

Best Practice of Yoga Sessions for Children with Special Needs and their Parents

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ABSTRACT

Yoga came from a Sanskrit word that means to draw together, to bind together; or to unite. It became popular with adults because it is said to be a meditative process of self-discovery and liberation. It eventually became a lifestyle and a way of life, but it can be beneficial for children with special needs. Aside from improving health and well-being, it can help improve focus and concentration of children. On the parent's part it is an important activity to help them manage their child's behavior and it can be an avenue for them to relax thus creating stress-free parenting. The best practice of guided meditation yoga sessions aims to improve the concentration and focus of children with special needs when they are in class, they are more focused to do their tasks and can join sports competitions. It is also an outlet for children so that when they are at home, they will be calmer and more comfortable because both the children and parents gained a bond in managing their condition. The effect of the yoga sessions in the focus and concentration of pupils has provided positive outcomes for children with special needs and their parents. The students with special needs were less aggressive and became more focused. When the learners are more focused it can help increase classroom interaction and improve pupils understanding instructions especially in participating in sports. The number of parents getting involved in their children's tasks also improved. It is expected that this best practice can help teachers, parents, and pupils improve focus and concentration which aids to produce positive behavior.

Keywords: Yoga, Students with Special Needs, Focus, Positive Behavior

Introduction of Best Practices

The 1987 Philippine Constitution. Article XIV, Section 2 and 3 states that: Every child with special needs has a right to an educational program that is suitable to his needs. Special education pertains to the array of teaching procedures, utilized equipment and materials, accessible settings, and other means designed to attend to the needs of students with learning differences, mental health issues, physical and developmental disabilities, and giftedness. (Manlapaz, 2014). It shares with regular education basic responsibilities of the educational system to fulfill the right of the child to develop to his full potential. It also aims to develop the maximum potential of the child with special needs to enable him to become self-reliant and shall be geared towards providing him with the opportunities for a full and happy life.

The public elementary schools paved the way to the actualization of the provisions. A curriculum with different sets of activities was given to cater to the different special needs. Since yoga has many benefits for children and has been shown to improve health and well-being it was implemented as an intervention activity done weekly for 1 hour so that it can help to improve focus and concentration of pupils which will help increase the academic performance of all students. As it was observed, children with special needs display different behaviors that require additional attention thus the yoga sessions are beneficial for the students, teachers, and parents. Traditionally, yoga was a way to unite the physical, spiritual, and emotional aspects of a person, thereby allowing them to reach a state of inner peace, or mindfulness. Yoga has three components: the emotional (breath), the physical (poses), and the spiritual (meditation) (White, 2009).

Teaching guided meditation yoga to children, especially with special needs, can be a challenge with their shorter attention span. However, it is at this point that parents can jumpstart an appreciation for the practice. The children with disabilities who practice Yoga often surprise everyone with their quick mastery of various yoga techniques as well as tremendous improvement of basic motor, communicative and cognitive skills; they develop greater concentration, balance and control in their day-to-day activities. Yoga is beneficial to all, but the only requirement is proper instruction and regular dedicated practice. It is highly recommended that the parents of the special children also enroll in with their children to experience the effects of Yoga for themselves. It also helps create better bonding and understanding between the parent and the child with special needs (Sandip et.al 2021).

Justification of Best Practices Implementation

A child with special needs might often show signs of intentional unwanted behaviors, a disrespectful attitude, or have a physical setback that prevents them from learning traditionally. These attributes can lead to frustration, anger, tension, and emotional outbursts from you and your child (Special Ed Resource.com, 2023). Every student with special needs has different needs and preferences. The Special Education classes in our school cater to children with different special needs, as it was observed during the pre-yoga sessions these children were always throwing tantrums and they lack focus and concentration. These situations were both stressful for the teachers and parents. Yoga routines such as meditation and poses can help children with learning disabilities develop greater concentration, balance, and composure in their daily lives. Parents can create a deeper bond while managing the negative behavior of their child. Everyone gains some level of benefit.

Objectives of Implementation

The objectives of best practice implementation are:

1. To implement yoga sessions for students with special needs and their parents
2. To improve the level of focus and concentration of the students.

Best Practices Implemented

Yoga offers a rich array of resources for living a healthier and better life. These help improve flexibility, create awareness of the body and enhance the energy circulation throughout the body (Sandip et. al, 2021).

