

KAY in The Classroom

By Sacha Demby, KAY Licensee

I had been teaching 5th grade in a Title 1 school for ten years before I took my first KAY training and I currently teach the math at a small K-8 Charter School in Pasco County. Over the years I have encountered many different types of kids, parents, and teachers. My experiences in the classroom have included piloting full inclusion ESE teams, getting trained in Learning Focused Strategies, and contributing to the creation of a school-wide behavior management system. I have also received my Master's in Special Education with a Reading Endorsement from the University of Florida and most recently got my CYT200 with Jiva Patha School of Conscious Yoga in Spring Hill. In addition to middle school math I teach two after school KAY classes at Athenian Academy of Pasco in New Port Richey and a Saturday morning class at Gaya Jyoti Yoga in Spring Hill.

My KAY teacher training was a life-changing weekend and full of “ah-ha moments” and light bulbs and connections back to my classroom: my mind was racing. The very next day after KAY training ended I was doing The Yoga Slide with fifty 5th graders in the media center. I became more aware of the teachable moments and began using Yoga lessons in the classroom, but using language modifications, as we do with the asanas. We might not see anything threatening in using the term “meditation” for example, but the reality is there are still a few people who do and I provide their children a public education. I don't mind selecting different words when teaching KAY strategies in my classroom; I am just happy I can use my personal Yoga to then translate that into skills and tools that are accessible to all children.

As a classroom teacher, I have found some natural connections between KAY lessons and games and basic classroom management. A great resource is a book called 1,2,3 Magic. This simple yet effective system of praising desired behaviors and using a counting method “that's one...two....three” without engaging in discussion. The consequence of three undesired behaviors is a 5 minute break. I use the 1,2,3 Magic methods in my classroom and I have also adapted it for the KAY class. It is uncommon to have many serious behavior problems in a Yoga class, but it is important to keep in mind that special needs populations are turning to kid's Yoga and many of these children have academic, emotional, or behavioral disabilities and/or could fall on the Autism spectrum, among a range of other diagnoses. It is important to know the kids in your class so you can differentiate and modify as necessary.

Although kids Yoga is about moving, breathing, jumping, and playing it is important to follow the outline of a KAY lesson to provide the consistency that many children want and need. It isn't only being taught to the children, but mindfulness is modeled and demonstrated throughout the class from the placement of shoes and backpacks at the start to rolling up the mats at the end. The use of the talking stick teaches and gently enforces active listening skills and can easily be turned into a learning focus itself. This manual has so many wonderful ideas and examples you will never run out of ways to keep your class engaged. KAY activities and games can be used in any setting where an adult needs to maintain control and composure, which can be challenging at times.

Mornings are generally when important subjects like reading are taught in the elementary schools. This is usually a good thing for most kids, but a common side effect among some commonly prescribed ADHD medications is drowsiness. Once they are awake, however, the child is usually more focused and ready to learn. Doing a couple Sun Salutations at the start of every day energizes the mind and body and it also serves as a way to set the intentions of the day and can "set the stage" for learning. If space is limited, a modified chair Yoga Salutation could be substituted and get the same effect.

Many guided reading books are about animals or have characters that could easily be turned into Yoga poses. There are opportunities to make Reader's Theater come to life in a new, fresh way that gets kids moving and stretching and breathing. Thinking creatively with math can also get kids to their feet. Yoga poses are full of angles and sides; having kids physically act out definitions for math vocabulary will have a profound impact on their understanding of the word. Poses are simple to use during whole group or small group lessons once you start looking at text and content through a Yoga lens.

Transitions can be a teacher's nightmare or best friend. If transitions between subjects and classes like PE, Art, and Music were planned out like a mini-mini-lesson, things would go smoother and more time would be spent during lessons and less time in refocusing a group of kids. When closing out one lesson and making the physical move to line up at the door, kids could be given a physical task to accomplish while lining up at the door. If your school has specials "a la cart" you could have a second seating chart so they still have a change of scenery and movement. Kids could do a Warrior Walk to the door, get in a Mindful Line by lining up in height order without talking (and having to re-start when someone does). Plan for this to take a few minutes while they are learning how to work together, make sure to give the assignment more than once so they

feel success, and then celebrate it once they do. Students can practice focus and concentration by counting their steps from the classroom to PE, collect the data, graph it and turn it into a math problem. You also will have a very quiet line. Taking a few moments to do a chair or standing pose BLISS before starting the next subject could be a unique lesson activator or way to review previously learned information.

A Talking Stick Circle at the end of the day is a great way to get verbal summaries and reflections from kids. Doing an entire circle of the whole class takes time and would be best saved for weekly class meetings. Some daily modifications could include passing the stick to three randomly or specifically chosen students or have a variety of Mini Sticks made out of straws to use in collaborative groups or for pair sharing. Building in a few minutes to allow the kids to discuss what they learned will help in their retaining the information and allows them to learn how to take turns talking. Finally, giving ownership of classroom cleaning and maintenance will teach mindfulness and be a gesture of respect for the space that is used for their education.

KAY activities and lessons can be fit into any class's behavior plan and can be used to start and finish an entire school day as well as individual classes or subjects. My KAY training re-ignited my passion for teaching and reminded me of the reasons I became a teacher in the first place. Becoming aware of these overlaps has made my classroom an even more positive and healthy learning environment that benefits my students and myself.