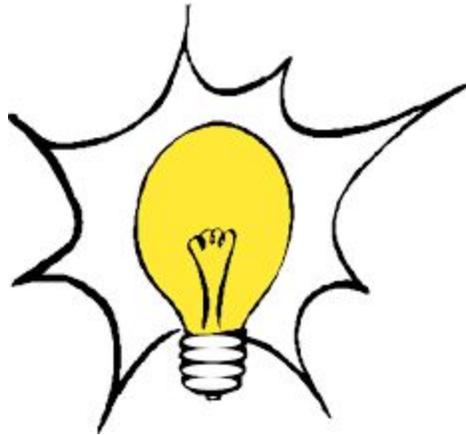Niamh Burke

Action Research Leadership Institute 2016-2017

Sawyer Elementary

Lightbulb Moments in a

Reflective 5th Grade Classroom

1. INTRODUCTION

Reflection is undoubtedly a word my students have come to associate with me. The process of reflection is embedded in every subject of my classroom, all parts of my units, and even my classroom management system. This past year, I sought to explicitly teach my students the tools of learning along with the content of our curriculums.

I started this journey armed with a strong belief that reflective practices would increase intrinsic motivation and facilitate learning. I ended with much deeper questions about the role of the teacher, the role of the student, and the ramifications of entering into these roles. Before the year began, I envisioned the perfect classroom: a well-oiled learning machine, student-led routines, bright eyes and dogged determination. A Rocky montage, in my head, of students leading each other to academic greatness. Although perfection is a limit that can never be reached, reflective practices reveal our successes and help us make sense of our failures. Time is the only test that will demonstrate the true value of a reflective practice. Throughout this school year, I both experienced and watched my students undergo flashes of insight. I might never know if they will continue to take deep breaths when they need to focus, or keep a quality record of their learning to review before the final. I'm confident, however, that together we have began to illuminate our paths towards the future.

---

2. SCHOOL CONTEXT

Sidney Sawyer Elementary School is a neighborhood school in the Chicago Public School district. Located in the south side neighborhood Gage Park, Sawyer serves about 1,800 students in kindergarten through 8th grade.

Gage Park has been a neighborhood of immigrants for generations. Earlier waves of Lithuanian and Irish immigrants have been replaced by successive waves of Latino immigration, primarily Mexican, throughout the 90s and continuing today. Bordered on three sides by train tracks, Gage Park occupies the area from 49th to 59th Streets and 3900 W to 2300 W. Gage Park is primarily residential with commercial corridors along 51st St., 55th St., 59th St., Western Ave., California Ave., and Kedzie Ave. Commercial spaces range from locally owned bodegas to corporate chains such as Bank of America and Chuck-E-Cheese. Gage Park is served by the Orange Line as well as several major bus lines down Western, Kedzie and Garfield. The nearby Stevenson Expressway is a major artery that allows access to downtown as well as other major highways.

Although there has been a steady decline in student population since 2011, Sawyer is still tied for largest elementary school in Chicago. Each grade level contains 5 to 7 classrooms and there are 11 teachers for resource classes. Sawyer is spread across three buildings. The old building houses 5-8th grade, a gymnasium, the auditorium, a computer lab and the art rooms. Four 4th and 2 5th grade classrooms meet in a separate modular building, formerly dedicated to high school preparation and

1-4th grade classrooms reside in a newer building, along with a second gymnasium, 2 more computer labs, a parent room and the cafeteria. Each building has it's own office. As one walks through the building, evidence to the large student population is everywhere. Learning spaces are set up at the end of each hallway and classrooms and staff are crammed in every available space, including the computer lab closet. Several resource teachers lack their own classroom and travel throughout the day to meet with their classes in their respective homerooms. Three art teachers rotate use of the art rooms each quarter.

Demographics of the school generally reflect the demographics of the surrounding neighborhood. Sawyer is 98% Latino, 1% white, and less than 1% is composed of African-American and other minority groups. These demographics have been fairly consistent over the past five years. The school is 98% low-income and reflects a slight drop in students receiving free or reduced price lunches since 2011 (100% low income). There is a small gap between percent of low income students in Sawyer compared to the district as a whole, which averages at about 87% low income and a large disparity when compared to students across the entire state of Illinois which is 54% low income. It is interesting to note that the state has seen a 6 percentage point rise in low income students over the past 5 years (rising immigration?). With a 12% student mobility rate, Sawyer is on par with the state in terms of student transfers and slightly below the district average of 17%.

Resulting from the large immigrant population and cultural groupings in the neighborhood, 37% of the school's population are English Language Learners (ELL). This is nearly double the district average of 18% ELL and almost quadruple the state norm of 10%. Sawyer is fortunate enough to have the population and teachers to support a bilingual program. The number of bilingual classrooms depends on needs of the grade level but by 5th grade all students are in regular or designated English as a second language (ESL) classrooms. For the 2016 school year, 3/6 of the first grade classrooms are bilingual, with these students receiving all of their instruction in Spanish. By fourth grade only 1/6 classrooms are bilingual with an additional two classrooms being designated as ESL rooms with instruction occurring primarily in English incorporating supports when necessary. By 6th grade, all students save recent immigrants speak and use English throughout their school day. Students who have not tested out of the bilingual program receive services from at least 1 bilingual certified teacher. The majority of Sawyer teachers, regardless of their classroom demographics, hold bilingual or ESL endorsements.

Beginning in 2015, Sawyer began a Comprehensive Gifted Program with one designated gifted classroom in first through 4th grades. In 2016 these 4th graders became the school's first gifted 5th graders. As students matriculate to the next grade, the gifted program will expand with a full gifted program by 2019. Gifted students are chosen based on NWEA map data, third quarter grades and a teacher observation checklist. The gifted program aims to serve advanced students by providing them with a differentiated learning environment allowing increased acceleration, rigor and abstract reasoning.

With an average class size of 31, Sawyer proudly obtained a prestigious Level 1 status within CPS this year. Parents, teachers and staff owe this success to the "more ambitious" instruction

undertaken by the school as noted on the 5Essentials Survey, completed annually across CPS. For the 2014-2015 school year respondents marked family involvement, teacher collaboration and supportive environment as average.

Teachers and parents come together to support a rich array of extracurriculars including soccer, basketball, volleyball, cross country, track, YMCA, drama club, dancing, singing, yoga, environment, poetry, tutoring and various other options depending on grade level and interest.

Being so large, the school has varying levels of teacher engagement and various opportunities for group collaboration. Aside from grade level clusters and traditional school teams such as ILT, Culture and Climate, and Bilingual, many teachers give up their personal time to participate in professional learning communities including partnerships with the Museum of Science and Industry as well as Rochelle Lee's Study Groups. Our administrative team is comprised of three former teachers, one of which (our principal) was a teacher at Sawyer. While they seek to support their staff as best they can, it would be impossible to ensure that everyone is happy at all times. Implementation of initiatives over 1,600+ students and 3 buildings can be challenging, but lines of communication are open and teachers and administrators have both shown flexibility. That being said, the passion and dedication of our leaders is obvious and Sawyer is one of the stronger and more cohesive teams I have been a part of. I have found various opportunities (free classes at the University of Chicago and Museum of Science and Industry, Cities of Peace fellowship and various grants) through these administrators and am happy to have the space and support to grow as an educator. Outside of teachers and administrators, Sawyer has two full time counselors, two full time case managers, a dean of students, a data specialist, math coach, a tech coordinator, five office clerks and a well oiled machine comprised of SECA's and recess monitors and custodians that keep Sawyer functioning day to day.

I am the newly appointed gifted teacher for the 5th grade class housed in the modular buildings described above. 27 of the 28 students were together in 4th grade. The culture established the previous year is evident in how students interact with each other, hold each other accountable to high standards, and are able to choose partners to facilitate their learning. One student has transferred into the program from a gifted program in a different CPS school. Although she is outgoing and has made friends, I see that she tends to prefer to work by herself or feels less confident when students have the options to choose groups or partners. True to their name, these students are performing above grade level, ending fourth grade with an average NWEA score of 226 in math (compared to the national average of 213) and an average of 220 in reading (compared to the national 205). Looking at PARCC data, a test aligned to new common core state standards, this classroom is still performing well above the school, district and state averages. On the reading assessment one student was approaching standards, 19 met expectations and 7 exceeded expectations. While most scores fell between the 750 and 790 range, the school's average was 725, the district average was 732 and the state average was 738. An opposite trend was seen in math, 8 students were approaching expectations, 18 students met expectations and 1 student exceeded expectations. Still, most scores fell between the 750-796 range compared to the school average of 719, district average of 725 and state average of 733.

Each student has expressed a love of learning and expressing themselves in varying ways, with students falling under all 8 categories of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences: 3 self identified as intrapersonal (self smart), 1 interpersonal, 7 as nature smart, 3 as logical-mathematical smart, 4 were identified primarily with their linguistic intelligence (5 including the teacher), 2 each as kinesthetic and spatial and 4 as predominantly musically intelligent. The majority of the room assessed themselves as being tactile learners (14) versus 3 visual and 7 auditory. Although they are alike in their giftedness, they are unique in interests and personalities. Still young, the group tends to break up into boys and girls during recess. The boys (and one girl) love to play with Pokemon and Yu-gi-oh cards while the girls prefer to sit in groups and talk. Some students are outgoing, chatting with everyone, while others connect with just a few of their best friends in the room and several find themselves a little shy.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Growth Vs. Fixed Mindset

"Don't call kids smart"a most counterintuitive tip coming out of educational research today. Parents and educators may have seen this advice in a number of publications over the past five years: The Atlantic, The Huffington Post, ABC News, and Scientific American to name a few. The wisdom of the research tells us that if a child attributes his/her success to an inherent quality (their intelligence), they are less likely to work hard; conversely, if a child is praised for their effort, they are more likely to see their success as a result of hard work and perseverance.

A commonly held belief is that intelligence is fixed and you have as much smarts as you were born with. Yet educators, researchers, and (hopefully) parents know this is not the case. Intelligence is malleable and everything from content (what we know) to process (how we know) can be improved if one makes an effort. Take two sixth graders who do not know their multiplication facts. If Student A believes that they do not know their facts because they are stupid, they are not likely to attempt to learn them; we call this a fixed mindset. If Student B has a growth mindset, they will identify the facts that they do not know and practice them until they are memorized because they recognize they are not dumb, they simply do not know it yet. Certainly, each person has natural gifts and sometimes natural challenges. Having a growth mindset does not mean each person will master each concept or skill, but given enough time and practice, each person will make progress towards mastery.

Adult readers are sure to recognize that they might have both growth and fixed mindsets about different subjects. For example I have a growth mindset when I am confident I could take a general education chemistry course and do well, even though I have not practiced chemistry since high school. At the same time, my mindset is more fixed regarding my ability to draw; I'm no artist! However, when I say "I can't draw," I really mean "I am not willing to put forth the effort that would allow me to draw photorealistic images."

Teachers, before they are able to teach, must orient their students towards a growth mindset and help each child believe that learning anything is possible, given time and dedication, no matter how difficult it seems at first.

With today's high stakes testing, growth mindsets are more important than ever. When the nation, state, and district boils students down to a number that determines pass or fail, teachers must do their best to mitigate some of the unintended ill effects of modern testing policies. According to Madeus and Russell (2010/2011), inadvertent effects include "narrowing the curriculum, decreasing attention on non- tested subjects, changing preschool and kindergarten curricula, narrow test preparation, corruption of test results, cheating, triaging "bubble" students, retaining students in grade, increased dropout rates, and increasing student stress and anxiety" (p. 28). Stress and anxiety amongst children is not to be ignored. I have seen a high performing eight year old throw up on her first day of state-mandated testing.

Stress of Poverty

Evans and Kim (2007) corroborate the literature correlating an inverse relationship between poverty risk factors and health. Poverty can be so harmful "because stress regulatory mechanisms are damaged by excessive exposure to cumulative environmental risks during childhood" (p. 964). Substandard housing, family turmoil, and poor nutrition are just three of many environmental risks associated with poverty. The Evans and Kim team found that having multiple risk factors in childhood correlated with higher levels of overnight cortisol. Cortisol, released when the body is in fight or flight mode, is an indicator of stress. Multiple risk factors were also found to be correlated with an abnormal or impaired regulation of the heart.

In addition to the increased stress from high-stakes testing, students who come from low-income households must also deal with a variety of stress factors they bring from home. Financial concerns affect most of my students, who receive free or reduced price lunches. Families sometimes cannot provide food, adequate winter clothing, money for field trips, internet and other de facto essentials of middle class homes. Gang activity and gun violence affects all of my students generally and several students have experienced the effects of shootings and drug overdoses in their own families.

