

**From Restless to Ready:
Using Yoga and Mindfulness to Support
Self-Regulation in the Elementary Classroom**

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Chapter 1: Philosophy of Education

Section 1 - A personal educational history and its influence on my study of yoga for student self-regulation in the K-12 classroom.

I attended K–12 school in an affluent suburb of Chicago, where nearly all students came from a culturally similar demographic. The material resources were abundant, but the atmosphere was academically competitive and socially stratified. Although I was identified as Gifted and Talented and attended a monthly enrichment class, this experience was disconnected from my everyday learning and rarely integrated into meaningful growth. Academically, I performed well, but emotionally, I felt invisible.

I grew up in an upper-middle-class suburban primary school system, experienced years of disengagement, eventually discovered community-based service work, and returned to education later in life. This has shaped both my philosophy of teaching and my interest in yoga in the classroom. Although I benefited from privilege in terms of resources, course offerings, and safety in my initial educational experiences, I did not experience inclusion, emotional support, or tools for managing stress and attention. I often felt invisible, without language or strategies to regulate my internal world. Later experiences in community engagement and teaching in nontraditional contexts showed me how essential it is for students to have practices that help them feel grounded, capable, and present in their own learning. Yoga, when implemented thoughtfully and inclusively, can offer students accessible methods for developing self-regulation, agency and a greater sense of belonging. These were precisely the elements that were missing from my own K–12 education.

In high school, the pressure intensified. With more than 3,000 students, academic tracking, and a heavy emphasis on Advanced Placement courses, the environment rewarded high performance but not creativity, reflectiveness, or individuality. I was interested in the arts and writing, yet those passions were dismissed as impractical by my family. I remember only one teacher—a speech coach—who encouraged my creative thinking, but my shyness prevented me from pursuing opportunities that might have developed my confidence.

The result of this environment was disengagement. Schoolwork came easily, but it did not feel meaningful or connected to who I was. When I reached college, that lack of engagement escalated into academic uncertainty. I changed majors multiple times and eventually dropped out. Only years later, after real-world experiences, did I rediscover learning as something empowering rather than intimidating.

Fifteen years passed before I returned to higher education. During that time, I volunteered with AmeriCorps, served a rural community in Montana, and discovered the transformative power of grassroots engagement. Teaching computer skills to children and adults, hosting community nights, and collaborating with families opened my eyes to the impact of connection and collective investment.

At the same time, my long-standing practice of martial arts and later yoga gave me a new relationship to teaching—one rooted not in hierarchy, but in shared experience, mutual growth, and joy. I became a certified yoga teacher in 2014, and a certified children's yoga teacher in 2015. In addition to the benefits I gained from practicing yoga, I found teaching yoga to be the most empowering, selfless, enjoyable thing I've ever experienced. I found that when I taught something I genuinely loved, my lifelong shyness dissolved. Teaching became less about

performance and more about service. I felt part of something larger than myself, a conduit for knowledge rather than the center of attention.

These experiences reshaped my understanding of education. I began to value relational learning, collective growth, and the empowerment of students and communities. Ultimately, these values drew me back to college to pursue a degree in the arts—a path I had once been told was “impractical,” but which had always felt authentic to me.

My educational philosophy has been deeply influenced by Paulo Freire and bell hooks, two thinkers who articulate the connection between learning, justice, and humanization. Freire’s call for *conscientização*, or critical consciousness, resonates with my desire to create classrooms where students are supported in becoming aware of their emotions, bodies, communities and responses to the world. This is an awareness that yoga can help nurture. Similarly, hooks’ belief that education can be a place of joy, love, and self-actualization reinforces my commitment to cultivating spaces where students feel grounded, safe, and empowered. Integrating yoga into K-12 learning environments extends these ideals by offering students accessible tools for self-regulation, emotional resilience, and holistic well-being, strengthening both their capacity to learn and their sense of agency.

I want my classroom to be a place where students bring their full selves, where their cultural and personal identities matter, and where learning is collaborative rather than top-down. My experiences in martial arts and yoga have also shaped my thinking. Teaching in these contexts taught me to move beyond fear and become deeply present with learners. In yoga, especially, I have learned to cultivate what hooks refers to as a “love ethic”: a commitment to compassion, community, and justice. Bringing yoga into K-12 classrooms allows me to extend this ethic to

my students by offering them tools for grounding, self-regulation, and mutual care, creating a learning environment where every student is seen, supported, and empowered.

Given my early educational experiences of high achievement but low engagement, access to resources but limited voice, I feel it is natural that I am drawn to approaches that decentralize teacher authority and support students in cultivating inner agency. Yoga in the K-12 classroom aligns directly with my values for several reasons. Classroom-based yoga counters student invisibility by helping learners connect with their bodies, emotions and needs; it nurtures critical consciousness through awareness of how stress and environment shape behavior; and it supports radical love by promoting compassion, mutual care, and shared responsibility. Instead of relying solely on external evaluations or compliance-driven classroom norms, yoga invites students to develop internal sources of regulation, resilience, and empowerment, skills that are especially vital for those who rarely feel seen in traditional academic structures.

As a child, I often felt disconnected from my learning environment, lacking both emotional tools and opportunities to express myself authentically. Yoga offers students what I did not have: consistent practices that help them notice their feelings, regulate their nervous systems, and experience themselves as valued contributors to a learning community. Through breathing techniques, mindfulness, and proprioception (awareness of personal physical form), students engage in meaningful reflection and become more attuned to their learning process. These practices honor students' experiences and strengthen their capacity to respond rather than react, both in the classroom and in the rest of their lives.

Drawing from Freire, yoga supports the development of critical awareness by helping students recognize the internal and external pressures that shape their behavior and attention.

This embodied awareness allows them to question and reimagine their relationship to learning. hooks' vision of education as a practice of freedom is actualized when students cultivate presence, compassion, and courage. Yoga requires listening, reflection, respect for oneself and others, and a commitment to community wellbeing. These qualities were missing from the competitive, isolating environment of my own schooling.

Yoga also mirrors the most transformative learning experiences I had outside of traditional classrooms. Martial arts, yoga, AmeriCorps, and community teaching, were the environments where I felt most alive. These experiences taught me that meaningful learning emerges from presence, mutual support, and embodied practice. Bringing yoga into K-12 classrooms allows me to recreate these conditions for my students, offering them holistic tools that nurture both person wellbeing and collaborative learning.

My path to teaching has not been linear. It moved through disengaged schooling, artistic longing, community service, martial arts, yoga, and a return to college grounded in authenticity rather than obligation. Because of these experiences, I want to create classrooms where students participate fully, support one another, and engage in meaningful reflection. Studying yoga in the K-12 classroom is, for me, both personal and pedagogical. It represents the kind of education I wish I had experienced—one where students are not invisible, where their inner lives matter, and where learning is a shared, joyful, transformative act.

Section 2 - Pedagogical Theories Supporting Yoga in the K-12 Classroom: Embodied Learning Theory, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Humanistic Education and Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

Students learn best when they can develop awareness of their bodies, emotions and thinking processes. Yoga in the K-12 classroom draws from multiple pedagogical theories that view learning as a holistic, embodied, and socially situated process. Embodied Learning Theory, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Humanistic Education and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are theories that all illustrate why yoga is an effective practice for cultivating student self-regulation and supporting whole-child development. Together, these theories suggest that learning is enhanced when students are emotionally regulated, physically engaged, and able to participate as their full selves.

Embodied Learning Theory states that cognition does not occur solely in the mind; rather, it arises through the interaction between the body, the environment, and lived experiences. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) argued that perception is the foundation of understanding; that the body is central, not peripheral, to how humans interpret and engage with the world. Contemporary scholars such as Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991), Shapiro and Stolz (2019), and Barbour (2016) support and expand upon this view, emphasizing that movement, sensation, and breath significantly shape attention, emotional regulation and cognition.

Embodied Learning Theory proposes that cognition does not occur solely in the mind but emerges through interactions among the body, environment, and lived experiences. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) argued that perception is the foundation of understanding and that the body is central to how humans interpret and engage with the world. Contemporary scholars such as Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991), Shapiro and Stolz (2019), and Barbour (2016) further emphasize that movement, sensation, and breath significantly influence attention, emotional

regulation, and cognition. Yoga aligns closely with embodied learning because it brings students into intentional awareness of posture, breathing and internal sensation. Through these practices, students learn to recognize stress, distraction and emotional states while developing tools to regulate their responses through movement and breath. This mind-body awareness supports both academic engagement and emotional resilience.

Elliot Eisner's work on art-based cognition further reinforces the educational value of embodied learning. Eisner (2002, 2005) argued that artistic and physical practices cultivate forms of intelligence often overlooked in traditional academic models. He described the body as an instrument of perception and expression, suggesting that sensory awareness, nuance, and attentiveness are essential components of cognition. Yoga, like the arts, develops these capacities by strengthening students' ability to feel, notice, and interpret their internal awareness. Yoga integrates embodied presence with reflective practices, which reflects Eisner's belief that education should engage multiple modalities of knowing, not just linguistic or mathematical.

The educational value of yoga can also be understood through Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020), SEL supports the development of five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Yoga practices, such as mindful breathing, grounding exercises, and guided relaxation, directly strengthen self-awareness and self-management, the competencies most closely linked to emotional regulation and attention. Mira Binzen, founder of Global Family Yoga, says that through yoga children can develop self-awareness, self-control, and self-mastery. Research in child development and educational psychology further demonstrates that mindfulness and yoga interventions improve executive functioning, reduce stress, and increase students' ability to focus

and persist through challenging tasks (Maloney, 2016; Butzer et al., 2017). For students who struggle with emotional regulation or carry stress into the classroom, yoga provides accessible strategies for calming the nervous system and restoring readiness to learn. When practiced collectively, yoga also supports empathy and relationship skills, reinforcing a positive classroom environment.

Humanistic Education provides another lens through which to understand the benefits of yoga in schools. Carl Rogers (1969) argues that students thrive when teachers demonstrate empathy, authenticity and unconditional positive regard, while Maslow (1968) emphasized that learning flourishes when students' needs for safety, belonging, and esteem are met. Yoga supports these principles by cultivating emotional awareness, personal agency, and self-compassion. Students are encouraged to notice their experiences without judgment and to develop confidence in their ability to regulate their emotions and responses. These practices reflect Nel Noddings' (2005) ethic of care, which places relationships, presence, and compassion as central to education. For students who may feel disconnected or unseen in traditional learning environments, yoga can provide affirmation, grounding, and a stronger sense of belonging. These ideas also reflect bell hooks' (1994, 2000) vision of education as a practice of freedom, love, and community.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework for creating classrooms that accommodate diverse learners through flexible pathways for engagement and expression (CAST, 2018; Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2014). Yoga supports UDL in two important ways. First, it enhances students' readiness to learn by regulating emotional and physiological states. A regulated student is more capable of engaging with multiple forms of instruction and expressing understanding in varied ways. Second, yoga itself can be adapted for accessibility. Movements

can be seated or standing, breathwork is extremely individualized, and meditation and relaxation are universally accessible because they are a personal experience for each student. Yoga allows students to participate more fully in the flexible, student-centered learning environment that UDL supports, because yoga supports self-regulation. Whether a student needs calming strategies before a task or energizing movement before group work, yoga offers tools that help meet learners where they are.

