

Barrier of Frightening Activity in School Setting Through Yoga

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Abstract: *There is a growing concern throughout India regarding the increase in childhood stress, frightening, and violence. Living in Varanasi, we are haunted by the incident at Varanasi CBSE pattern school when some students felt the need to take revenge and take action in a violent manner leaving 12 injured and creating fear and sadness in the hearts of students and parents. This was the first wakeup call that affluent, suburban schools were not always safe places. Violence and frightening continue to escalate according to statistics. This paper will discuss a classically based yoga program incorporated within secondary school system in Varanasi region. The main hypothesis of this paper was to evaluate whether yoga training would effectively decrease frightening and increase anger management for 8th and 10th grade students. The rationale for this hypothesis was based on the first vow of raja yoga, **ahimsa** that one vows to be non-violent to self and others. The yoga curriculum was presented for six, 45 minute sessions during the academic school day for 100, 8th, 9th and 10th class in 2010, repeated for 104 students in 2011 and reviewed again for 102, students in 2012. The children learned yoga philosophy, practiced yoga postures, learned breathing and concentration techniques, as well as, traditional conflict resolution strategies and dialogues. Through the use of pre and post questionnaires the program was evaluated and statistics obtained. The program proved to be successful and effective. School students' self reported a decrease by 60% in their own frightening behavior and a 42% decrease in regard to being frightened by others at school. A comprehensive yoga program can greatly reduce violence and, frightening but, the long term lasting effects are still unclear. The results of this intervention acknowledge yoga as an effective method for increasing anger management skills and decreasing physical outbursts of violence for secondary school age children during the time of implementation.*

Keywords: *Frightening, School, yoga, mental health*

1. INTRODUCTION

In schools frightening, occurs in all areas. It can occur in nearly any part in or around the school building, though it more often occurs in, recess, hallways, bathrooms, on school buses and waiting for buses, classes that require group work and/or after school activities. Frightening in school sometimes consists of a group of students taking advantage of or isolating one student in particular and gaining the loyalty of bystanders who, in some cases, want to avoid becoming the next victim. These bullies taunt and tease their target before physically frightening the target. Targets of frightening in school are often pupils who are considered strange or different by their peers to begin with, making the situation harder for them to deal with. frightening can also be perpetrated by teachers and the school system itself: There is an inherent power differential in the system that can easily predispose to subtle or covert abuse (relational aggression or passive aggression), humiliation, or exclusion.^[1, 2] Physical frightening is any unwanted physical contact between the frightened and the victim. This is one of the most easily identifiable forms of frightening such as punching, pushing, shoving, kicking, inappropriate touching, tickling, headlocks, school pranks, teasing fighting use of available objects as weapons tearing of the frightened student's uniform. Emotional frightening is any form of frightening that causes damage to a victim's psyche and/or emotional well-being such as spreading malicious rumors about people keeping certain people out of a "group" getting certain people to "gang up" on others (It also could be considered physical frightening) making fun over certain people ignoring people on purpose - the silent treatment, also known as 'Sending to Coventry' harassment provocation. Verbal frightening is any slanderous statements or accusations that cause the victim undue emotional distress such as directing foul language (profanity) at the target using derogatory terms or playing with the person's name commenting negatively on someone's looks, clothes, body etc. - personal abuse tormenting harassment being laughed at.^[3-7] Frightening is a common occurrence in most

