

25 Reasons Why Yoga, Speech and Language Go Together

By Christine Ristuccia, M.S. CCC-SLP, RYT

Yoga is a wonderful medium that combines physically calming exercises while opening a channel for better learning and retention. A centuries-old practice, yoga is increasingly being recognized and popularized for its health benefits. Less established are the significant benefits for mental health and the concomitant impact on learning. Yogic practice not only strengthens and flexes our bodies; it uplifts your mood, reinforces natural kinetic learning, brings clarity to make better decisions, and increases language reception and retention. This ideal combination leads to calmer and smarter kids.

Yogic techniques, specifically the purposeful breathing aligned with physical movement, are simple and easy to implement in an educational setting to better achieve educational goals. Bringing yoga into school does not need to entail a complete, hour-long class adults typically attend. Nor should it be one more thing to add to our ever-expanding to-do list of never-to-get-done items. Rather yoga is a tool to be used during transitions, breaks or as facilitators of active learning to enrich and enhance the overall learning experience. Yoga is inexpensive and easy to learn. As educators, we need to be attuned to new ideas and methods that can benefit our children.

Here are 25 reasons to consider using yoga in your clinic or school:

1. Yogic techniques, with real benefits, can be accomplished in as little as one minute.
2. Yogic breathing promotes self-control including impulse control and behavior stability.
3. Yoga emphasizes good health and fitness, which sets children up for a lifetime of healthy living.
4. Yoga is totally inclusive. Everyone participates all of the time—there are no choosing sides, sitting on the sidelines or waiting for a turn.
5. As kinetic movement, yoga can aid in developing decoding skills, fluency, vocabulary, syntactic knowledge, discourse knowledge and metacognition.[i]

6. Yoga, as a teaching medium through movement, gives children a context for listening and meaningful language production.
7. Yoga improves fine and gross motor coordination.
8. Since there is an established link between fine and gross motor delay and linguistic ability improving motor skills, through an activity such as yoga, you can positively impact concomitant development of both motor and language-linguistic skills.[ii] [iii]
9. Yoga is motivating because it is non-competitive, without public displays of skill (i.e., hitting a baseball) and achievement is individualized, thus leading to increased confidence and social acceptance. Children who are shy, lack in social skills and are perhaps frustrated with competitive sports because their motor skills are not on par with peers may benefit the most.
10. By using the body as a kinesthetic medium, yoga facilitates learning spatial and oppositional concepts, such as under/over, left/right, below/above, etc. [RG1]
11. The parasympathetic nervous system, which is essential to relaxing, de-stressing and good health, is activated by yogic movement and breathing.
12. Yoga teaches students the tools to “turn off” our hyper-connected, hyperactive world and fortify themselves from the constant bombardment of an over-scheduled, over-tested, and media-manic lifestyle.
13. Yoga fosters mental discipline, which results in an uplifted and positive mental outlook.
14. Knowledge, processed and stored temporarily in the hippocampus (with limited space), is re-filed by the brain during rest periods into longer-term storage areas. Yoga aids in retention by allowing deep rest periods that can allow for this integration.
15. Yoga is tactile/kinesthetic learning; the most basic child-centric learning style.
16. Yoga will make your students more attentive and ready to learn. As a

quick energizer, even one yoga pose done with purposeful breathing for just one minute will oxygenate the blood and lift the energy level of your students.

17. The bodily movements that yoga engages lends itself to stimulating conversational interaction that touch on a host of language-linguistic goals. “Where is your left foot?” flexes body parts, spatial concepts and interrogatory responses. “Place your feet parallel on the mat,” includes math, vocabulary, body part and following directions.

18. Yoga is anti-sedentary. It is the antidote to sitting at a desk. Many children, especially those with sensory integration issues, cannot sit still. It’s not a behavior or compliance issue; it’s that his or her body needs to move to make sense of environmental stimulus. Yogic movements are a great way to channel natural sensory-motor energy into a positive activity.

19. Yoga is one of the best activities for grounding and centering children. Grounded children are ready to learn with less behavior problems. Children that are nervous, anxious, aggressive, fearful or socially-challenged may especially benefit from yoga.

20. The cerebellum coordinates both sensory movement and processes language cognition. This intersection is where movement (yoga) harmonizes with language acquisition and retention.

21. Just being in a state of more awareness (focus), attained during yogic exercises, stimulates brain activity and thus reception.

22. Being an ancient practice, specific yogic movements have been refined over time toward known positive effects on a range of emotions, including improving creativity, compassion, tolerance, communication and reasoning.

23. Physically acting out stories using yoga movements (children especially like all the animal possibilities: cat, cow, dog, elephant, etc.) provide students with a variety of contextualized and scaffolded activities that gradually involve more oral language and active participation that are non-threatening and a lot of fun. [iv]

24. Yoga keeps the nervous system elastic and capable of bearing stress.

25. Bodily awareness is increased when one does yogic exercises, improving posture and breathing which are essential foundations for oral speech.

- [i] Sun, P.Y. (2003). Using drama and theatre to promote literacy development: Some basic classroom applications. ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English and Communication. Retrieved on April, 4, 2010 from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED477613>
- [ii] Murata, N. M. (2001). Speech language strategies for physical educators. The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance. Retrieved on March 18, 2009 from <http://www.questia.com/reader/printPaginator/260>.
- [iii] Sommers, R. K. (1988). Prediction of fine motor skills of children having language and speech disorders. Perceptual & Motor Skills, 67, 63-72.
- [iv] Reig, S. A. and Paquette, K. R. (2009). Using drama and movement to enhance English language learners' literacy development. Journal of Instructional Psychology. Retrieved January 22, 2010 from HighBeam Research: <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-88248041.html>
- Christine Ristuccia is the founder and president of Say It Right™. (www.sayitright.org) and the author of many books including the award winning /r/ remediation program **The Entire World of R™**. She is a certified yoga instructor with over 500 hours of training.