Yoga in the K-12 classroom is a powerful tool where multiple pedagogical theories intersect in meaningful and mutually reinforcing ways. Each framework emphasizes different dimensions of the student, yet together they create a holistic, centered and developmentally supportive foundation for integrating mindful movement and breathwork into everyday instruction. When considered together, these theoretical frameworks (UDL, SEL, Embodied Learning and Humanistic Education) support how yoga functions as more than a wellness elective. Yoga can be a pedagogical tool linking emotional development, humanizing relationships, and embodied cognition. From a humanistic perspective, yoga reinforces the dignity and agency of students, nurturing an environment where they can show up as their full selves. Through the lens of embodied learning, yoga deepens students' awareness of the mind-body connection, helping them develop attention skills and reflective habits that enhance both academic and personal growth. These pedagogical theories support yoga as a transformative classroom practice. Yoga aligns with justice-centered theories like those of Freire and hooks. Yoga offers educators a robust, research-supported rationale for using mindfulness practices to cultivate self-regulation, presence and holistic learning in K-12 classrooms.

Section 3 - Teaching Goals and INTASC Standards

As an educator influenced by Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Social Emotional Learning pedagogies, my teaching goals revolve around creating classrooms that support self-regulation, critical awareness, belonging, and whole-child development. Integrating yoga into K-12 learning environments is not simply an enrichment activity, it is a pedagogical strategy that aligns with my values and strengthens my ability to meet diverse student needs. Yoga offers practical tools for improving attention, emotional regulation, and community-building, which together create the conditions for deeper academic engagement and humanizing learning experiences.

One of my primary goals as a teacher is to help students develop the skills needed to manage emotions, sustain attention, and transition effectively between learning tasks. Many students arrive at school dysregulated due to stress, sensory overload, or emotional challenges. By incorporating brief yoga practices—such as breathing exercises, grounding movements, or mindful meditation, I hope to give students tools for calming their nervous systems and preparing their bodies and minds for learning. This directly supports their academic focus, executive functioning, and capacity to take on challenging tasks.

I hope to build a classroom with an inclusive and equitable learning environment. I believe that every student deserves access to curricula, materials, and experiences that honor their needs and identities. Yoga can be adapted for diverse physical abilities, cultural contexts, and sensory preferences, reinforcing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. Yoga also communicates a message of care and belonging, helping to build classroom climates where students feel safe, accepted, and valued as whole people. As a teacher, I aim to help students strengthen self-awareness, empathy, emotional vocabulary, and relationship skills. These capacities shape not only academic success, but lifelong wellbeing. Yoga contributes to SEL by

creating structured opportunities for students to notice their internal and external states, regulate emotions, practice kindness to self and others, and build awareness of how their actions affect others. These skills are especially important in collaborative and creative classrooms, where interpersonal relationships shape learning.

I hope students will be able to engage their senses, bodies, intuition, and imagination, not just their intellect. Yoga encourages students to listen deeply to their bodies, observe their thoughts and subtle sensations, and integrate physical awareness into their learning processes. Students can expand their connection between movement, perception and cognition. Like Freire and hooks, I believe education should empower students to understand themselves and the systems shaping their experiences. Yoga supports this goal by inviting students to develop self-knowledge, cultivate inner stillness, and recognize their ownership in managing their stress and emotions. When students feel grounded and empowered, they are more capable of engaging in critical thinking and collaborative problem solving. Yoga is part of a grander pedagogical commitment to nurturing students' humanity and dignity.

Integrating yoga in the classroom supports multiple Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards, reinforcing high-quality teaching practices. Yoga helps teachers support cognitive, social, emotional and physical development by giving students tools to regulate emotion, manage stress, and maintain attention. These practices support the INTASC Standard 1: Learner Development. Yoga aligns with Standard 2: Learning Differences, by offering adaptable practices for diverse learning needs, cultural backgrounds, developmental levels, and physical abilities. Yoga routines are easily modified to ensure equitable access and participation. Yoga supports Standard 3: Learning Environments, by creating safe, collaborative, productive classroom environments, by reducing stress, enhancing emotional regulation, and

strengthening community bonds. Yoga contributes to a climate of respect, calm, and positive social interaction.

Yoga prepares students for deeper content engagement by improving their readiness to learn, supporting INTASC Standard 5: Application of Content. Teachers who incorporate yoga in their classrooms model reflective practice and ethical responsibility by attending to students' entire wellbeing. Mindful movement and breathwork are a commitment to caring, developmentally informed pedagogy (INTASC Standard 9: Professional Learning and Ethical Practice).

Section 4 Summary

From an upper-middle-class suburban public school system to years of disengagement, community service, and a return to higher education, my educational history has shaped my teaching philosophy and interest in yoga in the classroom. Despite access to resources and high academic achievement, I often felt invisible, lacking emotional support and strategies for managing stress and attention. Later experiences in community engagement, martial arts, and yoga taught me the importance of practices that help individuals feel grounded, capable, and present. Teaching yoga revealed the power of shared experience, mutual growth, and joy, influencing my commitment to relational and humanizing education.

I hope to create classrooms where students are aware of their emotions, bodies, and communities, and where learning is collaborative and empowering. Yoga supports these ideals by offering students practical tools for self-regulation, emotional resilience, and holistic wellbeing. Through mindfulness, breathwork, and proprioception, students learn to notice their feelings, regulate their nervous systems, and engage as active contributors to a learning

community. These practices foster critical consciousness, compassion, and mutual care, addressing gaps I experienced in traditional academic environments.

Pedagogically, yoga in K–12 classrooms is grounded in Embodied Learning Theory, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Humanistic Education, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Embodied learning emphasizes the role of the body in cognition and attention, supported by Eisner’s work on sensory and aesthetic intelligence. SEL frameworks develop self-awareness, self-management, and social skills, while humanistic approaches stress empathy, autonomy, and emotional growth. UDL principles highlight the accessibility and adaptability of yoga, allowing diverse learners to participate meaningfully and regulating their readiness to learn.

My teaching goals reflect these theoretical commitments: helping students manage emotions, sustain attention, and engage in collaborative, reflective learning; fostering inclusive, supportive, and equitable classroom climates; and encouraging students to engage their full selves, body, mind, and spirit, in learning. Yoga supports these goals while aligning with multiple INTASC standards. By integrating yoga into classrooms, I hope to provide students with tools for self-regulation, presence, and agency, cultivating both academic success and holistic well-being.

Chapter 2: Reviews of Relevant Research and Scholarship

In this bibliography, I examine a range of empirical studies and scholarly reviews that explore the effects of school-based yoga and mindfulness interventions on students' social-emotional development, mental health, attention, and overall well-being. The selected sources span elementary through high school populations, and include randomized controlled trials, systematic reviews, qualitative studies, and mixed-methods research. These works investigate outcomes such as self-regulation, stress reduction, mood improvement, cognitive functioning, attention, and pro-social behavior. The purpose of this bibliography is to inform my action research interests in integrating yoga and mindfulness practices into classroom environments, particularly within arts-based education. I am to better understand both the measurable impacts and practical considerations of implementing yoga in schools.

1. Bazzano, A. N., Anderson, C. E., Hylton, C., & Gustat, J. (2018). Effect of mindfulness and yoga on quality of life for elementary school students and teachers: results of a randomized controlled school-based study. *Psychology research and behavior management, 11*, 81–89. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S157503>

This study looked at third-grade students receiving small-group yoga and mindfulness for 8 weeks. A randomized controlled trial was utilized to assess the impact of a brief intervention on third-grade students who screened positive for symptoms of anxiety.

Students were randomized to an intervention group and received small-group yoga/mindfulness activities over 8 weeks, while a control group received care as usual.

This study used a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) framework, and biostatistical analysis using Pearson's chi-square tests and Fisher's exact test. An RCT compares two groups: one that receives an intervention, and one that does not, and participants are

randomly assigned to each group to reduce bias. Biostatistical analyses use statistical methods to collect, analyze, and interpret data related to biology, health, psychology, or human behavior. Compared to control, intervention students showed a significant increase in emotional and psychosocial quality-of-life scores. This article was useful for my research because it demonstrates that a yoga-based intervention in an educational setting can improve emotional and psychological well-being among students.

2. Childress, T., Cohen Harper, J., Flesher, A., Gonzalez, A., Hyde, A., Kinder, W. (2015). *Best Practices for Yoga in Schools* (Volume 1). Yoga Service Council -Omega Publications. A guide for yoga teachers, classroom teachers, school administrators, social workers, and anyone else interested in bringing yoga to children safely, in a just and inclusive way. This book compiles research from a wide variety of topics, to effectively and sustainably offer high-quality yoga programming for all children. This book includes research and recommendations about culture and communication within the schools, curriculum best practices, trauma informed practices, working with children with disabilities, inclusivity, and specific best practices within different schools and age levels. This book also has an excellent summary of the benefits of yoga programs on children and the efficacy of school-based contemplative practice programs.
3. Felver, J. C., Butzer, B., Olson, K. J., Smith, I. M., & Khalsa, S. B. (2015). Yoga in public school improves adolescent mood and affect. *Contemporary school psychology*, 19(3), 184–192. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-014-0031-9>
The purpose of this study was to directly compare the effects of participating in a single yoga class versus a single standard physical education (PE) class on student mood. Forty-seven high school students completed self-report questionnaires assessing mood and affect

immediately before and after participating in a single yoga class and a single PE class. This study was a Random Controlled Trial (RCT); data were analyzed using paired-sample t tests and Wilcoxon-signed ranks tests and by comparing effect sizes between the two conditions. Participants reported significantly greater decreases in anger, depression, and fatigue from before to after participating in yoga compared to PE. Significant reductions in negative affect occurred after yoga but not after PE. In addition, after participating in both yoga and PE, participants reported significant decreases in confusion and tension, with no significant difference between groups. Results suggest that school-based yoga may provide unique benefits for students above and beyond participation in PE. The authors concluded that future research should continue to explain the distinct psychological and physiological effects of participating in yoga compared to PE activities. The weaknesses of this study were the limited sample size and scope of data. The authors themselves admit that future research with long-term measurement periods, and broader assessment of psychosocial and educational outcomes is needed.

