecting their attention back to task. Sometimes I think students see me as more of a task master. The Lunch Bunch gave me the opportunity to interact with students less formally; we were able to get to know each other. One of the students from Lunch Bunch is diagnosed with ADHD. In all of my years of teaching, I have never worked with a student who was so easily distracted. I spend most of class with him redirecting his attention to task. After the thirtieth redirection in a class period, I can't say that I always maintain my composure. I haven't always worn my cement shoes and stayed true to who I am. The Lunch Bunch has provided the opportunity to build a relationship with this student, to see him for the amazing person he is, and help me stay true to who I am. I can redirect him one more time and another after that. I can continue to encourage this progress without adding more trauma.

My experience with the Lunch Bunch students helped me realize the importance of creating opportunities to build relationships with other students who are struggling in school. Having conversations with students about things unrelated to school seems to ease the stresses and pressures of school. After a short conversation, I find that students have been more willing to try harder and attempt difficult tasks. I journaled about one of my students, a girl not involved with the Lunch Bunch, who daily experiences tremendous trauma and stress due to living in two households as a result of a messy divorce. Her attendance is poor. Her homework production is inconsistent. Taking some time each day to have a conversation with her and to show her that someone cares has helped motivate her to keep coming to school and placing effort on school work.

After completing the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) survey with The Lunch Bunch, I was astounded by the high ACE scores. Our Lunch Bunch is just a small sample of students on our team. I realized that there were bound to be other students suffering the effects of traumatic experiences. With this in mind, I started looking beyond student behavior and took a closer look at the students. One student that stood out comes to math class with a flat expression. He rarely smiles and just seems angry all the time. He is quiet in class and doesn't want to be noticed. When prompted to start warm-ups or practice work, there is always a scowl and he will grunt something like "I'm not going to do it" or "I don't want to." He is braced for a teacher to show that they don't care by ignoring him and allowing him to sit in the chair doing nothing or by berating him for his lack of motivation and effort. Now that I have trauma sensitive training and have experienced working with the Lunch Bunch, my approach has changed drastically. Before prompting him to start a task, I ask him a personal questions or tell him something quirky like "I am so glad it's 7th period so I can see

you." These statements usually result in a slight smile (mostly because he thinks I am crazy), but he then is ready to work and accepts my prompts without complaint. As we have built our relationship, he has become comfortable enough to ask for help. I will see him looking at me from across the room. I will mouth "do you need help." He will give me a little nod and learning happens. Since I have changed my approach with this student, he hasn't failed to complete any work. I would like to attribute these changes to becoming a trauma sensitive teacher which were truly inspired by my experiences with the Lunch Bunch.

Danielle-I believe that this project had a more profound impact on my learning as a teacher. The class discussions and book that we read heightened my awareness of the traumas that our students are dealing with and how those experiences are affecting their approach to their education. It made me reconsider how I deal with all of my students (and all other students at OMS) on a daily basis. I've learned to be more patient with my students, to talk with them more rather than always focus on teaching, and to empathize more with them. In escalated situations with students, it has helped me to take a step back, be mindful of my actions and words, and proceed in a calmer manner.

A change that I have made as a result of our class discussions and readings was in how I interact with my students in class (especially my more challenging students). I chose to make a better effort to take time (aside from instruction) with my students in class; to listen to them and their stories, to laugh with them, to talk; essentially to make meaningful connections with my students. One of my boys from Lunch Bunch always comes to me whenever there is a few minutes of downtime in class to "chat". He'll talk about whatever comes to mind; camping, videogames, Lunch Bunch conversations, etc. He has also done this while in our Lunch Bunch. In years past, I probably would have encouraged him to do his homework, study, or make up old work; but I realized that this was a connection that I needed to take the time to make with him. And, I'm confident that the connections I have made with him have helped him to be motivated to succeed in Spanish class. Another boy from our Lunch Bunch who failed 3/7 classes during quarter 3, passed my class with 93. Daily, he puts forth a good effort, participates, and volunteers in my class. I'm confident that the connection I've made with him in class and at Lunch Bunch has encouraged him to work hard for me and succeed in class. I've also made an effort to try to create these meaningful connections with some of my more "difficult" students that I've taught this year. It can be very difficult to find a common ground with a student who has behavioral issues or does not make their education a priority. I have thought to myself, "what can I do to make this child see that his/her education is important and that he/she can succeed (even if not able to in the past)"? There are two, in particular, that came to school this year and wouldn't smile. As a matter of fact, it was months into the school year before I saw a smile of their faces. They were also students who were not as concerned with being successful in class. I made it a point to smile at these students, to interact more with them during class, to ask how they were doing or what they had planned for the weekend; as a way to make a connection with them. I'm happy to say that these two particular students have smiled more in the past few months in my class than they have all year. I'm also hearing positive things about them and their behaviors in other classes as well. The boy that I'm referring to has also shown improvement academically. I even called his mom to tell her about his performance in class. As soon as she answered the phone, I could tell that she was stressed that it was going to be a "bad phone call". I immediately told her why I was calling and could hear the relief in her voice. Again, it has paid off to take the time to make these connections with my students in order to help them to succeed in class.

