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The Search for Balance: Understanding and Implementing Yoga, Peace, and Democratic Education

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“Yoga claims freedom from suffering as its primary objective. It is also from these realizations that our spiritual, ethical, and contemplative practices originate and mature. Wherever there is imbalance and suffering, yoga shows up”

- Michael Stone¹

Introduction

Barack Obama’s presidential campaign promoted the idea of hope for change and it seemed that the nation desperately wanted that, but somehow the hope waned and the pessimism crept back. What diminishes our sense of hope and self-empowerment? Fear? Loss of control and power over our lives? Once we lose that power, we begin to live in a space of mere survival, rather than a space of possibility and creation. This survival mode depletes our energy, and

¹ Michael Stone, *Yoga for a World out of Balance: Teaching on Ethics and Social Action* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 2009).

hinders the ability to create new possibilities of hope, love, compassion, honesty and empathy. The daily reality becomes a sense of complacency for what is... rather than what can be.

Students and teachers alike are at the bottom of the school hierarchy, thus diminishing their sense of power and efficacy in their teaching and learning. “Having been taught not to question authority, students may accept passively what teachers say....In this way schools may reproduce conditions in the larger society, some of which are conducive to the creation of an obedient work force that produces the economic goods that provide the basis for social wealth”². Even teachers feel disempowered based on teaching to the high-stakes tests, rather than teaching culturally relevant curriculum.³ Because of this, both students and teachers begin to lose their sense of self-empowerment, efficacy, and ability to enact social change. Students drop out, start to bully others, withdraw, become overly stressed, or act out. Teachers conform to standards they disagree with, feel beaten down or leave the profession altogether⁴. Jing Lin states,

We limit the vision of our young people to using education mainly to find a well-paid job, failing to enlighten them to see that our life is a precious gift with which we can expand our ability to love and care, to bring light to this world and kindle hope in others. We strive to meet external criteria for success and neglect reflection and inner transformation.⁵

In order to cultivate the possibility of social change, we must first start from within ourselves.

In this paper, I explore how the principles of peace, democracy, and yoga are not only interconnected, but enhance and promote the ideals of civic engagement, social justice and peaceful pedagogy. I then provide a list of ten pedagogical beliefs that must be upheld in order to embody these interconnections. Peace and democratic pedagogy advocate for self-reflection and inner peace. This promotes a sense of balance that is crucial to the principles of peace, democracy and yoga. Michael Stone speaks of the nature of balance, “Wholeness is not oneness but the dynamic balance of difference among systems. When we can respect and explore difference, intimacy arises”.⁶ Balance is also essential in sustaining peace and democracy. When we start to understand the interconnectivity of human life, nature and other species, we start to re-envision the world that allow others to flourish without taking away from ourselves, in fact when we give to others, we are giving back to ourselves.⁷

² Ian Harris and Mary Lee Morrison, *Peace Education* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company Publishers, 2003), 89.

³ Carl Grant and Lavonne J. Williams, “What is the Language of Care and Social Justice That We Use in Schools?”, in *Educating for a Culture of Peace*, ed. Riane Eisler and Ron Miller (Portsmouth, NH: Heineman, 2004), 208.

⁴ As a former 6th grade teacher, I can attest to this sentiment in several of my communications with fellow teachers.

⁵ Jing Lin, *Love, Peace, and Wisdom in Education: A Vision for the Education in the 21st Century* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2006), xi.

⁶ Stone, *Yoga for a World Out of Balance*, 134.

⁷ Tim Murithi, *The Ethics of Peacebuilding*. (Edinburgh: Edingburgh University Press, 2009); Lin, *Love, Peace and Wisdom in Education*; Stone, *Yoga for a World out of Balance*

The main purpose of yoga is to calm a stressful mind, bringing inner peace and providing gentle stretching to engage the body/mind connection⁸. Yoga is not only a form of physical exercise but a path to spiritual awareness and social action. Michael Stone links yoga practice specifically with democratic ideals and practices, “Today, our personal, ecological, and social situations present unique and direct challenges to every one of us to respond to the great existential questions of life and death, to look deeply into interdependence, and to fully actualize our awakening in a world distressed and in need.”⁹ To be healthy both physically and mentally implores our compassionate, humane, and conscience selves, allowing for a critical transformation of the way we interact with others.

Multicultural and critical educators also espouse the notion of first understanding one’s self in order to examine the impact one’s biography has on others. Carl Grant and LaVonne Williams suggest, “examining their own biography and interrogating their beliefs”¹⁰ first before being able to discuss social justice with others. Inner peace is necessary for political peace and justice because one cannot blindly go into action without understanding the social, cultural and political dimensions in which one experiences the world. Yoga emphasizes the need to eradicate the habitual pattern of attachment to material things, mental ideas and constant reaction to the world. Yoga allows for the detachment of these ideas so that one can observe the world rather than constantly react from our experience to it. Michael Stone states, “Yoga occurs when our inner works manifests in the world around us”.¹¹ In my experience teaching yoga in schools, I am constantly telling my students to take what they learn on the mat and out into the world. That’s where the real work of yoga begins.