4. Frank, J. L., Bose, B., & Schrobenauser-Clonan, A. (2014). Effectiveness of a School-Based Yoga Program on Adolescent Mental Health, Stress Coping Strategies, and Attitudes Toward Violence: Findings From a High-Risk Sample. *Journal of Applied School*

Psychology, 30(1), 29–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377903.2013.863259>

This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of a universal yoga-based social-emotional wellness promotion program, Transformative Life Skills, on indicators of adolescent emotional distress, prosocial behavior, and attitudes toward violence in a high-risk sample. Participants included 49 students attending an alternative education school in an urban inner-city school district. These students were recommended by faculty because of

concerns regarding risk factors for academic failure including poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, repeated suspension, or expulsion. Students self-assessed pre- and post-program using the Affect Valence Scale. Results indicated that students who participated in the Transformative Life Skills program demonstrated significant reductions in anxiety, depression, and psychological distress. Students exposed to Transformative Life Skills reported being significantly less likely to endorse revenge-motivation in response to interpersonal transgressions and reported overall less hostility than did students in the comparison condition. I appreciate that the authors of the study indicated that reliance on youth self-report for outcome measures is a methodological limitation. They suggest that supporting evidence from a teacher or parent would be important for future research.

5. Kaur, M., Eigsti, I. M., & Bhat, A. (2021). Effects of a creative yoga intervention on the joint attention and social communication skills, as well as affective states of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Research in autism spectrum disorders*, 88, 101860.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2021.101860>

This study evaluated the impact of a creative yoga intervention on the joint attention and social communication skills of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). 24 school-aged children with ASD received eight weeks of yoga (breathing, poses, relaxation), or play/academic intervention (reading, arts and crafts, building activities). Children were assessed with a Joint Attention Test (JTAT), pre- and post- intervention. Children with ASD showed improvements in responsive joint attention in both groups in the posttest vs. the pretest. Furthermore, children in the yoga group showed improvements in socially directed verbal communication skills across the intervention sessions, such as greater spontaneous and responsive communication from early/mid to late intervention sessions

compared to the academic group. The yoga group showed greater interest and less negative affect compared to the academic group. This study was very detailed and presented excellent specifics about methods and analyses. I have always been interested in yoga for children with special needs and would love to be able to offer yoga to a group of students with diverse special education needs. I was especially interested in the methods for this study, which listed specific side-by-side lesson plans with the control group.

6. Khunti, K., Boniface, S., Norris, E., De Oliveira, C. M., & Nicola Shelton (2023). The effects of yoga on mental health in school-aged children: A Systematic Review and Narrative Synthesis of Randomised Control Trials. *Clinical child psychology and psychiatry*, 28(3), 1217–1238. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13591045221136016>

This is a systematic review summarizing the results of 21 research papers about Random Controlled Trials (RCTs) measuring the effects of school-based yoga on mental health, self-esteem, anxiety/stress, and overall psychological well-being for children and adolescents. The quality of each study was rated against Version 2 of the Cochrane risk-of-bias tool for randomized control trials and a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria: primary and secondary school children aged 5-16; school-based yoga intervention measuring the effects of yoga on mental health; randomized control trials (RCTs). The findings compiled were complex. Findings concluded that yoga intervention in schools improves common mental health problems (anger, self-regulation, body awareness), anxiety and stress, depression, and self-esteem. This article is a fascinating summary of school-based yoga interventions and includes an excellent table (Table 2) comparing the sample, intervention, control group, duration, evaluation, outcome, findings and potential bias in each study. A rabbit hole indeed!

7. Martin, B., Peck, B., & Terry, D. (2024). Yoga in schools contributes to a positive classroom atmosphere for young children and educators: a PRISMA scoping review. *Sec Educational Psychology*, Volume 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1352780>

This article is another review of studies involving children (ages ~3–10) in school settings measuring the effects of yoga practices on improved psychological well-being, self-regulation, self-awareness/self-esteem, and social-emotional outcomes. This review found an initial 630 *potentially relevant publications*, screened and removed duplicates and narrowed their review to 14 studies that took place in the U.S., India, Germany, and Columbia. Textual data extraction was undertaken according to best practice principles, and as data were extracted, findings were grouped into similar categories: psychological wellbeing in school children, yoga and self-regulation in school children, yoga and cognitive function in school children, and yoga and contemplative practices. Psychological wellbeing was the target of social emotional learning (SEL) goals, and yoga was found to be a powerful and immediately available practice to support students and the entire school community. The findings on self-regulation linked the balancing postures of yoga to the competencies of self-management and self-discipline, as children take responsibility for their own behavior. The third theme of cognitive function found that yoga supported children' positive feelings about themselves. The final theme, yoga and contemplative practices confirms that yoga can support concentration through breathing and relaxation, and emotional intelligence through self-regulation. This article is a wealth of information about yoga practices in schools, and includes another detailed, fascinating table of information about the 14 studies examined.

8. Rashedi, R. N., Rowe, S. E., Thompson, R. A., Solari, E. J., & Schonert-Reichl, K. A. (2021). A Yoga Intervention for Young Children: Self-Regulation and Emotion Regulation.

Journal of child and family studies, 30(8), 2028–2041. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-021-01992-6>

The effects of an eight-week yoga intervention on economically disadvantaged pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children's self-regulation and emotion regulation were examined via a comparison study. Nine classrooms were assigned to the yoga intervention or a wait-list control group. All children were assessed at pre-intervention and post-intervention. Children were assessed using *The Preschool Self-Regulation Assessment* (PSRA; Smith-Donald et al., 2007) and the *Head Toes Knees Shoulders Task* (HTKS; Ponitz et al., 2009) and teacher ratings on the *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* (SDQ, Bourdon et al., 2005). Children demonstrated significant gains on behavioral task of self-regulation and declines in teacher-rated total behavior problems. I found the methods of assessment particularly interesting in this study, as well as the components of yoga intervention, specifically the intensity of intervention, up to six times per week per class.

9. Salmoirago-Blotcher, E., Druker, S., Meleo-Meyer, F., Frisard, C., Crawford, S., Pbert, L. (2019). Beneficial effects of school-based mindfulness training on impulsivity in healthy adolescents: results from a pilot randomized trial. *EXPLORE*, volume 15 (issue 2), 160-164, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.explore.2018.07.003>.

This study seeks to obtain estimates of the effect of mindfulness training (MT) in standard high school health education on impulsivity in adolescents. Impulsivity is associated with unhealthy behaviors in adolescents, and interventions targeting impulsivity could positively affect such behaviors. Two high schools in Massachusetts were randomized to school-based health education plus MT (HE-MT) or to health education plus attention control (HE-AC). The outcome was a change in impulsivity at end of treatment (EOT) and 6 months after EOT.

Students exposed to HE-MT had significant effects on impulsivity at EOT. The study is a randomized controlled trial (RCT), which uses empiricism to measure outcomes with psychological/behavioral scales or standardized measures. This study suggests that mindfulness training could have a beneficial effect on impulsivity in adolescents. This study could provide a good methodological model for how I could structure and evaluate a classroom-based yoga or mindfulness intervention in a high school classroom. The specific practices used with students as well as the assessment tools in this study would be a helpful launching point for my own program.

10. Sanchez, B., Allen, D. & Delgado, J. Positive Psychological Effects of School-Based Yoga and Mindfulness Programs for At-Risk Hispanic Adolescents. *Contemp School Psychol* 27, 118–135 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-022-00427-3>

This study investigates the impact of school-based yoga interventions and mindfulness practices on psychological well-being in at-risk Hispanic adolescent high school students compared to similar students enrolled in traditional physical education classes. Participants were selected using convenience sampling at a high school in South Texas. 56 adolescents were in the yoga class and 37 adolescents in the PE class. Researchers chose to assess mental well-being, mood, and affect utilizing scales found in previous research on yoga practices within schools. The BRUMS measures adolescent mood and consists of 24 mood descriptors organized into six subscales: Anger, Confusion, Depression, Fatigue, Tension, and Vigor. Students were asked to self-report on this scale.

The study is a randomized controlled trial (RCT), which uses empiricism to measure outcomes with psychological/behavioral scales. The results show a statistically significant difference, indicating that adolescents reported immediate improvements in mood and

affect when participating in a yoga or wellness class, however the yoga treatment class had a larger effect on adolescents than the PE class. A major strength of this article is its focus on an at-risk adolescent population, providing valuable evidence that yoga practices can support mental health in groups that often experience elevated stress and have less access to wellness resources.

11. Saxena, K., Verrico, C. D., Saxena, J., Kurian, S., Alexander, S., Kahlon, R. S., Arvind, R. P., Goldberg, A., DeVito, N., Baig, M., Grieb, A., Bakhshaie, J., Simonetti, A., Storch, E. A., Williams, L., & Gillan, L. (2020). An Evaluation of Yoga and Meditation to Improve Attention, Hyperactivity, and Stress in High-School Students. *Journal of alternative and complementary medicine (New York, N.Y.)*, 26(8), 701–707. <https://doi.org/10.1089/acm.2020.0126>

This study on 9th grade students over a 12-week period found reductions in self-reported inattention, hyperactivity, and perceived stress among those who participated in regular Hatha yoga compared to a control group. A total of 174 ninth graders from a Texas high school were enrolled in the study. Teachers assigned students to a yoga group (YG) or control group (CG) based on class schedules. Students self-assessed with a questionnaire designed by the research group. Chi-square tests revealed a substantial decrease in ADHD inattentiveness and ADHD hyperactivity. This study focuses on the effects of yoga on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which is a common condition in classrooms where I teach. I appreciate the references the authors made to the history and origins of yoga. Western society often distances yoga from Eastern origins; however, I think yoga and meditation can be even more powerful when the traditional masters are studied and appreciated. Learning yoga from traditional sources incorporates yoga into a larger philosophical, cultural and ethical system. For example, Patanjali's Sutras (written approximately 200 BCE) outline the eight limbs of yoga: ethical

restraints, personal observances, physical postures, breath, withdrawal of the senses, concentration, meditation, and enlightenment.

12. Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Oberle, E., Lawlor, M. S., Abbott, D., Thomson, K., Oberlander, T. F., & Diamond, A. (2015). Enhancing cognitive and social-emotional development through a simple-to-administer mindfulness-based school program for elementary school children: a randomized controlled trial. *Developmental psychology*, 51(1), 52–66.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038454>

Authors hypothesized that a social and emotional learning (SEL) program involving mindfulness and caring for others, designed for elementary school students, would enhance cognitive control, reduce stress, promote well-being and prosocial behavior, and produce positive school outcomes. Four classes of combined 4th and 5th grade students were randomly assigned to receive the SEL with mindfulness program versus a regular social responsibility program. The program administered was the MindUP program, consisting of 12 lessons taught approximately once a week, lasting 40-50 minutes each. These lessons include breathing, attentive listening, performing acts of kindness and engaging in community service. Students were assessed from five independent sources: behavioral assessments, salivary cortisol, child self-reports, peer nominations, and teacher rated math grades. Teachers reported significant increases in optimism and improvements on classroom social behavior; students in the SEL program demonstrated significantly improved social-emotional skills, attitudes, behavior and academic performance. This is the only study that I encountered which used a biological reference point: salivary cortisol. Students who received the MindUP program had significantly higher cortisol secretion at morning arrival than children who did not receive the program.

13. Thomas, E. M., & Centeio, E. E. (2020). The Benefits of Yoga in the Classroom: A Mixed-Methods Approach to the Effects of Poses and Breathing and Relaxation Techniques.

