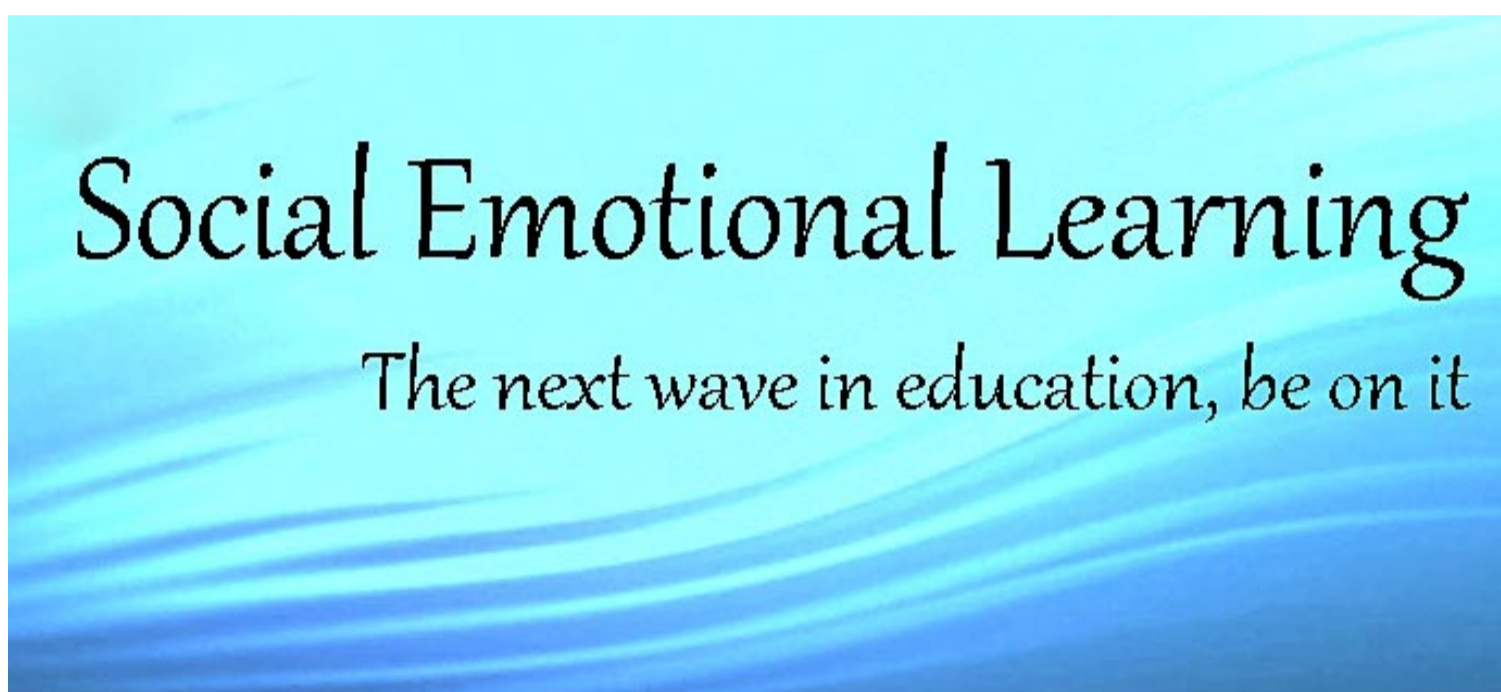


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Thank you to MEiN Groups at Yahoo. After I put out call for a guest bloggers several people responded within hours. A new paradigm seems to be emerging that instead of climbing over each other to get a piece of the economic pie, the people who are studying and practicing Mindfulness are helping and sharing information with each other. Imagine how this collective wisdom which is deepening and broadening exponentially will benefit children and society as a whole. I do not feel like a creator of new techniques - I just synthesize the best information stumbled upon from both the east and west. This shift is the 'abundance' view when one benefits, the whole benefits.
LG

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.."Self-care is not selfish.

Do not sacrifice yourself to a cause
--no matter how noble--
piece by piece,
for you will soon have nothing left to give.
Instead, give from a place of your highest being.

A healthy spirit and body can give so much more
than one that has become worn down."

Christine and Kelly

be well. teach well.