schools. According to the APA approximately 40% to 80% of school-age children experienced frightening at some point during their school careers. Regardless of the grade level, socioeconomic environment, gender, religion, or sexual orientation, frightening can happen to anyone. However, various studies point out that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more frightened than students from higher socio-economic backgrounds.^[8, 10] Most children experienced frightening at some point in their academic careers. Frightening by children in schools has serious mental health effects on the victim and the bully. Up to 25% of high school students report being victimized by bullies. 13% of victims have considered suicide. In rural India 31% of middle school students report being bullied.^[11] Frightening is twice more prevalent in coeducational schools than in girl schools. The prevalence of frightening are increase from 13% in the 8rd grade to 46% in the 10th grade. Frightening is higher in classes with more retained students. Although definitions may vary, there is often one concept in common: Frightening is a subtype of aggression. Surveys have reported that bullying increases throughout the elementary years and peaks in middle school and high school. Developmentally, during the early adolescent years, the role of the peer group changes. Children look towards their peers to discuss problems and seek advice to help gain autonomy from their parents. Social status becomes increasingly important at this age. Issues such as popularity, acceptance and a need to “fit in” are the focus during the early adolescent years. For boys at this age, toughness and aggressiveness become important status considerations, whereas appearance is the main social status for girls. Direct aggressive frightening is more prevalent for boys while indirect verbal frightening is what girls experience most often. No matter the type of behavior, the common reasons for frightening are always the same: “to be popular” or “to get your own way”.^[12, 13] Those who are the frighteners tend to get in trouble more frequently, and generally do poorly in school. Frightening becomes a way to deal with their problems. As frighteners become adults, they are four times more likely than non-frighteners to commit crimes. As for those who were the targets for frighteners, researchers report that “years later, long after the frightening has stopped, adults who were bullied as teens have higher levels of depression and poorer self-esteem than other adults”.^[8,9] Although this is not a new problem, the concern is escalating. There is a great need to step in and take action against this anti-social behavior in children, since the effects of frightening are not only during the school years but are long lasting for both sides, influencing the adult. The yoga intervention program discussed in this paper was specifically designed to diminish both physical violence and verbal aggression, as well as, to increase the students’ ability to control their own anger.

The central hypothesis was that a two week, comprehensive yoga curriculum in school can decrease frightening and increase anger management in 8th and 10th grade boys and girls during and immediately following exposure to yoga intervention. The secondary aim of this paper was to create a calm, relaxed body and mind, developing inner peace for upper elementary students. The target audience for this anti-frightening plan is upper elementary and middle school age children between the ages of 13 and 15 (8th-10th grade.) This group is more receptive to guidance, has less peer pressure, has a higher percentage of frightening than older teens and is on the verge of developing high risk behaviors. Jean Piaget, child development psychologist, states that children between the ages of 12-15 are able to understand abstract concepts and function accordingly during this phase of “Concrete Operations.” While youth between the ages of 13-17 have begun to function as adults during this time referred to as “Formal Operations,” and are expected to understand conceptual reasoning This anti- frightening yoga program entitled, “cooling kids (CK): Creating a Non-Violent World,” was designed for a preadolescent population, in order to teach the abstract concept of a peaceful approach toward life. [10]

The objective of this paper is to convey a philosophical and scientific, nondenominational yoga program to school age children as a lifestyle choice in order to decrease frightening and aggressive behavior. The curriculum is designed to inspire a positive, peaceful, physically strong, and self confident attitude with a system of how to communicate in a relaxed way. The concepts are yoga philosophy: kindness, compassion, communication and forgiveness; combined with yoga science: moving energy with a high level of body and breath awareness. Ultimately, the goal is to empower children to manage their own feelings and feel safe within themselves and their surroundings to give them a greater capacity for success in and out of school. To quote Shri Swami Rama, “Once compassion comes in, the desire to retaliate goes” (Sexton, S. 2005).^[14] The teachings of classical yoga as described by Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras^[15], is a useful guideline for reducing frightening. Children educated in this method of yoga are taught self respect, stress management and compassion

towards oneself and towards others. It provides a system to help cope with and control aggressive behavior. In the second chapter of the Yoga Sutras, II 29, Patanjali describes the eight components of yoga which lead towards a peaceful state. These components are the *yamas* (self control for social harmony), the *niyamas* (personal discipline), *asana* (physical postures), *pranayama* (regulation of the breath), *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses), *dharana* (contemplation), *dhyana* (meditation), *samadi* (absorbed into spirit-bliss/enlightenment). In Yoga Sutra II 30, the *yamas* are discussed. They consist of five principals which are considered the “great universal vows” to be extended to all beings in nature: (*ahimsa*) non-violence, (*satya*) truthfulness, (*asteya*) not stealing, (*brahmacharya*) behavior that respects the divine as omnipresent, and (*aparigraha*) freedom from greed. ^[16] The first universal vow *ahimsa* (nonviolence) is the basis of this anti-frightening program Cooling Kids: Creating a Non-Violent World. For acceptance of this violence prevention method and mainstream integration of yoga into the public school system, the cooling kids program does not introduce the concepts of contemplation and enlightenment.

