Inner Explorer
Beyond The Program for Teachers
February 2016



Fostering Self-Compassion



Dear Inner Explorer Teachers,

Well, we've started the second half of the year. It goes really fast, doesn't it? Hope you and your students are enjoying Inner Explorer.

Valentine's Day in elementary school can be really fun; cards, cupcakes, parties. Middle school, high school, college and real life can be tougher, particularly for people who are not in the type of relationship that is typically celebrated on February 14. We would like to propose a different Valentine's Day and February this year, one that focuses on taking good care of ourselves and of loving and appreciating ourselves.

I started reading a book about mindfulness and it was describing how we humans often berate ourselves. I read about ten pages and realized that the book did not pertain to me. With so much to read, I decided to put the book down. I got up, walked down the hall, thought about something I'd forgotten to do and immediately starting talking to myself using many pejorative words. Turns out I did need that book!

Negative self-talk is alive and well in many of us and we may not even recognize it, but it takes a toll.

We are often kinder to others than we are to ourselves. Teachers are givers; that's why many of us go into the profession. We want to help kids, share our love of learning and the job is a tough one. If a teacher has children, he or she may go home tired from the day but needing to step up to address the needs of the kids and family. We end up doing, doing all day long and often that doing doesn't involve meeting our own needs.

So what can we do about this? Listening to Inner Explorer with your class first thing in the morning is an especially kind thing you can do for yourself as it provides time to regroup, to enjoy quiet and calm. Have you ever been tempted to get work done in those ten minutes while everything is quiet in your classroom? Perhaps this month you can make an agreement with yourself to take care of yourself by participating in the practice.

What about lunch? Do you often eat while you are doing prep? Might you go outside to eat, or at least stop work completely to take a few mindful bites so you'll know how your food tastes? How about taking a walk around the block to get some fresh air and a new perspective? What about leaving work right when class ends a day or two a week? Perhaps you could go sit in a coffee shop to do your prep for the following day, or go for a walk in a park, or perhaps pick up your child and take him or her to an early movie before dinner?

In a class I was astonished when the professor asked, "How many of you do something you don't like every day?" All hands went up. When he asked "How many of you do something you love every day?" only about a quarter of the students raised their hands. This February how about we all make a commitment to ourselves to do something we love everyday? Our lives, and even our students' lives, will be happier as a result.

Activities for Inside the Classroom and Outside the Classroom

- 1. Host a discussion about the difference between being selfish and taking good care of oneself. Discussion the word compassion.
- 2. Ask kids to write down all the things they have ever done that show self-compassion.
- 3. Ask students to remember a time they did something very nice for someone else. Give them a minute or two to come up with a memory. Once they do ask them if they have ever done that same thing for themselves. If the answer is yes, ask them how it felt, if the answer is no, ask them what keeps them from doing so.
- 4. Ask students to write down five things they love to do. Ask them if they do at least one or two of those things every day. Invite a discussion about what they discover.
- 5. Invite students to share something very special they do to take care of themselves and then encourage students to pick something they hear and do that thing themselves as homework.
- 6. Ask students to describe how they feel when they practice Inner Explorer. If the answer is primarily positive, give them an assignment to practice their breathing where they live for two to

five minutes each day. Attached is a calendar you can pass out and encourage them to use to keep track of their practice.

7. By massaging one's head, one releases the hormone oxytocin in one's brain. This lowers blood pressure and calms thoughts and emotions. Explain this to the students and then give the class two minutes to give themselves a head massage, massaging the forehead, scalp, jaws, etc. Ask them to journal about how doing a head rub made them feel.

Neuroscience of Self-Compassion

Our brains were designed to keep us safe from danger so it naturally looks for danger, and it finds it everywhere, whether there are serious problems or not. The kinder we are to our selves and the more we spend time doing what we love, the more we stimulate the left side of our brain, which helps us deprogram our brain's need to look for danger. Research has shown the self-compassion is more effective at building resilience than self esteem! It's time to take good care of ourselves!



Drawing submitted to Inner Explorer by a 3rd grade student in Oswego, IL.

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