

Yoga and Speech Therapy

By Katie Poti, KAY certified in January 2012

Yoga techniques are over 5,000 years old and have changed over time through experimentation in practice. Presently Yoga is being recognized in Western society for its physical health benefits; and more recently the children's Yoga movement has begun to grow. More and more parents, teachers, and therapists are finding the effects of yogic breathing techniques, the physical postures, and the fun in movement actually aid in child development. Yoga is so much more than one more activity to put children in—it incorporates all the senses in a fun environment. The calming effect of the breathing techniques as well as relaxation/meditation prepares the mind to learn and *retain* what it has learned. Yoga can be done within a group class structure, or a few minutes of techniques can be incorporated into a one-on-one therapy session. Yoga teaches children to use the tools they already have to calm their minds and bodies, and deal with the stressors within their environments. Below are some reasons from www.sayitright.org/Yogaandspeech.html why incorporating Yoga could be beneficial in the context of a speech and language clinic.

1. As kinetic movement, Yoga can aid in developing decoding skills, fluency, vocabulary, syntactic knowledge, discourse knowledge and metacognition.
2. Since there is an established link between fine and gross motor delay and linguistic ability improving motor skills, through an activity such as Yoga, you can positively impact concomitant development of both motor and language-linguistic skills.
3. By using the body as a kinesthetic medium, Yoga facilitates learning spatial and oppositional concepts, such as under/over, left/right, below/above, etc.
4. Knowledge, processed and stored temporarily in the hippocampus (with limited space), is re-filed by the brain during rest periods into longer-term storage areas. Yoga aids in retention by allowing deep rest periods that can allow for this integration.

5. Yoga is one of the best activities for grounding and centering children. Grounded children are ready to learn with less behavior problems. Children that are nervous, anxious, aggressive, fearful or socially-challenged may especially benefit from Yoga.
6. The cerebellum coordinates both sensory movement and processes language cognition. This intersection is where movement (Yoga) harmonizes with language acquisition and retention.
7. Physically acting out stories using Yoga movements (children especially like all the animal possibilities: cat, cow, dog, elephant, etc.) provide students with a variety of contextualized and scaffolded activities that gradually involve more oral language and active participation that are non-threatening and a lot of fun.
8. Bodily awareness is increased when one does yogic exercises, improving posture and breathing which are essential foundations for oral speech.
9. Yoga is tactile/kinesthetic learning; the most basic child-centric learning style.
10. Yoga, as a teaching medium through movement, gives children a context for listening and meaningful language production.