International journal of yoga, 13(3), 250–254. https://doi.org/10.4103/ijoy.IJOY_76_19

This study examined classrooms that implemented yoga, breathing and relaxation techniques to measure behavioral changes, self-reported stress, and overall well-being in disadvantaged youth. Researchers used a control classroom and another classroom that received the Yoga Calm program for 10 weeks. Students were assessed pre- and post-intervention, with a self-assessment tool that measures the 21-item “stress in children” scale. Behavior was observed by teachers and researchers, and documented using observation forms. Students and teachers were interviewed individually. Data was analyzed and results show that students started to see changes in themselves (reduced stress, more calm), and in turn their observed behavior in the classroom improved. This is another framework that could be applied to an art-classroom context.

14. Wang, D., Hagins, M. (2016). Perceived benefits of yoga among urban school students: A qualitative analysis, *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 18 January 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2016/8725654>

This study reports on the findings of a qualitative evaluation of a yoga intervention program for urban middle and high school youth in New York City public and charter schools. Six focus groups were conducted with students who participated in a year-long yoga program to determine their perceptions of mental and physical benefits as well as barriers and challenges. These results were analyzed with a qualitative lens, rather than a statistical, pre- and post- quantitative data lens. Results show that students perceived the benefits of yoga as increased self-regulation, mindfulness, self-esteem, physical conditioning, academic performance, and stress reduction. An interesting finding is that students were able to translate the benefits of yoga practice such as

breathing and remaining mindful into their lives “off the yoga mat.” The strengths of this study were the in-depth interviews and focus groups with the participants. Students were given a chance to discuss their experiences and described benefits such as feeling calm and focused, control of stressful situations, and increased self-esteem.

15. Yang, Q., Wang, Y., Yuan, S., Tian, J., & Zhang, P. (2025). The impact of a 12-Week yoga intervention on attentional performance in school-aged children: a randomized controlled trial in Western China. *BMC public health*, 25(1), 3703. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-25060-6>

This study incorporated yoga as a component of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and evaluates the effect of yoga sessions on the attention of children. The study was conducted as a masked, parallel-group randomized controlled trial. 131 children were randomly assigned by grade using a computer to the yoga group, the PE group, or the control group. Over 12 weeks, the yoga group attended a 40-minute yoga class twice per week, the PE group attended a traditional 40-minute PE class twice a week, and the control group did not participate in any physical activity. Participants were assessed pre- mid- and post-intervention using a set of Attention Tests developed to measure attention allocation, attention shift, attention span and attention stability. The results of the tests were analyzed through a quantitative, cognitive behavioral lens. The authors treat attention as a cognitive variable that can be objectively assessed with standardized attention tests. Overwhelmingly, the students with the yoga intervention demonstrated earlier and more pronounced improvements in attention, for all measured variables. This study was very thorough, with excellent visual data presentation. The discussion makes excellent connections between the specific practices in yoga and anatomical and physiological adaptations in practitioners. For example: the practice of yoga involves

directing the attention towards the act of breathing; research shows that active, long breathing can lead to the regulation of the nervous system and a decrease in metabolic activity in the parasympathetic state, a positive impact on neurocognitive abilities, improved short-term memory, visual scanning and motor performance, which can enhance cognitive function, working memory, and an increase in cognitive ability.

The research reviewed in this annotated bibliography demonstrates consistent and promising evidence that school-based yoga and mindfulness interventions positively impact students' emotional regulation, stress levels, attention, mood, and overall well-being across elementary and secondary settings. The overwhelming conclusion is that contemplative practices can support social-emotional learning, cognitive functioning, and classroom climate, particularly for at-risk and diverse student populations. The evidence suggests that yoga and mindfulness are not merely supplemental wellness activities, but meaningful educational tools grounded in measurable outcomes. Building on this foundation, the following chapter outlines my methodology for implementing yoga and mindfulness practices within a K-8 classroom context. This chapter will describe the structure, duration, instructional approach, and evaluation methods of my proposed intervention. I seek to apply this research with practical, age-appropriate yoga and mindfulness activities to support my students' social and emotional growth.

Chapter 3: Methods

Section 1 – Research Questions

Action research is a systematic and reflective form of inquiry conducted by practitioners to improve their own professional practice. Sagor (2000) defines action research as a “disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking the action.” The primary purpose is to help educators refine and improve their teaching practices and the learning experiences of their students. Unlike traditional research methods that may position teachers as external implementers of theory, action research is conducted by those directly involved in teaching and learning. The findings are immediately relevant and applicable to instructional settings.

Sagor (2000) outlines a seven step process for conducting action research in educational settings. These steps include: 1) selecting a focus; 2) clarifying theories and beliefs about the focus; 3) identifying research questions; 4) collecting data; 5) analyzing data; 6) reporting results, and 7) taking informed action based on findings. This structure of this process supports reflective practice and continuous improvement. Teachers begin by identifying an area of instructional concern or curiosity, then research that concern or curiosity within theoretical frameworks. They gather multiple sources of classroom data, in order to increase validity and reliability. Through analysis of patterns and trends, teacher-researchers develop insights that inform future instructional practices. Action research does not end with reporting findings; rather, it leads to adapted and updated instructional practices and begins a new cycle of inquiry.

Action research is an appropriate methodological approach for this study because it aligns closely with both the pedagogical aims and theoretical framework described in Chapters 1 and 2. This study investigates how integrating brief yoga and mindfulness practices into the classroom routines may influence student self-regulation, attention, and classroom climate. Because these

outcomes are highly influenced by specific classroom dynamics, student populations, and instructional approaches, a practitioner-based research design allows for meaningful investigation within an authentic learning environment. Sagor (2000) notes that one of the greatest strengths of action research is its capacity to ensure “fit” between instructional strategies and the unique characteristics of a particular group of students.

Action research reflects the humanistic and justice-centered educational philosophies guiding this study. In Chapter 1, I describe a commitment to relational learning, student agency, and holistic development, influenced by Freire’s concept of critical consciousness and hooks’ vision of education as a practice of freedom. By investigating yoga and meditation as pedagogical tools through action research, I can examine how social-emotional learning practices function in real time.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 provides empirical evidence that school-based yoga and mindfulness interventions can positively impact emotional regulation, stress, attention, and classroom behavior across diverse educational settings. Many existing studies are conducted under controlled research conditions, or outside of arts classrooms. The action research design of this study extends the literature by examining yoga practices within a specific classroom. This methodology therefore supports both professional learning and contribution to broader conversations about contemplative practices in education.

The following research questions guide this action research project:

1. How does the integration of classroom-based yoga and mindfulness practices influence students’ self-regulation and emotional readiness for learning?
2. In what ways does participation in regular yoga activities affect students’ attention, classroom engagement, and transitions between learning tasks?

3. How do students and the teacher perceive the impact of mindfulness and yoga practices on classroom climate, relationships, and overall learning experiences?

The purpose of this Action Research Project (ARP) is to examine the effects of integrating developmentally appropriate yoga and mindfulness practices into daily classroom routines in order to support student self-regulation, attention, and social-emotional wellbeing. Through systematic observation, reflection, and analysis of multiple sources of classroom data, this study seeks to better understand how contemplative practices function as pedagogical tools. Ultimately the goal of this study is to refine instructional strategies that foster inclusive, responsive and humanizing learning environments where students can engage academically while also developing emotional awareness, agency, and resilience

Section 2. Participants and Setting

This action research takes place at Willow Creek Private Academy (pseudonym), a small independent K-8 school in a college-town community in Western Oregon. The school serves approximately 170 students and emphasizes academic rigor, character development, world languages, and strong arts programming. The campus is situated near parks, bike paths, and community arts resources, contributing to a learning environment that values enrichment, creativity, and academic excellence. Families in this school community are generally of middle-to-upper socioeconomic status and demonstrate high levels of involvement in school events, fundraising, and classroom volunteering. While the student population includes meaningful cultural diversity, the majority of students identify as White, with additional representation from Asian, Hispanic/Latino, and multiracial backgrounds.

The focus classroom for this study is a third-grade arts class of 17 students. The class includes approximately 82% female students and 18% male students. Students attend art

instruction for 4 minutes two to three times per week, and the structure of our lesson typically includes an opening mindfulness routine, direct instruction with modeling, studio work time, and collaborative clean-up and reflection. Over time, I have come to understand this group as both academically capable and socially complex. Several students are identified as Talented and Gifted and demonstrate strong creative thinking and attention to detail. Other students experience challenges related to anxiety, selective mutism, or attention regulation, requiring flexible participation structures, movement opportunities, and explicitly organizational supports.

The classroom reflects important cultural and linguistic diversity that shapes my planning and teaching. Students bring backgrounds that include Chinese, Korean, Syrian Islamic, and Hispanic heritage, as well as varied family experiences and personal interests. Most students have studied Spanish for several years as part of the school program, and this multilingual exposure contributes to their developing identities as learners and communicators. I see these cultural experiences as funds of knowledge that enrich classroom dialogue and artistic expression. Students often draw on personal interests such as animals, geography, sports or storytelling when creating artwork and these connections help make learning meaningful and personally relevant.

Academically and socially, students demonstrate a wide range of strengths. As a group they are enthusiastic about making art and are generally willing to experiment with new materials and techniques. Many students show strong perseverance and pride in their work, and they respond positively to collaborative studio routines and positive behavior systems. Importantly for this study, students are already familiar with brief yoga and mindfulness practices integrated into classroom transitions. They often approach these activities with curiosity and openness.

At the same time, this classroom has meaningful areas for growth both for students and for my own teaching practice. Some students have a tendency to rush through projects, while others struggle with perfectionism, anxiety or initiating tasks independently. One student with selective mutism requires thoughtful communication strategies such as written responses, increased wait time, and reduced pressure to perform verbally. These experiences continually challenge me to refine my differentiation strategies to create learning environments that honor diverse communication styles and emotional needs.

I have worked with this group of students since September 2025, which has allowed me to build trusting relationships and develop a deeper understanding of their learning patterns and personalities. One of the most notable strengths of this group is their willingness to participate, not only in artistic exploration, but also in yoga and mindfulness activities. Students often express excitement about movement breaks, breathing exercises, and guided relaxation. Their openness has encouraged me to consider how embodied practices might influence their focus, classroom climate, and emotional readiness for learning.

Because I see students regularly and have established routines that already include contemplative practices, I am well positioned to observe how yoga may support attention, self-regulation, and self-awareness . The diversity of learner profiles within the classroom also allows me to examine how yoga practices function across a range of academic strengths, emotional needs, and cultural experiences. Ultimately this study comes from my desire to better understand how embodied mindfulness learning strategies can help create an inclusive, humanizing classroom where all students feel confident, capable and connected.