Learning disabilities can have an impact on a child's behavior. That can create a complex problem in which a child's learning disability and behavior problems make learning difficult. (Haddad, 2020)

One study published in the journal *Pediatrics* found that children with learning disabilities often experienced behavior problems related to reduced self-confidence and increased anxiety and stress. Other symptoms such as aggressive behavior and social isolation were also common.

With this identified behavior the teachers took note of the observation and interview from the parents. A special needs specialist, Dr. Anna Famorca, pledged to help give yoga meditation sessions to pupils and parents. It is also part of the school's Adopt-A-School Program wherein the sessions were free instead of giving her a professional fee.

Yoga sessions were conducted every Monday for an hour, it has two batches all of which are pupils with special needs accompanied by their parents.

The sessions begin by singing a hi and hello song or by storytelling. Usually, the stories were fable wherein the main characters are animals. The chosen animal's position will be demonstrated as the story was told. After which, the pupils along with the guidance of their parents follow the positions several times. The yoga positions will be repeated sometimes, it would be a frog or a butterfly. There is daily recapitulation of the positions taught from the previous day. The sessions end with a game and a goodbye song. They are given assignments to practice the positions at home so they will remember, and they are guided by their parents. In turn the parents can also relax and meditate with their child.

It became a routine for the parents and pupils thus the focus and concentration of pupils improved and created a positive behavior.

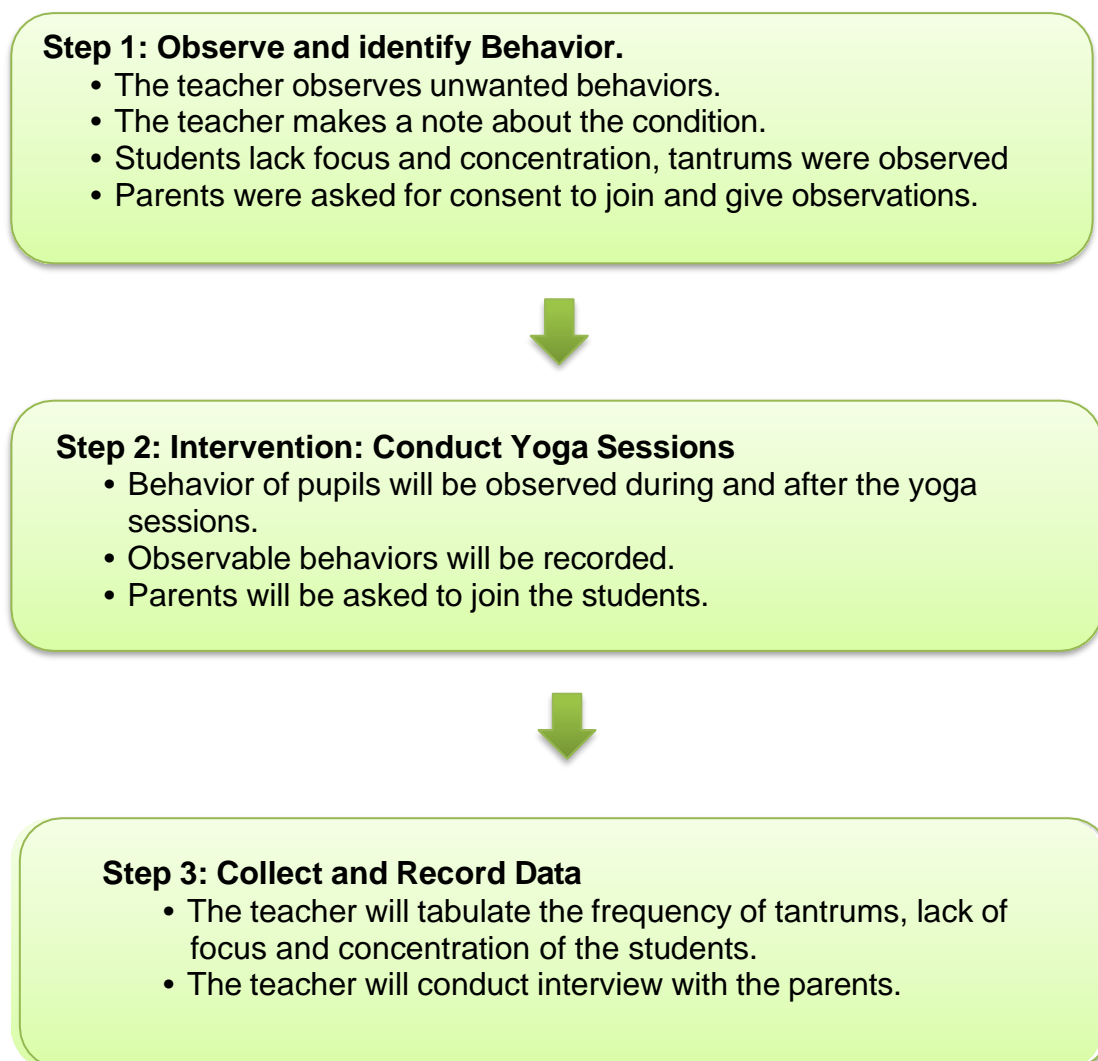
Figure 1 shows that yoga meditation sessions helps the students' with special needs to focus, concentrate and show positive behavior.

