

Gail Ulmer

## Final Project Reflection

I love to learn. As an educator I feel like it is just good practice, but I take classes because I enjoy gaining new knowledge and exploring others points of view. However as a busy mom, wife, and counselor committing to yet another responsibility was scary. The content was pertinent, but would I have time I needed to learn it in a meaningful way? It would be something that I could do for myself, but was I taking on more than I would be able to balance?

I had many reservations about taking this class. But it was more about my personal situation and where I am at in life right now. In the end, the course work was completely manageable for me. In fact, I think this class is exactly what I needed for where I am in my life right now.

What stood out for me the most were the implications that mindfulness can have on students in our schools. Kids are so thirsty for new skills, especially if those skills help them with issues or deflects that they have. With the increasing amount of anxiety and stress that so many of our students are experiencing as well as trauma, we as a society are in need of some skills to teach them. Skills that they can understand as children and apply to life now and later. The coping strategies that we learned ourselves throughout the duration of this course and then taught to students are simple to understand and can be generally applied to all types of situations.

I shared in one of my reflections about how I came to the realization last year that I needed to slow down. Running back and forth down the

hall from my office to the copier had become my normal “pace”. I knew that I couldn’t maintain that speed and that I needed to make changes. Taking this course emphasized the importance of being more aware of ourselves (like our pace) and in order to do that I need to slow down and be mindful of what is going on. Such a simple concept that has improved my physical and mental health, as I was able to notice and acknowledge this issue in my own life.

I especially appreciated all of the various mindfulness practices that were introduced to us. I don’t know if I would have tried several of them if they had not been an expected part of our course curriculum. Prior to taking this class I wouldn’t have understood how beneficial it would be for me to take 15 minutes out of my day to complete a body scan. Practicing this and then recognizing the benefits of it helped me find the time and reserve it for myself. It became a priority to me.

One thing that I recognized about myself due to the self- reflection is that I tend to have a lot of patience with students and teachers at school, but this is not the same mindset that I bring home to my husband and children. I am very quick to snap at my children or to bicker with my spouse. This is not how I want things to be for my own family. I want to be able to offer them a patient and encouraging mother and wife. I learned that I need to acknowledge and name what I feel when I am ready to snap at my children or use a less than pleasant tone of voice with my husband. This is how I will begin to stop the cycle and gain control of this behavior.

In taking this course I was encouraged by the number of staff from our school that also took the class. Throughout our time together, I enjoyed hearing about the lessons and activities that they did with their

students in class. I believe that everyone that took the class is able to see the benefits of mindfulness for their students and the importance of integrating it into their curriculum.

Ironically, my children have one of the teachers that took the course. My son came home one day and said something to the effect of “is Mr. McCabe taking the class with you? He keeps asking us to focus our flashlights on him.” As more educators learn of the benefits of some of these simple, time effective activities it can only mean that our students will learn and benefit from some of the common language and practices.

As an educator, I want to continue to introduce mindfulness practices to students when they feel stressed or overwhelmed. I would like to compile a list of various apps that I could specifically recommend to students and parents. I am in a unique position to be able to work one on one with students in the midst of highly emotional situations. To be able to share some of the mindfulness practices that I learned over the past couple of months could be extremely beneficial for them.

One question that popped into my head several times was we read through *the chapters of the 5 dimensions of engaged teaching is*, do we spend enough time addressing the needs of the whole student? Character education has taken a back seat recently to make room for more academics and test remediation. I believe that students need to be taught about healthy relationships and ways to express their feelings in school in order to be able to be more available to learn addition and multiplication.

We cannot assume that many of these life applicable skills are being taught at home. So many of our students are in need of strategies to

help them navigate from day to day. The practices that I have learned over the past couple of weeks are ones that I will be able to pass on to students. Hopefully as they find something what forks for them, they too will pass on.

I was so concerned about not having time to dedicate to this course in the beginning. In the end, I feel so affirmed in making time to learn more about mindfulness. I enjoyed the introduction to self- reflection and the various ways that I can practice mindfulness. I look forward to learning additional practices as well as ways to help students at our high school utilize these practical skills.