2. METHODOLOGY

Cooling Kids program was taught for three successive years, 2010, 2011 and 2012, in CBCE Pattern School, Varanasi. The curriculum was presented during the academic school day for 100, 8th and 9th grade students in 2010 and repeated for 104 students in 2011 and reviewed again for 102 students in 2012, with a sex ratio approximately equal. Children ages 13– 15 ranging from middle to upper middle class status were instructed for six 50 minute sessions which totaled four and one half hours of yoga training per year. The 50 minute yoga class was added into the daily academic curriculum, every other day, for a two week period. Each class was crucial since the students only had six sessions: 1 Day one, Monday, the children were introduced to the concept of *ahimsa*: nonviolence to self and toward others. After a discussion regarding this ethica standard, a 25 minute *asana* practice followed introducing gentle joint freeing movements and *surya namaskar* (salutation to the sun). The class ended with a brief transition of rest before returning to their classrooms. 2 Day two, Wednesday, the students were visually stimulated with props, imagery and games to represent the three types of breathing (chest, abdominal and intercostal) and their effects on one’s mood and energy. After that a ten minute *asana* session was followed by a long relaxation in *makarasana* (crocodile pose, a position lying prone) which consisted of one-to-one breathing practice (*sama vritti ujaye* breath) using numbers and phrases. 3 Day three, Friday, the entire session focused on conflict resolution strategies with role-playing scenarios composed of subject matter volunteered by the children, i.e., real life bullying situations they had encountered. Homework for the weekend was given directing the students to teach a family member anything they had learned during the first three yoga classes 4 Day four, Monday, a third of the class time was devoted to an open discussion about their homework: what the students chose to teach and to whom. The remaining time was an *asana* session introducing classical *asanas* for strength and balance such as *virabhadrasana 2* (warrior 2), *utthita trikonasana* (extended triangle pose), *vrikshasana* (tree pose), etc... ending with systematic relaxation in *savasana* (corpse pose), and a review of the concentration and breathing practice taught previously. 5 Day five, Wednesday, a 30 minute session combining *vinyasa* (flowing postures) and classical *asanas* was taught followed by more complex concentration and breathing practices, as well as, creative visualization techniques. The students ended on the floor in the relaxation pose of their choice (supine, side-lying or prone). 6 Day six, Friday, a review of all material was covered with active participation by the students, followed by more role-playing and non-violent communication techniques. Questions and closure finished the class format. A booklet was designed and written for the children entitled Yoga keeps me cool, fit and focused. The booklet was written between the first and second years of the program. The objective of using this booklet was so that the children had another visual tool to use while discussing breathing, body awareness and yoga postures. In a generation where visual stimulation is status quo, it was vital for the study to have a guide book for each student to utilize. The booklet also allowed the teachers and parents to have a tangible medium to view at school and at home. Learning from the Booklet Vrikshana (Tree Pose) Teaching Alignment of Body, Mind & Spirit Ustrasana (Camel) Demonstrating the Movement of the Diaphragm Balasana (Child’s Pose)

3. MEASURES

The children were given pre- and post-questionnaires all three years to determine their levels of anger, aggression, and violent behavior before and after the program. Parents signed an "informed consent"

form before commencing the study. The school staff and families were told that participation was voluntary and the questionnaire answers would be anonymous as the data would be presented in statistical form. This authorization was considered satisfactory; there was no need for an ethics board or human review committee. The students were asked questions regarding their feelings of anger, their ability to control anger, whether they have been bullied at school, if they bully others, whether they have ever hit anyone, or if they have ever been hit, how well they handle their stress, how well they handle their anger, and what strategies the children use to handle disagreements. All of these points were addressed within the surveys both pre- and post yoga. The post-yoga questionnaires directed the students to report if using the practice of yoga changed their interactions and experiences at school or after school during the two week training period. In order to assess the efficacy of yoga as an intervention technique, the questions allowed for a specific profile of each child’s outbursts of anger towards schoolmates, bullying of others, perception of being victimized and understanding of anger management. The participants were given the first questionnaire the day before the COOLING KIDS yoga program began. Each year the teachers informed the students that the questions related only to the time frame between the start of the current school year, approximately the September, and when the yoga program began, the November. These surveys were given to the students with a number written in the upper right corner. At that time, the children were instructed to write down this “special” number on a separate piece of paper and place it in their desks for later reference. The teachers explained to the participants that this questionnaire would not affect their grades in any way, nor would the information be used against them. It was strictly anonymous, and they were to be as honest as possible when answering the questions. When the post-questionnaires were handed out the students were instructed to label the papers with their “special” numbers. The same questions were presented as in the pre-surveys, but the students were to answer them regarding their experiences after the six yoga sessions. For this plan, there was not a control group of students. The children themselves were their own control. A control group would not have allowed all of the students to be involved with the yoga training. For the COOLING KIDS intervention it was best to have all students involved. This might possibly be considered a limitation; in the future a control group may be included. At this time, it would have been a greater handicap to leave students out of the plan since the school staff and families were excited about the outcome of this study and wanted all students to participate.