Another change that I have seen is that I've only written a total of 5 referrals for this school year, with only 1 occurring this semester. I'm not one to write a lot of referrals anyway but there have been instances of poor behavior from students, who in the past, would have prompted me to write a referral or ask them to leave the classroom. This year, I have taken a step back and chosen to not be as reactive as I have been in the past. Again, getting back to what I was talking about previously, I've made it a point to make connections with those "challenging" students so that I'm already a step ahead when an issue occurs. Now, I make a conscious effort to not escalate situations with these students, but to address the issue, move on, and then re-visit later on in the day (or the following day) when the student has calmed down. Just last week, one of more challenging students took an assignment from my desk and started working on it when he was supposed to be doing something else. When I addressed it, he became very mad and refused to work for the duration of the period. I continued on with instruction and he left when the bell rang. I waited until I saw him in class the next day to address the reason for the issue the day before. He was much more

calm and accepting of what had transpired and why I was disappointed in his behavior. He agreed and worked just as well as he had previous to the situation in the class the day before.

One additional change that I made was to make an effort to acknowledge any student that I passed by in the hallways. In years past, I have always stood at my door to greet my students as they walk in. It has helped to "take the temperature" of students before I start class. When reflecting on our readings, I thought about how I've walked down the hallways only to see a student, whom I don't know, not look up at me or acknowledge me. I'm just as guilty of not acknowledging the student. This year, I decided to make a mindful effort to say hello or smile to ANY students (and colleagues) that I passed in the hallways; especially students that I do not teach or do not know. Often times, as teachers, we are so busy trying to get our tasks done that we pass by students in the hallways and never acknowledge them. Sometimes, it is amazing what a smile and a hello can do to change a person's day. It truly can make a difference for how they proceed with their efforts and behavior in classes.

Sandee:

As with my colleagues, the biggest impact that came as a result of reading the book and from our project was teacher attitude and behavior. I was surprised. I was really hoping that by showing our Lunch Bunch students that we cared and by developing another connection with them outside of the actual classroom setting would result in some kind of substantial positive academic change. I suppose it had a little bit of an impact, but not to the extent that I was hoping. However, there is much more to our job than teaching facts and figures. Most of those boys are walking away having learned lessons that can't be taught in a textbook. Mutual respect was given, communication skills were stressed, empathy and compassion developed for others, and memories were made.

I do feel that the students have definitely benefitted. I believe they feel a stronger connection to four of their teachers and that it has helped at least one of our Lunch Bunch students to feel better about school. His mother had previously expressed her concerns at a parent conference about his low self-esteem and his apathy toward school. That same boy attended all but one of our Lunch Bunch sessions. He looked forward to it and it wasn't just for the pizza. He told me that he liked getting to know his teachers and to spend time with us. He even decided to join us for our Team Activity Night, when I don't feel he would have otherwise, not without the connection we forged with him during our Lunch Bunch meetings. I truly feel that this experience will have a lasting impact on him (and most of the other boys).

Another one of our Lunch Bunch Boys, who has had an attendance issue--never missed our Lunch Bunch Thursdays. Since Lunch Bunch, he makes it a point to talk to me before and after every class (sometimes about academics, but usually about personal things in his life). This helped me to remember how young they really are and that they still want and need that connection.

Although I still am consistent with my high expectations for positive and productive behavior in the classroom, it has helped me to deal with discipline issues with more of a compassionate tone and the motivation and ability to repair the situation afterward. I always explain that we expect kids to make mistakes--that's natural. However, when I'm prevented from doing my job. It's that behavior that needs to be addressed in a fair, yet consistent manner. It's nothing personal, but sometimes the disruption needs to be removed for the good of the whole. The student who is disruptive has the chance to regroup, we repair the situation with a frank discussion and reteaching, and we start fresh the next day.