Poverty disproportionately affects students of color. Given the fact that black and Latino students perform worse on standardized tests than their white peers, it is not a leap to believe that stress negatively affects student achievement.

Use of Reflection

Thomas Metzinger, a modern philosopher, comments on how the internet and modern technology have changed how we understand ourselves and our knowledge (many of us use the internet as an external memory device, for example). At the same time, modern technology fragments our attention and creates a limitless supply of diversions to link-hop across the web. Metzinger describes the need to manage one's attention in *The Ego Tunnel* (2010), explaining that humans have developed the ability

to make sense of their surroundings, feelings, and the feelings of others. The ability to focus our attention should not be taken for granted; "attention is a finite commodity," (p. 235) because it is limited by the amount of time we have each day. Metzinger believes that meditation and relaxation techniques should be part of the curriculum for modern schoolchildren so that they learn to control their attention and focus it on tasks of their choosing and avoid being distracted by competing sights, sounds, and desires.

Yoga Sutra 1.1 atha yoga anushasanam (now comes the study of yoga)

Rubber mats, elastic clothing, and breath synchronized movements are probably some of the images that jump to mind when hearing the word yoga. Physical practice, or asana, however, is just one of the "eight-limbs" of yoga as described by Patanjali, the Indian sage who penned the Yoga Sutras over 1600 years ago. The Yoga Sutras have been described as Cliff Notes for the Bhagavad Gita, an collection of ancient texts with recommendations on how to live. Asana (position during meditation) along with yamas (behaviors), niyamas (observances), pranayama (breath) and pratyahara (withdrawal of senses) are used to reach enlightenment. Yoga, as defined by Patanjali is the "stilling of the mindfield" (yogash chitta vritti nirodhah). The sutras go on to give advice and categories for recognizing changing thought patterns and sorting through them. While browsing through the Sutras, it is apparent that stress and fragmented attention are not modern inventions.

While many claims of modern yogi's have been discredited (yoga will not "boil the toxins" out of your blood), the practical and health benefits of self-reflection (study of oneself- the third niyama) and mindfulness activities (including yoga postures, breathing and turning the senses inwards) is well documented. In the past two hundred years we have developed a whole social science dedicated to studying one's thoughts, behaviors and attitudes (psychology). In a review of research linking health to meditation, Hayes (2004) said that research demonstrates that meditation, in and of itself, is an effective tool against stress and pain. One study, focused on teenagers, found decreased absenteeism and reduced behavioral issues among teens who meditated (Lee, 2004).
CPS is part of a larger trend to reduce punitive measures within schools and increase restorative justice. Robert W. Coleman Elementary in West Baltimore recently made headlines for replacing detention with meditation. Students are sent to a lavender scented room to identify why they were removed from class and to focus on their breath. As a result, referrals are down and they have not needed to suspend any students (Dokoupil, 2016).

Metacognition

The First 20 Days is a popular reading curriculum for setting up reader's workshop in an elementary classroom (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). One of the first lessons explains that reading is thinking. However, with the sheer amount of content teachers must teach, it is difficult to take time out of our already cram-packed lessons to remind students about metacognition. I want students to go beyond what they are learning and consider how they are learning. Metacognition is key for students to understand what they know and what they do not know.

Berger (2014) thinks this is key to involving students in the assessment process and promoting autonomy. Students need daily learning objectives in order to understand what they are responsible for knowing at the end of a lesson. Teachers must then check for understanding and invite students to engage in analysis of, and reflection on, their own data. In his model, students are less focused on "Oh good, I have a B" and more able to articulate the concepts they understand and those that they are still working on. Teaching students to question, critique and reflect upon their own learning empowers them to take charge of their education and prepares them for secondary and postsecondary education.

Defining Our Terms

Because of my grounding in yoga, I will blend meditative and mindfulness practices including breathing and physical postures. Additionally, students will track their metacognitive processes by writing about their learning and monitoring their academic progress. These meditative and metacognitive practices, for the purpose of this paper, are grouped together under one umbrella that we will call reflection. Campbell's (1994) research bolsters this decision, suggesting that "unifying the many definitions and practices of meditation is the notion of training the mind" (p. 246), as well asdiscussing the relative lack of resources connecting writing to meditation. While I believe mindfully incorporating various reflective practices will benefit my students long term health, I also suspect that it can have a positive effect on current achievement. Campbell quotes Moffett (1982), whose theories appeared early on the scene in 1965:
He proposes inner speech as the "bridge" between meditation and writing and writes that meditation helps one gain "some control of inner speech ranging from merely watching it to focusing it to suspending it altogether" (236). This allows a writer to engage in "authentic authoring" by helping the writer perceive "the deeper self that abides at least somewhat independently of the outside," a trait he believes necessary for effective writing." (p. 248)

Moffett's inner-speech seems synonymous with thought. Watching thought describes the process of metacognition, focusing and suspending thought are the aims of a mindfulness practice. While modern research suggests the academic and health benefits to be earned by these respective practices, Moffett suggests that together they can be used to understand what lies below the surface of consciousness and to become a better writer.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Primary Question

❖ What happens when I incorporate mindfulness techniques and metacognitive routines into my practice?

Subquestions

➢ What happens to the educator's ability to provide reflective solutions to students?
➢ What happens with students' ability to verbalize goals in regards to their learning and behavior?
➢ What happens to students ability to self-monitor and correct?

5. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

- **Teacher Journal**: Since September I have collected my personal feelings, observations, thoughts and hopes in a teacher journal for this class. By January of this year I had developed a habit of recording moments in class on a post it, sticking it near my computer and going back to record further thoughts in my handwritten journal or an online copy (depending on how much I had to say).
- **Emotional Check In Survey**: Beginning in December as a monthly check in, I began checking in with students twice a week via a Google Form that questioned their happiness and stress levels on a scale of 1 - 5, one being the least happy/stressed and 5 being the most happy/stressed.
    - **Focus Group**: Based on my emotional survey, I identified six students that were more stressed than their peers and met with them as a group and one on one.
- **Student Work**: I pulled information about the efficacy of metacognitive practices from any and all student work, especially through their notebooks, online surveys, and embedding reflective questions into assessments. Students were expected to maintain a record of their learning in writing and math portfolios, as well as reading, social studies, and science notebooks. These notebooks and portfolios were regularly assessed.
    - **Quick Writes**: Quick write is a routine of writing for a designated length of time about a topic or question. Students are not finished until the timer is up and expected to add on and revise their thoughts. While I do utilize quick writes for content, it is my main mode of garnering reflection among my students by asking them to analyze their learning. For example: What do you know now that you didn't know before the unit? What is your reading goal? How will you answer your question?
    - **Use of Rubrics**: Students and myself have created, analyzed, and reflected about rubrics and checklists to understand progress on projects, writing, speaking, listening, and managing records of their learning.

7. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The number of reflective interventions implemented in my classroom far exceeds the scope of this paper. In this section, I will lead you through results from processes I used specifically to reflect on behavior and the process of learning. Although results found in all subjects were encouraging, the data presented below was the most interesting and, I believe, the most compelling. This section is organized into two sections. The first section is about routines implemented under the umbrella of mindfulness. In the second I share some of the routines and results that I believe show metacognition. Throughout the paper, I indicate some of my conclusions through "Lightbulb Moments," boxes separated from the text and indicated with a symbol of a lightbulb.

I. MINDFULNESS

CHECKING IN

Before I began a series of social-emotional interventions that included mindfulness techniques, it seemed logical to assess my class on their general moods. Fortunate to have a 1:1 technology ratio, I created a survey on Google Forms that asked for students' names, for students to rate their levels of happiness and stress on a 1-5 scale and to explain why. 1 was least, 5 was most and a 3 indicated neutrality (see Appendix A). Although I asked about happiness as a general mood check in, I was mostly interested in what students were going to report on stress.

I initially had students complete the survey once every two weeks, starting in December. This check-in was useful. It gave students a space to share with me things I otherwise wouldn't know, including sickness in their family and celebrations at home. It was particularly useful for some of my shyer students, who spoke as little as possible.

At first, I looked at the data in aggregate, and was completely shocked. My students were not very stressed. I had anticipated that stress would be a larger factor of my students' lives because of the intersectionality of their experience, being from lower-income, immigrant families and living in a city that can be very violent. I expected that stress to be compounded because they had been recognized as the high-achieving gifted class and knew that this designation meant a more rigorous curriculum and higher expectations for their performance.

Charts A-C: Results from first three Check-ins. The bar indicates how many students selected each response.

Chart A.

Chart B.

Chart C.
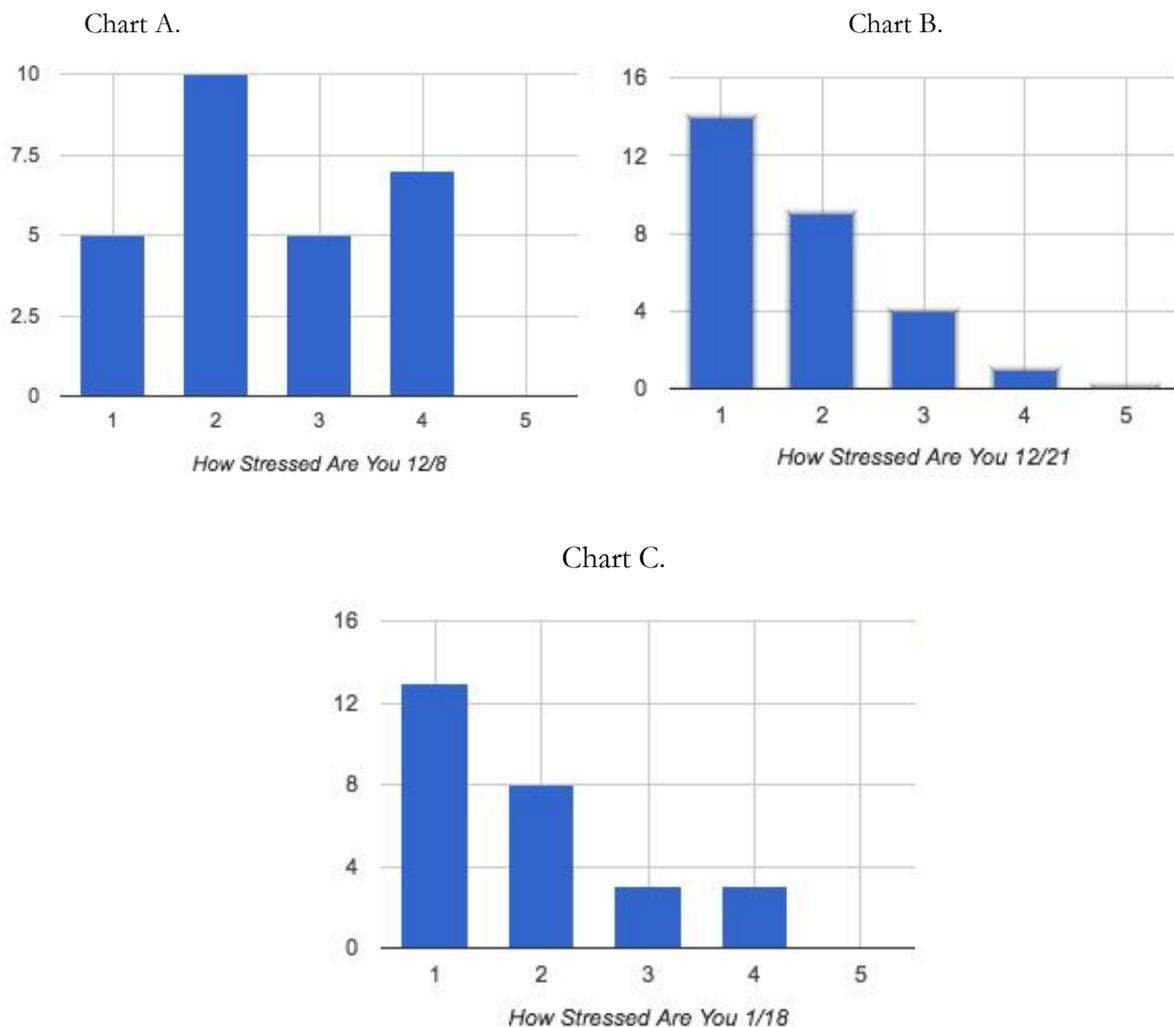
These initial surveys were conducted as we approached Winter Break and the holidays, a celebratory time of year. The third survey, about a week before grades were due for report cards, did not coincide with a rise of stress either.