Figure 1
Best Practice of Yoga Sessions for Children with Special Needs and their Parents



Figure 2 shows the procedures used for the implementation of the best practices of yoga meditation sessions helps the students with special needs which involved three main steps namely observation, intervention of yoga meditation sessions and the collection of data.

FIGURE 2

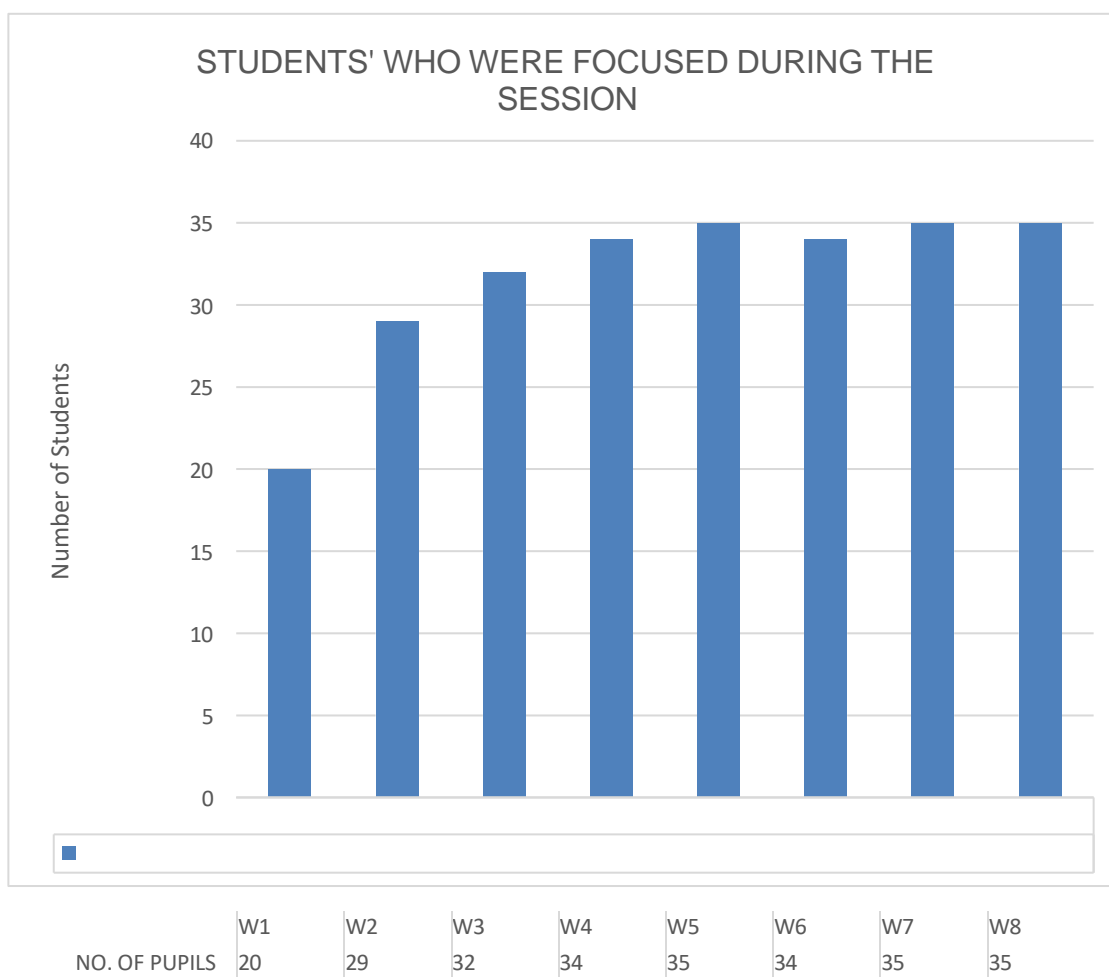


Impact of Best Practices Implemented

The impact of this practice was observed during and after the yoga meditation sessions. All the children and parents successfully completed 1-hour weekly sessions. Most of the children could accurately imitate the poses and do the guided meditation done by the yoga instructor. The most important finding concerned the attention span and appropriateness of the length of the session. In the Week 1 session 20 out of 35 children chose to participate and performed the guided meditation poses. There is an increase for weeks 2- 5 but for week 6 there is a minimal decrease. All of the children participated in the breathing and stretching exercises however after 10 minutes five children began talking and were yawning in the session. Once the guided mediation session was complete the students managed to focus.

Table 1 shows the number of pupils who remained focused during the sessions. There is an increase in the attention span of pupils.

TABLE 1
Number Of Students Focused During Sessions



The Implementation of Yoga Sessions for Students with Special Needs and Their Parents

Yoga is all about connection. Although we often think of this connection as being inward toward the self, it can also be an outward, nurturing relationships with others. (Heggs, 2018). People who used mind-body interventions showed higher levels of awareness of and connection with their bodies. This resulted in greater self- acceptance, vitality, and lower sensory pain.

According to Psychology Today, there are other children with special needs, hampered with less-developed social skills, they often struggle to bond with peers, sometimes leading to frustration and anger that only distances them further. Unfortunately, such children are often unaware of their social deficits, and so calm guidance and support from parents during interactions with other kids may help.

Yoga sessions also helped the parents to relax and create a special bond with their children.

Table 2 shows the results of the parents' feedback checklist wherein they observed improvement on different positive behaviors.

TABLE 2
Parent's Feedback Checklist

NO	ITEM	YES	NO
1	Yoga helps coordinate the activities of mind, body, and emotions	35	0
