

A YOGA-BASED CURRICULUM TO HELP LEARNERS DEAL WITH ANXIOUS SITUATIONS

by

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Anxiety is the most common psychiatric disorder affecting children and adolescents, with over 30% of children meeting the criteria for an anxiety disorder before their 18th birthday (Kessler, Avenevoli, Costello, Georgiades, Green, Gruber & Merikangas, 2012; Weir, 2017). There are numerous physical benefits that yoga provides children and research indicates it can help reduce anxiety. Through my experience working in education, I have seen the many benefits that yoga can provide children. My observations led to my asking the following research question: *What are the elements of a Yoga curriculum that can support learners in dealing with anxious situations?*

During my review of the research it was difficult for me to find a simple yoga curriculum geared toward middle elementary schoolers. That is why I created a four week yoga curriculum for teachers to use with their third graders (though other grade levels could use this curriculum with some adjustments), with each lesson lasting approximately 10 minutes. The purpose and design of this curriculum project is to create support for any student who exhibits anxious behaviors whether or not they have an official anxiety diagnosis. As a third grade teacher, I know that teachers already have a lot on their plates. This curriculum is easy for teachers to follow.

Included in the curriculum are activities and formative assessments are included in this curriculum, along with a multitude of other resources. Through the development of this curriculum, I have learned how to combine appropriate yoga

postures and meditation activities with a variety of engaging cooperative learning activities. Students engage in turn and talks, create projects in small groups, and are provided choice.

A premise of this capstone is that teachers can limit anxious behaviors and thoughts by implementing yoga and mindfulness activities in their classrooms. The need to create a yoga curriculum that encourages mindfulness, teaches children yoga postures, and teaches students how to breathe while incorporating parent involvement in an elementary setting is clear because of those benefits that researchers have identified.

“Understanding by Design” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) was used to informally guide the development of this curriculum. I used their guiding principles to informally develop the curriculum goals. Specifically, this curriculum started by looking at the outcomes desired by the lessons. Their lesson plan format was not used, however. I asked myself questions, including “In what ways can I make this engaging for third graders?” and “How can I connect yoga and mindfulness to decreasing anxious feelings, and encourage students to use these two strategies to help themselves when feeling anxious?” These questions guided the development of this curriculum.

Multiple types of formative assessment were developed for this unit. Formative assessment are informal and completed throughout the unit. Formative assessment examples that are provided in this curriculum include 1-5 rubric check-ins and self-reflections that assess how students are responding to the yoga and mindfulness activities. Self-reflections are an important formative assessment because they give students the opportunity to reflect on how their yoga practice is making them feel. The

summative assessment includes an Anxious Behaviors Checklist for teachers to complete. This requires the teacher to look at the anxious behaviors each child in the classroom is exhibiting at the beginning of the unit and end of the unit. The Stressed Strategies Checklist and Anxious Questionnaire will be completed by students at both the beginning and end of the unit, too.

References

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- Malik, J. R. (2008). *Adapting yoga to youngsters: Viewpoints of certified youth yoga teachers (doctoral dissertation)*. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database.(UMI No. 3303044)
- Murray, L. No Worries! An activity book for young people who sometimes feel anxious or stressed. United Kingdom: Studio Press.
- Neiman, B. (2015). *Mindfulness and yoga skills for children and adolescents: 115 activities for trauma, self regulation, special needs and anxiety*. Eau Claire, WI: PESI Publishing & Media. Retrieved from ProQuest

Week 1 Overview

*This week will include pre assessments to determine existing strategies and times of day when students feel the most stress. Students will be introduced to twists, mountain pose, volcano breaths and child's pose. Optional: Include 5 minutes at the end of each lesson for students to reflect in journals about how they feel. Teachers should complete the "[Anxious Behaviors Checklist](#)" prior to beginning the curriculum. Teachers can also send home this [family letter](#) that explains this unit. To provide formative feedback, teacher should use this [rubric](#) weekly.

Standards Addressed

- 3.4.4.1 Identify the role of rules and etiquette used in a variety of physical activities.
- 3.5.1.1 Recognize how the body and mind respond during and after physical activity participation.

