

Bring Yoga to Schools

by Heidi Bornstein

Yoga in the classroom can help teachers create a more focused, harmonious environment and support students. It can enable both students and teachers to decrease stress, increase well-being and improve responsible behaviour and academic achievement.

Children are often told to "Pay Attention". Yoga practice is the "how" to paying attention. It helps children explore awareness of their bodies, discovering how the body and mind are connected and affect one another. Through breath awareness, children can learn invaluable skills for self-care.

Yoga is non-competitive, and can be practiced by all children, of all ages, at any physical level. It is FUN for children, gentle on their bodies, and helps foster positive feelings about themselves and others.

"When students and teachers regularly address the conditions of their mind-body states and know how to implement specific tools to support their health and well being, they create a harmonious inner and outer environment. Improved focus, concentration, responsible behaviour, creativity and academic achievement are some of the many benefits.

Healthier teachers and students today, creates a healthier community tomorrow." Jacquie Lewin, Certified Yoga Ed Instructor

If we can envision a world that is peaceful, balanced and compassionate, then a good place to start is with ourselves and our children, through practicing Yoga.



- Heidi Bornstein

Case for Action

In 2010, the Ontario Ministry of Education released a new "Health and Physical Education" curriculum for K-8. This contains a significant addition featuring yoga as a means to accomplish the health and wellness component.

Three elements encompassed in the Health and Physical Education Curriculum are:

- Healthy living
- Fundamental movement skills
- Active participation

We now have a prime opportunity to implement yoga programs in schools. There are many inspired and accomplished yoga teachers who are skilled at teaching yoga to children. They have made inroads into bringing yoga from private studios to public classrooms with creative ideas. There are many parents and teachers who practice yoga themselves, have introduced yoga to their children and support yoga as part of phys-ed.

This summer, I will be giving a workshop at the Yoga Festival Toronto directed to those involved in children's yoga by sharing ideas on how yoga can practically become implemented into as many schools as possible. The idea is to gather those interested in this project together in one place to share resources, explore possibilities and design a forum within Yoga Community Toronto for this endeavor. I will be offering information on what is available in Toronto as well as other relevant resources. If you would like to contribute, please contact me at heidi@yodayoga.ca.

Why Yoga?

Yoga was developed in India over 5,000 years ago. The word "yoga" means union. Yoga is an ancient philosophy and practice that teaches the mind and body to unite and work in harmony to create a more balanced and responsive individual.

Yoga is not a religion, although it has an ancient spiritual root. It can be many things to many people, including a spiritual source, exercise for the body, a way to quiet thoughts as well as a technique to gain body awareness. The approach for yoga in the classroom is health, well being and fitness.

"Yoga helps build much more than flexibility, it can improve cardiovascular capacity muscle endurance and overall well being," says Gisèle Tennant, manager of fitness for YMCA Canada.

Physical And Mental Benefits Of Yoga For Kids:

- Develop strong, flexible and healthy bodies.
- Improve posture and body awareness.
- Increase concentration, focus and attention.
- Build self-esteem and confidence
- Cultivate a peaceful, relaxed state of body and mind.
- Express creativity and imagination.
- Acquire personal tools for stress management.
- Understand anatomy and health
- Participate in a cooperative, noncompetitive activity, with a sense of achievement.
- Foster language development and social interaction
- Explore self-reflection

Yoga And Posture

Developing good posture habits is a benefit that will last a lifetime. Consistent yoga practice will result in improved posture, and an increased sense of balance, with head, shoulders and pelvis in proper alignment. Also, unlike many other forms of exercise, yoga helps stretch and strengthens both sides of the body equally.

Proper body alignment and good posture, which helps maintain the natural curvature of the spine, is an important part of reducing or avoiding lower back pain.

Yoga Awakens the Spine

The spinal column is our backbone, the central support of the skeletal system and yet most people don't give it the time of day. Is it any wonder that back pain strikes 80% of the population at some point in their life? Back pain is often the reason why many students take up yoga but you don't have to leave it that late. Practicing yoga will help you correct postural misalignment and keep your back strong, healthy and supple. It's a way of taking responsibility now for the future of your spine.

Breath Awareness

In addition to aiding relaxation, encouraging children to breathe deeply has a host of other benefits as well.

Deep breathing can help children:

- Sleep better.
- Strengthen their immune systems by increasing their oxygen supply.
- Relieve symptoms of asthma.
- Improve concentration, increase in academic achievement and a decrease in behavior issues.
- Deal with anxiety and stress, which can result in improved test performance.
- Control situations and overcome obstacles, because deep breathing is an excellent coping mechanism.
- Obtain a sense of calm, which is reflected in every part of their lives.

Heidi Bornstein is one of the Faculty of the Yoga Festival of Toronto 20210. She is a certified Hatha yoga teacher, Yoga Ed. Instructor, and MBSR - Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction - Facilitator. Heidi is the creator of the Yoda-Yoga Program for kids, a program specifically designed for use in the 20 minute DPA (Daily Physical Activity) in elementary schools as well as a facilitator for the Learning to BREATHE program, a mindfulness curriculum for adolescents in high schools.

This article originally appeared on the Yoga Community of Toronto website at: <http://www.yocoto.org/newsletter.html>

YOGA COMMUNITY TORONTO
membership. collaboration. resources.



For more information, please visit www.yodayoga.ca