💡 **LIGHTBULB MOMENT #1:**
My 5th grade gifted class from a 99% free lunches school on the Southside of Chicago is not as stressed as I expected.

I wanted to collect more data. At the end of January, I had students complete the check-in twice a week, Tuesday and Thursdays, as a bell ringer for our Social Emotional Learning (SEL) time.

After increasing the check-ins, I had enough data by the beginning of March to confirm my initial findings. As discovered initially, my students were not very stressed. Only 39 out of the 292 responses over the 3 month period indicated that a student felt stressed out, less than 15% of the

time. Almost half of responses (42%) indicated that most students feel very relaxed most of the time. Only 4% of responses indicated a high level of stress.

Chart D. Number and Percentage of Responses Indicating Each Level of Stress

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
1 - Cool as a Cucumber (very relaxed)	123	42%
2 - Somewhat Relaxed	90	31%
3 - Neutral	30	10%
4 - Somewhat Stressed	35	13%
5 - SO. STRESSED.	11	4%

Diving deeper into who was reporting being somewhat or very stressed, I found that only 15/28 students had ever reported feeling stressed. 13 students went 3 months without reporting an instance of stress. Even more interesting, I began to look at who was feeling stressed. Discounting students who only reported being stressed 1 time over the three month period, stress was affecting only 9/28 students, roughly a third of the class. I continued narrowing down the data and found that the vast majority of stressed responses came from the same six students.

I mentally flagged these 6 most stressed students because they were reporting being stressed 30-60% of the times that we checked-in. An interesting fact that I noticed about these 6 students is that this group of six contained all of my "behavior problem" students. I use behavior problem loosely because at the time, my class did not have serious issues with behavior. Of these 6 students, 4 of them are my least compliant students. They are most likely to get distracted, walk around the room when unnecessary, talk to each other instead of packing up at the end of the day, or be caught play wrestling before school or during recess. I decided to create a focus group with these six students to talk about managing stress. Continuing a trend I noticed early on, this focus group would end up being as much, if not more, of a learning experience for myself as it was for them.

> **LIGHTBULB MOMENT #2:**
> In instances of stress, 69% of reports of stress stemmed from the same 6 students.

Initially, my intention was to share with students what I knew about stress and how to manage it. A fellow action research had found that stress in her classroom was linked to a lack of quality sleep. I shared with students articles about affects blue LED light and sleep after finding that 5/6 of these

students reported using a screen right before bed. We discussed the articles and shared with each other methods of de-stressing.

All students had a list of things they liked to do to relax. Jose, the student in the room that hates school the most, often discussed how relaxing he found videogames. I didn't put much stock in his claim. Until I stumbled across an article with the headline "Science Proves that Playing Video Games Reduces Your Stress." The article explained research from University College in London, finding "a correlation between the total number of hours spent playing games (primarily first person shooters and action games) per week, and overall recovery from work-related stress that day." (Dube, 2015) While I heard what Jose had said, I didn't listen until I saw that researchers had proven his claim.

Perhaps I was projecting my own experience of stress onto my students and was limiting the conversation by veering towards solutions that I believed would have the biggest effect. Instead of a small group meeting, I started to meet with students individually for more casual "talking lunches." These one on one conversations helped me better tailor interventions by allowing students to set the topic and allows for a broader space for students to deal with things that caused them stress.

For Jose, it was becoming easily frustrated and discouraged when a concept didn't come easily to him, especially when completing math homework. Instead of expecting him to benefit from the same stress relievers that I used, I had the opportunity help him with one thing that he identified as a factor in his stress. I reminded him that homework was graded on completion, not accuracy and pointed out that it was okay to have questions and he would be able to bring them to peers when checking over homework the following day. I encouraged him to set an overall time limit on his math homework and told him to move on from a problem after he had attempted it, even if he didn't fully understand.

Natalia, had a different issue. She explained that she was easily upset by friends and classmates and wanted to avoid overreacting. Becoming easily upset, even at things she knew were jokes, affected her personally and academically. When she was unhappy with something in her social life, she was distracted in class and, subsequently, her work suffered. There were occasional periods where there would be a slew of missing assignments. Natalia, like Jose, did not need my help recognizing her stressors. She even had a plan for what she could do about to address the problem. She simply benefited by having someone listen to her. We discussed long term goals (go to Harvard and become a nurse) and the short term goals necessary to get there (getting good grades now). This conversation helped her verbalize that if she was putting her future first, she wouldn't let personal issues affect her grades. By the end of the year Natalia proved that she had developed the ability to compartmentalize school and social as separate. Not only had she learned to not sweat the small stuff, she dealt with bigger obstacles in her personal life. At the end of the year she experienced ostracization by her friends, fears about U.S. attitude towards immigrants, the loss of her grandfather, and had earned her highest grades-- straight A's in the 4th quarter.

Through these conversations and others, I found that what was more important than my experience or expertise was my ability to communicate with students. My ability to communicate with

students hinged on the level of trust students and I had built in our relationship. In these more casual conversations, I began to notice the smaller ways I let my personal experience and perspective influence how I approached students. I had made a lot of assumptions about what problems I needed to address with students. I had begun to form plans of dealing with these perceived problems without input from students. I wanted to provide children in my class the skills that would help them be successful, without considering how much I needed to tailor this goals to each student. I could share 1,001 mindfulness techniques and never give students something they need.

Successful moments within the focus group, and successful moments teaching in general, appear spontaneously. They appear when, using a combination of several pieces of information, a teacher is able to design a unit, a lesson, a moment, in which the student has no choice but to learn. In order to understand what connections to make, a teacher must build strong relationships with each individual student.

LIGHTBULB MOMENT #3:
I was projecting my own understanding and beliefs about stress onto my students, and this limited my ability to help them manage their stress.

LIGHTBULB MOMENT #4:
Relationships with students are the primary factor in a teacher's ability to maximize student growth.

MEDITATION

In the first week of school I diligently led my students through a series of guided meditations and breathing exercises. In yoga, connecting with breath is essential to finding stability (breath is constant) while adapting to change (one must always be taking in or letting go of the breath). Meditation seemed like it would fit well as a transition between reading/social studies and writing workshop. Meditation would both help students became more aware of their internal world, prepare them for solitary, focused work, and set a calm tone for an extended period of writing.

Many students initially find it bizarre to be asked to close their eyes in the classroom. In the first couple attempts, I also had students who struggled to take the exercise seriously and could not refrain from making eye contact and giggling with other distracted students. Silent proximity was generally enough to elicit more respectful participation. I did end up needing to speak privately with three students, explaining that even if they did not find it useful, it was important to be respectful of their classmates who might find benefits from meditation and I hope they would try again. My initial meditations included directed instruction on noticing breath and tracking the movement and feeling of breath throughout the body.

During first quarter writing, which focused on narratives, I used guided meditation as a tool to help students visualize their story. During the drafting/idea stage I led students on several guided

meditations to uncover things they were interested in, such as imagining visiting a forest with doors on every tree that revealed a different universe within. Before writing I led students on a guided meditations inviting them to sit back in the movie theater of their mind and imagine the story they were about to write play on the screen. While several students (including what would become stress focus group students) still had trouble keeping their eyes closed for extended periods of time, the silliness that marked our earliest forays into group meditation was absent.

As the pace of the school year picked up, I struggled more with sticking to brief meditations before writing, particularly as students developed a habit and routine of writer's workshop.

I found my class, having spent 4th grade together, was especially chatty. Although they accomplished a lot of work, I found myself frustrated with transitions that I felt took too long. End of the day routines were particularly challenging as I quickly realized that I had a different routine planned than their previous teacher. For a short period of time, I tried to employ a "moment of meditation" at the end of the day to help us end the day in a less frenetic manner. Due to the everchanging end of day announcements (beginning anywhere from 2:41-2:55), slower students, the time consuming nature of plugging chromebooks in, and my own time management skills, this routine never stuck.

LIGHTBULB MOMENT #5:
It is difficult to develop a habit you will not be held accountable for.

By March, I had an alternative reason for not being as diligent with meditation routines as planned-- my students were not very stressed. Although this part of my project was put on the back-burner, it did have a profound impact on how I would manage student behavior as the year progressed.

BRAIN BREAKS

Physical movement is essential for a health body and a healthy mind. Primary teachers are especially aware of the short attention span of children and have a highly organized series of micro-routines each day. Teaching older students, on the other hand, sometimes causes a teacher-amnesia about how long anyone can focus on a given task. In the fall, when one of my administrators shared an Edutopia article purporting the benefits of brain breaks, I was happy that I had developed that tool as part of my teaching repertoire.

There is no set method for brain breaks. The general idea is that instructional time is paused while students get out of their desks and move around. For my classroom I have written a number of exercises on popsicle sticks including yoga balancing postures like tree pose, traditional warm up exercises like jumping jacks and squats, and the sometimes awkward, yet student adored, freestyle dance. Although I initially tried to develop a regular routine for using brain breaks, I found this is not always useful (sometimes activities have built in brain breaks like when students need to transition

between multiple groups in jigsaw or walk around the room in four corners). Eventually I became comfortable with the fact that using brain breaks would be less scheduled and more as-needed.

I found myself using brain breaks in two contexts. First, I planned to use them when students had a long period of independent work time such as a long test, a reading-heavy assignment, or a period of research. Additionally, I found it helpful for both myself and the students to state aloud that students would have a brain break after 20 minutes of work. This held me accountable, decreased the chances that I would forget if I was working with a small group at the time, and helped students settle into independent work without delay because they knew they had a break.

Secondly, I used brain breaks spontaneously in the middle of longer lessons, especially when the material was challenging and I could feel the energy level draining from my students. Restless bodies, eyes staring into space, or a rise in side conversation was a clear indicator that this was necessary.

Using brain breaks sporadically can be challenging however, because it's easy to forget to use. There was one particular science lesson at the end of the day that could have been drastically improved had I remembered to pull a brain break. Students had a few smaller assignments they needed to finish up before I collected their notebooks to grade. Despite the looming deadlines, and the fact that I was actively circulating and positively narrating, the class would not be quiet. Students raised their hands to ask me to clarify directions I had explained at least three times. I felt myself grow resentful.. I started to take notes on my clipboard indicating that most of the class would receive a zero in participation for the day. Afterwards, it was clear that a brain break or three would have made that class more enjoyable for both students and myself.

Brain breaks appealed to some students more than others. There were the quick to move and the slow to join. However, I was pleased in the third quarter when a student, Juan, began to ask for brain breaks. This was a powerful moment because it indicated that this student was able to reflect about their own experience enough to recognize that they were becoming bored but still held himself accountable for learning. It also was a moment of success because it showed that there was a sharing of responsibility between student and teacher for the functioning of the class. By raising his hand and asking for a brain break respectfully this student implicitly shared with his classmates that becoming bored is normal and it's okay to be honest about your needs. By witnessing the exchange, students saw that I was reinforcing their power in the classroom.

Now that we approach the end of the year, I have 4-5 students who will interrupt my lesson or call my attention during independent work time to ask for brain breaks. I thank students for their excellent idea and my students return to their desks with a renewed energy to address the task at hand. Although not a huge percentage, this shows that there is overall growth in the class in utilizing meditative routines and is a flag that students are taking ownership over their learning.

LIGHTBULB MOMENT #6:
I can ask for what I need

HOW TO BREATH

The average human takes about 17,000-30,000 breaths a day. The average human consciously thinks about very few of these. Undoubtedly, the biggest success that came from my mindfulness interventions is the habit of taking a deep breath. Taking deep breaths is a body hack that puts you into a rest and digest mode (rather than fight or flight). In yoga, we often begin by connecting to our breath and sharing breaths together. Yoga teachers will provide you with many anecdotes of how this communal breathing can shift the energy of the room and is a key component of remaining present.

I found that shared deep breaths were an important component of alleviating jitters and calming my class down. Today's standardized testing culture is well documented and my students feel an additional pressure to succeed because they know that they have performed well on these tests in the past and recognize that these tests are linked to future opportunities. I found a loud "lion's breath" was useful in helping students push aside their nerves and get to work. A lion's breath requires one to breath deeply through the nose and to exhale loudly with a sigh/pant. A deep breath, taken collectively, can become a physical symbol of letting go. It is a communal action that recognizes "we are in this together," and can be a silly and fun way of addressing stress.