4. RESULTS

For statistical analysis Chi square tests were used to test the significance of changes in the responses in pre- and post surveys. The questions reported in Table 1 were the first eight asked within the 35 question survey. The yes or no answers to these questions were the most significant results obtained. The findings are presented in Table 1 below. Although the answers to the remaining questions showed a trend in overall improvement in regard to fidgeting, headaches, self esteem and ability to sleep, the results were not statistically significant and did not address our main hypothesis. Both years show a decrease in aggressive behavior after yoga and an increase in anger management.

Table1. Yes responses pre- and post- yoga intervention, Years 2010, 2011 and 2012.

(1) Do you have trouble controlling your angry?

| 2010 | | | | 2011 | | | | 2012 | | | |
|-------|------|------|--------|-------|------|------|--------|-------|------|-------|---------|
| Pre | | Post | | Pre | | Post | | Pre | | Post | |
| % | Yes | % | Chi-sq | % | Yes | % | Chi-sq | % | Yes | % | Chi- sq |
| 14.14 | 5.95 | 8.19 | 6.75** | 17.59 | 8.82 | 8.77 | 4.88 * | 15.94 | 3.08 | 12.86 | 9.6 ** |

(2) Do you ever feel angry for no reason?

| Pre | Post | % | Chi-sq | Pre- | Post- | % | Chi-sq | Pre- | Post- | % | Chi- sq |
|-------|------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| 23.23 | 7.92 | 15.31 | 7.53 ** | 27.62 | 10.78 | 16.84 | 5.63* | 21.74 | 7.96 | 14.05 | 4.74 * |

(3) Do you ever feel as if your friends are angry at you?

| Pre- | Post- | % | Chi-sq | Pre | Post- | % | Chi-sq | Pre- | Post | % | Chi- sq |
|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| 59.60 | 10.89 | 48.71 | 5.04 * | 50.48 | 21.00 | 29.48 | 12.31** | 54.55 | 12.70 | 41.85 | 4.32 * |

(4) Have you ever hit anyone at school?

| Pre- | Post- | % | Chi-sq | Pre- | Post | % | Chi-sq | Pre- | Post- | % | Chi- sq |
|-------|-------|------|----------|-------|------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| 20.20 | 5.20 | 15.0 | 25.24 ** | 15.75 | 0.97 | 14.78 | 6.42 | 24.64 | 5.80 | 18.84 | 13.00** |

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(5) Have you ever hit anyone at home?

| Pre- | Post- | % | Chi-sq | Pre- | Post- | % | Chi-sq | Pre- | Post | % | Chi- sq |
|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------|------|-------|---------|
| 45.45 | 12.24 | 33.21 | 9.57* | 44.76 | 13.86 | 30.90 | 15.19** | 30.30 | 8.06 | 22.24 | 6.31 |

(6) Has anyone ever hit you at school?

| Pre- | Post- | % | Chi-sq | Pre- | Post- | % | Chi-sq | Pre- | Post- | % | Chi- sq |
|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| 35.54 | 16.32 | 22.22 | 10.00* | 46.23 | 22.33 | 23.90 | 17.25** | 69.71 | 20.00 | 19.71 | 16.79** |

(7) Do you ever feel kids at school frightening you?