Measurable Objectives

- I can practice a variety of yoga poses quietly while focusing on my breathing.
- I can learn new strategies for calming myself down when I feel stressed.

Week 1	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Time needed	10 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes
Activate Prior Student Knowledge Begin class with this statement	Prior Knowledge: gym activities and being calm Opening teacher stmt: In gym, you work out and stretch. It helps clear your mind.	Prior Knowledge: intro to yoga Opening teacher stmt: Yesterday's questionnaire showed me lots of us feel stress at certain times in the day.	Prior Knowledge: calm strategies and places Opening teacher stmt: Today we are going to focus on places where we feel calm and learn a yoga pose called "child's pose."	Prior Knowledge: child's pose Opening teacher stmt: It's important to create a calm and safe environment. It's important for us to be able to relax and feel safe.	Prior Knowledge: calm and safe place Opening teacher stmt: Yesterday, we tried mountain pose, twists, volcano breaths and child's pose.
Teach	WK 1 Monday Teaching Summary	WK 1 Tuesday Teaching Summary	WK 1 Wednesday Teaching Summary	WK 1 Thursday Teaching Summary	WK 1 Friday Teaching Summary
Model/Think Aloud	WK 1 Monday Modeling and Think Aloud	WK 1 Tuesday Modeling and Think Aloud	WK 1 Wednesday Modeling and Think Aloud	WK 1 Thursday Modeling and Think Aloud	WK 1 Friday Modeling and Think Aloud
Active Involvement	Students complete anxious feelings questionnaire	Students complete Stressed Strategies Assessment	Students share and try a pose .	Students are actively trying the poses .	Students are actively trying the poses .

Week 2 Overview

*Students will build upon yoga and breathing strategies they learned last week. Students will create group posters of the various poses. Optional: Include 5 minutes at the end of each lesson for students to reflect in journals about how they feel.

Standards Addressed

- 3.1.2.2 Transfer weight from feet to hands then to different body parts and bases of support for balance and travel.
- 3.5.1.1 Recognize how the body and mind respond during and after physical activity participation.
- 3.1.2.4 Perform non-locomotor skills as the body moves into and out of balances.

Measurable Objectives

- I can practice a variety of yoga poses quietly while focusing on my breathing.
- I can work together with a group to create a yoga poster.
- I can practice quietly meditating.

Week 2	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Time needed	10-15 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes
Activate Prior Student Knowledge Begin class with this statement	Prior Knowledge: breathing focus Opening teacher stmt: Last week, we practiced mountain pose, twists, volcano breaths and child's pose.	Prior Knowledge: breathing and yoga poses Opening teacher stmt: Today, you're going to create posters that tell about a pose.	Prior Knowledge: posters yesterday Opening teacher stmt: Today you will finish your posters.	Prior Knowledge: museum walk and reflections Opening teacher stmt: Today we are going to reflect and learn a pose.	Prior Knowledge: tree pose Opening teacher stmt: Today we are going to spend time meditating.
Teach	WK 2 Monday Teaching Summary	WK 2 Tuesday Teaching Summary	WK 2 Wednesday Teaching Summary	WK 2 Thursday Teaching Summary	WK 2 Friday Teaching Summary
Model/Think Aloud	WK 2 Monday Modeling and Think Aloud	WK 2 Tuesday Modeling and Think Aloud	WK 2 Wednesday Modeling and Think Aloud	WK 2 Thursday Modeling and Think Aloud	WK 2 Friday Modeling and Think Aloud
Active Involvement	Creating posters	Creating posters	Creating posters	Reflecting and doing yoga	Meditating
Share at end of class	Questions?	Questions?	Students complete a museum walk.	What is your favorite pose and why? Oral discussion.	What is something you've learned?

Week 3 Overview

*Students will build upon yoga and breathing strategies they learned last week. Students will begin self-selecting poses that they prefer and will discuss why they like those particular poses. Optional: Include 5 minutes at the end of each lesson for students to reflect in journals about how they feel.

Standards Addressed

- 3.5.2.1 Describe the challenge and personal enjoyment that comes from learning a new physical activity
- 3.5.1.1 Recognize how the body and mind respond during and after physical activity participation.