This paper has three sections. First, I give an overview of the principles of peace, democracy, and yoga education and how they serve as a foundation for peaceful pedagogy in schools. Second, I explain why self-empowerment belief systems are imperative to necessitate the possibility of peace in our life and in our classroom. After each belief, I provide the physical and mental skills necessary for a democratic and peaceful school environment. Finally, I discuss the implications for aligning this kind of pedagogy within the school curriculum by training teachers, gaining administrative support in providing a peaceful agenda for the school, and how to get the community involved.

Exploring Peace, Democracy, and Yoga in Education

Peace can be described in several different ways.¹² Peace in different countries depends on the kinds of violence they address and the way peace is promulgated. Peace is more than just the absence of war, but the balance of forces on the macro and micro levels. Much like the balance of yin and yang, light and dark, male and female; each balances the other. Peaceful

⁸ Sudheer Deshpande, HR Nagendra, and Nagarathna Raghuram, “A Randomized Control Trial of the Effect of Yoga on Verbal Aggressiveness in Normal Healthy Volunteers,” *International Journal of Yoga* 1, no. 2(2008).

⁹ Stone, *Yoga for a World out of Balance*, 4.

¹⁰ Grant and Williams, “What is the Language of Care and Social Justice That We Use in Schools?,” 213.

¹¹ Stone, *Yoga for a World out of Balance*, 5.

¹² Paul Smoker and Linda Groff, “Spirituality, Religion, Culture and Peace: Exploring the Foundations of Inner-outer Peace in the Twenty-First Century,” *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 1, no. 1 (1996): 313.

relations on the micro level are when countries are not in conflict, but may focus on interpersonal relations, the sharing of resources, a focus on unity and diversity, defending freedom of expression and civil rights, sustainable living on earth and finally, inner peace. Peace essentially “strives for the means to resolve disagreements without resorting to warfare or physical force, and for justice where human beings are treated with the dignity afforded them by their human rights. Peace has an individual context which implies peace of mind and the absence of fear.”¹³ These individual contexts may be the workplace, friendships, families, schools, and communities to uphold justice and well being for all.

Contextualizing Peace Education and Peaceful Pedagogy

The definitions of peace education and peaceful pedagogy vary depending on personal conviction and context. This kind of pedagogy allows schooling to be personal, compassionate, moral, participatory, holistic, and civic-minded. Contested notions of what peace is and what it is not have been under discussion in peace education and research circles and cultural groups.¹⁴ Peace education is described as, “a responsive pedagogy that develops knowledge, skills and dispositions for peace-building, for transformation of conflicts to prevent or stop violent responses to them, as well as for resolution of conflicts”¹⁵ More specifically, Carter states that peace building “occurs through learning how to maintain peaceful interactions in the face of conflicts. It also helps students acquire dispositions such as acceptance of diversity, which reduce cross-cultural conflicts”. Carter continues to note the lack of specific curriculum focus on peace and that even democratic focus on decision-making, “fails to advance peace for the outvoted minority whose needs can be left unsatisfied”. She continues that it’s important to include “instruction in methods that bring about consensus in decision-making, for the good of everyone through processes such as deliberation and active listening”.¹⁶

The Hague Appeal for Peace describes peace education as a, “participatory holistic process that includes teaching for and about democracy and human rights, nonviolence, social and economic justice, gender equality, environmental sustainability, disarmament, traditional peace practices, international law, and human security”¹⁷. Traditional peace theory is a knowledge-based, skills and attitudes approach, but not pedagogically descriptive and transformative. The skills and attitudes are a starting point but change agency and participatory action is necessary for real transformation in peace education.¹⁸ Schools can be the place where social awareness and participatory action starts.

¹³ Harris and Morrison, *Peace Education*, 13.

¹⁴ Brigit Brock-Utne, *Feminist perspectives on peace and peace education* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1989).

¹⁵ Candice Carter, “Voluntary Standards for Peace Education,” *Journal of Peace Education* 5, no. 2 (2008): 141-143.

¹⁶ Candice Carter, “Whither Social Studies? In Pockets of Peace at School”, *Journal of Peace Education* 1, no 1 (2004): 78

¹⁷ Hague Appeal for Peace, 1

¹⁸ Anya Jacobson, “Nonviolence as a Way of Knowing in the Public School Classroom,” *In Factis Pax* 1, no. 1 (2007).

Three kinds of peaceful pedagogy are, a) peacekeeping, b) peacemaking and c) peacebuilding. Peacekeeping focuses on the “get tough” policies of peace through strength in which schools and governments alike build strong defense systems. Peacemaking incorporates conflict resolution and anti-bullying techniques. Finally, peacebuilding provides a context for “how non-violence can provide the basis for a just and sustainable future...which is proactive and seeks to avoid violence and conflict.” Peacebuilding also has its roots in inner peace. Inner peace is not just about thinking about oneself and ignoring the plight of others. It’s the beginning of a journey in order to help others in a more compassionate and socially conscious way. Inner peace and nonviolence promotes empathy, compassion, and understanding the multiple perspectives of truth, “Educators committed to nonviolence in education encourage students to discover the ways they think about themselves and others, replacing fears, hostilities, negative statements, and prejudices with nonviolent ways of thinking about self and others that respects the truth that can reside within each of us”.¹⁹

