Using Yoga as a Personalized and Emergent Model for Early Childhood Educators

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As teachers, it can be advantageous when we bring personal interests into the teaching context. These personal interests can be seen as strengths, hooks, or ways of engaging others in our lessons as well as making learning contextualized and meaningful. We cannot be interested, knowledgeable and ‘strong’ in every area, but that should not prevent us from bringing in slices of interesting tidbits from many domains to personalize teaching with adults or children. This workshop utilizes yoga in the early child-centered education context to demonstrate how children and early childhood educators can experience literacy and personal development benefits either from a one-time exposure or from repetitive use of personalized sessions.

Keywords
personalization, literacy, yoga, early childhood educators, early childhood educator training, emergent curriculum

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Using Yoga as a Personalized and Emergent Model for Early Childhood Educators
Mary M. MacPhee, University of Prince Edward Island

SUMMARY
Personalized and emergent instruction is an effective model for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and students to consider and use in their own teaching. This workshop utilizes yoga as an experiential and emergent model with ECEs to be reproduced for contextualized and meaningful learning in the early childhood environment. The workshop highlights how children’s literacy and personal development can be enhanced by yoga or other personalized sessions with one-time or multiple-session use.

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES
By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:
• value and practice personalized teaching;
• replicate the demonstrated model through observational learning;
• connect curriculum to real life for meaningful, purposeful learning;
• instruct emergently using instructors’ or students’ interests, talents, and abilities;
• appreciate the importance of inclusion in building a sense of belonging and community;
• replicate the workshop using a variety of methods and approaches; and
• value and use yoga for literacy and personal development benefits.

REFERENCE SUMMARIES

Keefe argues that in this post-technological age, we need students to develop life-skills that will enable them to adapt as life-long learners. Personalized instruction involves using diverse methods to create meaningful teaching and learning by demonstrating that teachers and students alike are valued as members of the community. Keefe encourages teachers to use previous knowledge and interests to help develop a sense of community, belonging, and purpose in our education. Personalized learning allows students and teachers to access their talents and aspirations, while connecting curriculum to real life and beginning where
students are. This can be particularly meaningful for approaching literacy in a meaningful context.
This workshop uses yoga as a ‘personal interest area’ to allow students to explore yoga experientially according to their own ability. The use of books to guide the yoga practice makes the literacy experience meaningful, enjoyable and memorable. Participants will be encouraged to practice yoga in a way that is accessible to them as individuals.


Riley and Roach encourage the promotion of learning for early childcare educators (ECEs) by modeling behaviors in the early childcare environment that children will, hopefully, imitate. The authors favour creating experience-based learning opportunities when teaching adults or children. They also emphasize the importance of open, trusting relationships where teachers can refer to their own knowledge and stories for teaching and learning. The authors also stress the importance of helping ECEs move from identifying a specific skill toward a general application of the skill in many areas of working with children.

In this workshop, ECEs in professional development or training will participate in an experience-based learning opportunity that they can reproduce with children in their work environment. The model can be easily replicated since yoga can be substituted for any other teacher or student interest in a personalized and emergent fashion.


Komitor and Adamson emphasize the multifaceted nature of yoga which promotes physical strength, flexibility, and other physiological aspects of well-being while developing mental and emotional aspects of self-confidence, self-acceptance and a calm controlled mind. The philosophy of yoga promotes a sense of belonging and community.

In this workshop, designed to be imitated in an early childcare environment, children can benefit from this type of physical and emotional development. For example, arm, hand and finger strength and dexterity develop from holding themselves up in yoga poses and will enhance pencil holding for writing. When children are led through the philosophy, breathing and calming techniques from yoga, they will become better aware of their emotions and develop new ways of calming themselves. By encouraging students to participate in a way that is personally appropriate, bearing in mind personal differences, yoga also promotes self-acceptance.

This author demonstrates methods for using storytelling combined with yoga to not only stretch and strengthen the body but also to cultivate the mind of children. The stories can be simple or more complex and lead to moral and ethical discussions. Stories and books can help broach emotional and social issues when working with children and can be used in a way similar to a parable. Additionally, this type of story telling has the added benefit of working through issues or demonstrating it with our bodies.

In this workshop, participants will experience two different ways to combine story telling with a yoga experience to make the interaction appropriate for younger or older children. The yoga experience will cultivate imagination, challenge memory and stretch and strengthen the body.

