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# Yoga and School



**Practice Book**

*With Illustrations  
by Julie Thomas*

*Translated by Jana Lobe*

**Edition Forsbach**

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In this book, the generic masculinum is used without intending to exclude anyone.

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**We are not human beings having  
a spiritual experience.**

**We are spiritual beings having  
a human experience.**

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955)

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# 1

## Yoga Belongs in School!



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# Yoga Belongs in School!

*Education is not the filling of a pail,  
but the lighting of a fire.*

William Butler Yeats

As a high school teacher with correction-heavy subjects, about ten years ago I worked in Australia at the German International School in Sydney, where I completed a teacher training course on “Yoga in schools”.

Since then, I have been teaching five minutes of yoga in school at the beginning of every single class every day. With this concept I have had great success ever since.

I am also a yoga teacher who has completed various yoga trainings. However, in numerous teacher trainings that I have held, I have realized, that in school it is not mandatory to be a yoga teacher at the same time. Thus, it is possible for any teacher to guide through a few simple yoga exercises at the beginning of the class to ensure more peace in the classroom without having to raise their voice.

I do not even want to go so far as to offer yoga as a separate subject in schools, which would of course also be conceivable and can certainly already be encountered in some schools.

My primary concern is to integrate the method itself into everyday school life. Even with regard to the curricula, there is still enough time to ensure that the teacher and the students are doing well in an atmosphere of mutual respect – with only five minutes at the beginning of each lesson.

The time that is saved without regulations can consequently be put to valuable use in a number of ways. Regular exercise also strengthens the immune system and improves resilience. A good mood and relaxation are immediately noticeable.

## More Rest and Relaxation in as Little as Five Minutes!

The recipe is very simple: Performing standing exercises together at the beginning of the class creates a feeling of solidarity among the students and a trust-based connection with the teacher. This strengthens the team spirit – the students look after each other more.

This goes far beyond the classes in which the yoga exercises take place. All at once, the classes in which yoga is taught perform better in all aspects. They are characterized by more discipline and perseverance (for example in PE class), more empathy, more respect for other teachers, more diligence and commitment, and an overall better class environment.

As part of his bachelor’s thesis, an intern even scientifically proved that the so-called “Yoga Classes” in which I taught are significantly less “prone to disruptions” and are marked by a particularly high level of social competence. In proportion to the yoga exercises carried out in a class, the disturbances in all class levels decrease significantly. This, in turn, has a positive effect on the overall classroom environment and thus, of course, on the teacher.

In general, the teaching profession represents an occupational group in which the clinical picture of burnout is extraordinarily widespread. Only when teachers succeed in actively practicing selfcare in their professional lives on a daily basis the risk of burnout can be minimized.

It has been scientifically proven that yoga exercises, which are performed by the teacher together with the students, are also suitable for this purpose. This way, teacher and students are equally relaxed and focused on the actual class content. And it always works!

This book therefore also contains numerous selfcare tips for teachers and other people, who are in helping professions and need to speak and be present in front of other people.

It is conceivable, for instance, to start seminars, meetings and discussions by performing a few standing yoga exercises. The effect: All participants are more relaxed, more attentive, more peaceful, more focused – every meeting is more successful automatically. The results speak for themselves and can be quantified as well.

Yoga is not a matter of age, Yoga in school is suitable for all age groups and school types.

Even in the days of homeschooling, my concept of teaching Yoga in school has proven tremendously successful. In the beginning I was a little reluctant, but soon students were complaining of eye and back pain. They were not used to sitting in front of the computer for six hours every day.

So I invested a few minutes, as I usually do at school, to alleviate the pain. Especially the eye and back exercises were of benefit to the students. They can be found in the chapter later in this book.

## What Is Yoga?

The word “yoga” is now on everyone’s lips, no longer belonging to the esoteric realm. It has long since arrived in the heart of society, but unfortunately not yet in schools in the way that would be

both desirable and necessary. Yoga not only comes from India, it is also taught there as a matter of course in many schools.