| Pre- | Post- | % | Chi-sq | Pre- | Post- | % | Chi-sq | Pre- | Post- | % | Chi- sq |
|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| 27.84 | 16.66 | 11.68 | 5.43 | 28.97 | 15.84 | 13.13 | 16.84** | 30.43 | 16.92 | 13.51 | 4.10* |

8) Do you ever frightening

| Pre- | Post- | % | Chi-sq | Pre- | Post- | % | Chi-sq | Pre- | Post- | % | Chi- sq |
|------|-------|------|--------|------|-------|------|--------|------|-------|------|---------|
| 6.40 | 2.46 | 3.96 | 1.83 | 5.10 | 2.04 | 3.06 | 1.36 | 7.46 | 3.08 | 4.83 | 3.47 |

5. QUALITATIVE REPORTS

Each time the session ended the teachers were asked to observe the children for the remainder of the day and report if the class dynamics changed after the yoga class. Comments from the teachers were, (1) the children are so much calmer after the yoga classes. (2)The atmosphere in the room after yoga is more peaceful. (3)The students seem to be less fidgety and more focused on the daily work even on non-yoga days. (4)My students sit still and listen to me after yoga days. (5)Fewer negative interactions (6) they seem to be working out some of their differences more effectively (7) I have personally benefited from the six sessions of yoga and so have my students. (8)Their focus is so much better and I really think they are kinder and more patient with each other. (9) I've noticed my students can calm themselves a lot more which makes learning better.

It's given me great ideas on how to help them not only to work out their problems with the breathing and the quietness, but also, how to help them focus and learn better and to listen to the person they really are, instead of trying to keep up with the fast paced world."

The best report came from the principal-

"I feel that it has made a difference in our school community and climate with our 9th and 10th graders. It's brought a different type of atmosphere to our school. CALMING KIDS is teaching some wonderful skills: problem solving and frighten proofing, talking about self esteem and how students feel and feel about themselves and how they can continue to be proactive and be successful both academically and socially in our school. Hopefully, we can continue with the yoga program here." The most endearing words came directly from the students in their comments written to me: This really helps my breathing and now I am a lot calmer."

6. DISCUSSION

The COOLING KIDS anti-frightening program addresses all of the various learning styles children possess: some children absorb subject matter audibly, others visually, and others interactively. It is deemed that the positive effects of cooling kids creating a Non-Violent World are due to the variety of methods in which the information is conveyed to the students.

There were several factors that went into designing the cooling kids curriculum. The first being the eight limbs of classical Ashtanga yoga as described under the Introduction section of this paper. The second consideration was the incorporation of educational components that are part of other frightens proofing programs. The combination of both of these elements created the CK success. There has been a continual increase on the amount of analysis and study regarding frightening in schools over the past 10-20 years. The most successful research had been done by Olweus (1991).^[17] Olweus intervention decreased frightening by 50%. The program consisted of:

1. A parental awareness campaign through newsletters and meetings.
2. Intervening individually when crisis emerged.
3. Increasing school staff supervision during recess and lunch times.
4. Role playing exercises.

The results obtained in this study confirm that classical yoga which addresses the body and mind and how they influence our actions is an effective tool for implementing behavioral changes when presented to upper elementary age children. Unexpected benefits that the students reported were fewer headaches, less fidgeting, and an overall improved ability to sleep. Although we were not studying these symptoms, this could suggest a relationship between physically comfortable children and less frightening. The CK program presented along with the yoga booklet, *Yoga keeps me cool, fit and focused*, gave them insight about coping with stress. This booklet helped reinforce the yoga they learned in class and allowed them a reference at home. Each year the students reported the same results: a decrease in aggressive behavior and an increase in the ability to control anger which supports the original hypothesis. This study demonstrates that when upper elementary students are exposed to yoga for only 4½ hours over two weeks, a consistent decrease in frightening behavior occurs by 60% and greater. Fekkes et al. (2006)^[18] have shown that their anti-frightening program which was applied for two successive years was effective, but without continuous implementation it lost its effectiveness. A longer commitment to yoga training within a school curriculum with a focus on non-violence, can positively affect, the consistent problem of aggression in school age children, and thus decrease the amount of daily frightening. Future plans are to introduce this program into other schools each year during national nonviolence time, i.e., cool week.

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