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Yoga in Schools is an organization on a mission to infiltrate schools around the nation with yoga instruction, exercises and techniques. The purpose is to teach wellness and coping mechanisms to kids in a physical education or classroom setting that they can take with them through life. Yoga is meant to calm, rejuvenate, energize, center and strengthen a person, and make a person more self-aware.

The Yoga in Schools organization is based in Pittsburgh, PA, but the Yoga Ed curriculum is used in over 100 schools throughout the United States. As a result of studentsâ€™ involvement in Yoga Ed, teachers have reported that students are calmer, physically stronger and more flexible; have better concentration and retention in class; are doing well academically; have more confidence and stress management abilities; and classrooms are running smoother. So the instruction appears to be working and having a positive impact on students and teachers.

However, there is a controversy brewing as a result of this radical and fairly new agenda in the public schools. Yoga has deep spiritual roots based in Hinduism; the language and movements all center on the spiritual connection between the mind, body and the universe around us. Thatâ€™s pretty much whatâ€™s creating a bit of a fuss in public schools where these curriculums have been used. Many of us remember the major controversy that erupted from having prayer in schools and the even greater controversy from taking it out of schools. People seem to want a clear line drawn between education and religion â€“ or separation of church and state â€“ and any subtle moves to show otherwise are frowned upon.

To keep the peace, some teachers have taken measures to remove the religious element from yoga curriculums in schools by eliminating the Sanskrit language, prayer poses, chanting and any movements that tie religion to these classes. Other teachers keep parts in and take parts out, but it is generally up to the school to determine what can and cannot be allowed as part of the yoga classes.

Christian fundamentalists and others who oppose Yoga Ed believe that this curriculum, like all other religions, has no place in public schools no matter how watered down and secularized it is. Doctors have said that children can benefit from other exercises like weight lifting or ballet just as much as with yoga, so thereâ€™s no need to bring in this spiritual practice simply for its physical and wellness benefits. Another belief by the opposition is that bringing this practice to children as young as kindergarten age is nothing more than an attempt to brainwash our youth before they get a chance to choose for themselves. Itâ€™s kind of the same argument that came up with prayer in schools.

Despite widespread opposition throughout the U.S., Yoga Ed continues to thrive in public schools and there seems to be no definite end in sight. Only time will tell.

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