On days interrupted by field trips, assemblies, and nice weather, I found that asking my class to collectively take a few deep breaths had positive results for them and me. Instead of getting angry or trying to haphazardly issue consequences, these deep breaths served as a moment to say "I understand your focus is elsewhere, but I need you to come together before we move on." It began to serve as a class attention signal. In effectiveness, it matched other common attention signals such as a chime, countdown, or silent raised hand. Admittedly, stopping to take deep breaths is more time consuming than a chime or bell attention signal, which is designed to be instantaneous. I am able to justify this expense because, while it takes longer, it requires students to work through more steps. It is a greater cognitive load. Teaching students to pause and connect with their bodies through their breath has an additional benefit of providing students with a self-care habit. This physical cue to clear the mind will be more useful to students than the Pavlovian conditioning between bell and silence.

The biggest coup of the deep breath initiative came through interventions with individual students. When a student was overly upset or nervous, the first thing I lead them through was a deep breath. I began to expand this habit.

All teachers recognize that short and possibly explosive moment when one child's giddiness or excess energy is about to spread like wildfire and derail a lesson. These moments become more common towards the end of the year, especially after lunch: your students no longer fear you or fear making a bad impression, the weather is getting warmer, and students and teachers begin counting down until summer. These moments are even more frustrating because they become more frequent at the same time that you begin feeling like you've done everything you can to build routines and a climate for learning, "it's the fourth quarter! and you're in 5th grade! you know how to be in school!" (Teacher Journal, 5/2/17) These moments can be the calm before the storm, the seed of a power struggle or they can disappear unnoticed into the ether. I began to notice these moments more as my

attitude and beliefs about the purpose of my project began shifting towards one more focused on relationships. These moments, I discovered, could be swiftly dealt with a single breath.

It is natural for children to become hyper. It's useful when students recognize that they are acting hyper and need to adjust their behavior to focus on long-term goals. A moment with Andres, one of my six focus group students, helped me understand the power of a single breath. We were transitioning from a bathroom break to math. Our routine included taking out homework, quickly reviewing it with classmates and returning to desks to watch a review video before assessing the concepts we had covered previously. Homework review had always been loud and came at a time of day where students needed more support throughout the routine. On this day, I had called students to return to their seats while I was setting up the projector. Andres, for whatever reason, began laughing uncontrollably, in a way that was almost cartoonish. As if the moment was in slow motion, I felt that I had a limited amount of time to determine a course of action. I was aware that my response would either shut down this distraction or spread like a contagion among classmates. Issuing a warning seemed unfair, because he was not the only one making sound and I don't necessarily want to discourage expressions of joy. I didn't approach the student for a quiet verbal reminder of expectations because I was rushing to have the video ready to begin the moment students were seated. In the moment of pause after instinctively calling "Andres!!" I stopped myself from calling out some of my initial reactions "NO! STOP! AHHH!" and managed an "Eyes. Deep breath." I modeled the deep breath I expected by exaggerating the sound of my own breath. It was successful. The laughter immediately stopped, the moment did not become a spectacle and my students were at their seats prepared to move on. Without negative language or judgement, this student corrected his or her behavior. At the same time, I found a mastery of my own emotions. Not only was I masking my own emotional response, but I was stopping myself from feeling them. In taking a deep breath with the student, I recognized the alluring sway of irritation and anger and cleared it from my mind. This moment represented a shift for me because in this moment it was obvious that what occurred in the classroom was not something I was doing to or for students, nor simply what students were doing in the room, but a collaboration of what we were doing together.

LIGHTBULB MOMENT #7:
Take a breath.

After this moment, I began to use the same intervention when an individual student was beginning to unravel, seriously off-task, or who had succumb to a case of the sillies. Each time it functioned like a calming snake-charm. If one deep breath didn't stamp out the burgeoning issue, two sealed the deal. Unlike other behavior corrections, this one lacked tension. Eye contact and a shared breath expressed more nonverbally than the most clear and concise set of directions. It did not depend on the traditional power structures with the teacher managing the student, but established the teacher/student role as equals. Every time the intervention was employed, students entered back into

the lesson or routine without further need for correction and a whole class disruption was avoided. Individual reactions varied. Luis and Lucero invariably apologized. Andres tended towards shaking his head as if awakening from a spell. Jose, in resignation, allowed his face to say "I don't want to do this, I don't want to be here, but since this is where I am, I agree to trying harder." These moments lacked a feeling of coercion and silently reaffirmed that teachers and students, ultimately, have the same goals and that mutually interested parties needed to agree in order for student learning to occur.

These breaths were also a powerful reminder for me and made me more aware of my own needs in the classroom. Teachers, ideally, maintain a neutral face and calm demeanor in the face of the most frustrating student behavior. In my attempts to separate my feelings and experience from the needs of the classroom, I had confused being professional with a desire to be invisible. I had visualized the teacher and the class as something separate, instead of understanding that the teacher was a part of the class. While I want to give my students the best, I needed to recognize that my capacity was only human. Taking a deep breath with my students also gave me a second to restart and to choose not to succumb to feelings of anger or annoyance.

This discovery of myself within the classroom put a wrench in my approach to the power dynamic within the classroom. There are certain power dynamics within the teacher-student and adult-child roles that are inescapable. At the end of the day I am responsible for the learning and progress of 28 students, and this involves a certain level of intentional behavior management. However, it was not enough to model my thinking, have clear classroom routines, and attempt to be fair. I needed to interrogate how this person, this self, affected the classroom. I had already discovered, in regards to student stress, that I was capable of projecting my own expectations and beliefs about experience onto my students.

Teaching is a challenging career. Shortages of time and resources coupled with incredible amounts of standards often mean that, no matter how much time a teacher puts in before and after school, the work is never done. To be successful as a teacher, I have to recognize that it is impossible to avoid bringing my own experience and perspective into the classroom. This year was useful for reminding myself that instead of seeing my beliefs, emotions, needs as something I needed to minimize in the classroom, I need to do more to acknowledge the ramifications of having Ms. Burke as a teacher and leverage it within the classroom.

LIGHTBULB MOMENT #8:
The teacher is a living, breathing, dreaming member of the classroom community.

II. METACOGNITION

An ability to control the mind and direct thinking was one prong of the reflective practices that I introduced to students throughout the year. Metacognitive practices, or having students explicitly think about their thinking, was the second prong. This was the aspect of my project that earned the most space in class and became an essential and expected part of class routines. It was also more difficult to measure because my goal was to increase an invisible process. I could not directly measure if students were being metacognitive and I began this journey with few expectations about what it would look like. As Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously decreed, "I'll know it when I see it."

RUBRICS

One important way I asked students to think about their thinking was through the use of rubrics and checklists. I developed routines of sharing rubrics, discussing expectations, self evaluating with a rubric, and comparing self-assessments with Ms. Burke's scores. Additionally, I took students input on what should be on the rubric and had the class create rubrics to assess projects.

List of Projects/Assignments that Utilize Rubrics:
- Throughout the year
    - Weekly letter about reading
    - 2x quarterly notebook checks in social studies and science
    - Speaking rubric
- Writing Checklists adapted from Lucy Calkins
    - Claim, Evidence, Reasoning (CER) argument structure rubric
    - Narrative writing checklist
    - Argument writing checklist
    - Informational writing checklist
- Projects
    - How to Care for Classroom Plants Research Poster
    - Math Storybook
    - Holocaust Tribute
    - Genocide Tribunal
    - Space Project
    - Math Board Game
    - Math Portfolio
    - Immigration Research Peer Teach

Midway through the year, a student reflected, "well, before... I didn't really look at the rubric." (Student Notebook, 2/2/2017) This self-assessment from one of my most analytical students mirrored what I saw throughout the class with initial projects. Although we went through each rubric,

line by line, students had difficulty transferring this to their work. The average grade on the early group assignment-- to research and describe how to take care of a plant within the classroom-- was a C+/B-.

I was incredibly disappointed by the math storybooks that students created at the end of the first quarter. The storybook was for students to be creative with their understanding of multiplication and to demonstrate reasonable situations in which a character would need to multiply increasingly difficult numbers from 1 x 1 digit multiplication to 3 x 3 digit to decimal x decimal multiplication. I created a checklist of required components and questioned the validity of using the project as a grade. It seemed that it would be easy for everyone to get an A and that this project would end up padding math grades.

This turned out to not be the case, as students seemingly ignored the checklist. One of the expectations on the checklist was that students vocabulary relating to multiplication including the words factor and product. This was so important to me that it was worth two points instead of one on the checklist. One out of fourteen pairs used these two vocabulary words. Later, a reflection on quality would show that students shared my sentiments, "to be honest, I was really disappointed in my math storybook."

I did not give up on rubrics and checklists and continued to incorporate them into the classroom. For the Holocaust tribute project, I tasked students with collectively making the rubric. First, they decided that they wanted a separate rubric for posters and journals (students had a choice of tribute). Then, I had students brainstorm a list of categories that needed to be assessed. To finished, I assigned groups of students one category they were responsible for deciding what master, apprentice, and novice work looked like.

The rubric is not perfect (see Appendix B), and students began to see some of their mistakes when they used the rubric to grade their peers. The poster rubric below shows that there is some redundancy between detail and presentation and there are no clear guidelines for expectations of color/pictures.

Despite its imperfections, this project began to mark a change in how students were using rubrics and it was clear that their understanding was deepening. By the end of the second quarter, I did not have to force students to look at rubrics. After I announced a project, students began to ask when they would be able to see the rubric. Work requiring a rubric also improved.

In reading, students were required to write a friendly letter each week about their reading. By the end of the second quarter, students were much better at meeting the expectations of the rubric. Almost no one forgot the date or a signature. Even if the analysis wasn't a 100% students could provide a quote that matched their claim. I told the class "almost everyone that loses points for spelling is misspelling the word "sincerely" and this stopped being a problem. At the same time, I felt like the letters had reached a plateau. The letters were boring. Students were bored writing them. I was bored reading them. The letters had become an exercise in compliance, rather than an exciting opportunity for me to see what my students thought about while reading. Letters were more alike than they were different and students tended towards summarizing. Even after I would point out that

they were summarizing and ask questions to elicit more, I received different versions of the same letter each week. Instead of using evidence to prove an interesting point about the book, students used evidence to demonstrate that a detail in their summary was fact, "Stanley did not steal the shoes. I can tell because in the text it says 'I did not steal the shoes.'" (Student Essay, 3/14/17) Just like I had discovered early in the year, students had little reason to change if they were not held accountable for the change. Even with a letter comprised mostly of summary, students could still get a B. I decided I needed to redo my letter rubric. (See Appendices C and D for original and revised rubrics.)

To force my students to become more involved in higher level thinking about their books in their letters, I began requiring students to write about a weekly general topic. This helped me to practice reading skills that students had covered previously and allowed me to assess individual students on their understanding of the skill. I could gain an additional data point that helped me plan for small groups. Some of my required topics included theme, describe character, compare/contrast book to a movie, identify a piece of figurative language.

Immediately, the new rubric began to elicit deeper analysis. Increased direction helped students avoid a summary. For some students, the topic became the main content of the letter. Other students spent more time speaking sharing about their opinions or time spent with the book and addressed the topic in the last third of the letter. Because of my students interaction with the letter, I was able to improve my rubric and improve the quality of student work.

Additionally, by monitoring patterns within responses I was able to tailor my mini lessons to better reach students' needs. Work from the letters helped me understand students needed additional minilessons to develop their ability to turn topics into themes. From their responses I discovered that they were quite adept at understanding metaphor and simile, but tended to confuse hyperbole, idioms, and exaggeration.

I could tell that students were becoming better at their letters, because grades continued to improve throughout the third and fourth quarters use of the new rubric. After launching the new rubric, it was impossible to get an A or B with a letter that was entirely all summary. Initially, 72 and 78s were common scores on the letter. By the end of the fourth quarter, the average grade on a weekly letter was an 84 and I saw an increase in the number of students receiving hundreds. I encouraged students to examine their recent letters to look for common mistakes. I found the rubric was especially helpful with my less fluid writers. In the third quarter Lucero excitedly remarked "What? Really! I just got my first hundred on a letter."