Additionally, as far as a change with teacher attitude goes, I feel that this has been an on-going process developed over the past three years--starting with the mindfulness classes and resulting in the Gratitude Journals that sprung from the first class we took and that have been incorporated into my (and Wendy's) classroom. That has really helped to establish a connection between us and our students. Not only do we get them to focus on what is positive in their life, but we invite students to share what their grateful for. The benefits of sharing are many. Not only do the students who have a hard time seeing the positive in their own life, have the opportunity to see what others choose to focus on, but you can see them write a little more down in their journal than they had before--because people modeled things that they didn't even think of or realize that they could or should be grateful for. Another benefit for everyone is that we discuss what's

Entire Action Team Findings -   Further evidence of our behavior shift (for the whole action research team) is seen in the culmination of two projects that we've been meaning to do for almost a decade. Projects that we've talked about, but have never put forth the energy to complete. The first was a team activity night. At our team meeting, our action research team put forth the idea of donating our time on a school night to open the school facilities to the students on our team. The turnout was outstanding - 68 students on a team of 105 (11 of the 13 lunch bunch students attended). In conversations leading up to the event, the teachers involved stated that they wanted to make school a more enjoyable place for students to experience. This evening was free of charge and chaperoned by the Action Research group, other team teachers, and several volunteer teachers from various subject areas in the school. The feedback was outstanding. The students reported back that they loved the event and appreciated the teachers' creating the opportunity for them. Several teachers even reported that interactions in the classroom were more positive and cooperative directly prior to and after the event. We also received positive feedback from the administration and other teachers involved. They thanked us for going out of our way to bring this event to students and said they were happy to be involved with it this year, and would be even volunteer again if we made it a yearly tradition. The reason they provided was that they enjoyed having positive interactions with students that helped to build relationships outside the classroom.

    The second program put forth by the Action Team was to begin the long-talked-about Student of the Week Award. For several years (perhaps as many as 10), this idea has been periodically proposed, but never initiated. Following our lunch bunch meeting on 3/23, the team discussed wanting a way to recognize more students in a positive way to help increase student feelings of satisfaction with our team. Our increased awareness of students in trauma broadened to an increased awareness/compassion for all students in general. Just as we were going out of our way to recognize, work with, and improve the school environment for students experiencing trauma, so too did we want to provide these same advantages to students who, may or may not be experiencing trauma, but are certainly demonstrating positive behaviors and serve as role models for their peers. We collaborated to develop an award, gathered resume paper, printed color certificates, and have been rewarding one student per week for the positive contributions they have been making to the team.

Analysis of Data on Student Learning:

Attendance: Of the students who regularly attended Lunch Bunch, 7 out of 8 were absent from school 2 times or less in Quarter 3. The other student was absent for a total of 7 days this quarter (the same amount as quarter 2). Although attendance was not an issue during Q3, it is important to note that many of the absences **did not** take place on Thursdays (Lunch Bunch meeting days) as previously mentioned in our first section.

Grades from Q2-Q3: Unfortunately, our Lunch Bunch did not have a dramatic impact on academic performance as we had hoped. The overall average of our Lunch Bunch students for Q3 was 75% (down from 78% in Q2). Two out of 8 students had an overall average below 65% in Q3. One student maintained the same average from Q2 to Q3. Only 2 of the 8 students in our group were able to raise their overall

averages (by 2 points and 7 points) from Q2 to Q3. Three out of 8 students passed all classes listed on their report cards.

Behaviors/Interactions: The biggest change that we saw from our Lunch Bunch students was in their behaviors and interactions with us. Of the students who took the final survey, all but one mentioned liking Lunch Bunch because they were able to talk with their teachers outside of the normal classroom discussions. Several students mentioned on the final survey that they like to talk to teachers in a relaxed, quiet, and calm environment-- as opposed to the stressful environment of the lunch room. One mentioned that it kept him motivated and coming to school. That right there should be considered a success! A few of the boys even mentioned that it helped them to improve their social skills with others (both peers and adults).

An additional comment from the boys that we felt was noteworthy, was that they felt we did the lunch bunch because we care about them and want the best for them. They also felt it made the teachers happy!

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

The changes I made involved not using the complete Meta-Cognitive Variables rubric. I chose certain variables that I felt would be most beneficial to be able to assess my middle school students' social and emotional growth. This change was implemented because the original rubric was too long to have my students fully complete at their age. I felt that I could assess my students' growth with the variables that I chose to consider and evaluate. Also, I decided to include an assessment of my students' grades to reflect their cognitive development throughout the year.