Section 3. Data Collection & Analysis

This action research project examined how the integration of yoga postures, meditation practices, and mindfulness routines within elementary art instruction influenced student engagement, self-regulation, and participation in learning. Following Sagor's (2000) framework to teacher action research, I collected multiple forms of practitioner-generated data that documented both instructional design and students response over time. Sagor emphasizes that teacher researchers should gather naturally occurring classroom evidence, such as planning documents, observations, student work, and reflective records, in order to study and improve their own practices. My data sources included my unit plan, formal and informal curricula, daily lesson plans, teaching reflection journals, formative and summative assessments, information observations of student engagement, and feedback from my mentor teacher and university field supervisor.

The unit plan provided a foundational data source because it organized the central focus of the study: students' exploration of oil pastel techniques alongside structured opportunities for mindfulness and movement to support social-emotional learning. Within this unit, social-emotional goals explicitly included developing confidence with self-expression and supporting self-regulation through meditation, breath awareness, and yoga postures. These goals were incorporated into instructional activities and transitional points in the lessons.

In my planning, I worked with both the official curriculum and the more informal routines that naturally developed in our classroom. While the written curriculum focused on helping students build specific oil pastel skills such as blending, stippling, scumbling and sgraffito, I began to notice that students' learning was also shaped by the mindfulness practices we used throughout each lesson. Brief meditation moments, yoga movement breaks, and shared classroom rituals became just as important as technical skill instruction. Over time, these

practices helped create a learning community where students could settle into their bodies, refocus their attention, and feel more ready to participate in art.

My daily lesson plans became an important source of insight because they showed how mindfulness and movement were naturally incorporated into the flow of instruction. Each class began with a short meditation, such as “Breath, Body, Mind” or box breathing, which helped students settle their bodies and focus their attention before instruction. I also intentionally included brief yoga movement breaks throughout the lessons. For example, students practiced Tree Pose when we introduced the abstract tree project and later explored poses such as Plank during the transition to studio work time. These moments supported students who needed help regulating their energy, including those with anxiety, attention challenges, or difficulty participating verbally. At the same time, the lesson structure continued with gradual release of responsibility, visual thinking discussions, and independent studio exploration. Paying attention to how students moved between mindfulness activities and instruction or studio time gave me valuable insight into how embodied learning can support attention and creativity.

I also looked closely at both formative and summative assessments as evidence of student learning over time. Student work such as technique graphic organizers, abstract tree sketches, and completed oil pastel projects helped me see how students were developing artistic skills and making creative choices throughout the unit. As I moved around the room during independent studio time, I paid attention to how students approached their work, whether they stayed focused, experimented with their art, or participated in conversations with their peers. These observations were an important part of understanding student engagement in real time.

In addition to collecting student work, I kept notes about when students appeared more regulated, focused, or ready to learn. I noticed whether students were able to transition more

smoothly after meditation or movement breaks and whether they showed greater persistence when facing artistic challenges. Over time, these observations helped me see patterns in how mindfulness routines influenced classroom energy and participation. I also reviewed feedback from my mentor teacher and university supervisor, whose outside perspectives helped me reflect more critically on classroom climate, instructional pacing, and the ways yoga-based supports were affecting students in the classroom.

As I began reviewing my lesson plans, student artwork, and reflection notes, I looked for patterns that could help me better understand how mindfulness and movement were shaping students' learning experiences. I identified moments that stood out to me, for example, time when students appeared more focused after meditation, showed increased willingness to try new techniques, were more helpful or cooperative with their classmates, or when they struggled to sustain attention during longer work periods.

I began to group similar moments together in order to make sense of what was happening in the classroom. Some of the patterns I noticed included calm and focused attention during instruction and group discussion, greater persistence when students encountered artistic challenges, and smoother transitions after yoga breaks. These patterns helped me organize broader themes of engagement, self-regulation, and creative confidence from isolated classroom moments.

I compared insights across different sources of evidence. I connected what I observed during studio work time to how finished artwork reflected levels of focus and experimentation. Looking at the data, I found myself returning to the theoretical ideas that had shaped my teaching philosophy. Embodied learning theory helped me understand why students seemed more grounded and ready to work after movement and breathing practices. Freire's writing reminded

me that these moments were also about helping students feel capable and present in their own learning. Mindfulness routines contribute to a classroom culture built on connection, participation, and creativity, embodying hooks' concept of engaged pedagogy, which nurtures the whole student: mind, body and spirit. These frameworks helped explain what I was noticing in the students' behavior.

Finally, I discussed my observations and emerging ideas with my mentor teacher and university supervisor as the study progressed. Their feedback helped me look at classroom moments from new perspectives and helped me notice aspects of student engagement that I might have missed on my own. For example, supervisors pointed out how beginning lessons with meditation and incorporating yoga movement breaks helped create a calm, focused tone and supported students' readiness to participate in learning. They also encouraged me to slow pacing at times and provide more opportunities for student dialogue and reflection. These conversations became an important part of the analysis process, allowing me to refine my instruction and develop a more balanced understanding of how mindfulness and embodied practices were shaping classroom participation, relationships, and creative engagement.

Section 4. Researcher Positionality

My interest in studying yoga as a pedagogical practice is closely connected to my own educational experiences. I grew up in an upper-middle class suburban school system that offered strong academic opportunities and material resources. At the same time, I often felt disengaged from learning and did not develop strategies for managing stress, attention or emotional challenges. These experiences continue to shape my belief that students benefit from classroom practices that support self-awareness, self-regulation, and a sense of belonging. They also

influence my desire to explore how mindfulness and movement can be meaningfully integrated into everyday instruction.

Freier's concept of humanizing education helped me to understand that yoga practices are not simply tools for students to improve focus or classroom management, but also as opportunities to develop agency and awareness. Bell hooks' idea of engaged pedagogy supports my intention to teach in ways that nurture the whole student, intellectually, emotionally, and physically. These frameworks shape how I notice students engagement, interpret moments of regulation or frustration, and understand the broader significance of mindfulness practices in learning.

As a white female teacher and certified yoga instructor, I recognize that I enter the classroom with both institutional privilege and particular assumptions about learning shaped by my own schooling and professional pathways. My background includes time spent working in community-based settings, studying martial arts and yoga, and returning to higher education through a nontraditional route. These experiences have led me to value classrooms where students feel comfortable participating, moving, asking questions, and expressing their ideas. I try to create learning environments where students can focus, take risks, feel supported and connected to one another.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this action research project was to explore how integrating yoga and mindfulness into an elementary art classroom influenced students' self-regulation, attention, engagement, and sense of classroom community. Through the use of yoga poses, breathing exercises, meditation, and mudras, this study sought to understand how embodied mindfulness practices could support whole-child development and create a more supportive and emotionally responsive learning environment. Three major themes emerged from analyzing the data. They are: 1) yoga and mindfulness practices supported student self-regulation and focus; 2) embodied and movement-based learning increased student engagement and participation; 3) reflective discussion and collaborative classroom practices strengthened students' social-emotional learning and artistic confidence. Each theme is discussed with supportive data gathered through lesson plans, teaching reflection journals, informal observations, student assessments, and feedback from the mentor teacher and field supervisor.

Theme One: Yoga and Mindfulness Practices Supported Student Self-Regulation and Focus

This theme reflects how mindfulness routines and yoga-based practices helped students transition into learning, regulate attention, and sustain focus during art activities. Data showed that short breathing exercises, meditations, movement breaks, and calming hand postures positively influenced classroom readiness and emotional regulation.

Throughout the unit, students participated in one-minute mindfulness exercises at the beginning of lessons, including breathing activities such as box breathing and guided "Body, Breath, Mind" meditations. Reflection journal entries consistently documented calmer classroom transitions following these routines. In one journal entry, I noted that students entered the

classroom energetically after P.E., but after a brief breathing exercise, “the overall noise level decreased significantly, and students appeared more settled and prepared to begin the lesson.” Informal observations further showed that students who typically struggled with focus demonstrated improved attention following mindfulness activities.

Lesson plans also intentionally integrated yoga poses into instructional transitions. Each day a different card from *Yoga Pretzels*, a fifty-card deck of yoga pose cards for children, created by Baron Baptiste, was displayed on the white board. During instructional transitions, I

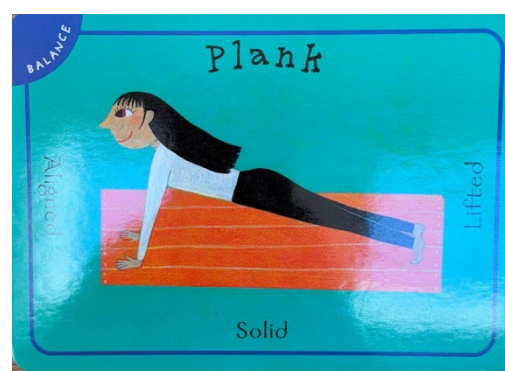


Image 1: Plank pose, from *Yoga Pretzels*, by Baron Baptiste

demonstrated the pose, and while students tried the posture, I spoke to the students about transition expectations. For example, students practiced Tree Pose (see image 4) while discussing the “abstract tree” oil pastel project. On side one of tree pose (right leg), I explained how to hold the posture. On the second side of tree pose (left leg), I explained how students would share the responsibilities of collecting different supplies for their table groups. Later in the lesson sequence, students used Plank Pose (see image 1) during work transitions to refocus attention before continuing independent artmaking. Students held yoga postures as they received instructions for gathering materials, sharing resources, and reminders for independent work expectations. While holding their bodies in specific forms, they were able to focus their minds on further instructions, even though they were physically excited to move on and begin. These movement-based strategies appeared to help students regulate energy levels and sustain engagement during longer studio work periods.

Student exit tickets and verbal reflections supported these observations. Several students stated that breathing exercises helped them “feel calm”, or “slow down.” One student wrote that the mindfulness exercise helped them “stop thinking about P.E. and think about art.” Another student explained that movement breaks helped them feel “more ready” for the next step in the class period. These responses suggest that mindfulness and yoga practices supported students’ emotional awareness and self-regulation during learning tasks.

Assessment data also reflected increased student persistence and task completion during lessons that incorporated mindfulness routines. Students were generally able to remain engaged for longer periods of studio work and demonstrated greater willingness to revise and refine artwork. Students were deeply engaged in art making, and often were reluctant to put away materials or stop working at the end of class. Their final projects (see images 8-13) reflected attention to detail, high levels of craftsmanship, and perseverance. Reflection journals documented fewer behavioral redirections during lessons that included movement and breathing strategies compared to lessons without these supports earlier in the year.

Feedback from the mentor teacher further supported this theme. The mentor teacher noted that “social emotional needs are supported through warm up meditation and yoga,” and “Laura has introduced mindfulness moments, movement (yoga), and music in order to create a calm and positive environment.” In other words, my mentor teacher noticed that the students were calm, happy and productive in the classroom, as a result of the mindfulness movement and moments. The field supervisor similarly observed that yoga and mindfulness routines created a supportive classroom atmosphere that encouraged focus and emotional safety. Students were helpful to classmates, excited about their projects, and willing to work hard for extended periods of time on their oil pastel works.