As the year progressed, the rubrics gave students a meaningful way to self-assess their work. Rubrics gave students the vocabulary to provide themselves and peers with feedback. One student wrote, "... but, I have to think about the rubric," (Student Journal 2/2/17) when explaining how to develop a quality project. Diego also reflected on work that had not received a high grade, "that is a shame and the science project was mostly in PENCIL which is a dead givaway that I was effortless." (Student Journal 2/2/17)

Student ability to provide quality feedback about their own writing was also improved as the year progressed. Initial self-assessments with writing checklist included students scoring themselves

highly in their ability to develop a story or cohesively blend facts and opinions in a research paper. These self-assessments for our earliest pieces in writing workshop tended to be higher than the grades I gave them. I was particularly baffled when students would give themselves a 3 (Mastered it!) for using correct punctuation with quotes when their piece had no quotes. By our final piece, a research paper somehow relating to environmental activism, students were much better at recognizing what they were not yet doing in their writing. Student self-assessment scores were closer to the final score they earned on the assignment. Particularly, students demonstrated an ability to be honest and tough on themselves. I found a lot more students accurately checked "2-Starting to" or "1-Not Yet" on categories that they had not yet mastered. (See Appendix E for checklist.) This showed me that, even if students couldn't produce perfect papers, they were starting to understand what a model piece of writing entailed. "Will we be grading ourselves again?" one student randomly asked during an indoor recess. My response was, of course, enthusiastic, "of course!" (Teacher Journal, 4/4/17)

Rubrics gave students something concrete to refer back to when analyzing writing and this showed in their reflections about their writing and their ability to provide their peers with feedback. The final section of writer's workshop included a reading. Daily, one or two students would read a piece of writing they were working on and call on four peers to provide them with two compliments and two questions/comments. Early in the year, it was a struggle to help students focus on the writing. They initially focused on content; "I like that you wrote about six flags," one student shared early in the year. (Teacher Journal 10/18/17) I did not give up and continued to model appropriate feedback and positively narrate when a student's comments were related to the writing itself. Slowly, students feedback improved. "You did a good job of finding evidence that matched your claim," became a common complement midway through the year, after we had studied the claim-evidence-reasoning (CER) argument structure. By the end of the year, students needed very few reminders to keep their comments related to the writing. "No offense, but your hook didn't really grab my attention.. so maybe you could make it more interesting," one student commented as several students raised their hand in our silent "agreeing" hand signal. (Teacher Journal 5/24/17)

EMERGENT WRITERS

Quick writes helped students understand that there was always something to improve. Early in the year students would lay down their pencil and indicate they were "done writing" before the timer went off. By the end of the year, if I told students I expected them to write for 5 minutes on a topic, they were not surprised when I gestured that their pencil should be moving. More and more, I found students were not finished when the timer went off and scrambled to capture the rest of their thoughts. Students understood that, "I'm thinking," was not a valid excuse to not be writing and kept their pencils poised to write, even when they were struggling to answer the question.

In the beginning of the year, when students were asked to write a long-form piece of writing like an essay or a story they often presented a giant block of text and indicated that they were done. Grading our initial narratives, I found that only 1 or 2 students had really mastered the necessary components of a story, especially character growth and the development of a theme or lesson. At the

end of the year, students showed an increased ability to analyze their work. Reflecting about writing under time limits, students demonstrated that they were much more aware of components of different forms of writing, even if it wasn't present in their own work. "Did you write an essay?" was one of the reflective questions that I asked. "I didn't really write an essay because I didn't finish my 3rd body paragraph or conclusion," one student explained. (Student Notebook, 6/2/17) Another was able to demonstrate how they knew they were finished, "I did write an essay. I had an introduction, two body paragraphs, a conclusion. I used CER to explain." (Student Notebook, 6/2/17) Aside from structure, students also began to show a greater awareness for the purpose and flow of longer forms of writing, "I did not write a complete essay because even though it was long I did not get to conclude my thoughts." (Student Notebook, 6/1/17) Teaching students how to analyze a quote and explain its relationship to a claim is one of the most difficult parts of teaching writing. Aside from providing models, there is not much a teacher can do for instruction, as each reasoning is variable depending on the story and the claim the student is making. When I introduce the claim-evidence-reasoning structure students initially tend to restate their claim or to simply write that the evidence does support their claim. Reflecting on the completeness of an essay, another student showed both an understanding of the structure of an argument and how this structure relates to the structure of a paragraph and, ultimately, the whole essay, "No, [I didn't write an essay,] because I only had one quote in each body paragraph and I didn't finish explaining." (Student Notebook, 6/2/17) This reflection demonstrates that while the student made an effort to demonstrate an understanding of the overall format of an essay and comply with expectations, they did not adequately flesh out their arguments because they did not provide enough evidence or fully explain why the evidence they had chosen supported the claim. Initially, quotes made up the bulk of an argument and students were shocked when I pointed out that analysis should take up more space than the quote. Towards the end of the year, students were better able to discuss growth, "[my writing has] improved because the evidence that I use is getting better and I can add a lot to my analysis now." (Student Notebook, 6/12/17)

This growth could also be seen when asked to reflect on narratives that students had written at the end of the year. Although not all students became masters at slowing down at the climax and really building tension to the most exciting moment, students better understood how these parts were essential elements of a story, "I almost completed the story, but I am close to the falling action of my narrative. It's very interesting in the climax." (Student Notebook, 5/29/17)

Showing students that they understood what they were doing had a positive effect on students' understanding of themselves as writers. One student wrote, "I know now how to write a full essay: at the beginning I HATED essays. They were so boring. I didn't know what to write." (Student Notebook, 6/12/17) Later, a group of 5-6 students and I had a casual conversation about books in the classroom library. Somehow the conversation veered towards the fact that different teachers have different expectations and different strengths and part of school was figuring out different teachers' expectations. "I like writing more this year," one student pointed out. Several classmates agreed.

"Writing is more interesting this year," one student followed up. "I like the topics more," a third followed. (Teacher Journal, 6/12/17)

LIGHTBULB #9:
Thinking about thinking helps students develop academic identities.

HABITS INFLUENCING QUALITY OF WORK

Asking students to repeatedly reflect on quality of work forced students to come to terms with some of their own weaknesses. This gave us a space to reflect on habits that influenced our learning and helped students become more aware of places they could make different choices. I found students analysis of quality often referred back to time management, group work, and interest.

On one mid-year reflection that asked students to reflect on the quality of their projects, 15/28 students cited time as a key factor. 5 stated that spending time was key to creating a quality product while 7 indicated that doing their project last minute, rushing, or not spending time on their project led to a low-quality project. (All quotes from different student journals written on 2/2/17)

       a. I know the science project I did was not my best. I did it last minute. However, I did spend time on the Holocaust tribute. I think that it was my best work.
       b. I spent quality time on thinking what Im (sic) gonna do then spending that time to actually do it. ... The math board game I have been working on it a little every day.
       c. I'm taking as long as I can after school so I can make it look like a quality work. Me and [my partner] didn't do it last minute because we have it 90% done.
       d. My last math project it wasn't complete it was done a day after the due date.
       e. I put a lot of effort into it I took a lot of my personal time.

These reflections were powerful, because it showed that students were able to specifically break down factors that helped them be successful. Although I scaffold project checkpoints and give students time to work in class, students also need to be able to build independent time management skills.

LIGHTBULB #10:
Quality work takes time.

This round of reflecting, specifically, helped me understand that I needed to place an increased emphasis on time management and continue to model this skill. By the end of the year, reflections revealed that students had internalized time management and furthered their ability to analyze their progress. Instead of focusing on having time or not enough time, students began to increasingly discuss their need to increase their pace or focus. (All quotes from student notebooks, written 5/29-6/2.)

a. I need to improve on pacing because I spent to (sic) much time in one question that I didn't finish the other question.
b. I grew in pacing because [I used to not] even get halfway through & [now] I just need the resolution, how everything ends up.
c. I am reading faster and getting more questions answered.
d. I think with all of this practice I have been accomplishing more and writing faster.
e. I need to improve my focus because I was staring into space and I didn't get everything done.
f. [I'm not engaged] when I'm not interested in what we're learning or when I have things on my mind that distract me

Students showed, through reflective writing, that whether or not a project or assignment was completed alone could have a major effect on the quality of the product. A major disadvantage to not having a partner is to havea lot of work to do by yourself. The problem with partners stemmed from working with friends and not staying on topic or being in a partnership/group that had not equally divided the work. Early in the year students were often excited to be able to chose their own partners. This happened more often as I began to learn about students' personalities and the social dynamics of the class. The following three reflections came from three different students considering what had happened when they chose their partners: (All quotes from notebooks, written 2/2)

a. One project that I have done with very poor quality is the math storybook. I felt like I was doing all the work. I felt rushed and I really liked the project was very interesting and it really sounded like a cool project.
b. I feel like I did not try my hardest because it was in a group and we did not know to communicate and we pick a group with my best friends and we played around and we would get of task and we would not do are work and we would do it last minute.
c. Another challenge was my math decimals project because [Partner A] and [Partner B] weren't doing anything so I pretty much had to do all of the work.

LIGHTBULB #11:
My best friends may not be my best workmates.

I noted previously how initial quality of work did not meet expectations. Choosing workmates often meant that the distribution of personalities was not equally distributed. Easy to distract students or students with low motivation would often end up in groups together, meaning the disparity between the highest quality project and lowest quality project was stark. After a candid class discussion about the challenges of working in groups, I began to chose groups myself with greater frequency. Whenever possible, I incorporated student interest and choice, so students could still have a stake in the project.

Most importantly, I spent more time in class devoted to discussing how to complete a project and divide work. I created graphic organizers so that students could equally distribute tasks among

group members and these served as a record to keep students accountable. Additionally, later group projects were more intentional in roles, so that the final project put together several parts into a cohesive whole. By our final group project, peer teaching about a topic in immigration based on student independent research, the distance between the highest grade and lowest grade was shorter.

Students' tendency to want to work with or around friends became important when it came to selecting seats. Students wanted the freedom to sit around the room during independent work time, but often made choices that were not conducive to their focus. Despite all our work with reflection, I saw students make the same bad choices over and over again. Sometimes, when I established an expectation that students would work in their desks, some of my easily distracted students would move to tables on the periphery of the room. Often this felt confusing and unfair to other students, who had followed my explicit instruction. Struggling with the decision to allow student choice in seating or expect students to sit at their desks, I developed new language to help students chose a seat. Towards the end of the school year I found a balance by asking students to "sit where you need." This subtle difference of focusing on need vs want helped students to prioritize their learning. Before, 26 students would move when told they could "sit where they want." Towards the end of the year, many more students elected to stay in their desks when they were instructed to "sit where they need." Additionally, I needed to redirect fewer students as students who left their seats were more conscious about working away from friends or peers they found distracting. I am not convinced that telling future students to "sit where they need" will be enough to ensure students begin making better choices earlier in the year. The difference between need and want is too vague. This subtle use of language was effective because of the amount of reflection students had completed before I began using the word need and students had a better understanding of what I wanted from them as a teacher.

Teacher chosen groups presented students with an obstacle, one student wrote "some of my challenges were working with people I don't really like/know." (Student Notebook, 2/2/17) At the same time, forcing students to work with people they would not have chosen allowed them to build empathy and positive experiences around shared interests or needs. This same student would go on to explain how they have grown as a scholar throughout the year, "I have grown to like the community I am in." (Student Notebook 6/12/17) Another student remarked "math groups were helpful because even if one person didn't understand it we could talk about it and all have a chance to figure it out." (Student Notebook, 6/12/17)

One aspect of planning that is most ignored is student interest. Juggling the standards that must be covered, the resources on hand, time limits on completing quality lesson plans and teacher interest often means that student interest is an afterthought. The difficulty in creating learning activities and projects that incorporate interest is compounded by the fact that it's impossible to gauge levels of interest for something students don't already know about and that it is impossible to meet 28 different people's interest 100% of the time. In our mid year reflection about quality, 10/28 students cited interest as a key factor in producing a quality project. "Quality shows how much you actually cared about doing the project," one student wrote. While the purpose of school is learning, not fun,

teachers should also make every effort to make learning fun. One student´s comment especially reminded me of both the importance and difficulty of incorporating student interest:

> "I feel like quality is based on how important it is and how much intress you have. for example if you give me a project about the history about a audmobile it wont be as intresting as the history of soccer as that case I might put more effert in the soccer project then in the audmobile because that is my interest but for some people it might be the oppieste because the old cars might interest them more than it might interest me because I like soccer not cars (sic)." (Student Notebook, 2/2/17)

In another reflection from the same day, I found this written conversation between two students:

Student 1:	What would you do to make sure you had very great quality?
Student 2:	To like my project
Student 1:	What would you do to improve [the project]?
Student 2:	I would focus and try to like them more than I actually do. (Circled in red ink by student and annotated: I commit to this claim.)