Peace education also fosters communication, civic and virtuous education and appreciation and promotion of diversity. Learning about peaceful leaders, movements, and the impact they have had on the United States and international societies allows students to see the amazing results of one person or idea. It’s important for students to know how they can actively achieve peace through self-reflection of their own biases that allow them to understand the construction of those biases that lead them to social understanding and action. Jing Lin terms this “peace intelligence” which is “associated with a deep love for all lives, a deep compassion for all existences, a courage and conviction for unconditional forgiveness and reconciliation”.²⁰ The term “nonviolent epistemology” suggests that “Thinking of violence as the symptom of a system rather than a natural and inevitable condition and creates a space for the educator to make change, for by studying peace and removing knowledge that assumes violence, we can change an aspect of the system that legitimizes and perpetuates violence”. Violence emerges when the act of dehumanization is present and nonviolence is the work of re-humanizing oneself and others.²¹

Furthermore, peace education has to provide a framework for all educational activities, not just as extracurricular or a separate topic reserved for the social studies classroom. Peaceful pedagogy that provides the kind of transformation to a nonviolent epistemology that involves the entire school and educational system. School communities can start with taking a long look at *what* they promote in their school. Do they have positive ways in which the students can create a community of choice and autonomy? How does the curriculum incorporate models of peace both within the school and community? Not only do we need to discuss peaceful leaders, but incorporate peace into our daily lives. Interactions with students should be focused on the behavior and direct communication of expectations to allow space for positive solutions and forgiveness. Sometimes as teachers we forget to forgive our students and ourselves for simply being human. Peaceful relations start with the very skills needed in cultivating democratic principles.

¹⁹ Harris and Morrison, *Peace Education*, 11, 136.

²⁰ Lin, *Love, Peace, and Wisdom in Education: A Vision for the Education in the 21st Century*, 68.

²¹ Anya Jacobson, “Nonviolence as a Way of Knowing in the Public School Classroom,” *In Factis Pax* 1, no. 1 (2007). 40-42.

Democratic Principles and Overcoming the Culture of Complacency

In this section, I discuss how the United States has cultivated what I believe to be a “culture of complacency” when it comes to civic engagement. Then, I describe what a democracy is and the principles that undergird it. I use this idea of a “culture of complacency”²² reflected in United States society not to blame citizens for not caring about their government, but in the context of a paralyzing disempowerment based on a lack of power and voice. It seems that government officials do not adhere to the principles of democracy in such situations as undemocratically bringing democracy to Iraq, the ways in which our health care system is being debated, and our interactions with North Korea and Iran. Howard Zinn discusses how schools may teach democratic ideals, but don’t give students the information and analytical tools to see the discrepancies in our current system, much less to rectify it. He continues that schools don’t tell students the truth about how corporate power and money rule every aspect of our society especially in our class and racial divides.²³ Durkheim describes society as existing as an “ongoing, organic collectivity, created historically, and the individual can only be educated within the parameters of this collective achievement.”²⁴ Knowledge circulated within a society is then constrained through educational processes. Only when that knowledge is challenged and critiqued can it change.

Our history books and curriculum tend to ignore the contributions of ordinary citizens, women, and persons of color. War is usually discussed as the pinnacle of human achievement. Citizenship is taught in Social Studies but sometimes as a distant concept that students might not really understand or think applies to them. “The rights of citizenship for all Americans include freedom, diversity, property, privacy, human rights, and due process. The responsibility of citizenship includes justice and equality, adherence to authority when it comes from the people, participation in the democratic process, speaking the truth about all people, and patriotism in the democratic process”²⁵.

Democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.²⁶ This communicated experience has to come from a collective union of empowered people and institutions that are focused on peace for all, not just for a few. A democratic principle such as freedom promotes democracy where every voice is equally represented in a compassionate, healing, and socially responsible way. However, many students see their voice being squelched in the classroom and their oppression permeating

²² Charles J Sykes also uses the term “Culture of Complacency” in his article “Culture of Complacency: The Growing Disconnect Between the Schools and the Workplace” in which he discusses Wisconsin’s racial learning gap.

²³ Howard Zinn and Donaldo Macedo, *Howard Zinn on Democratic Education*, (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005) 21.

²⁴ Emile Durkheim, “The Nature of Education”, in *Schooling the Symbolic Animal: Social and Cultural Dimensions of Education*, ed. Bradley A.U. Levinson (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield), 57-61.

²⁵ Grant and Williams, “What is the Language of Care and Social Justice That We Use in Schools?”, 206.

²⁶ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, (Toronto: Collier –Macmillan, 1966).

across all areas of social marginalization such as race, class, sex, and homophobia in order to fortify “interlocking justifications the dominant group maintains to continue their dominance”.²⁷

Shaking up the culture of complacency starts with education and empowering students through not only academics, but social and personal skills as well. Democratic principles can be achieved through peace education and yoga by respecting all forms of life,

Students develop positive self images, a sense of responsibility for self and others, a capacity to trust others and a caring for the well-being of the natural world...and contributes to the social growth of all children if it helps develop characteristics essential for the attainment of peace—a sense of dignity and self-worth, a confidence to question their values, communication skills, an ethical awareness, and an empathy for others.²⁸

This furthers the agenda for peace education, democracy and the ability for inner peace to extend to outer peace.