Image 3: Baby Nigerian Dwarf goats came to visit the students

The third and fourth grade students have been practicing meditation, breathing exercises, yoga, and mindful body awareness regularly since January, which presented itself as support for a very exciting day in the classroom. I have a small farm where we raise Nigerian Dwarf dairy goats. The baby goats were due at the

end of March, and I have been letting the students know that I will be bringing the baby goats for a classroom visit. On the day that the baby goats were visiting, my farm hands and I set up the room before students arrived, pushing tables out of the way and laying a large tarp on the floor. Ten baby Nigerian Dwarf goats, all less than 8 days old, were in two Rubbermaid tubs (see image 3) in the center of the room. The students were very excited as they approached the classroom. Before they entered the room, I let them know that they needed to have calm body energy, because these are baby animals. When they entered the room, they sat in a circle around the goats, and together we practiced our four-count breathing. The room became noticeably quieter and the energy settled, creating an atmosphere of calm and safety. Then the students were ready for us to place baby goats into their laps. For approximately thirty minutes, the students quietly held and cared for the baby goats, taking turns, speaking softly and respectfully, and showing genuine patience while waiting for the goats and one another. Many of the goats fell asleep in the students' laps, and students responded with stillness, care, and attentiveness.

The students demonstrated a high level of self-regulation, gentleness, and emotional awareness throughout the experience. Informal observations from this experience suggested that the mindfulness and breathing techniques that students had been developing throughout the year helped support their ability to regulate excitement, sustain calm attention, and participate in a nurturing and emotionally connected classroom experience. Other classroom teachers came to experience the baby



Image 4: Other classroom teachers came to visit the baby goats

goats as well (see image 4), which also strengthened the overall classroom climate by fostering trust, empathy, collaboration and shared joy among students and teachers.

This theme, *Yoga and Mindfulness Practices Support Student Self-Regulation and Focus*, connects strongly to the theoretical framework of embodied learning, which emphasizes the relationship between physical movement, emotional regulations, and cognition. It also aligns with Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks that emphasize self-awareness and self-management. Freire's concept of humanizing education and bell hooks' engaged pedagogy additionally support the importance of creating learning spaces where students feel emotionally present, safe, and physically connected to their learning experiences.

Theme Two: Embodied and Movement-Based Learning Increased Student Engagement and Participation

This theme demonstrates how integrating physical movement and embodied learning practices into art instruction increased student participation, engagement, and enthusiasm. Data suggested that the movement-based strategies supported active learning and helped students connect more deeply with artistic concepts and materials, and artistic processes. Movement and embodied learning were intentionally embedded into instruction rather than functioning as separate “brain breaks” or unrelated activities.

Throughout the oil pastel unit, students engaged in physical and kinesthetic learning experiences connected to artistic processes. Yoga poses, movement breaks, demonstrations, and hands-on exploration, and collaborative activities were integrated intentionally into lessons. Lesson plans consistently documented the use of one-minute meditations and yoga transitions at the beginning of class and between instruction and independent work time. For example, students practiced Triangle Pose during the oil pastel techniques lesson, Tree Pose (see image 4) during the abstract tree project, Plank Pose during painting lessons, Twisting Dragon during oil pastel work sessions, and Arrow Pose during the Georgia O’Keeffe enlargement project. These poses were used as transitions between instructional phases, helping students to regulate energy, refocus attention, and prepare physically and mentally for the next stage of the lesson. Lesson plans additionally emphasized collaborative and multimodal learning opportunities that supported embodied engagement. Students participated in Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) discussions, peer sharing,

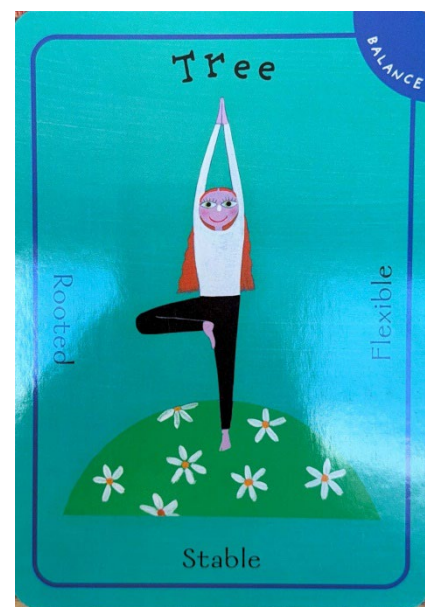


Image 4: Tree pose, from *Yoga Pretzels*, by Baron Baptiste

demonstrations, collaborative vocabulary practice, and reflective conversations. These practices encouraged students to engage with art through observation, dialogue, movement, and creation, rather than relying solely on passive instruction.

Embodied learning was also integrated into hands-on artistic exploration. For example, during oil pastel lessons, students physically practiced directional movements related to blending and layering techniques before applying them to paper. Students learned through tactile interaction with materials, repeated demonstrations, and kinesthetic participation. Lesson plans frequently emphasized “hands-on exploration” and movement-based support for student learning. These embodied strategies appeared to increase student understanding of artistic techniques, and maintain engagement during instruction.

My teaching reflection journals repeatedly documented high levels of participation during lessons that incorporated movement. One reflection described students as “enthusiastic to share group responsibilities and excited to begin work” during lessons that included yoga transitions or physical demonstrations. Many of my students who were typically hesitant to contribute verbally often participated more confidently during movement-based activities.

Informal observations also showed that movement breaks reduced signs of restlessness and frustration during longer studio periods. Students frequently returned to tasks with renewed focus after participating in short yoga or breathing exercises. During one observation, a student who had previously disengaged from a drawing activity became re-engaged after participating in a brief movement break and subsequently completed the project successfully.

Observation data strongly supported the connection between embodied strategies and student engagement. One observation noted that “students are engaged in movement around the room during learning,” highlighting the active and physical nature of the classroom environment.

Another observation described how “The yoga moves mid-lesson were seamlessly implemented as she simultaneously used that movement/focus moment to give next step directions,” demonstrating that movement was integrated directly into classroom management and instructional pacing. Supervisors also repeatedly documented strong student engagement during lessons involving movement and tactile exploration. The mentor teacher and university supervisors consistently observed that movement-based and mindfulness-centered instruction supported student participation and motivation. One observation noted “great use of SEL - meditation, yoga, reading,” while another commented that embodied strategies created an “active and student-centered learning experience” that encouraged participation from a wide range of learners. Supervisors also described students as “engaged,” “excited,” and actively involved in both individual and collaborative learning tasks throughout the unit. Collectively, these observations suggest that embodied learning practices supported not only artistic skill development, but also sustained attention, participation, collaboration, and emotional connection to classroom learning experiences.

Student discussions and closure reflections further supported this theme. Many students expressed excitement about incorporating yoga and movement into art class. When asked, students described these transitions as “fun,” “challenging,” or “it feels good”. They often asked to be observed by their classmates and teacher while performing yoga postures. Several students stated that movement

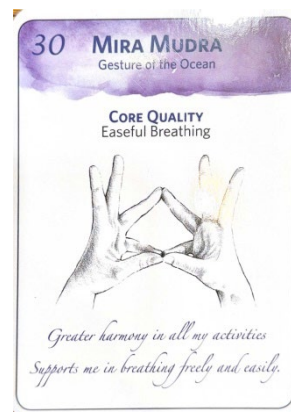


Image 5: Mira mudra, from *Mudra Cards*, Joseph and Lilian LePage

activities “helps me focus.” Twice, I almost forgot to include the yoga transition, and several students reminded me: “What about yoga?” These comments suggest that embodied learning strategies increased both emotional and cognitive engagement.

Throughout the unit, in addition to yoga postures during transitions, students practiced mudras (intentional hand postures) during the final classroom transition into closure discussion. After independent work time and classroom cleanup, students were guided through brief calming practices using simple mudras paired with breathing exercise. Sometimes I demonstrated the mudras myself, and sometimes mudra cards from *Integrative Yoga Therapy* by Joseph and Lilian Le Page (see images 5, 6 and 7) were projected onto the board for students to observe and imitate. These moments appeared to help students regulate energy levels after active

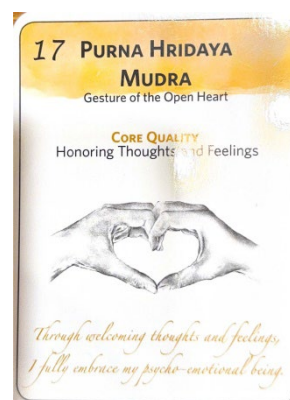


Image 6: Purna Hridaya mudra, from *Mudra Cards*, Joseph and Lilian LePage

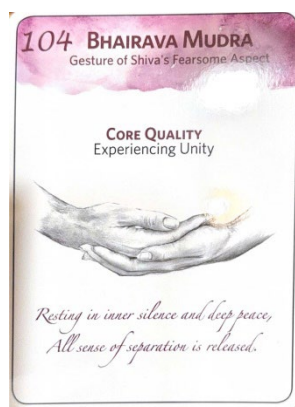


Image 7: Bhairava mudra, from *Mudra Cards*, Joseph and Lilian LePage

artmaking and supported a quieter transition into reflective conversation. Observational notes suggest that students became visibly calmer and more attentive during these routines. Yoga mudras, or intentional hand postures, are believed to support self-soothing by combining gentle tactile sensation, focused attention, breath awareness, and embodied mindfulness practice. In classroom settings, mudras can help students calm their nervous systems by giving them a simple

physical action to focus on during moments of transition, overstimulation, or dysregulation.

Because the movements are small and grounding, they encourage students to slow their

breathing, reduce external distractions, and redirect attention inward toward bodily awareness and emotional regulation. The intentional placement of the hands creates a calming ritual that helps students shift from heightened activity into a more reflective and regulated state. Practicing mudras after independent work and cleanup supported students in transitioning from the stimulation of artmaking and the social activity of cleanup into quieter closure discussions by helping settle energy levels and increase attentiveness. These practices also promoted feelings of safety, routine, and predictability, all of which contribute to emotional regulation and self-soothing.

Lesson reflections noted that these brief embodied mudra practices helped students settle both physically and emotionally, creating a calmer classroom atmosphere during transitions. Over time, students quickly became familiar with the routines. When it was time to clean up, a mudra card was presented on the large monitor at the front of the room; students transitioned into the practices quickly and independently. They began clean up when the mudra card appeared, and did not need very much instruction from the teacher, settling into their seats with hands in the days' mudra while waiting for table points and closure discussion. This suggests that students were becoming comfortable with mindfulness-based regulation strategies embedded within the classroom environment.

Assessment evidence also indicated strong engagement during embodied learning activities. Students consistently demonstrated effort, experimentation, and willingness to try new techniques. Many oil pastel artworks reflected dedicated, thoughtful application of techniques introduced through movement-based demonstrations, including blending, layering, stippling and sgraffito.

This theme, *Embodied and Movement-Based Learning Increased Student Engagement and Participation*, aligns closely with embodied learning theory, which argues that cognition is deeply connected to physical experience and movement. It also reflects principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which emphasizes providing multiple means of engagement and representation. Additionally, hooks' engaged pedagogy supports the idea that active participation and holistic learning experiences deepen student investment and connection to classroom learning.