This conversation was important to me because it showed that the student could honestly reflect on when they were able to produce high quality work. At the same time, it was a space for them to think about how they could meet their academic goals, even if it wasn't their favorite subject or assignment. This one student had begun to understand that everyone's work will at some point include something they do not want to do and that even if the assignment didn't interest them in the moment, it did contribute to their overall success as a student, which they were interested in. While it is impossible to cater to every student's interest for every assignment, it is important to incorporate elements of student choice so that students have an easier time buying into the assignment.

LIGHTBULB #12:
"Quality shows how much you actually cared about doing the project." (Student Notebook, 2/2/17)

GROWTH VS. FIXED MINDSET

One policy I maintain in my classroom is designed to help students develop a growth mindset. In my class, students can redo any assignment and I will regrade it for more points. Additionally, I will accept any work late. This policy helps minimize excuses and increases student ownership over grades. It is particularly useful for talking to parents because it is solution oriented and forces responsibility of earning a quality grade onto the student. I did not expect this flexibility in my grading to provide me with data, but as the year progressed, student use of this policy demonstrated that they had a growth mindset.

Other teachers have criticized this practice as being unfair to students who complete their work on time and earn high grades the first time they complete an assignment. While I do want students to understand that there are consequences for our actions, and fear that my policy allows a certain level of procrastination, I think it is more unfair to hold all students to the same set of standards. A role model student gains nothing from me refusing late work, while their less organized or lower achieving peer may simply need more time with a concept before they show mastery.

As the end of the first quarter approached, many students began to approach me and ask for extra credit. I don't give extra credit, I explained. I told students they needed to complete any missing work or redo assignments that had earned them the lowest grade. This policy seemed to baffle students and only 2/28 students chose to redo work to earn a higher grade in one or more subjects.

By end of the second quarter over half the class was redoing work to improve their grades. Most of the time, students redid work to raise C's to B's and maintain their honor roll status. "Ms. Burke I was wondering if I could redo my narrative because my parents and I both think I can do better in writing," I received in an email midway through the year. After studying comma use in quotations and re-writing her ending two times, she improved her grade by 13 percentage points from an 80 to a 93.

Even though students were spending more time redoing work, they still had difficulty identifying how to reach their goals. "How do I raise my _____ grade?" students repeatedly asked and I modeled how to identify the lowest grade that would have the highest impact, prioritizing missing work or work that had earned an F. They needed coaching to help them prioritize their work. This tendency to ask for help deciding which assignments to redo did not disappear by the end of the year, although many students showed increased independence. While some students continued to ask for permission to redo their work ("Great idea!" I would always respond), more and more students did not approach me until they had redone work for me to grade. There was less of a need to hunt down missing assignments, "I completed three missing letters and still owe you two more."

For fourth quarter progress reports, 26/28 students redid work to earn higher grades. In reflections, several students commented that the work was "getting harder." In response, they needed to work harder to maintain the same grades that they (and their parents) had come to expect. Only one student received straight A's in the first and second quarter. The third quarter found three scholars earning these grades.

Something unusual also began to occur in the second half of the year. Students began redoing work even if it didn't have a dramatic affect on their grades. Students who were already earning an A or a B wanted to redo assignments that had earned bad grades. I noticed this was especially true if students had earned a low grade on an easier assignment, such as completing questions about a reading they had done in science. None of these students complained when this redone work did not shift their grade higher. Students took particular pride in their favorite subjects and did whatever they good to raise B's to A's.

One student who loved math decided they wanted an A in the fourth quarter. He had redone many assignments and slowly inched their grade up from a low B to a medium B and was unsure of

what else he could do. His lowest grade was in class participation, something that could not be redone. I looked over his math grades and noticed that he had a low B on 3/4 of the exams we had taken that quarter. "Redoing a test would have the greatest effect," I pointed out and began to calculate what he would need to earn an A for the quarter. "You'd need to earn about 100% on each of these tests in order to earn an A in the class." He immediately agreed to redo the three tests. "It's possible, I explained, if you're willing to work hard and stay focused, but it will be very difficult." "I can do it," he shared confidently. This student, prone to nervousness and over thinking, was centered by this challenge. "I am motivated by competition," he would write in his end of year reflection. During independent work time he got down to business and reviewed his work for the first test, finally indicating that he was ready to retake the test. He earned 100% and his pride was palpable. The next day, he proved that he had completed his additional self-assigned homework in preparing for a retake. He retook the final two tests and earned a 98% and 100%, securing his A. In this case, a competition with himself allowed him to improve his already high grade and demonstrate mastery.

This policy also inspired students to keep track of returned work. If they couldn't find a letter they wanted to add on to, they found that they had to redo the entire assignment. More than once a student explained they "couldn't find it" and found me unsympathetic. At times I knew the student had completed the work in class, but failed to ensure it was in their notebook when it was time to grade. "I can't grade work I can't see," I explained more than once. In the second half of the year, students were much more adept at keeping track of assignments in their notebook. Glueing a graphic organizer in right away proved to be easier than redoing the entire assignment three weeks later.

Students also demonstrated a belief in their ability to learn in written reflections, one student wrote: "if I don't get what we are doing I ask for help or tell someone who understand it to help me and show me an example." (Student Journal, 6/2/2017) Students saw themselves as capable of learning and did not give up when challenged. Another student pointed out "I know I can do good on assignments but it all depends on how hard I try." (Student Journal, 6/2/2017)

LIGHTBULB #13:
I earn my grades/My success is tied to my effort

In final reflections, many of my students cited grades as a main motivation for them. "I know that sometimes I am lazy so I mostly work hard when I know I have to." This focus on grades used to feel like a superficial marker of growth. Reflection may not have revealed students love of learning as much as it reflected their desire to be good at school. After I saw how more diligently giving grades to reading logs led to increased reading log completion, I became more comfortable with the fact that this external scoring was so important to students and it is fair to hold students accountable for the work I want them to complete.

HIGHER ORDER THINKING AND GOAL SETTING

Early in the year I did a survey, asking students to explain what we were learning about in each subject. My questions were broad, but I found that most students tended to respond with a topic or an activity, despite the fact that I wrote daily learning objectives on the board. For example, when asked what we were learning about in writing 14 students wrote "We are learning about quote sandwiches." Two students explained why we were learning about quote sandwiches, "to prepare us for our essay." Only 4 students indicated that they understood what a quote sandwich was supposed to demonstrate, "we are learning how to make a claim, a quote, and analyzing a character and their character trait." (Google Survey, 12/8/16)

Later in the year, students were better able to express that they understood not just what we were doing, but why we were doing it. In the fourth quarter, students got into a mini debate about whether they needed to complete a quote sandwich or a paragraph to answer a particular question. "They're kind of the same thing," one classmate pointed out. (Teacher Journal, 5/18/17)

Most importantly, students understood what was required from them in reflection and could discuss what was going on in their brains. Towards the end of the year I had students complete reflections about their growth throughout the year and their development of analytical skills. Students showed an increased understanding of the relationship between learning activities and learning objectives, could describe their thinking processes, and create meaningful goals for themselves as learners. (Student Journal shortened to SJ)

   a. I looked at the questions. So I preplanned... (SJ 5/29)
   b. I can also answer the questions easier now that I look at the questions before reading the text, so I know what I'm looking for. (SJ 5/29)
   c. I have grown because when I was writing, I knew all ready (sic) what to write. (SJ 6/12)
   d. I learned to identify what kind of question its (sic) about, like a vocabulary question, like the definition of something... (SJ 6/12)
   e. I pay more attention to my annotations and I figured out why pre-reading the questions will help because it is way easier to find evidence to support my ideas. (SJ 6/12)
   f. My skills have grown because at first it was kind of hard to see spicifaclly (sic) what the question wanted but now I know how to do it. (SJ 6/12)
   g. To annotate the text wasn't helpful but now it is and I know what and how to do it. (SJ 6/1)
   h. Analyzing helped because I got 100% on my newsela quizzes. (SJ 6/1)

i. [My analytical skills] have grown because I never used to use these skills, they helped me find evidence in the text. It made it a little bit more easier. (SJ 6/2)

j. I can improve by trying harder, especially in math. In every past grade, I have always gotten an A in math and now, for the whole school year, I have been getting C's. (SJ 6/12)

k. As a scholar I think I have grown a lot in my least favorite subjects than my favorite ones. This is good because I think that you make perfect if you practice more on the things you do not do perfect on. (SJ 6/12)

l. I read at my lexile and highlight important facts of texts then I get a 75% or 100% on the quizzes. (SJ 6/12)

m. I have gotten to be a better scholar because of the people that have inspired me like [straight A student] inspires me because she gets good grades and is a role model scholar. (SJ 6/12)

n. Dividing decimals was hard because I didn't know where to place the decimal point. (SJ 6/12)

o. I can improve by using more habits that may help me acronyms like LAWNS for what plants need (Light, air, water, nutrients, space) (SJ 6/12)

One student noticed that their priorities had shifted. Early in the year, this student would spend a lot of time reading a text, at the expense of completing the rest of the work. By incorporating more time management into classroom routines, and asking students to evaluate their progress, this student began to understand that they were a slower reader and needed to compensate by skimming or answering questions based on what they had read so they could have a chance to finish all parts of the assignment: "The way my analytical [skills have improved] is by being able to [do] what I have to do in the time they give me. Since before I just wanted to get my reading done, but now when I have to get the thing done I get it done and not focus on the text."

This assortment of excerpts is broad and covers many topics. While each statement came from a different student, it is not completely comprehensive. It also fulfills the elusive "I know it when I see it metric" for measuring student metacognition. Alone, any of these statements represents a mere flash of insight for a particular student. Together they demonstrate that the time I devoted to reflective routines was time well spent.

LIGHTBULB MOMENT #15:
"I have learned a lot of myself. I know what I'm capable of. I know I haven't let out my full potential." (SJ 6/12)

CORRECTING MISTAKES

My classroom of 28 students contained 12 boys and 16 girls. There were several subgroups within the group of boys, but these groupings seemed flexible as the year progressed, often

responding to interest in activities (ie. playing soccer, tag, or talking during recess). Three girls, united by their shy natures and disinterest in mainstream media, formed their own separate group, undisturbed by their classmates. One student was a social butterfly whose primary friend group was a group of boys. The remaining group of twelve girls had rotating pairs of "best friends" that changed over time.

As the end of the year approached, I almost felt my entire project derail when I became aware of the fact that not all my students were monitoring their behavior and taking steps to improve. I found that bullying behaviors were pervasive in my classroom. In the final weeks of school I was able to connect the dots and realize that several different social issues had the same origin.

As crushes developed throughout the year, I noticed burgeoning problems. Many students were uncomfortable when their classmates publically "shipped them," or discussed who would make a good couple. When two boys developed a crush on the same girl the class began a divisive campaign for Team S or Team G, depending on who classmates thought the girl should "chose." Other teachers and myself were troubled by the appearance of truth or dare. I was especially alarmed when these dares expected students to engage in physical acts without consent, i.e. hugs, dancing, or kisses on the cheek. In one sad and extreme case, a student with suicidal ideation cited his classmate's pressure for his crush and another friend to "date" as a factor in his unhappiness in a private journal.

I opened discussions with other gifted teachers and my administration on the need to be intentional with the gifted class' social development. We needed to be cautious and responsive to ensure that toxic social dynamics did not develop. I had handled one tricky case that appeared midway through the year when many students began calling a classmate gay and transgender. After discussing how it is offensive to both assume someone's gender or sexuality and to use minority status as an insult, students stopped calling this classmate names.

My ability to recognize these behaviors as bullying was confounded by several factors. First, my class was incredibly close knit and, entering into puberty, more and more aware of the expectations of their classmates. When I became aware of a social issue, it was often difficult to get to the bottom of it because students were adept at deflecting my questions and protected each other to avoid "trouble." A second factor stemmed from the fact that there was no single obvious bully. When questioning different students separately, stories rarely lined up and each child brought their own understanding of the social groups within the classroom. Lastly, most of these issues took place during lunch and recess or online through emails and social media, spaces that I am not explicitly in charge of students.

The bullying became clear to me when one student, female, began to come to me because she was having trouble completing assignments. Instead of focusing on the groupwork, many classmates used this as an opportunity to discuss social issues, including rumors. I noticed Natalia sitting by herself at recess and saw that she was no longer interacting with girls she had been friends with throughout the year. I was shocked and disappointed when a student who sat next to Natalia emailed me and asked me to move her seat, "I just don't like her and I don't have the bravery to tell her. So i suggest to move me." (Student Email, 6/1/17) Natalia was clearly being ostracized by her classmates

and all of the social issues that students had been experiencing were related. Particularly, this group of 11 girls, of which Natalia was once a part of, was involved with every social issue that had emerged in the classroom.