Yoga’s Quest for Peace and Social Justice

What better way to advocate for going beyond just the knowledge-based approach of “doing” peace but “being” peace.

One of our problems in the United States is that youth have been sold a bag of secular individualism, one that encourages the worship of money and power. Youth can be taught to understand that spirituality is about the greater, larger picture of the universe...Spirituality is not about a religion. Spirituality is based on our interconnection and interdependence with each other and the earth.²⁹

So far, I’ve discussed how peace education advocates for inner peace, a calm mind, the absence of fear, and the furthering of democratic principles of social justice. In this section, I will describe the physical and spiritual practice of yoga. Then, I provide the research foundation for the mental, emotional and physical benefits of yoga. Finally, I link its connection to the foundations of peace and democratic education in their mutual quest for social harmony and justice.

Yoga in Sanskrit means, “union” and its goal is to calm the mind. Yoga is a series of postures and gentle stretching that bring about a total development at the physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual levels. The purpose is also to calm emotions in order to make better decisions, to be mindful and develop compassion for ourselves and others. There are hundreds of styles of yoga, but they all follow similar characteristics called the Eight Limb Path, 1) injunctions for social and personal behavior (yama niyama), 2) body postures (asanas), 3)

²⁷ Grant and Williams, “What is the Language of Care and Social Justice That We Use in Schools?”, 213.

²⁸ Harris and Morrison, *Peace Education*, 35.

²⁹ Linda Bynoe, “Strategies for Teaching Caring and Empowerment: Drawing from African American, Mexican American, and Native American Traditions,” in *Educating for a Culture of Peace*, ed. Riane Eisler and Ron Miller (Portsmouth, NH:Heinemann, 2007), 194.

breathing (pranayama), 4) meditation (Pratyahara), 5) withdrawal of the senses (Pratayahara), 6) concentration (Dharana), 7) meditation (Dhyama), and 8) super-conscious state (Samadhi).³⁰

The first limb is the moral discipline that involves social and personal behavior, which falls in line with peace and democratic principles.³¹ This limb contains the characteristics: a) non-harming and nonviolence, b) truthfulness, c) non-stealing, d) moderation in all things, and e) non-possessiveness. The five characteristics to observe are, a) purity, b) contentment, c) determined effort, d) self-study, and e) surrender to the divine. B.K.S Iyengar, the founder of Iyengar yoga, states that in India the qualities of “violence, dexterity instead of honesty, libertinism and greediness and the potential for stealing anything and everything, with no respect for our fellow beings” is considered to be the God of Death.³² The physical practice of yoga aims to eliminate distractions from the mind, allow deeper breathing, help release tension and stress, and calm the mind. By calming the mind, negative feelings such as anxiety, anger, fear and depression begin to go away opening the mind to positive feelings of patience, acceptance, and compassion. The most important part of yoga is to allow deep breathing and to listen to the body and mind to open the path to peaceful living.

Micheline Flak introduced yoga techniques to the French educational system and created Research on Yoga in Education (RYE) in 1978. She states that yama “promotes living in peace, observing moral rules and learning to live as a part of a group, respecting and listening to oneself and others. Another stream or element is Niyama, which “eliminates toxins and negativity by maintaining health of the body and mind, and by promoting positive thoughts, self-image and good humor”. Breathing is also very important in yoga. It enhances control over your thoughts and can lead to “inner self-confidence, purification and an enhanced ability to resolve conflicts and monitor aggression”.³³ Yoga has proven to calm verbal aggression, relieve stress which enhances academic performance, increases concentration, attention, coordination, relaxation, reduces body weight, increases vitality, improves memory and aids in diseases such as anxiety, depression, insomnia and cancer.³⁴ It also slows down the nervous system and mind giving it room to examine thinking, acting and reacting engendering respect for self and others.

Gamma-Aminobutyric Acid (GABA) is a neurotransmitter in your brain. If someone has high levels of GABA, it has a calming, relaxing effect and it increases ability to focus, and

³⁰ Nancy Gerstein, *Guiding Yoga's Light: Lessons for Yoga Teachers*, (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2008).

³¹ Svi Shapiro, “Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Peace Education,” in *Peace Education: The Concept, Principles, and Practices Around the World*, ed. Gavriel Salomon and Baruch Nevo, (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 63-71. Murithi, 2009; Stone, 2009; Lin, 2006; Reardon, 2001.

³² B.K.S. Iyengar, Foreword to *Yoga for a World out of Balance*, by Michael Stone (Boston & London: Shambhala, 2009) foreword.

³³ Rachael Jefferson-Buchanan, “An Introduction to Research on Yoga in Education”, *Physical Education Matters* Summer (2006).

