

**RALPH W. PERRY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

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March 13, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

As a School Social Worker, I struggle to find strategies to teach students, in both regular education and special education, how to manage their emotions and control their physical actions. Many of these students are impulsive or have disorders that impact neurological responses to stimuli and are consequently hyperactive in classrooms and more likely to experience discipline problems, particularly in the less structured settings like lunch, recess, hallways or on the bus. Others have cognitive limitations that impact executive and social functioning. Their ability to read social cues, make critical choices, empathize with others or calm themselves is limited, again leading to discipline issues as well as social alienation. In 15 years of researching and teaching social skills and providing individual counseling to such students, I have finally observed something that works.

Earlier this year, I invited the "YogaTales" program run by Carol LaFache, a NYS Certified Teacher and Yoga instructor and Laureen Violante, a highly recognized area expert and instructor of Yoga, to run a program for special education students currently participating in a social skills training class once each week. Students ranged from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and included individuals with Autism, Down's Syndrome, Traumatic Brain Injury, mobility limitations, significant Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder with Hyperactivity and Conduct Disorders.

The instructors utilized a combination of Language Arts with social meaning, yoga movement to retell the story, and relaxation and deep breathing techniques. At the start of the class, students learned how to calm themselves and open their minds to learning through a series of breathing and relaxation exercises. Then, using an old tale about Ghengis Khan and an eagle, they held the students' in rapt attention (about 12 in each class) while using the medium to teach the importance of impulse control and anger management. The story also raised emotional sensitivity and empathy. Next, the students stood and followed instruction through a series of yoga movements that retold each aspect of the story, re-iterating the concepts while the students controlled their physical selves. At the end of the session, they were asked to lie down, close their eyes and remain still while experiencing an imagery exercise and more relaxation breathing. Now remember, these are teens between 12 and 15 who never sit still, who are anxious, and have difficulty following directions day in and day out. Not one of the students was off task or verbally disruptive for the full 40 minutes in all the class. This was remarkable for me to observe. I am now incorporating some of the strategies used for YogaTales in my social skills classes and seeing improvement with my students.

I cannot recommend this program enough. It is professionally designed and meets the standards for learning with so much more. The instructors, Ms. Violante and Ms. LaFache, both relate extremely well with students and were a joy to work with. I hope to bring the program back in the next school year, providing this opportunity to more students for an extended period of time. You, too, may find this an excellent support to your existing curriculum. Thank you for your consideration of my opinion.

Respectfully yours,

Christine A. Porter, LCSW