Measurable Objectives

- I can practice a variety of yoga poses quietly while focusing on my breathing.
- I can independently select yoga strategies that help me.
- I can practice quietly meditating.

Week 3	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Time needed	10 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes
Activate Prior Student Knowledge Begin class with this statement	Prior Knowledge: poses and reflections Opening teacher stmt: Today we are going to focus on how yoga makes us feel.	Prior Knowledge: yoga feelings chat Opening teacher stmt: Today we are going to continue our yoga journey.	Prior Knowledge: yoga and meditation Opening teacher stmt: Today we are going to discuss yoga challenges we might face.	Prior Knowledge: What stuck with you? Opening teacher stmt: Today, we're going to have fun with yoga!	Prior Knowledge: cat/cow and favorite yoga time Opening teacher stmt: Yesterday you had some time to do preferred yoga with music.
Teach	WK 3 Monday Teaching Summary	WK 3 Tuesday Teaching Summary	WK 3 Wednesday Teaching Summary	WK 3 Thursday Teaching Summary	WK 3 Friday Teaching Summary
Model/Think Aloud	WK 3 Monday Modeling and Think Aloud	WK 3 Tuesday Modeling and Think Aloud	WK 3 Wednesday Modeling and Think Aloud	WK 3 Thursday Modeling and Think Aloud	WK 3 Friday Modeling and Think Aloud
Active Involvement	Yoga choice and meditation	New yoga poses and meditation	Yoga choice and child's pose	New <u>poses</u> , yoga choice and child's pose	Partner work
Share at end of class	My goal for you is for you to use a yoga strategy sometime today or tomorrow and be ready to share tomorrow.	Quick check in. On a post-it write down your Name, Favorite yoga pose/s, and when would be a good time to try a pose.	What are your favorite things that we do in yoga? Write them down on a post-it and put them on the "What stuck with you" board.	What makes you feel more calm: yoga or meditation? Turn and talk and then share what your partner said.	Why is it important for you to know which yoga poses are your favorite? Turn and talk, then share.

Week 4 Overview

Students will complete a stressful situations activity. They will also complete 2 post-assessments. Teachers should go through the “[Anxious Behaviors Checklist](#)” following the completion of this yoga curriculum.. Optional: Include 5 minutes at the end of each lesson for reflection.

Standards Addressed

- 3.5.2.1 Describe the challenge and personal enjoyment that comes from learning a new physical activity
- 3.5.1.1 Recognize how the body and mind respond during and after physical activity participation.

Measurable Objectives

- I can practice a variety of yoga poses quietly while focusing on my breathing.
- I can independently select yoga strategies that help me.
- I can complete a stressful situations activity and discuss with a partner what I can do when I feel stressed.

Week 4	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Time needed	10 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes
Activate Prior Student Knowledge Begin class with this statement	Prior Knowledge: favorite poses and reflections Opening teacher stmt: Today we are going to practice what to do when we feel stress.	Prior Knowledge: Activity yesterday. Opening teacher stmt: Today we will finish the stress activity.	Prior Knowledge: did pre-assessment questionnaire Opening teacher stmt: You have learned so much about yoga, meditation and yourselves!	Prior Knowledge: did stressful situations pre-assessment Opening teacher stmt: You have learned so many strategies to help you when you are stressed!	Prior Knowledge: previous lessons Opening teacher stmt:
Teach	WK 4 Monday Teaching Summary	WK 4 Tuesday Teaching Summary	WK 4 Wednesday Teaching Summary.	WK 4 Thursday Teaching Summary	WK 4 Friday Teaching Summary
Model/Think Aloud	WK 4 Monday Modeling and Think Aloud	WK 4 Tuesday Modeling and Think Aloud	WK 4 Wednesday Modeling and Think Aloud	WK 4 Thursday Modeling and Think Aloud	WK 4 Friday Modeling and Think Aloud
Active Involvement	Stressful situations activity and meditation	Stressful situations activity and meditation.	Questionnaire and yoga/meditation choice.	Stressed strategies assessment and yoga/meditation choice.	Students take turns leading activities.
Share at end of class	How did you feel during the activity? How do you feel now?	What have you learned from the activity?	Share responses from turn and talk.	What are strategies that you think you'll continue to do?	Celebration with treats!

