

I was once the one person who signed up for a yoga class to see what all the “hype” was about and found myself hyperventilating because I couldn’t stop my mind from thinking of the thousand other things I SHOULD have been doing. I chuckle as I think back... how else was I supposed to get everything done?

My name is Amy Lopes and I have been teaching for 20 years. I am currently a 5th grade teacher at William D’Abate Elementary School in Providence. 97% of our students receive free and reduced lunch. 5 years ago when I was asked if I wanted my students to participate in Center for Resilience’s 32-week social emotional learning through mindfulness program. My initial response was “NO WAY...this will never work...I can’t waste classroom instruction time for this!”

I decided to practice what I preached to my students; the importance of risk taking and having a positive attitude towards things we do not like to do. After 2 weeks of working in the classroom with our instructor twice a week for 25 minutes each time, I went from the never shut your brain off person to seeing the value in taking time to stop, breathe, and notice. I began to see changes in the behaviors of my students immediately. The moment I became a learner alongside my students and practice mindfulness, my classroom went from one of high energy and stress to one of high energy and focused. I saw the value of social and emotional learning practices and the impact it has on overall academics and behaviors. A student recently told me, “The skills I am learning from ResilientKids has made me a better person because when I get mad, instead of yelling at the person, I find my anchor and breathe.”

From the moment the students walk in, we do a temperature check in on how they are feeling to mindful breakfast eating in the classroom. Starting our day like this, has greatly impacted students’ focus and has set their day up for success. Throughout the day, the students use various breathing techniques, body tapping, and movement to help them refocus in all academic areas. In turn, the students are much more engaged with all learning experiences at hand. They’ve learned to stop and notice when they are about to “flip a lid” which helps them personally descale a situation making an impact on behaviors. During PARCC testing, the students used positive self talk to keep them motivated to do their best work. This positive self talk enabled them to maintain their stamina to work through the assessment without giving up when they might have reached a problem/question that might have posed more difficulty. One student said, “I learned to believe in myself and never give up.” Another student said, “When I was taking a test, I said “I can do this” in my head and I started to believe that I could really do it.”

I believe in creating an environment where all students feel safe and know they will learn. It is when I became a participant 6 years ago, alongside my students learning and practicing the mindfulness strategies taught by the Center for Resilience, that I saw the impact social and emotional learning has in creating a positive learning community.

Center for Resilience is a nonprofit who has been teaching social emotional skills through mindfulness throughout Rhode Island for the last 7 years. A Center for Resilience instructor visits my classroom twice a week for 30 minutes. The Center for Resilience’s ResilientKids curriculum is aligned with the Common Core Standards, CASEL, and Rhode Island’s new SEL Standards. Students learn valuable skills that help them to be learning ready while also developing skills to become engaged adults, global citizens and community leaders. A few quotes from the students: “When I am all over the place, I now have strategies that I

can use to calm myself down.” “ResilientKids has helped me be less judgmental of myself and others.” “I used the skills I was learning in ResilientKids when I was struggling with my homework. I was then able to stay calm and I just did my very best.” 95% of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students who participated in the ResilientKids program at William D’Abate during the 2016-2017 school year said that they use their mindfulness strategies at school and outside of school.