Theme Three: Reflective Discussion and Collaborative Classroom Practices Strengthened Social-Emotional Learning and Artistic Confidence.

This theme highlights how reflective conversations, collaborative routines, and supportive feedback practices contributed to students' social-emotional growth and artistic confidence. Data indicated that structured opportunities for discussion and reflection helped students articulate ideas, develop self-awareness, and build confidence in their artistic abilities.

Throughout the oil pastels unit, the consistent use of discussion-based and reflective instructional strategies strengthened classroom climate and learning. Lesson plans repeatedly incorporated choral response, collaborative vocabulary practice, Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) discussions, student-led reading of rubrics, peer support structures, and reflective questioning. These practices encouraged students to communicate their ideas, participate collectively, and build confidence in sharing their thinking. During VTS discussions, students were asked open-ended questions such as "What is going on in this painting?", "What makes you say that?", and "What more can you find?" while analyzing artwork by artists such as Piet Mondrian and Georgia O'Keeffe.

These types of discussions encouraged students to observe carefully, support their interpretations with evidence, and listen respectfully to the perspectives of others. Collaborative

vocabulary practice through choral response and shared rubric reading also helped create a supportive classroom environment where students could participate together without fear of making mistakes individually. Over time, these routines appeared to strengthen students' confidence, participation, and sense of belonging within the classroom community.

Observation data and informal classroom observations further supported the development of a positive and collaborative classroom climate. Supervisors consistently noted strong peer collaboration, emotional safety, and student ownership within the classroom environment. Observation notes documented that "Students help each other" during learning activities and project work. Additional observations noted that "Students know the type of behavior expected of them" during instruction, work time, and classroom transitions, reflecting the consistency of classroom routines and expectations. One supervisor also observed that "Students obviously feel at home in the art room," suggesting that students experienced the classroom as a welcoming and emotionally safe environment. Another observation described students as "engaged, understood the task, and ultimately experienced success," emphasizing both student participation and confidence within the learning community. Supervisors additionally noted that "Students are excited to show TC their work and discuss progress," demonstrating increasing student confidence, pride, and willingness to engage in reflective dialogue about their work.

Feedback practices additionally strengthened artistic confidence. Throughout the lessons, I provided verbal feedback focused on effort, experimentation, expression and technique development. Rather than emphasizing perfection, feedback encouraged students to take creative risks and continue refining their work. For example, students received comments related to strong contrast, careful observation, effective blending, and persistence with challenging techniques.

Student assessments and artwork demonstrated increased willingness to experiment creatively. Many students used techniques in increasingly sophisticated ways over time and showed greater confidence in artistic decision-making. Students revealed growing self-awareness in closure discussions, and several students identified personal growth in areas such as focus, confidence and perseverance.

The mentor teacher observed that students appeared increasingly comfortable sharing ideas and participating in class discussions throughout the unit. The field supervisor similarly noted that classroom routines fosters a “supportive and inclusive learning environment” where students felt safe expressing themselves creatively.

One example that strongly illustrated the growing acceptance of mindfulness practices in the classroom involved a student who was initially highly resistant to yoga and meditation activities. When I first transitioned into leading the classroom, the student openly challenged my authority and questioned my role, asking where the “real art teacher” was and stating that he did not have to listen to me because I was not his actual teacher. During early meditation activities, he refused to close his eyes, made rude comments during mindfulness exercises, and at one point told me to “go sit down” while I was leading instruction. His responses reflected both emotional defensiveness and embodied learning.

However, over the course of approximately six weeks, observational notes and teaching reflections documented noticeable shifts in the student’s participation and demeanor during mindfulness activities. Although initially resistant, the student gradually began participating in yoga postures alongside peers and appeared increasingly comfortable during meditation and breathing exercises. Informal observations noted visible physical signs of relaxation, including lowered shoulders, calmer body language, and reduced verbal opposition during transitions into

mindfulness activities. By the end of the unit, this student was observed laughing with peers during yoga poses and independently discussing different mudras with classmates while waiting in line to leave the classroom. These interactions suggested not only increased acceptance of mindfulness practices, but also a growing sense of comfort, social engagement, and emotional regulation within the classroom environment. This experience became an important example within the data because it demonstrated how consistent, nonjudgmental exposure to mindfulness routines may support student self-regulation and participation over time, even among students who initially resist or reject these practices.

The baby goat classroom experience also reflected many of these same themes of trust, empathy, gentleness, collaboration, and classroom community. Although students entered the room feeling highly excited, they were able to regulate their energy through collective breathing practices and mindful body awareness before interacting with the animals. Students demonstrated patience while taking turns, carefully held the baby goats, and responded with calmness and attentiveness as many of the animals fell asleep in their laps. The experience became a shared emotional moment within the classroom community, where students collectively practiced care, emotional regulation, and empathy. This even illustrated how mindfulness routines and collaborative classroom structures had contributed to creating a classroom environment grounded in emotional safety, mutual respect, and connectedness.

Data from teaching reflections and informal observations further indicated that mindfulness practices extended beyond movement breaks and yoga poses to include smaller embodied strategies such as mudras during lesson closure. These practices appeared to support students' emotional readiness for reflective discussion by helping them shift from the stimulation of creating and cleaning up into a more focused and present mindset. The consistent use of

calming routines contributed to a classroom environment that emphasizes emotional awareness and collective regulation. This finding aligns with embodied learning and social-emotional learning theories, which suggest that physical practices connected to breath and body awareness can support attention, emotional regulation, and classroom engagement.

This theme, *Reflective Discussion and Collaborative Classroom Practices Strengthened Social-Emotional Learning and Artistic Confidence*, aligns with Social-Emotional Learning frameworks emphasizing relationship skills, self-awareness, and social awareness. It also reflects Freire's emphasis on dialogue and student voice within learning communities. hooks' concept of engaged pedagogy further supports the importance of relational and collaborative learning environments that honor students' experiences and identities.

Conclusion

The findings of this action research study suggest that the integration of yoga, mindfulness, and embodied learning practices positively influenced students' self-regulation, classroom engagement, and social-emotional learning experiences within the elementary art classroom. Across lesson plans, reflection journals, classroom observations, student discussions, artwork, and supervisor feedback, students consistently demonstrated increased focus, emotional readiness, participation, collaboration, and artistic confidence throughout the oil pastel unit.

The first theme revealed that mindfulness practices such as one-minute meditations, breathing exercises, and yoga-based transitions supported students' ability to regulate their emotional and prepare for learning. Observation data and informal reflections indicated that students became calmer and more focused following breathing exercises and mindful movement activities. The baby goat classroom experience provides one particularly meaningful example of this finding in practice. Although students entered the room highly excited, they successfully

used collective breathing and mindful body awareness to create a calm and emotionally safe environment while interacting gently and respectfully with the animals. This experience demonstrated students' developing capacity for self-regulation, empathy and emotional awareness.

The second theme demonstrated that embodied and movement-based instructional practices increased student engagement and participation. Yoga poses, movement breaks, tactile exploration, and hands-on artistic processes encouraged students to engage actively with materials and concepts rather than participating passively. Observation

notes repeatedly documented high levels of student enthusiasm, participation, collaboration, and movement throughout the lessons. Students appeared especially engaged during opportunities that combined physical movement, creative exploration, and collaborative discussion. The integration of embodied learning strategies also supported accessibility for diverse learners by providing multiple pathways for participation and expression.

The third theme highlighted how reflective dialogue, collaborative learning structures, and supportive classroom routines strengthened classroom climate and relationships. Through Visual Thinking Strategies discussions, peer conversations, choral vocabulary practice, and reflective questioning, students developed confidence in expressing ideas and discussing



Image 8: Abstract tree, oil pastel, 4th grade student



Image 9: Abstract tree, oil pastel, 4th grade student



Image 10: Abstract trees, oil pastels, 3rd grade students

artwork. Observation data indicated that students felt emotionally safe within the classroom community, helped one another during projects, and demonstrated pride in sharing their artistic

growth. Students increasingly appeared comfortable taking creative risks, discussing challenges, and celebrating one another's work throughout the unit.

Student artwork further reflected many of the themes identified in this study. The oil pastel projects demonstrated not only technical growth in blending, layering, contrast, and composition, but also creativity, experimentation, persistence, and emotional expression. Students created highly individualized interpretations of abstract trees



Image 11: Oil pastel, 3rd grade student



Image 12: Oil pastel, 4th grade student

inspired by Piet Mondrian. These images provide visual examples of student learning, experimentation, and creative engagement during the unit (see images 8, 9 and 10).

As the final project in the unit, students enlarged natural forms inspired by Georgia O'Keeffe, and made observational drawings that reflected close attention to detail and personal artistic decision-making. Many students demonstrated

increasing confidence in their use of color, line, texture, and oil pastel techniques throughout the unit. The artwork also reflected sustained engagement and willingness to experiment with



Image 13: Oil pastel, 3rd grade student

challenging artistic techniques over time. These images provide examples of the students' work on the Georgia O'Keeffe inspired oil pastel projects (see images 11, 12, and 13).

Chapter 5: Discussion, Limitations, and Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that yoga and mindfulness practices can support student self-regulation, engagement, and classroom participation within the elementary art classroom. Observational data, lesson reflections, student interactions, and classroom routines indicated that mindfulness practices such as yoga poses, meditation, breathing exercises and mudras contributed to calmer classroom transitions and increased emotional awareness among students. Movement-based activities appeared to increase student engagement during artmaking, particularly during lessons that integrated yoga poses and embodied demonstrations connected to artistic techniques. Mudras and mindful breathing practices implemented at the beginning and end of lessons appeared to help students settle after the transition into the classroom, refocus after independent work, and calm down after clean up, preparing them for reflective closure discussions. Over the course of the study, students demonstrated increasing comfort and familiarity with mindfulness practices, participating more willingly and collaboratively over time. Collectively, these findings suggested that embodied mindfulness practices supported not only emotional regulation, but also the development of classroom community, attentiveness, and reflective participation.

Similar to the embodied learning frameworks described by Merleau-Ponty (1962), Eisner (2002), and Shapiro and Stolz (2019), students in this study appeared to develop awareness and engagement through physical and sensory experiences. Yoga poses, mindful breathing, mudras, and movement breaks were not separate from academic learning, but became integrated into artistic processes and classroom routines. Students physically embodied artistic concepts during instruction through movement demonstrations connected to blending, layering, posture, and spatial awareness. These embodied experiences appeared to strengthen attentional readiness and

support sustained engagement during independent work time. Eisner's emphasis on sensory awareness and multiple forms of cognition was reflected in the way students interacted physically, emotionally, and creatively with materials and learning experiences. Yoga and mindfulness practices functioned as grounding sensory experiences that helped students transition between activities and return attention to the present moment. Mudras in particular appeared to provide students with tactile and embodied strategies for self-soothing and emotional regulation after periods of active studio work. These findings align with embodied cognition theories which suggest that learning occurs through the interaction between body, perception and environment, rather than through cognition alone.