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Calming Cranky Kids By Ms G. (Christine Galib) & Ms. S (Kelly Seibert), co-founders of

[*be well. teach well.*](#)

Jamie* (name changed) was the high school student who directed his energy to pestering others, defying requests to start working, and retaliating with a "But it wasn't my fault—he started it, Ms. G!" when I saw him throw paper balls at his friend during my 5th Period class. *Don't negotiate with him*, my mentor

advised. *He wants to argue with you, oppose you, push your buttons, and see what he can get away with. Show him who is in charge.* I struggled to debrief my mentor's comments: I wanted to understand *why* Jamie behaved the way he did. *Why was Jamie reacting to situations, rather than responding? And, how could I use my experiences in mindfulness and yoga to coach Jamie to respond?*

The 5 Breaths activity was crucial to my behavioral management strategy with Jamie. I told Jamie that whenever he felt anger, frustration, or the need to annoy his peers, he had my permission to give me a "secret signal" (index finger indicating the #1) that enabled him to step outside and take 5 Breaths. One condition: the 5 Breaths had to be slow inhales and exhales through the nose, with one hand on his stomach. Jamie's response to practicing 5 Breaths for the first time was: "*Ms. G, was that magic!?*" The 5 Breaths activity became our thing. It worked for Jamie because it gave him something to do with his body, his breath, and his mind—something on which he wasn't graded or judged. By directing his energy to his breath, Jamie created time for a response instead of a reaction. For Jamie, this activity gave him control in a situation over which he felt he had none.

As much as I wanted Jamie to be right, the effect of slow, deep breathing wasn't magic. Slow, deep breathing stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system—the body's "rest and digest" system that decreases heart rate and blood pressure, signaling to the body that it is an appropriate time to relax. By letting himself breathe, Jamie was enabling his body to relax, rather than engage his "fight-or-flight" stress reaction.

In too many school settings, students like Jamie hear constant commands from teachers and administrators: "sit down, be quiet, sit still, pay attention, stay awake, have more self-control." While these commands—which are more common than the hot chips you see in the school cafeteria—are in place to create order and discipline, how often are students, especially ones with Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), actually given the tools and training to truly understand how to comply? Sitting still and paying attention is hard! Just ask any adult who has sat through a staff meeting recently.

For students with who may be on the Attention Deficient or Oppositional scale, constantly hearing these commands—without having an accessible toolkit of strategies for understanding how to manage their bodies—can be a stressor. This stress often activates the sympathetic nervous system, responsible for the "fight-or-flight" reaction (increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, and increased signaling to the body to either "fight" or "flee" from an emergency situation—or to flat-out freeze. The negative feedback loop that these students experience is broken by giving students tools that help calm them and allow the function of reason to kick in.

Teaching students mindfulness, meditation, and yoga provides students with tools to slow down the moment and create time to respond to stressors, which helps students navigate the narrow definition of an ideal learner that we see in our current education system. These tools can be taught in one-on-one interactions similar to Jamie and Ms. G's story, or in whole-class settings, similar to Ms. S's story about bringing meditation to her class of 8th graders in Southeast Houston:

At the end of March, just before the Texas State Assessment for ELA, I nervously began guiding my students through five minutes of meditation every single day. We engaged in breathing, visualization, and positive thinking exercises. Mindfulness, meditation, and yoga had very positively impacted my identity as a teacher, so I decided the risk of my students thinking I was totally crazy was worth it!

Meditation turned out to be one of the best gifts I ever gave to my students. I know I taught them a lot about reading and writing, and even about social justice and being informed citizens, but I feel meditation had the greatest

potential to help my students through the rest of their academic careers and beyond. It gave them an activity that enabled introspection, emotional regulation, and stress management.

For my students, meditation became a daily routine: my students would remind me anytime they thought I would forget about meditation that day. They adopted the tools for themselves, meditating at home before their exams, or meditating for a few breaths to calm their nerves before walking across the stage for their 8th Grade Graduation Ceremony. I knew the tools were working when one of my students—the one whose name EVERY teacher in the school knew because of his seemingly complete lack of self-control—caught me when I was being very reactive, and offered meditation as an option to self-regulate! I even allowed students to become the guides for mediation and, perhaps unsurprisingly, it was the ODD students who seemed to benefit the most from this experience.

As education leaders reflect on how and what we are actually teaching our students, it is crucial that we consider how mindfulness, meditation, and yoga can provide tools for individual development of self-awareness, self-efficacy, and resilience in nonjudgmental and inclusive ways.

ABOUT US be well. teach well. believes that self-care is the key to effective and enduring leadership in the school setting. We provide workshops and training to bring yoga, mindfulness, self-care, and stress reduction techniques to teachers, school leaders, and As former public school teachers, co-founders Christine Galib and Kelly Seibert understand first-hand the important benefits that are created through yoga and mindfulness in the classroom. To this end, our workshops are tailored to fit the needs of the schools and individuals we work with, and can be brought into the classroom, professional development settings, and teacher and school leader training programs. The key to our be well. teach well. strategy is our focus on school and classroom leaders as individuals with highly personalized self-care needs. The benefits of yoga and mindfulness for students have been seen in school districts across the country, but we also understand that focusing solely on students does not get to the root of the challenges we are facing in education today. Many of our hardest-working, most dedicated teachers and school leaders end up draining their own energy and effectiveness through the sacrifices they make for their students. We believe that in order to keep our best leaders in our classrooms and schools, we need to support them in caring for themselves with the same intensity that they care for their students. The tools we provide can be used in and out of the classroom to help these leaders cultivate their own mindfulness, stress-reduction and health to help avoid burn-out.



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