³⁴ Amit Kauts and Neelam Sharma, “Effect of Yoga Performance in Relation to Stress”, *International Journal of Yoga* 2 no. 1 (2009): 39-43; Sudheer Deshpande, HR Nagendra, and Nagarathna Raghuram, “A Randomized Trial of the Effect of Yoga on Verbal Aggressiveness in Normal Healthy Volunteers”, *International Journal of Yoga* 1 no. 2 (2008): 76-82. Shirley Telles, Satish Kumar Reddy, and H.R. Nagendra, “Oxygen Consumption and Respiration Following Two Yoga Relaxation Techniques” *Applied Psychophysiology Biofeedback* 25 (2000): 221-227.

decreases irritability and stress. Low levels are associated with anxiety, stress and insomnia. Research studies have shown that yoga may increase GABA (γ-aminobutyric acid) to creatine ratios and could help improve symptoms in low GABA levels associated with depression, anxiety disorders, and epilepsy.³⁵ Another study on intervention strategies involving massage, yoga, and relaxation for children with emotional and behavioral difficulties indicated that the intervention group showed improvements in “self-confidence, social confidence, communication and contribution in the class.” The children in the intervention group displayed “decreases in negative behaviors such as bullying, being disruptive and rule breaking, and increases in positive behaviors such as obeying instructions, joining in with a group and asking for help in class.”³⁶

In my own ethnographic research on incorporating peacebuilding and yoga with fourth graders into the schools, I asked self-reflective questions in the student surveys. I wanted to know if students were internalizing the skills, attitudes, and beliefs necessary for peaceful living and interactions. When the students first started the program, they constantly talked, fidgeted and couldn't stay still in both the yoga and peace class. The peace class was taught during Social Studies and yoga was taught during Physical Education. Whenever the students left yoga class, the teachers stated they noticed a significant difference in the way they walked to class and interacted with each other. Both the boys and girls discussed what it means to take responsibility for their actions. When students think about constructing ideas of peace in ways that are normalized and not demonized, it's only natural that their perceptions of peace and war will change.

Students learned how to use “I” statements such as, “I feel angry when you take my pencil” and how to enlist calm yogic breathing when they get angry. They also learned listening skills and basic breathing techniques and yoga postures. There were 78 students who participated. One question that proved significant was, “Do you think learning about peace and yoga has helped you with your relationship with others?”. Students said:

- “Yes, because me and my brother used to fight but now we help each other”.
- “I talk with people about taking responsibility for my actions”
- “Yes, because I was a mean girl before I did peace and yoga. Now I'm a peace girl. I'm not getting in trouble a lot”.
- “I do not yell at my cousin anymore, I take responsibility for my actions”.
- “Learning to talk about my problems. I know how to do yoga. Learning how to react with my family members and looking in the person's eyes when they are talking and asking questions”.
- “I've learned that when I have an argument I have to understand the other person. I use yoga method so I don't burst”.

³⁵ Chris C. Streeter, Eric Jensen, Ruth Perlmutter, Howard Cabral, Hua Tian, Devin Terhune, Domenic Ciraulo and Perry Renshaw, “Yoga Asana Sessions Increase Brain GABA Levels: A Pilot Study”, *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 13, no. 4 (2007): 419-426.

³⁶ Lesley Powell, “A Journey of Self-Discovery: An Intervention Involving Massage, Yoga, and Relaxation for Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties Attending Primary Schools”, *European Journal of Special Needs Education* 23, no. 4 (2008): 403.

- “The students are much calmer and focused since they started yoga. I’m even more calm” (Teacher A).

The students also listed important aspects such as taking responsibility, developing better relationships with family and friends, using positive communication, and not yelling or getting angry as much anymore. Students stated how much they enjoyed the yoga sessions because they “learned new postures, and felt more relaxed, calm, and could breathe better.”³⁷ When asked if the students would like to see this curriculum in their daily classes, they excitedly said yes, and that they were tired of not talking about things that are important to them. The students listed famous peacemakers, like Martin Luther King and even people in their family that were peacemakers. They began to see the qualities that these peacemakers had and why they were effective in promoting peace. The students also saw a demonstration by a young Latino national yoga champion from their community. They kept asking him if he really was from their community and where he first learned about yoga. They were intrigued by him and it made such a difference that he was from their community.

Yogis believe that peace starts from within. Then and only then can it be extended outward to others and the community. When we suffer, we tend to be more willing to inflict pain and misery upon others and ourselves, whether through words, actions, and energy. Creating a practice of non-violence towards oneself and others allow each individual to gain a stronger sense of well being, thus reducing their negative impact on the world. The ultimate impact is the realizations that we can each contribute to creating a more peaceful, healthy global society by becoming more peaceful and healthy.³⁸

Most importantly, the skills learned and practiced in yoga are essential in supporting peace and democratic principles. In my yoga practice, the instructor discusses healing and forgiving ourselves for creating stress and tension in our lives. They discuss how the inner peace and harmony we get in our yoga practice can be taken out to the real world and given to others in ways that leave them peaceful and harmonious. As a whole class, we end our practice saying, “Namaste”. “Nama” means bow, “as” means I, and “te” means you. This literally means “I bow to you” but in yoga it can mean a variety of things such as, “May the Peace/Divine that is within me, also be within you.” Palkhivala states that, “Namaste allows two individuals to come together energetically to a place of connection and timelessness, free from the bonds of ego-connection. If it is done with deep feeling in the heart and with the mind surrendered, a deep union of spirits can blossom. This allows the basic yoga truth that we are all one when we live from the heart.”³⁹ By seeking to understand and feel compassion for ourselves first, then we are more apt to view others without criticism and judgment, but with understanding and love, creating spaces for authentic social justice and action.