Analysis of Data on Teacher Learning: I examined my written reflections and found the following:

When I am rested, feel loved, am not tired, I know I can best help my students. I care about kids and want to be able to influence them in good ways and help them to lead joyful, productive lives. Three core values that I believe are monumental in helping students achieve deeper social and emotional learning are honesty, self-worth, and confidence. I used various strategies to help my students develop these core values.

Throughout the school year, my reflections revealed that problems occur when students do not understand content. They act out. It has also been a year of vast change emotionally and intellectually from day to day. I can have the worst day teaching students, ranging from bad moods to deal with, misunderstanding, and students not getting the lesson, anger, and refusal to work. Then, the next day, students can be angelic, trying their best. It really comes down to living "one day at a time" and beginning each day "again" to not feel buried with the burden of feeling like I am failing the students; fresh attitude every day and brushing off yesterday's failures.

With the difficulty I have experienced getting my enrichment group to focus on daily content, I have done many mindful breathing exercises with them. The class was small, all students participated and found the breathing exercises to be beneficial. They reported that they felt calmer. They asked me to do breathing exercises with them often. They found they could regulate their emotion during stressful events, even outside of school.
One day as I was leading the class in a breathing exercise, at the conclusion of the exercise, I asked for feedback. This is what they said:

"I felt like I was in an all-white room."
"I felt like I was black all around me, an endless void."
"I feel calm."
"I felt like I wanted to fall asleep."
"We should do this in math class."
I was very excited that they could express their thoughts, feelings, and insights in this way.

Another day, it was the end of the day and the students needed to calm down and focus. I decided to do Spiderman breathing with them. The reflections they expressed afterward were:

"I felt light headed."

"I felt like I have no comment."

"I did not like it."

My Asperger's student asked to come to the board and drew a picture of a broken heart and said it was of "a broken soul."

"I did not like it and also felt light headed."

"Did not like it."

"I felt like Spiderman swinging on his webs."

Although this breathing exercise was not a favorite one, the students were more focused after the exercise and a calmer classroom ensued.

I recorded student expressions often after the exercises. It was interesting to me that they could leave their negative thoughts behind and really free their mind up to express these emotions after mindful breathing. Their focus in the classroom was much better and they were eager to do well.

Analysis of Data on Student Learning:

I examined students' pre and post-Meta Cognitive Variables (MCV) assessments to analyze growth, report card grades, and attendance records and found the following:

MCV analysis: Students completed a MCV assessment in December 2016. I had students complete another assessment in April 2017 to monitor growth. The data showed that students are learning how to think about their thoughts with the aim of improving how they learn. As we completed the questionnaire together so that I could clarify what the questions were asking, the students learning goals have significantly shifted to a desire to learn and to acquire good grades. Most students initially answered questions reflecting a fixed mindset about personal and academic skills. The second assessment indicated evidence of a growth mindset and the desire and interest in self- or skill- development. They want to personally achieve better scores and were becoming more aware of their own accountability to be successful and responsible about completing their math assignments.

Report Card Grade Analysis:

Quarter 1:

Student 1 (cb): Grade: 60.8% Class mean average: 78.2%

Student 2 (aw): Grade: 71.4% Class mean average: 78.2%

Student 3: (ed): Grade: 75.7% Class mean average: 80.6%

Student 4 (ae): Grade: 68.2% Class mean average: 80.6%

Student 5 (dg): Grade: 73.6% Class mean average: 76.9%

Student 4 (av): Grade: 69.6% Class mean average: 74.8%

Mean Student Average: 69.9%

Quarter 2:

Student 1 (cb): Grade: 73.1% Class mean average: 80.8%

Student 2 (aw): Grade: 53.7% Class mean average: 80.8%

Student 3: (ed): Grade: 79.9% Class mean average: 83.0%

Student 4 (ae): Grade: 69.7% Class mean average: 83.0%

Student 5 (dg): Grade: 76.7% Class mean average: 79.0%

Student 4 (av): Grade: 66.2% Class mean average: 77.8%

Mean Student Average: 69.9%

Quarter 3:

Student 1 (cb): Grade: 68.0% Class mean average: 78.2%

Student 2 (aw): Grade: 64.5% Class mean average: 78.2%

Student 3: (ed): Grade: 81.3% Class mean average: 83.1%

Student 4 (ae): Grade: 56.3% Class mean average: 83.1%

Student 5 (dg): Grade: 80.6% Class mean average: 75.1%

Student 4 (av): Grade: 53.8% Class mean average: 74.7%

Mean Student Average: 67.4%

Quarter 4:

Student 1 (cb): Grade: 70.9% Class mean average: 77.3%

Student 2 (aw): Grade: 75.7% Class mean average: 77.3%

Student 3: (ed): Grade: 76.4% Class mean average: 85.6%

Student 4 (ae): Grade: 71.8% Class mean average: 85.6%

Student 5 (dg): Grade: 77.0% Class mean average: 74.0%

Student 4 (av): Grade: 28.8% Class mean average: 67.5%

Mean Student Average: 66.8%

Removing the outlier (28.8%), Mean Student Average: 74.4%

When comparing the mean averages from Quarter 1 through Quarter 4, there is a significant increase in academic average for math.

Attendance Records:

Student 1 (cb): Year to Date Absences: 25 Qtr. 4 Absences: 1

Student 2 (aw): Year to Date Absences: 14 Qtr. 4 Absences: 1

Student 3: (ed): Year to Date Absences: 11 Qtr. 4 Absences: 3

Student 4 (ae): Year to Date Absences: 18 Qtr. 4 Absences: 3

Student 5 (dg): Year to Date Absences: 24 Qtr. 4 Absences: 6

Student 4 (av): Year to Date Absences: 34 Qtr. 4 Absences: 7

Attendance records data is inconclusive. I cannot come up with a relevant analysis with what I have. I wanted to get the 6th grade attendance records to compare last year from this year but was unable to receive them in time.
Conclusion:

The work that I have done with my students this year is not about using any specific trauma curriculum. Although I have learned a lot through the book, various articles, and student research, it really is about giving students the support, trust, and connection that they need to consistently know that I have their backs and am there to care about them and help them succeed. Students appreciate the connection. I am an active listener and I care about their stories, their successes, and their lives. They know this.

AW was a challenge from the beginning of the school year. I knew that I had to build a relationship with this student or have a really tough year. We had a rocky path in the fall semester. However, by spring, he was hearing from his friends that they liked working with me. He asked to be put into my math enrichment class. He told me that he did not like me very much earlier in the year. However, as the year has gone by, he has learned to trust that I care about his well-being and want him to succeed. He has been vulnerable enough to show that he wants to succeed as well and his grades have improved.

AV is another student that had little interest in academic endeavors. However, as we have explored mindful breathing exercises, I have been able to show this student a different way to calm down and learn. Although this student varies with her academic success day to day, she knows that she can talk to me when life troubles her.

CB has had a tough background and family life. He suffers from ADHD and has such Jekyll/Hyde days in the classroom that it is tough to deal with him on certain days. However, I have also seen him be able to calm himself down and focus. He is very intelligent, as most of these students are, and has a tough time staying emotionally even on a consistent basis.

DG showed me an angry side earlier in the year. However, this boy also has learned that if he works hard, he is going to succeed. He is insecure about his abilities academically. However, over the year, he has shown a real desire to do well and get good grades.

ED and AE "graduated" from my class in January when their grades used to evaluate their placement in enrichment math exceeded expectations. They are still maintaining a reasonable math grade and are not expected to be placed in enrichment math for the time being.

I have had the opportunity to collaborate with another teacher in this class. Her support and encouragement have benefited me immensely. We have discussed our students, given each other ideas, reassured, and inspired each other to finish strong.

Teacher Participant Name: Dan Rose

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

Originally, my project was focused on a teacher writing with his students, that is, a writing teacher taking time to write and develop a piece of writing for publication during the school year and reflecting on the experience all the way through.

After this experience of writing, seeking publication, and reflecting along the way, I would be more in tune with the young writers who enter my classroom each year, more sensitive to their needs, more adept at coaching them to raise the level of their writing. More importantly, perhaps, is the fact that through this experience, I would be able to feel the emotional ups and downs that accompany the process of writing. My ability to teach all writers would improve and I would be more in tune with the social emotional learning of my students. At least, that was my goal.

Originally, I had only one piece of writing in mind for this project. This changed as I began to write with my students in September. By December it was clear that I would be attempting to publish more than just one piece of writing. In fact, to date, I have published 5 pieces of writing during the time that I have been engaged in this class. I also have 1 more piece that will be published in the next 3 weeks, and another for which I am waiting to hear.