This is no coincidence, for this path of practice, which consists of body exercises, breath control, cleansing techniques, concentration drills and meditations, has self-realization and the development of one’s own potential as its ultimate goal. School aims for nothing else: for students to discover and live their talents.

Yoga therefore means a union or connection of body, mind and soul. It comes from the Sanskrit word “yui” and means “yoking”, i. e. getting into contact with one’s body and thus with oneself.

Through the movements and bodywork, the mind becomes still. Only when we are in contact with ourselves, we succeed in being attentive and able to follow things with focus, in this case: the contents being taught.

This is true for the teacher as well as for the students. A teacher is only as good as his concentration allows him to be. The teacher demonstrates to the students their way of dealing with the subject matter. The more focused the teacher is, the more focused and successful the class will be.

Nowadays, many teachers no longer feel that they can meet the challenges of the teaching profession. As in nearly all professions, these challenges have increased enormously in recent years. A teacher is simultaneously a manager, social worker, educator, knowledge broker, and for some, simply a service provider.

Young teachers in particular tend to be very committed and motivated when they first enter the profession, until they realize that their work often has Sisyphean qualities, that their efforts are never enough, and that they are seldom recognized. What is left then is utter capitulation or an unconscious attitude of resent-

ment toward the students, who are the ones who suffer. Breaking this vicious circle is a major challenge indeed.

Yoga can also be a remedy for this. The concept of yoga is holistic – it nourishes, strengthens and meets people where they are. Through the multitude of movements at the beginning of each class, the teacher notices a physical change in themselves.

The breathing pattern changes and deepens. Often, we feel stressed just because we breathe too shallowly in everyday life, as energy levels drop with a breath that is too flat and halted.

Immediately after the exercises, the teacher feels just as relaxed as the students. The teacher's state of relaxation and the feeling of having done something good for themselves and their body, instead of simply functioning like a robot, is transferred to the students. The connection between teacher and student is established on an energetic level and provides the fertile ground for working effectively and respectfully together.

## How Does Yoga Work?

The effect of yoga consists of an interplay that takes place equally on the physical and mental level and can be noticed very quickly. Our body has a large store of prana, the universal life energy. How we feel, physically, mentally and emotionally, depends on how freely this energy flows. By practicing yoga, we can learn to influence the energies of our body.

On the physical level, yoga works on the muscular, nervous, cardiovascular, respiratory and digestive systems. The changes on the somatic level can be experienced instantly. Therefore, just five minutes at the beginning of the class is enough to see a change in the entire energy balance. These changes in turn have a positive

effect on the mental level. One develops better body awareness and a better self-esteem; one is less anxious, less stressed; the ability to focus and to cope with challenges increases.

Through the tranquility experienced during yoga practice, everyday life is perceived as less stressful, since one has more energy at one's disposal. The situation of day-to-day life with all its challenges, especially at school, however, does not change. Furthermore, school is a space in which the "state of emergency" of an otherwise usual communicative setting constantly prevails. You need to be permanently responsive on all channels for hours on end and react to numerous external impulses uninterruptedly. It is only the perception that changes. Through consistent practice of yoga, it becomes possible to handle these actually unnatural communication situations at school in a different way.

Particularly in this digital age in which we find ourselves, the technical requirements are constantly on the rise, in addition to all the demands I have already mentioned. The attention span of children is permanently reduced, as I have observed during my many years of teaching. Things are no longer stored in long-term memory, forgetfulness is immense and is apparent in a number of ways.

The ability to focus on one object for a longer period of time is increasingly losing its appeal. The reason for this is often simply the inability to concentrate. Multitasking takes its toll.

At the same time, however, the desire to be able to concentrate better is growing among children and adults alike. Students suffer from their own forgetfulness and their inability to stay focused.

Many students complain that they can't remember anything despite spending hours on vocabulary. That's why they usually love the yoga exercises at school. They realize that yoga helps them