



# amaZEN U & The Classroom:

*yoga and mindfulness videos as a classroom tool for developing self-regulation, self-management, and helping to cope with the effects of trauma*

## Introduction

At amaZEN U we know yoga and mindfulness can be game changers in the classroom. When compared to exercise alone, yoga encouraged improvement “across measures of anxiety, self-regulation and adaptive skills” according to Lindy Weaver of The Ohio State University (Weaver, 2015). A study conducted in Vancouver public schools also found that as a result of introducing mindfulness practices “82 percent of children reported having a more positive outlook, 81 percent learned to make themselves happy, and 58 percent of children tried to help others more often.” (Schwartz, 2016) The same study also found that students “improved more in their cognitive control and stress physiology; reported greater empathy, perspective-taking, emotional control, optimism, school self-concept, and mindfulness, showed greater decreases in self-reported symptoms of depression and peer-rated aggression, were rated by peers as more prosocial, and increased in peer acceptance (or sociometric popularity)” (Schonert et al., 2015). In this white paper we will dive deeper into the positive effects yoga and mindfulness practices can have on students’ self-regulation, stress and anxiety management, and coping with behaviors caused by trauma both in and beyond the classroom.

## Increase Self Regulation

Mindfulness has been credited with significantly improving executive functioning, especially in self-regulation.

**Self-regulation is one of the strongest predictors of academic achievement (Flook et al., 2010). “An even stronger predictor than IQ, self-regulation in beginning years of life is one of many functions that can predict math and reading achievement in elementary and middle school” (Deshpande, 2016).**

Interestingly, a study conducted by Lisa Flook of elementary students found that students who demonstrated the highest level of difficulty with executive functioning also had the highest rates of improvement with mindfulness intervention (Flook et al., 2010). Our students who struggle with regulating their own behaviors and emotions do have hope for improvement.



## Improving self-regulation in students can help decrease the need for disciplinary action.

In fact, rather than relying on “zero tolerance” discipline policies, mindfulness is being incorporated increasingly in classrooms in the US and abroad like the Mindfulness in Schools Project in the UK, and even replacing detention in some cases. At Patterson High School in Baltimore, suspensions were reduced dramatically by weaving mindfulness practices into its school culture.

## Manage Stress and Anxiety

Practicing yoga in the classroom with amaZEN U can help students manage stress and anxiety, which can manifest in the classroom as lack of focus and misbehavior. Anxiety and stress are all the more prevalent in today’s society and notably among students in the classroom due to many factors including increased pressures from high-stakes testing, the constant bombardment of stimuli from our plugged-in lifestyles, life circumstances and reduced physical activity. In the No Child Left Behind Act era, the Center for Educational policy reported an average loss of 50 minutes of recess time across the United States. These factors make it more challenging for students to focus in school and handle the complexities of adolescence both at school and at home (McMurrer, 2007). By providing the opportunity for physical activity and mindfulness exercises that are offered with amaZEN U’s videos throughout the school day, you are giving students the opportunity to connect with and calm their own anxiety and stress, which can lead to better behavior and increased focus.

## Help Cope with the Effects of Trauma

Feeling heartbroken, a pit in the stomach, and tightness in the chest are a few of the many symptoms people, including our students, feel when experiencing the effects of trauma. These feelings result in off-task behavior, disengagement, and poor relations with peers (Van der Kolk, 2014). These factors are clearly inhibitors to academic performance. However, the regular use of yoga in the classroom can reverse these effects allowing for a healthier and more productive classroom environment.

School counselors and teachers are becoming increasingly aware of the prevalence and effects of trauma on students inside and outside of the classroom. Trauma can manifest itself in off-task behaviors and disengagement, as well as inability to connect with other people. Yoga can help people manage effects of trauma, getting them on-task, engaged and connected. In his research, Dr. Van der Kolk, a leading author on healing trauma with yoga, found that ten weeks of yoga practice markedly reduced symptoms of trauma in patients who failed to react to other methods of treatment (Van der Kolk, 2014).



Research supports activities that increase mindfulness practices as an effective way of building resiliency in universal populations, offering benefits to all who practice (Greenberg et al., 2012). Being mindful of sensations of trauma helps people to gain control of them.

## Other Facts Supporting Yoga and Mindfulness in the Classroom

In addition to helping with self-regulation, stress and anxiety management, and managing the effects of trauma, **yoga and mindfulness practices like guided visualization and breathing exercises directly help academically, notably by producing the spacing effect (Watson, 2015). Essentially, spacing effect means that if you learn something and then have an ample rest period and then review it again, the information is better retained** than larger concentrated blocks of practice of a concept. When children learn a new concept and then participate in mindfulness practices it provides a rest period which is proven to help increase long-term retention. Yoga and mindfulness exercises can be the perfect brain break to take advantage of the spacing affect, yielding improved academic performance.

A comprehensive study conducted by Amika Singh, PhD, in 2012 even found that physical activity improves academic performance. By sampling several studies across the globe, Singh found that physical activity improves heavily tested areas such as math, reading and science. The use of amaZEN U yoga and mindfulness videos in the classroom can have a direct positive effect on your class test scores!

## Conclusion

amaZEN U yoga and mindfulness videos can be easily incorporated into the daily routine during brain breaks, morning meetings, and before exams, to name a few. By utilizing the easy-to-navigate interface you will be helping your students develop the social-emotional capacities to self-regulate, manage stress and anxiety, and to cope with trauma. amaZEN U is ready to be your partner in creating a classroom that is more focused, engaged, and collaborative.



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