



Meditation and Relaxation Awareness

by Gloria Napper-Owen

Children come to our schools each day feeling many of the stressors that we would normally attribute to adult experiences. At an early age, children are confronted with situations that may make them anxious or begin to doubt their self-worth. Conflicts with parents, siblings, or friends may create anger that is difficult to control, and the result may be the child in the classroom that lashes out at other students in an attempt to release negative energy. Random name calling on the playground may cause a child to doubt his or her ability to be a successful participant in day-to-day recess activities. Teachers can help children learn to manage their stress by helping them become more aware of negative feelings and behaviors and introducing them to meditation and relaxation techniques to create positive feelings and actions.

Stress is a normal part of life and affects nearly everyone to some degree. Physical activity has been found to be effective at relieving stress, so the physical education class time is a wonderful opportunity to

also introduce children to relaxation and meditation techniques that may be practiced to reduce stress. Often, however, the physical education teachers don't have resources at their fingertips to assist in the implementation of these techniques. The *Children's Awareness Curriculum*, created by Lori Lite, is designed to decrease stress and anxiety by teaching children how to perform deep breathing and muscular relaxation exercises, in addition to helping them use visualization techniques and positive affirmation statements to build self-esteem.

The *Children's Awareness Curriculum* package includes four lessons that may be taught over and over again so that children learn to use the techniques of affirmation, visualization, breathing, and muscle relaxation. Each lesson follows a suggested format that includes movement exploration, stories, songs, and artwork. Four story books (*A Boy and a Bear*, *The Affirmation Web*, *A Boy and a Turtle*, and *The Goodnight Caterpillar*) and a music/audio book CD (*Indigo Dreams*)


are the materials designed to support the implementation of these lessons.

The set induction for each lesson allows the teacher to incorporate movement exploration about a theme that links to the focus of the lesson. Following the movement activity, an explanation of the meditation or relaxation technique occurs before the story is read. For example, "Stomp your Fears" is the instant activity that leads to teaching about deep breathing to become calm when feelings of fear arise. In the explanation phase, the teacher blows into a balloon to demonstrate how the lungs inflate with normal breathing and how the belly moves up and down with deep breathing. The story of *A Boy and a Bear* allows children to practice deep breathing while listening to the audio CD and looking at pictures in the book. Discussion after the story encourages children to problem solve about how the technique taught within the particular lesson could be applied in stressful situations. With repetition throughout the school year, children could be better prepared to deal with conflicts and stress more positively.

A visit to the website (www.LiteBooks.net) lets you listen to samples from the CD and each book. The books are quite cute and the music is soothing and could make a unique contribution to day-to-day activities in a preschool or early childhood classroom. The physical education teacher might find the lesson ideas

helpful for use during closure before sending students back to the classroom after a particularly vigorous activity.

The downside to the *Children's Awareness Curriculum* is the expense. The lesson plans included in the curriculum do not provide enough detail that the teacher could implement the content without purchasing the books and/or the CD. Some of the activities, such as the artwork or music, require more time than many physical education teachers are willing to take from movement. In order to fully implement some of the activities, the physical education teacher may want to collaborate with the classroom teacher or the art and music specialist in their school. Although the introductory materials mention that these lessons may be modified for any age group, the teaching aids might maintain the interest of preschool and primary children best.

If you've wanted to incorporate meditation and relaxation activities into your curriculum, you might find the *Children's Awareness Curriculum* to be a creative resource. Visit the LiteBooks website for a closer look at this curriculum package! 

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