This discovery brought me through all five stages of grief. I felt guilty that it had taken so long to notice and angry at the cruelty of my students. They were "good girls," always compliant in class, positive relationships with their parents. I felt that all of these students knew better. Initial attempts at addressing the problem in community circles was fruitless. No one wanted to point the finger and the group tended to reframe topics I brought up so that they were never at fault. What I had previously saw as group cohesion, I came to understand as a culture of fear. I began to doubt the efficacy of my action research. "What did I even do all year?" I asked myself in my journal, "what's the point?" (Teacher Journal 6/1/17)

After discussing the problem with parents, fellow teachers, the school counselor, and even one bright 10 year old I came up with a plan of action. My go-to methods of dealing with problems in the classroom were not working, and I needed to take more pointed efforts. Since there was not a clear leader of the group, I decided I would address all 11 girls.

I designed a lesson on bullying for these students. During this lesson a personal anecdote about bullying and shared with students the Pyramid of Hate (see Appendix F). As we went through the pyramid of hate, students were asked to think back to our unit on genocide. Initially revealing only the top of the pyramid, I asked students to share how genocide affected them personally or related to the world they lived in. The discussion was productive and students demonstrated they understood what acts were covered by the category of genocide, violence, and discrimination. Students could clearly articulate why discrimination was unfair for other groups (black men getting shot by the police) and themselves (people think immigrants should be deported). Several audible gasps met my unveiling of the final two rungs of the pyramid. "Acts of prejudice," I read, "I've seen name calling in my classroom. I've seen social exclusion. I've heard belittling jokes. I've seen scapegoating." Guilt was evident on every face. Afterwards, I asked students to read and reflect on an article where a former bully apologized to their victims and reflected on how it was impossible to take back what they had done. To conclude the lesson I asked all students to reflect on the question, "am I a bully or a bystander?" I told students that I expected them to use evidence and that their personal lives became my business when they interrupted learning in my classroom

These reflections on bullying were more productive than I could have hoped. Additionally, I believe it was empowering for students to analyze their own behavior and categorize it themselves after I made clear what kind of actions and patterns of behavior I saw as bullying. Students expressed regret for many of the issues that had been brought to my attention, as well as some that had not. 10/11 of the reflections showed students taking ownership for their actions and beginning to set goals to improve. A line from each of their reflections (6/9/17):

        a. I regret doing that (saying mean things) because I did that because the way they looked not what is inside of them.

b. (on being a bystander) I feel like I need to start making my own decisions, and that I have to stand up for myself. I think that I should peer pressure my friends in a positive way to being everyone's friend and to not be a bully.

c. I now realize that I may hurt people with my words...I want to tell my side of the story to my teacher, but, she might not believe me. Because I'm the bully.

d. I realize that I knew whatever happened is bad and when I had a chance to intervene I didn't do anything. I could have helped in some way but I didn't.

e. I have been both the bully and the bystander in the past.

f. I also called a girl chubby kid because she would bully me back and I tried defending myself but it wouldn't make anything better.

g. I have been a bully because I have been peer pressuring people in our class community. ... I dare him to hug her and he doesn't want to and then I tell him "come on its nothing bad just do it! Please! Come on," and he doesn't want to do it & at the end he turns out doing because of my peer pressure.

h. I am a bystander & a little bit of a bully....when somebody was getting bullied because they thought [he] was gay I never told anyone about it and never upstanded for it or said anything.

i. By getting involved I don't mean calling them names or hurting them. I just take a side and see what happens.

j. I was mentally hurt by certain people but I feel like the way I was "defending" myself was way worse. I said things to people that I would never think about saying to someone now. (On being a bystander) I was taught to speak up when I know that something isn't right but I don't know what went through my head at that time.

> **LIGHTBULB #16:**
> To be human is to err.

One reflection after one discussion on bullying does not ensure that bullying is eradicated from this group of students. Future teachers must continue to monitor the group dynamic to ensure that all students are safe. At the same time, students have shown a capacity to meet my expectations and apply lessons to their own behavior. I was relieved that these girls could be honest and rigorous in their self reflection. Supportive families and positive classroom environments in previous years was a key factor in how quickly these girls were able to take ownership over problematic behaviors. My final sub question centered on the ability of my students to monitor their errors and make corrections. I expected most of my data from this section to relate to student learning; students would revise misconceptions and change behavior to help them learn. As expected, this happened. Unexpectedly, my students also began to apply this ability to self reflect to their personal lives.

One student did not take ownership over the fact that her behaviors could be hurtful, even though she admitted to ignoring Natalia and I had seen her peer pressuring classmates. Over the past several years Alicia has experienced the death of their father and grandfather, been brought in to translate for family members in court, and watched several family members struggle with addiction. She understands ugly parts of life that no 11 year old should have to know about. This student had more absences than any of her classmates and related to the one parent that didn't show up to parent teacher conferences in the third quarter. This was also the student that struggled the most with the reflection on bullying. "I don't know if I'm a bully or a bystander," she explained at the beginning of her reflection. (6/1/17) While hesitant to label herself, she had an easier time labeling her behavior, "I have to say is most of the time I have a reason. I have a reason to say what I say sometimes I saw stuff that are mean I do realize that."

I knew I needed to come back to this student, but I chose to step back to see how my mini lesson and the subsequent reflections impacted the classroom dynamic. Natalia seemed happier and sought my company less. At the end of the following week, I received an email from Alicia after school.

Screenshot of email received from Alicia on 6/9/17

to me ▾

 Ms.Burke I wanted to text you to ask you if you can tell me what I have to do for hw and what I missed so I won't be behind the reason I was absent was because I tripped and almost fell down the stairs but I didn't I just hurt my foot and my rist but I am ok now.I also wanted to ask if some time during the week I can do a speech to the class and apologize to some people about bullying.In my speech I will not point out people who have bullied others but I will say sorry to the people I said mean stuff to.

I was floored, because this student had followed up with herself before I even had a chance to. Although I didn't see the internal dialogue between Alicia and Alicia, the ability to reflect was evident. Not only did she reevaluate her own behavior, but she was taking steps to address it with no prompting.

On Monday, we agreed that she would present her speech the next day. I had initially planned about 15 minutes for her speech, but that was not enough time. Alicia did not deliver a mere apology speech. Alicia reviewed examples of bullying, factors that influence bullying, name calling, gossip, peer pressure and holding grudges. After recounting every conceivable point on a topic, peer pressure for example, she would apologize in general for participating in the behavior and then apologize to specific people that had been affected by her behavior. Then, she would invite others to publically apologize themselves. Initially, one or two hands were raised. Emboldened by their classmates honesty, more and more students began to raise their hands for the chance to publically apologize to others. Once a topic had been exhausted, Alicia would bring up her next point and repeat the process. Apologies addressed every social issue that besmirched our year. They ranged in seriousness, from apologizing for using a silly nickname to assuming someone was gay. Alicia's speech easily took 45 minutes, though it was easy for me to give up valuable instructional time as students experienced a public healing ritual. As the speech reached a climax Alicia explained that sometimes bullies do something as a reaction to something that has been done to them, but this does not excuse their

actions. "I wanted to apologize to you, Natalia," she began before explaining that she had been holding onto something Natalia had done in second grade, and because of this, she did not give Natalia a chance to explain herself in recent situations.

A follow up with Natalia also showed promising results. "I wanted to check in about some of the things that had been bothering you." "Yeah, things are better." "I'm glad, why do you think that is?" "We had a chance to talk about it." (Teacher Journal, 6/14/17)

⚡ **LIGHTNING BOLT MOMENT:**
I can correct my mistakes/It's never too late to say sorry.

ARE REFLECTIVE PRACTICES EFFECTIVE?

Evidence for the efficacy of these metacognitive practices I built into our classroom is primarily in small moments, random student statements, captured in my journal and sentences pulled from student reflections. I am confident defending these practices and the time they take because I feel supported by research and proof that my students learned. While it would be foolhardy to attribute student success to one factor, the end of the year brought many moments of victory. As mentioned previously, 100% of my students showed growth in math on the NWEA MAP assessment. The mean score for the class grew from a 225 to a 236; number of students scoring above the 80th percentile rose from 11 to 16. Reading MAP data, also showed growth. Class average rose from a 219 to a 224 and 22/28 students showed growth on this assessment. While the lesser growth in reading supported other realizations I was coming to make in my classroom, 100% of students showed growth in reading on other assessments. On the Fountas and Pinnell reading assessment, commonly referred to as BAS (Benchmark Assessment System), students are assigned a letter to indicate the level of complexity they are capable of reading and comprehending. See Appendix G to see how the levels often correlate to each grade. 26/28 students[1] in my room grew at least two levels, the minimum growth necessary to "meet expectations." Average growth for my room was 3 levels, indicating that the majority of my students "exceeded expectations" in reading. Two students grew by six levels. Reach performance tasks are another standardized test that students must complete as part of a teacher's evaluation. This test is also meant to show growth by comparing beginning of the year data to end of the year data in a subject the teacher is responsible for. My students completed the REACH performance task for literacy and 100% showed growth, earning scores that were between 8 and 44% higher at the end of the year.

Standardized tests are not the end-all be-all of measuring learning. It bears repeating here that my students' high test scores were a factor in them being chosen for the gifted program. At the same time, they do provide one lens to look at a classroom and one metric of success. While I was relieved

---

[1] Of the 2 students that did not "meet expectations," one began the year at a level Z. The second student grew from a U to a V, still ending the year on grade level. Why didn't this student meet expectations? I think lack of growth can best be explained by the fact that this student needed glasses and received them in the last month of the school year.

to find that the testing data supported my work, my belief that I was on the right track was fueled by smaller lightbulbs I saw appear over my students heads.

9. CONCLUSION

What happened when I incorporated meditative and metacognitive routines into my classroom? A lot!

As an educator, I became more aware of the position I held in the classroom, not just as the teacher, but as a member of a community. Like all members of a community, I bring my own experiences, beliefs, and biases into the classroom. This is not something that can be erased, but it needs to be monitored. I must continue a diligent practice of self-reflection to ensure that I do not let my own experiences get in the way of student learning. Before this project, I believed that in examining my own white privilege and reading extensively about Latin American culture and history was enough to minimize my own bias. This is not true. I am capable of projecting onto my students in other, more subtle ways. This was an issue when I tried to teach Jose my own favorite ways to manage stress, ignoring his preferred methods of relaxation. On the other hand, framing a lesson on bullying that included my own experience as a reformed bully helped to create a space where girls in my class could honestly reflect on their behavior and feel safe acknowledging they had made mistakes.

I noticed this year that my relationships were the most powerful tool I had to facilitate student learning. More than any amount of lesson planning, efficient routines, or research, relationships are the key to a successful classroom. My reflective routines were effective because students trusted that I cared about them and their progress. They saw that I listened to their suggestions and responded to their needs. They were willing to work hard because they saw that I was working hard for them and capable of addressing my own mistakes. Relationships with my students helped me understand when to step up and when to step back. I cannot eliminate power structures in my classroom, but this is not necessarily a bad thing. During teacher appreciation week I asked students to write a letter of appreciation to a former teacher. Jose, lover of videogames, hater of school, was not listening when I emphasized that the letter should be directed to a teacher they had in the past. As I sorted letters to send off to other teachers, I found one addressed to me: "Thank you for everything. You helped me build confidence, be less stressed and realize I'm not bad at math." (Student Letter, 5/9/17)

Student reflections reiterated that student interest and choice must be addressed to ensure students are engaged in their learning. If students don't care about a topic or a project, they will not do their best work. The process of completing and grading this projects will be a waste of time for students and teachers.

Throughout the year, after being forced to reflect often, students were better equipped to address obstacles of their learning head on. They became more adept at discussing learning objectives, habits of work, monitoring their progress, and reflecting on their goals. They engaged in higher order thinking and made discoveries about the importance of time management and making productive decisions when given a choice of workmates or topics. They could describe, with greater accuracy, the concepts and skills they were learning. Additionally, they could correctly assess themselves and could

create more meaningful learning objectives based on what expectations they had not yet met. Students were able to correct errors they made on schoolwork and within relationships with classrooms, as evidenced by their written reflections and increased participation in my redoing work policy. In addition to the rigorous self-reflection that students engaged in regarding their learning, students also showed that they could be reflective in their personal lives. The girls in my classroom, especially, recognized behaviors that did not live up to their values and made a plan to address these errors. This allowed Alicia to make a conscious decision to correct bullying behaviors and assume a leadership position in the classroom. She didn't just address an error of her own, but something she saw as a problem for the whole group. Two final reflective moments:

> a. The thought of me succeeding and being a successful doctor helps me be better. I want to achieve my dream I want to be a pediatric nurse. Another thing that keeps me going is the thought of me going to Harvard University I want to go there and study. And I know that I need to work hard to go to that school. I can improve by focusing better, not fooling off, leaving all the problems behind and let the learning come in first. I can also improve by letting myself shine out and not pretending to be another person. - From Natalia's final reflection on growth as a scholar.
> b. Next year, I want to grow as a person. - Maria sharing her goals with her sixth grade teacher.