Self-Empowered Value and Belief Systems

³⁷ Wiggins, forthcoming

³⁸ Gerstein, *Yoga’s Guiding Light*; Stone, *Yoga for a World out of Balance*; Lin, *Love, Peace and Wisdom in Education*.

³⁹ “The Meaning of Namaste,” Rita Geno, <http://www.yogajournal.com/basics/822>

In this section, I intertwine the above-mentioned peace, democratic, and yogic theories to form a belief system that undergirds a more holistic form of peace education with the skills needed to carry out those beliefs. These beliefs need to have balance and harmony in order to be truly effective. Balance is essential in yoga, for instance if you lean too far on one side, the other side has to try harder and you end up falling out of a posture. This is indicative of being out of balance and one group is taking on more responsibility or burdens and the other group isn't helping to balance the load. Peace education moves people away from apathy, seclusion, cynicism, and ignorance toward increasing their awareness, consciousness, engagement, and ability thus increasing their power to act and engage in finding solutions to violent social realities.⁴⁰ Peace education and yoga allow for a sense of balance and harmony to reengage students and teachers alike. The following ten descriptions of a peaceful belief system is not mutually exclusive and certainly has room to grow and overlap, but it's a start to linking the value of yoga to peace and democracy in schools.

These descriptions are based on a number of theoretical principles such as moral development⁴¹ and the interconnections between justice and care,⁴² peace education,⁴³ democratic principles,⁴⁴ and yoga⁴⁵. For instance, Carol Gilligan's research on moral development counters and expands on Lawrence Kohlberg's theory by examining it from an ethic of caring standpoint in which relationships are contextual. According to Gilligan the pre-conventional stage allows the actor to dissipate any conflict between caring for oneself and the care of others.⁴⁶ This ethic of care has to be agreed upon within the community and when empathy and forgiveness are needed, then the moral boundaries need to be redrawn to include previous enemies. However, a universal notion of justice and the ethic of care must be concurrently established to be effective and socially transformative.⁴⁷

A belief system is a shared system of beliefs and values that systematically define a way of perceiving the social, cultural, physical, and psychological world. To incorporate yoga practice, each value should engage breathing techniques. Inhaling is allowing the life force to infiltrate body and mind and exhaling lets go of the physical and emotional toxins such as anger, fear, frustration, tension, and stress. Constantly focusing on the present moment allows one to stay focused on your practice and meditation. Meditation enhances qualities of gratitude, contentment, mindfulness, and patience.

⁴⁰ Harris and Morrison, *Peace Education*.

⁴¹ Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Essays on Moral Development*, vol 1. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981); Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁴² Murithi, *The Ethics of Peacebuilding*.

⁴³ Lin, *Love, Peace and Wisdom*; Carter, "Voluntary Standards for Peace Education"; Betty A. Reardon, *Education for a Culture of Peace in a Gender Perspective*, (UNESCO Publishing, 2001): 85-86.

⁴⁴ Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom*; Anna S. Ochoa-Becker, *Democratic Education for Social Studies: An Issues-Centered Approach 2nd ed.* (Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, 2007); Grant, *What is the Language?*; Shapiro, *Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Peace*.

⁴⁵ Stone, *Yoga for a World out of Balance*.

⁴⁶ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*.

⁴⁷ Murithi, *The Ethics of Peacebuilding*.

First, democracy, peace and, civic engagement principles need to be embedded in all facets of our culture i.e. home, communities, schools, politics, economics, and international relationships. The ethic of care and hope and a commitment to nonviolence has to be included. “The arts and skills of care are learned...and must become as important a factor in the public realm as in the private.” Hope, “can be elicited and developed through practicing the skills of visioning, imaging and modeling.”⁴⁸

Secondly, sharing from all members of the group is essential. One can respect experiences from both novice and experts, young and old, male and female. This respects the balance needed in a democratic society and reflects the Taoist principle of yin and yang. One must allow for new thinking and new ways of doing things in order to truly grow. Each individual has the ability to work cooperatively by listening, sharing, being open-minded, and being confident to question the values of the others in the group. Cross-cultural relationships have the ability to compromise, accept the majority vote, and find sustainable solutions. Allowing several perspectives to infiltrate and span across cultures is essential in an open democratic society.⁴⁹

Third, humility, gratitude, forgiveness, compassion, and honesty are virtuous qualities of a peaceful and harmonious life. Humility is cultivated in yoga by being noncompetitive and not seeking to create the perfect posture, but to admit fragility and taking care of your body and mind, rather than to impress others. Having gratitude that you can practice yoga with a group of like-minded peaceful individuals with a common goal. One can learn to forgive oneself and others. It’s very difficult to forgive others if you are not willing to forgive yourself. Tim Murithi explains that in order for forgiveness to occur, enemies must seek a common moral community based on a framework that acknowledges our common humanity.⁵⁰ Compassion includes both sympathy and empathy. Both qualities are essential in truly being compassionate. Finally, honesty is important in speaking the truth about any situation and accepting responsibility if you made a mistake or did something wrong. These qualities are at the heart of daily yoga practice. As Michael Stone emphasizes, “As we still the distractions of mind and body and settle into a more authentic way of being in and of the world, we also awake to a larger responsibility, namely, serving and supporting others where they are suffering.”⁵¹

Fourth, the importance of believing in yourself and your word is essential to social action. If you are committed to being a change agent, then seeking the action towards change is imperative if you are to keep your word. You must believe you can make the change as this leads to self-empowerment and integrity. The ability to self-reflect, be responsible and accept the consequences of your actions is also essential. Another approach to becoming critical and truly democratic is the notion of autonomy. To be autonomous is to understand your influence in the world and the constructions that compose the way you are categorized, “To be autonomous is to be self-directed and responsible; it is to be capable of acting in accord with internalized norms

⁴⁸ Reardon, *Education for a Culture of Peace in a Gender Perspective*.