The findings of this study also align with existing research on social-emotional learning (SEL) and self-regulation in school-based mindfulness programs. Similar to the SEL competencies identified by CASEL, students appeared to develop increased self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills through repeated participation in mindfulness practices. Research by Butzer et al. (2017), Bazzano et al. (2018), Martin et al. (2024), and Schonert-Reichl et al (2015) identified improvements in emotional regulation, focus, stress reduction, and classroom climate through yoga and mindfulness interventions, and similar patterns were observed in this study. Observational data suggests that transitions into classroom opening activities and closure discussions became calmer and more focused over time, and students appeared increasingly prepared to engage in reflective conversation after practicing meditation or mudras. One student in particular demonstrated how mindfulness practices may support gradual emotional regulation and classroom belonging over time. When I first transitioned into leading his classroom, this student openly resisted yoga and meditation practices, questioned my authority as a teacher, refused participation, and made disruptive comments during mindfulness

activities. However, after several weeks of consistent exposure to yoga, meditation, and mudras, observational notes documented noticeable changes in his participation and demeanor. The student was later observed laughing with peers during yoga poses, visibly relaxing during meditation, and discussing mudras with classmates while waiting in line to leave the classroom. While these observations cannot establish causation, they suggest increasing acceptance of mindfulness practices and indicate that repeated, nonjudgmental participation opportunities may support emotional regulation, social engagement, and classroom trust-building over time.

The findings additionally reflect principles of Humanistic Education and the pedagogical philosophies of bell hooks and Paulo Freire. Mindfulness practices appear to help create a relational and emotionally supportive classroom environment, grounded in presence, reflection, and mutual care. Rather than functioning as disciplinary tools, yoga and mindfulness routines were integrated as collective practices that encouraged students to participate together in breathing exercises, yoga poses, reflective discussion, and moments of stillness. This collaborative participation reflects hooks' concept of a "love ethic," emphasizing compassion, community, and emotional presence within educational spaces. Similarly, Freire's vision of humanizing pedagogy was reflected in classroom routines which center student awareness, agency, and emotional wellbeing rather than compliance alone. Students who initially resisted mindfulness practices were not punished or excluded from participation. They were continually invited into the classroom community through consistent and low-pressure opportunities for engagement. Over time, these practices appeared to support a greater sense of belonging, emotional safety, and collective joy within the classroom environment.

The findings of this study align with previous research which demonstrates that yoga and mindful practices may improve emotional regulation, attention and focus, classroom climate, and

social-emotional wellbeing among school-aged children. This study also extended current research in several important ways. Much of the existing research reviewed in Chapter 2 examined yoga through short-term interventions, clinical studies, or isolated wellness programs that operated separately from academic instruction. In contrast, this study examined yoga and mindfulness as integrated pedagogical practices embedded throughout everyday classroom experiences within an elementary art setting. Rather than functioning as a standalone intervention, yoga was woven into transitions, demonstrations, cleanup routines, closure discussions, and creative processes. Mudras became part of the classroom culture and functioned as embodied tools for grounding and self-soothing during transitions between activities. This study also connected embodied mindfulness practices specifically to artistic cognition and creative engagement, illustrating how movement, sensory awareness, and reflective practices may support both artistic learning and emotional regulation simultaneously. In this way, the study contributed to existing research by examining yoga not only as a wellness intervention, but also as an integrated pedagogical approach within arts education.

Despite the overall positive findings of this study, some students initially resisted yoga and mindfulness practices. A small number of students expressed discomfort with meditation, reluctance to participate in yoga poses, or skepticism toward nontraditional classroom routines involving mindfulness. These responses reflected some of the “roadblocks” that can emerge when introducing unfamiliar embodied practices into classroom settings. However, resistance did not appear to eliminate the potential benefits of mindfulness practices over time. Instead, observational data suggests that consistency, repeated exposure, and low-pressure participation opportunities helped students gradually normalize these routines within the classroom environment. The student who initially challenged my authority, resisted meditation, and

disrupted mindfulness activities later became one of the clearest examples of increasing participation and acceptance. Over time, he appeared more relaxed, engaged in his artwork, and more emotionally open during mindfulness activities. This progression suggests that student resistance may sometimes reflect discomfort with unfamiliar vulnerability or classroom expectations rather than rejection of mindfulness itself. Moments of resistance in this study did not overshadow the broader evidence of student growth, engagement, and community-building that emerged throughout the project.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this action research study. These limitations include theoretical considerations, methodological constraints, and practical challenges related to implementing yoga and mindfulness practices in K-12 classrooms. While these limitations do not diminish the value of the findings, they provide important context for understanding the scope of the study and identifying directions for future research.

One theoretical limitation involves the complexity of applying broad educational theories such as Embodied Learning Theory, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Humanistic Education, and the work of Paulo Freire and bell hooks to a classroom-based action research project. While the findings generally align with these theoretical frameworks, it was not possible to examine every dimension of each theory. For example, embodied learning theory emphasizes the relationship between bodily experience and cognition, yet this study primarily examined observable classroom behaviors rather than directly measuring cognitive changes resulting from embodied practices. Freire's concepts of critical consciousness and hooks' vision of education as a practice of freedom extend beyond self-regulation and classroom engagement. Although

students appeared to develop increased self-awareness and participation, the study did not specifically investigate long-term shifts into critical consciousness, identity development, or social transformation. Future studies could incorporate student interviews, reflective journals, or longitudinal data collection to better examine how yoga and mindfulness practices contribute to these broader theoretical outcomes.

Another limitation concerns the qualitative and action research design of the study. As both the teacher and researcher, I occupied a dual role that created the possibility of researcher bias. Because I believe strongly in the value of yoga and mindfulness practices, it is possible that my interpretations of student behavior were influenced by my own expectations and experiences. The study was supported by data from lesson plans, observations, assessments, and feedback from mentor teachers and supervisors; however the study relied heavily on my interpretation of classroom events. The qualitative nature of action research emphasizes depth of understanding rather than statistical results. Future research could strengthen these findings by incorporating mixed-methods approaches, such as quantitative measures of self-regulation, attention, or emotional wellbeing. Studies involving multiple researchers or independent observers could also reduce potential bias and provide additional perspectives on student outcomes.

The duration and scope of this study present another methodological limitation. This project was conducted over a relatively short period of time within a single classroom setting. Although meaningful changes in student participation, emotional regulation, and engagement were observed, it is difficult to determine whether these outcomes would be sustained over longer periods. The study also involved a limited number of students within one independent school, making it difficult to generalize findings to other educational contexts. Student responses to yoga and mindfulness practices may vary significantly across age groups, school settings,

socioeconomic contexts and cultural communities. Future research should examine longer term implementations of yoga and mindfulness practices across multiple classrooms, schools, and grade levels to better understand how these practices function in diverse educational settings.

Another methodological limitation involves the type of data collected. The primary sources of data included lesson plans, teacher reflections, observational notes, student work and informal feedback. While these sources provided valuable insight into classroom experiences, they did not directly measure physiological indicators of stress, attention, or emotional regulation. Additionally, many observations were based on visible behaviors rather than students' internal experiences. For example, a student who appeared calm and focused during meditation may have experienced the activity differently than what was observable from the outside. Future studies could incorporate student interviews, surveys, or self-assessments to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how students experience yoga and mindfulness practices.

Practical limitations also affected the study. One challenge is that successful implementation of yoga and mindfulness practices depend heavily on the knowledge, comfort and commitment of the classroom teacher. My background as a certified yoga instructor and children's yoga teacher influenced both the quality of implementation and my confidence in facilitating these practices. Teachers without specialized training may experience challenges in adapting yoga safely, responding to student needs, or integrating mindfulness into existing curriculum. Future research could investigate how teachers with varying levels of experience implement yoga and mindfulness practices and identify professional development models that support successful classroom integration.

Finally, the unique context of the elementary art classroom may limit the transferability of these findings. Art education naturally emphasizes creativity, reflection, sensory exploration

and flexible learning environments, all of which may complement yoga and mindfulness practices. It is possible that the positive outcomes observed in this study were partially influenced by the artistic context in which the practices occurred. Classrooms with more rigid schedules, high-stakes testing pressures or different instructional structures may experience different results. Future research could explore how yoga and mindfulness practices function across a variety of content areas, including mathematics, science, language arts and social studies, to better understand the broader educational applications.

Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insight into how yoga and mindfulness practices may support self-regulation, engagement, and classroom community within elementary art education. The limitations identified here also suggest opportunities for future research that can build upon and extend the findings of this project. Continued investigation across diverse contexts can help educators better understand the role of embodied mindfulness practices in supporting whole child development and learning.

Conclusion

The purpose of this action research project was to examine how yoga and mindfulness practices supported student self-regulation within an elementary art classroom. Drawing from Embodied Learning Theory, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Humanistic Education, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), this study explored how yoga poses, breathing exercises, meditation, movement breaks, and mudras influenced students' engagement, emotional regulation, and participation. Through analysis of lesson plans, teaching reflections, observations, student work and classroom interactions, the findings suggest that mindfulness practices support calmer classroom transitions, increased engagement during learning activities, and fostered a stronger sense of classroom community. Students appeared to develop greater

awareness of their emotions, bodies, and behaviors over time, while mindfulness routines became increasingly normalized and accepted within the classroom culture.

This study reinforced many of the findings identified in previous research on school-based yoga and mindfulness programs. Consistent with existing research, students appeared to benefit from opportunities to slow down, focus their attention, regulate their emotions, and connect with one another in meaningful ways. However, this project also demonstrated that yoga and mindfulness can function as more than isolated wellness activities. When integrated into everyday classroom routines, artistic processes, transitions, and reflective discussions these practices became part of the learning environment itself. Yoga was not separate from learning; rather, it became a tool that supported students' readiness to learn, participate, create and reflect.

Perhaps the most important lesson that I learned from conducting this study is that students often need more than academic instruction alone. They need opportunities to develop awareness of their emotions, manage stress, build relationships, and feel a sense of belonging within their learning community. I entered this project believing that yoga could offer students tools that I wish I had access to during my own K-12 education. Throughout this research, I observed moments that strengthened that belief. I watched students use breathing techniques to calm themselves, support one another during yoga activities, participate in reflective discussions, and gradually become more comfortable with mindfulness practices that initially felt unfamiliar. Even students who demonstrated resistance at the beginning of the study often showed increased openness and participation over time.

As I reflect on my findings and my own educational journey, I am reminded that learning is not solely a cognitive process. Students learn through their bodies, emotions, relationships, and experiences. Creating opportunities for students to develop self-regulation and emotional

awareness is not separate from academic learning; it is foundational to it. Ultimately, this study reaffirmed my commitment to creating classrooms where students feel seen, supported, and empowered. Yoga and mindfulness practices offer a pathway towards that goal by helping students cultivate presence, resilience, self-awareness, social awareness, and a stronger connection to themselves and their learning community. These were the qualities that were often absent from my own educational experiences and they are the qualities I hope to continue to foster throughout my career as an educator.

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