10. LIMITATIONS & FURTHER QUESTIONS

Like all educational action research projects, this one is limited by small sample size. It is a story about this teacher, these students, and their classroom. Additionally, I must understand that correlation is not causation. While I did notice patterns and trends, my paper could, at most, imply a connection, not state with certainty that any given intervention could be replicated with success in another room. As stated, my students' standardized test data was very encouraging, but it is impossible to parse out how much credit different aspects of my teaching practice deserves.

The nature of my question was broad and the nature of reflection is private. In combing through paragraphs and paragraphs of student reflection, there exists the likelihood of confirmation bias. Did I find signs that my students had grown in their ability to reflect on their behavior and academics? Or did my expectations cause me to cherry pick from student responses and ignore signs that reflection was not useful?

I leave this year with new questions. How can I be more intentional in forming meaningful relationships with all students? What challenges to student learning will emerge among next year's students? How do I ensure students are interested in my lessons? How can I incorporate parents and families into my classroom? How do I communicate with parents when neither of us is fully fluent in the same language? How do I better incorporate student choice and interests into my classroom? How do I measure if my students know they are loved and respected?

11. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

SCHOOL LEVEL

Teachers need ongoing professional development on the social and emotional needs of the youth that they serve as well as the culture of the neighborhoods in which they work. Because most teaching graduates are white females and the largest districts are parts of cities with large groups of students of color, teachers need ongoing support in navigating differences in culture and understanding the changing contexts in which our students exist. This is vital and necessary to designing lessons that meet student interest. Schools should compensate teachers for their participation in these trainings and spend at least as much time helping teachers understand the community they teach in as they they spend explaining how to be a standardized test proctor.

DISTRICT LEVEL

Chicago Public Schools should switch to standards based grading. Our current grading system is powerful motivation for students who want to do well and the main method of providing parents with feedback about their child's learning. Our current grading system mixes habits of work with mastery of content specific grade-level standards. This does teachers, students, and parents a disservice. C's on a report card could indicate a struggling student who works incredibly hard to earn a passing grade or they could reflect a naturally bright but lazy student who completes few assignments but does well on tests. Different teachers will way different aspects of class work differently. Despite the use of rubrics, grading is somewhat subjective. Work that would earn a C with one teacher might be a B in another class. Ultimately, grades tell us nothing. Standards-based grading would give students and parents more direct feedback on students progress and separate out work habits from content knowledge. The pass/fail dichotomy is not productive for a growth mindset and can be traumatic for students that struggle. Standards-based grading presents schoolwork on a continuum of learning and evaluates students progress towards an agreed upon standard. It would free teachers and parents from conversations about letters (why is my child earning a C?), and provide them with a tool for meaningful discussion on student progress.

NATIONAL/STATE/CITY LEVEL

Our country needs to adopt student-first finding. Current national budgets prioritize corporate interests and military over the needs of the most vulnerable citizens. Politicians need to treat all of America's children like their own children. As a nation, we have the knowledge and resources to provide all students with a quality education. If we do nothing to address the achievement gap between those with the most privilege and those without, we perpetuate institutional racism and colonial practices in an endless cycle of oppression.

12. WORKS CITED

Berger R, Rugen L, Woodfin L. Leaders of their own learning: transforming schools through student-Engaged assessment. San Francisco, Ca.: Jossey-Bass; 2014.

Campbell J. Writing to Heal: Using Meditation in the Writing Process. College Composition and Communication. 1994;45(2):246-251. doi:10.2307/359010.

Evans GW, Kim P. Childhood Poverty and Health. Psychological Science. 2007;18(11):953-957. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2007.02008.x.

Haynes A. Meditation and Health: An Annotated Bibliography. Reference & User Services Quarterly. 2001;44(1):18-25.

Madeus G, Russell M. Paradoxes of High-Stakes Testing. The Journal of Education. 2010;190(1/2):21-30.

Metzinger T. The ego tunnel the science of the mind and the myth of the self. New York: RHYW; 2011.

News CBS. How meditation is making a "huge difference" in one Baltimore school. CBS News. http://www.cbsnews.com/news/meditation-students-mindful-moments-program-robert-w-coleman-elementary-school/. Published October 26, 2016. Accessed July 1, 2017.

13. Appendix

Appendix A. Screenshot of student check-in survey.

How happy are you today?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not happy at all	○	○	○	○	○	Super happy!

Why?

Long answer text

How stressed are you today?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Cool as a cucumber	○	○	○	○	○	SO. STRESSED.

Why?

Long answer text

Appendix B. Student created rubric for Holocaust Project

Tribute	Master - 5	Apprentice - 3	Novice - 1
Writing conventions	You have 2 or less grammar and spelling errors.	You have 3-5 words spelled incorrectly and Correct Grammar.	Most words are spelled incorrectly and has poor grammar.
Effort	Has enough work done that seems that you really care about your represener and you took time to add details/	You put most of your effort on the project and took you a while, it looks mostly done.	You didn't put your hardest in the work. it looks like if it was all put together at last minute.
Organization	Neat Writing, Trying your best to organize your writing, and took your time to complete it correctly.	Mostly neat but not your best and took your time but not enough.	Looks like you completed it last minute and didn't spend enough time on it.
Presentation	Looks like you spent time and effort on the project. No cross outs, etc. (2-3 hours)	Project is pleasing to the eye, may have ½ cross outs or mistakes.	Project has image that is no to the represener. Just pencil on paper.
Detail	All parts are detailed and you can see an image in your mind like an scene.	Part of the project related to understanding of unit.You can see part of an Image in your mind. But not very detail, leaves some questions.	Not many details about the person. Does not create a clear image of what you have learned.

Appendix C. Original rubric for weekly letter.

Letter to Ms. Burke Grading Rubric

	Master - 5	Apprentice - 3	Novice - 1
Parts of a Letter	Letter has date, greeting, body, conclusion, & signature	Letter has ⅘ parts of a friendly letter.	Letter has 3 or less parts of a friendly letter.
Length	Letter is at least one page minimum.	Letter is almost a page long.	Letter is half a page long or less.
Content	Letter has made claims about the book backed up with evidence.	Letter is a summary of the book with some opinion.	Letter is a summary of the book.
Conventions	Letter has less than two spelling, grammar or punctuation mistakes.	Letter has 3-4 spelling, grammar or punctuation mistakes.	Letter has 5 or more errors.

18-20 A   16-17 B   14-15 C

Appendix D. Revised rubric for weekly letter.

Letter to Ms. Burke Grading Rubric 2

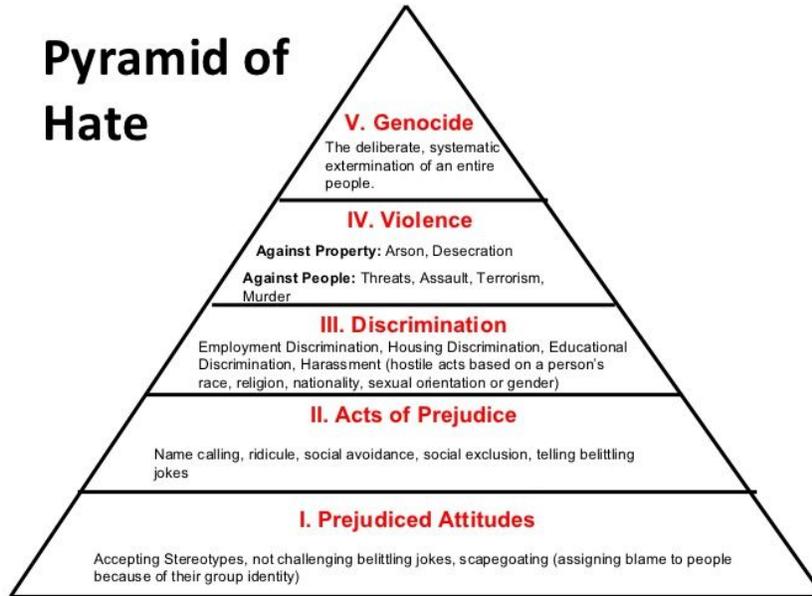|	Master - 5	Apprentice - 3	Novice - 1
Parts of a Letter	Letter has date, greeting, body, conclusion, & signature	Letter has ⅘ parts of a friendly letter.	Letter has 3 or less parts of a friendly letter.
Length	1 page	¾ page - 1 page	< ¾ page
Spelling	0 misspellings .	1-3 misspellings, missing/incorrect punctuation	>3 misspellings or punctuation errors
Skill	Demonstrated understanding of skill.	Tried to use the skill, not fully accurate.	No writing about skill evident.
Evidence	Logical quote relates to claim.	Quote but claim/analysis not present.	No quote.

23-25 A   20-22 B   18-19 C

Appendix E. Writing rubric based on Lucy Calkins checklist

Informational Writing Checklist	Not Yet (1pt)	Starting To (2 pts)	Got It! (3pts)
Structure			
Introduction: hooks the reader, previous subtopics			
Linking words: consequently, as a result, in contrast, by comparison, a little later, for example			
Conclusion: restates main points, offered final thought/question			
Organization: writing organized into sections.			
Each section has an organized flow of ideas, follows a genre-specific structure. (IE. cause and effect, compare/contrast)			
Development			
I explained using examples, details, dates, and quotes.			
I used trusted sources and gave credit.			
I gave bckgrnd info, summarized POV and explained my thinking.			
I made deliberate word choice to have an effect on my readers, "Juicy" vocabulary and explained terms			
I explained information clearly.			
I blended storytelling, summary and my ideas for a cohesive piece.			
I had varied sentences and an expert tone.			
Language Conventions			
I spelled all words correctly.			
I use vocabulary words important to my topic.			
I used commas to set off introductory parts of sentences.			
I used a variety of punctuation to avoid run-on sentences.			
I used punctuation to cite my sources.			
Total:			
Grand Total:			

Appendix F. Pyramid of Hate by the Anti Defamation League

Pyramid of Hate

V. Genocide
The deliberate, systematic extermination of an entire people.

IV. Violence
Against Property: Arson, Desecration
Against People: Threats, Assault, Terrorism, Murder

III. Discrimination
Employment Discrimination, Housing Discrimination, Educational Discrimination, Harassment (hostile acts based on a person's race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation or gender)

II. Acts of Prejudice
Name calling, ridicule, social avoidance, social exclusion, telling belittling jokes

I. Prejudiced Attitudes
Accepting Stereotypes, not challenging belittling jokes, scapegoating (assigning blame to people because of their group identity)

Appendix G. Fountas and Pinnell chart showing BAS level and grade level expectations.

	Beginning of Year (Aug.–Sept.)	1st Interval of Year (Nov.–Dec.)	2nd Interval of Year (Feb.–Mar.)	End of Year (May–June)
Grade K		C+	D+	E+
		B	C	D
		A	B	C
				Below C
Grade 1	E+	G+	I+	K+
	D / E	F	H	J
	C	E	G	I
	Below C	Below E	Below G	Below I
Grade 2	K+	L+	M+	N+
	J / K	K	L	M
	I	J	K	L
	Below I	Below J	Below K	Below L
Grade 3	N+	O+	P+	Q+
	M / N	N	O	P
	L	M	N	O
	Below L	Below M	Below N	Below O
Grade 4	Q+	R+	S+	T+
	P / Q	Q	R	S
	O	P	Q	R
	Below O	Below P	Below Q	Below R
Grade 5	T+	U+	V+	W+
	S / T	T	U	V
	R	S	T	U
	Below R	Below S	Below T	Below U
Grade 6	W+	X+	Y+	Z
	V / W	W	X	Y
	U	V	W	X
	Below U	Below V	Below W	Below X
Grade 7	Z	Z	Z+	Z+
	Y	Y	Z	Z
	X	X	Y	Y
	Below X	Below X	Below Y	Below Y
Grade 8	Z+	Z+	Z+	Z+
	Z	Z	Z	Z
	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Below Y	Below Y	Below Y	Below Y