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration (Min)</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Ask participants what some of their interests are (activities or hobbies you partake in). Follow this up by brainstorming current general trends in society/culture which children and their parents are likely to be aware. This may include: Gangham Style or other popular music; Zumba, Yoga or dance; video games or other technology; or the “hot item” for Christmas this year. Record (or have participants record) their answers on white board or flip chart paper.</td>
<td>Introduce workshop by exploring participants' personal interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>Brainstorming Yoga</td>
<td>Hand out some adult and children’s yoga books for participants to use for this activity. Invite participants to visually compare some of the yoga poses in the books with common stretches many fitness activities use. Either as a large group or in smaller groups of two or three, invite participants to make up new kid-friendly names for the poses. Using whiteboards or chart paper, ask participants to share the kid-friendly names they develop with the class. Encourage participants to draw stick figures of the poses.</td>
<td>Familiarize participants with the basic practice of yoga and its applicability as a teaching method.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 25 | Yoga as Literacy Strategy | In a large space, encourage participants to sit down on the floor or assume a similarly appropriate position. Make sure that the area is suitable and includes rugs or yoga and fitness mats. Using the child’s storybook prepared in advance, read a story TWO times to your group gathered on the floor. Ask the participants to represent the described pose on each page with the bodies.  
   • **First Reading:** After each page, pause and choose one image to highlight for a yoga pose. Ask the participants to embody this pose immediately. Some potential examples include a cat, a dog or a tree, etc.  
   • **Second Reading:** After reading each page, pause and choose one image to highlight for a yoga pose. Ask students to remember the pose. At the end of the story, ask the group to recall the story by using their bodies to represent the items they remember. | Model the methods of instruction so that participants can recreate this workshop for their own classroom environment. |
| 30 | Replicating the Workshop through Emergent Learning | Divide participants into small groups of approximately three individuals and give each group access to the range of resources used to plan this workshop. Consult Appendix A for a list of suggested resources. Using the resources provided, ask participants to plan a mini-lesson in groups of three where they engage the other two members of the group in doing yoga poses inspired by the resources. This should include at least three yoga poses. Allow time for each participant to teach this “mini-yoga experience” to the other | By planning a mini-lesson based on the principles of this workshop, participants will be able to reproduce this type of instructional method in diverse and personalized ways |
members of the group.

If participants select yoga-specific books, encourage them to focus their mini-lesson on breathing or meditation exercises from the books as well as a physical pose.

15

| Conclusion |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| To conclude the workshop, facilitate a roundtable discussion by asking participants to share their experience. Some questions to ask the group include: |
| • How did it feel to lead? |
| • How did it feel to be led? |
| • Could you see benefits of doing this? |
| • What challenges became apparent? |
| • What suggestions has this workshop offered for how to teach using yoga? |
| • What gifts did you discover? For example, are there any opportune moments when you will want to use yoga in the future? When, where, with whom, why? |
| • What personal interests or strengths could you bring into the early childcare environment? |

Facilitate a move away from a specific knowledge to a more generalized knowledge by exploring what participants have learned and how they can use this teaching model in multiple ways.

Total Time: 85-95 minutes

PRESENTATION STRATEGIES
The workshop was designed with an assumption that participants had only a beginner's knowledge of yoga. The focus of this workshop is on how to transition to a new learning style. Discussion should focus not only on what participants have learned but how they would apply this content. Participants have several opportunities to ask questions. This workshop also considers not only the importance of listening and speaking or reading and writing but also the value of being kinaesthetically involved with body movements. All of this ensures that workshop appeals to many learning styles. Participants benefit from observing the desired approach and having the opportunity to make choices to imitate instruction in an individually appropriate way. Please note this workshop requires some resources (consult Appendix A) and a space large enough for the group to do some basic yoga.
APPENDIX A: Handout: Yoga for Personalized and Emergent Instruction

Personalizing teaching creates meaningful, contextualized opportunities for learning in addition to encouraging a feeling of belonging as a valued member in a community. In particular, this workshop focuses on the contextualization of literacy through yoga, which offers many additional benefits of personal development.

**Suggested Template for Adapting This Workshop**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduce the workshop by focusing on what the audience already knows. Focus on brainstorming and activities that explore personal interests.</td>
<td>Invite children or participants to share their personal stories or interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose one topic to explore (e.g.: yoga) to use as the basis for personalized and emergent instruction. This should be based on the instructor’s personal knowledge and interests.</td>
<td>Share personal story or interest with group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase your audience’s familiarity with the chosen topic.</td>
<td>Everyone will personally connect to the personalized instruction by seeing, hearing, touching, modeling or in some other way understanding why the personal interest was chosen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This may involve looking at books, videos, Youtube, audiotapes, seeing or handling artifacts or objects, observing or coloring images, playing games, learning new words, smelling or even eating something.</td>
<td>Children share what they learned, ask questions, develop a plan for subsequent lessons.</td>
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</table>

Resources to consider for replicating a workshop that combines yoga with literacy:

- Holiday theme books, such as for Christmas, Easter, Earth Day, summer vacation or a visit to the fair
- Children’s books with animals
- Coloring books with simple pictures [1 per page]
- Books about vehicles
- Alphabet books
- Scholastic books, particularly the entry into kindergarten books such as: *Canada 1,2,3 or Ears to Toes*
- Sliding page books where the image is hidden while text is read, such as *Whose House is This?*
- Large group size books, such as *Dan the Flying Man*
- Yoga for children books, such as: *A Yoga Parade of Animals; Yoga Pour les Enfants; The ABCs of Yoga for Kids and Yoganimo - version française*

*Note:* These books can be readily borrowed from most libraries.