

May 25, 2015

Vanessa Sifuentes  
Managing Director, East Oakland Community Team  
Teach for America  
1611 Telegraph Ave. Ste 1210  
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Vanessa,

As a second year TFA teacher, I cannot express to you how grateful I am for Inner Explorer. My first year as a third grade teacher at Reach Academy was incredibly stressful. Because of Inner Explorer I feel so much calmer this year. The year is equally as hard as last, but I've been able to succeed because I am practicing with the students on a daily basis. Inner Explorer gives me the opportunity to see past the chaos; I can exist in it and respond to it in a much calmer manner.

This year from day one, I started using Inner Explorer and mindfulness throughout the day. We have built a mindful classroom culture and more trust as a result. There is still conflict in our school and in our classroom. However, the students respond to conflict differently now. They get less triggered. When they are upset, they are able to walk through the experience differently and get over difficulties more easily.

I can speak for myself and for the students when I say our minds are clearer and not convoluted. As a result I am getting to be my best self and modeling that for the students so they are able to do the same. Because of the daily practice I get from Inner Explorer I am meeting my students differently this year. I am able to be more present for them, and am available to keep conversations going about many things, including mindfulness. That said, I'm not providing or trying to provide all the solutions to the trauma they are experiencing; they are learning how to deal with those issues themselves. This creates less burden for me as a teacher.

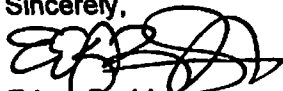
When we walk into the classroom, we don't do anything before we do Inner Explorer or mindfulness. Whenever my kids come into the classroom, whether first thing in the morning, after recess, lunch or an enrichment class, I don't know what's happened with them. Students cannot learn if they are not in the right frame of mind and Inner Explorer and mindfulness help them be ready to learn. I'm delighted to report that my kids' grades and test scores have gone up this year. When I began only 33% of my students were reading at grade level, now half of them are. Math scores have also risen.

As a child, I lived through the trauma many kids in my class are experiencing. Because of mindfulness my students are able to perceive things in a different way and as a result they are able to respond to those things more effectively.

My mom and dad both see me looking healthier and regularly tell me that I talk about my students way differently than I did last year. In fact, I am much healthier and happier and because I am available to my students, I am a much better teacher. Education is a tough career. Mindfulness has helped me find peace in education.

I recommend that TFA make Inner Explorer available to all of their teachers. It has made a world of difference in my life and in the lives of every one of my students. I would be delighted to sit down and talk to you about this,

Sincerely,



Edgar Rodriguez  
TFA 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher Reach Academy