Much of my writing for this project was not about teaching writing, per say, but about other areas of my life which were demanding attention -- namely parenting . . . fatherhood. So I guess my project did change in that regard. I originally set out to write a 'teacherly' article, and I did, but ironically, it was not the teacher article that was accepted for publication. It was the articles I wrote and shared with my students.

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

1. Ideas are everything. This became clear as I read through my reflections for this project. My ideas come in bunches, so that I will go from having 0 writing ideas to all of a sudden having 5 or 6 different ideas -- a flurry of thought. The more I write, the more I realize that without a meaningful idea -- I've got nothing. No in road. Nothing to say. Through this experience I have come to realize that I should never ignore an idea . . . no matter where it comes to me. Ideas call out from everywhere, from the crowded aisle at the grocery store, from the early morning front lawn (while waiting for the dogs to do their business), from the dead end road at twilight, from the surging shores of Lake Ontario, from beyond the back window pane, from the couch surrounded by my three kids, all listening to me read to them.
I will change me teaching because of what I learned through this project. Ideas are everything. All writers need ideas that give them a charge emotionally and spiritually. Writers need to believe that the idea is important, relevant to their world, and pertinent to society.

2. The writing 'process' varies greatly from writer to writer and piece to piece. Through this project, I also became keenly aware of the great degree of variation which occurs from creation of a piece to publication. I guess I never took time to slow down and reflect on my own writing process and when I look back at my notes from the course, I can easily see the diverse ways in which I created and finished writing pieces. Sometimes I would have most of the piece written in my head already, and it would come out practically 'finished' on the screen. Sometimes I had the ending of a piece written in my head but nothing else, and so the rest of the piece came in painstaking chunks, bit by bit, word by word. Sometimes, I would write pages and pages of seemingly unrelated ideas that I had on my mind, only to find upon rereading that 2 or 3 different pieces were 'hiding' inside the larger one.

There is one constant in my writing process. Revision. It happens all the time. It does not matter if I am writing in my head, on a piece of paper, or on a computer screen, I am always working at saying things in more beautiful, more meaningful, more efficient ways. Revision, for me, starts as soon as I begin thinking about an idea. It starts in the form of questions: What is it that I am trying to say? What is the deeper meaning behind this idea? Why will people care about this idea? Who will most likely care about this idea? What is the best way to showcase this idea so to move people to think about, act upon, talk about it? How should the idea start? What structure will best support the deeper meaning behind this idea?

And then, of course, while I am writing I am revising. It happens now almost without thought, and my revisions skill grows the more I write and revise.

As I work to create writing to be published, I am becoming a better teacher of writing. By forcing myself to publish writing periodically, I am gaining a better understanding of what it means to write well, to continually

work to raise the level of the writing. Because of my own experiences writing, I am able to create better writing lessons, deliver better writing conferences, and model better writing behaviors and attitudes. I offer most of my writing as mentor texts and students use them to guide their own writing.

Analysis of Data on Student Learning:

I have studied my reflection entries, my published writing pieces, and student written reflections on writing (as well as finished student writing projects) for this class and found that by writing and publishing along with my students, I am sharpening my skills as a teacher of writing.

Examining my own writing process has given me insight into the difficulties associated with scholarly writing and composition while also giving me a chance to look closely at the lessons and instruction I deliver each day. I have added many writing (mini) lessons as a result of attempting to publish my own writing. I have added lessons on building ideas. I have added lessons on ways to elaborate. I have added lessons related to structuring a piece. I have added lessons that help a writer tease out the deeper meaning in their piece. I have added lessons on creating better endings and titles.

All of this teaching was born from my own experience.

I also took note of audience - someone to write for. Having a tangible audience makes writing so much more real and palpable. Knowing (from the start) that there are readers out there who will take notice of my writing, that genuinely care about what I am saying, makes a huge difference in engaging the writer for the duration of the piece. Getting all 8th grade students engaged in a piece of writing - a piece of writing for which they came up with the idea - is a difficult task, and one that should not be taken lightly. Allowing the students the freedom to choose and idea is not enough -- a teacher of writing must present different lessons which show beginning writers how to come up with a worthy idea. A writing teacher must present 3 or 4 different lessons around ideas. A writing teacher must reveal their own lists of ideas. This project helped reinforce this point -- that ideas are everything. That audience matters. That we can't expect an 8th grade writer to just magically arrive at a worthy writing idea. We must show them how. We must model. We must let them see our writing, our struggles, our end results.

I write so I can better teach writing.