⁴⁹ Ochoa-Becker, *Democratic Education for Social Studies*.

⁵⁰ Murithi, *The Ethics of Peacebuilding*.

⁵¹ Stone, *Yoga for a World out of Balance*, 80.

and principles; it is to be insightful enough to know and understand one's impulses, one's motives, and the influences of one's past."⁵² These characteristics are essential to knowing one's place in the constructing of self and others.

Fifth, the belief in the power of practice and the acceptance of new challenges allows you to grow as a person, citizen, and yogi. Yoga practice can be seen as a metaphor for life. Steady, patient practice allows you to have greater concentration and focus, thus making you slow down and be mindful of both your yoga practice and daily life. You will gain access to new knowledge, be critical and thoughtful of what you hear, read and see. "Authentic expressions of citizen criticism and political interest are not acts of disloyalty. Quite the contrary, they have a very strong attachment to democratic principles that they hope to stretch ever closer to the democratic ideal."⁵³

Sixth, sharing a sense of purpose is integral to growth. Most people want peace in their lives even though they can create turmoil very easily. The essence of humanity is based on peace. It's our culture that indoctrinates us to the apparent necessity of violence.⁵⁴ The global community can start within the classroom by students and teachers bringing about social change through their actions as a community with purpose. Svi Shapiro suggests that, "More than ever we need an education that will address why we make wars, destroy lives, brutalize and devalue others, and follow those who lead us into the blind rage of ethnocentrism or other forms of hatred and bigotry."⁵⁵ We must understand that the policies we make affect others. We must take care to hear marginalized voices as well as dominant ones. As I stated earlier, at the end of yoga practice, the class turns to the teacher in their final meditation and says, "Namaste"- "May the peace/divine that is within me, also be within you". One must seek the divine peace in every person you meet.

Seventh, the power of self-love, self-worth, and dignity that supports inner peace allow for social transformation to the outside world. It takes great strength to address and resolve feelings of anger, desperation, fear, stress, and feelings of self-righteousness. We need to first love ourselves in order to truly love and respect others. We also have to have the strength to be willing to put ourselves on the margins in order to grow. To examine the fluidity of our own privilege and marginalization in addition to deconstructing race, class, gender, sexuality, religions and ablism and how each is represented in both the official and hidden curriculum is a part of the ethic of care curriculum. Carl Grant and Lavonne Williams explain that care and the practice of caring must affirm one's cultural constructions and illuminate how care is conceived and distributed.⁵⁶ We are then able to adapt to change and understand the potential change in power dynamics. This takes great courage. Like the warrior pose in yoga, it takes great concentration and balance to stay focused and not fall to one side or the other.

⁵² Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College, 1988), 118.

⁵³ Ochoa-Becker, *Democratic Education for Social Studies: An Issues-Centered Decision Making Curriculum*, 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Shapiro, "Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Peace Education", 65.

⁵⁶ Grant and Williams, "What is the Language of Care and Social Justice that We Use in Schools?"

Eight, we can believe in our personal growth and learning from challenges and missteps. We are all human. “Accepting feelings of fear and vulnerability as normal human reactions frees people to share those feelings with others and explore common links that provide the basis for joining together to address these problems. People make connections with others based on fear for their own survival and that of others, and concern for the future.”⁵⁷ Unfortunately, the culture of intolerance isn’t fixed on one country or culture; it’s everywhere. We must first seek to understand and deconstruct the roots of this oppression to better work through and overcome it. “A benevolent or tolerant interpretation of care mutes and silences discussions of power, privilege, and oppression, and leave the discourse on care unproblematic.”⁵⁸

Ninth, believing that truth can be based on multiple realities engenders a feminist perspective according to Gilligan, but a universal notion of justice and care can be intertwined to create a more equitable belief system. “Educators committed to nonviolence in education encourage students to discover the ways they think about themselves and others, replacing fears, hostilities, negative statements, and prejudices with nonviolent ways of thinking about self and others that respects the truth that can reside within each of us.”⁵⁹ Communication is an important skill when seeking to subvert unjust practices in the promotion of social justice. Solving interpersonal conflicts comes from trying to understand another point of view. One must understand the power of the word. Paulo Freire emphasized the impact the word has on the world and how it is intertwined and inherently connected to praxis through reflection and action. In order for praxis to have efficacy, it must be embedded in authentic dialogue. For Freire, dialogue is crucial to the subversion of the status quo and dominant practice of the oppressors. Dialogue must be accompanied with qualities of a true revolution. The truest revolutionary act is infused with love, hope, humility, having faith in humankind and critical thinking. Thus, these qualities bridge a “mutual trust between the dialoguers,”⁶⁰ and create “well-developed communication skills that include reflective listening, participatory hearing, articulate speech and the ability to clarify.”⁶¹

Finally, everyone must believe that once you reach “nirvana” or a sense of peace, then you turn around and help others along a similar path to peace. One can be participatory, actively committed in the peace process, and seek ways of restorative justice. “Increasingly, peace education is being seen as having its essential roots in the work necessary for “inner peace.” Inner peace does not mean merely a state of inner being, which ignores the reality of human suffering. Rather, holistic peace is seen as encompassing an individual compassion for human need, coupled with a sincere attempt at identifying with and helping to transform the suffering of others.”⁶²

⁵⁷ Harris and Morrison, *Peace Education*, 93.