2	Reduces distracted state of mind thereby building up focus and concentration	30	5
3	Improves activities of day today living to the degree which could never otherwise be achieved	34	1
4	Helps develop social relationships, and reduces frequency of violent emotional upsets	33	2
5	Develops a positive outlook improving self-confidence, self-sufficiency, and sociability	35	0
6	Improves interpersonal relationship	35	0
7	Improves their locomotor skills and psycho-motor coordination	34	1
8	Improved attention span	35	0

The Implementation of Yoga Sessions to Improve the Level of Focus and Concentration of The Students.

The non-competitive nature of Yoga helps children feel accepted and able to participate regardless of physical and mental **ability**. Traditional therapy addresses this specific issue in these children which are not worthy, however Yoga addresses the whole child. (Balaji, et. al, 2019).

Yoga sessions establish a strong bond with the child. To do this the teacher and parent will need to enter the world that the child lives in to meet the child on their own level. Only then will the teacher and parent be able to gain the child's complete confidence. Massage, music, dance, rhymes and stories are some of the different techniques that the teacher can use to connect with the child. Parents, students, and teachers gradually develop a foundation of mutual trust and friendship.

Figure 3
Students with Special needs concentrates on their Yoga pose



Figure 4
Yoga sessions with students and parents imitating an animal pose



Summary and recommendations

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the Yoga session implemented has succeeded in changing negative behavior to more positive ones. This proves that the Yoga session guided meditation is one of the techniques that can give impact and help students if it is utilized with the problem to be solved. This method must be followed up with positive reinforcement by the teachers and parents. Therefore, it is appropriate to use this method as a solution to a negative attitude. Apart from that, the concept of reward and punishment by Thorndike (1874-1949) and Skinner (1904-1990) has been discussed in behavioral science as a reinforcement activity in learning. Every single child is unique and special. They behave differently but with appropriate utilization of different activities it can help them as well as their parents. Each child has the fullest right to live, learn, and play without hindrances. Yoga sessions have been found to be beneficial. In addition, further studies can be done on the implementation yoga sessions for each disability and condition.

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