⁵⁸ Grant and Williams, “What is the Language of Care and Social Justice that We Use in Schools?”, 212.

⁵⁹ Harris and Morrison, *Peace Education*, 136.

⁶⁰ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970), 91.

⁶¹ Reardon, *Education for a Culture of Peace in a Gender Perspective*, 101.

⁶² Harris and Morrison, *Peace Education*, 134.

In yoga, daily intentions should adhere to these values and students need to constantly seek the interconnection between what they are discussing in the classroom and how their yoga practice informs and enhances those social understandings. The idea of taking it off the mat and into the world is part of this kind of social action.

Curricular Implications for Yoga, Peace, and Democracy

Making our curriculum culturally relevant, empowering, peaceful, and socially sustainable grants access to the knowledge and skills needed to overcome the culture of complacency. This is imperative if we really want students to create an accurate democratic system reflective of social justice and equitable human rights. Teacher training, classroom environment, and administrative and community support are all essential elements in implementing peaceful pedagogy. In this section, I'll provide some guidelines to start a culture of peace in schools. Cultivating peaceful citizens begins with teacher training, program and curricular implementation, and involving the community allowing spaces for libratory dialogue and peaceful, nonviolent social action.

Teacher Training

In order to create a peaceful school environment, teachers have to first address their own biases, limited expectations of students, and their ability to let go of control and allow the students a sense of autonomy. I was a teacher for many years and I know the feeling of being stressed out, tired, and on the edge when students start acting out. They pick up on the energy of the teacher and school, whether it's positive or negative, and they move forward based on that energy. Educators may unconsciously perpetuate the status quo if they are not provided the opportunity to take a critical lens to the ways in which society rejects true democracy and freedom by its very insurgence of dehumanizing others. Thich Nhat Ninh focuses on holistic approaches emphasizing, wholeness, a union of mind, body, and spirit. Knowing oneself in ways that reveal holistic, critical reflection, and action is to understand one's identity better⁶³.

Teachers must model a culture of peace by addressing those issues of healing, forgiveness, and conflict resolution and their vision of a peaceful world and classroom. In return, students can share their visions. If respect is maintained between students and teachers then making democratic decisions and reparative attempts when a project or activity doesn't go the way you planned is imperative. In creating a democratic classroom, boundary setting is also necessary to allow for differences in opinions and room for compromise. Finally, a teacher's expectations must be tempered between love, care and compassion and a consistent expectation of excellence. Students must be held accountable for their actions, but we can aid them in their journey of self-discovery and intrinsic motivation.

Schools of Peace

Program, support groups, and school-wide promotion of peace have to be a permanent part of the curriculum and school culture in order to fully embrace a self-empowering peaceful

⁶³ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace is Every Step* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992).

culture. Programs should be set in place for anger management and conflict resolution for both peer and faculty support groups. The promotion of peace should be presented throughout the year through peaceful assemblies, social debates, and opportunities for action. Awards should be presented for peaceful action in the community, state, and national levels. Peace should also be a theme throughout the content areas and certainly in the fine arts. Famous citizens like Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. should be studied as well as ordinary citizens. Ordinary citizens can be people from the community that have made strides toward creating peace and improving public policy. They can also be people that students know and admire for making peace in their homes and families. Many times, when high-stakes testing season is near, the fine arts and social studies get left out to allow more study time for the test. This takes key elements of learning away from students. The curriculum has to be culturally relevant and embrace student experiences.

Community Action

Finally, the community must be involved through newsletters, hosting peaceful functions, and workshops on peaceful living that promote positive communication, yoga practice, increased awareness, and critical deconstruction of racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia. This can help to open a dialogue with a variety of other communities in and around the area. When implementing peace skills into the community, we need to have the initial social skills, then we can manifest these skills into action such as, a) taking an active role in defining community problems and framing questions from a community perspective, b) the ability to make difficult decisions by mastering public deliberation, articulating a sense of common good and recognizing a shared sense of purpose and direction, and c) creating efficient relationships among constituents to achieve mutual purposes. Other active skills are the ability to identify resources, work as a team, identify goals, and resolve interpersonal conflicts. We must connect our sense of humanity to the decisions we make about our communities and global lives.

Conclusion

Peace, yoga and democracy share a vision of freedom, truth, and justice to promote both individual and societal transformation. Barack Obama created a vision of hope in 2008; students should be allowed to carry out that vision of freedom and democracy in their homes, schools and communities with curricular implementation across the content areas. Allowing the community and the school to interact and makes strides for change are essential if peace is ever to be a possibility.

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