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Yoga for People with intellectual Disability

Date: October 2, 2016

Time: 1435 hrs – 1520 hrs

Many studies have highlighted the efficacy of yoga as a potent tool in bringing out positive changes in the physical and psychological wellbeing of a person. Its application for people with Intellectual Disability (ID) has not been explored enough scientifically. In 1983 an attempt was made in Chennai, India to answer 2 questions: i) Can yoga be taught to children with ID and if so ii) what are the benefits. The results showed yoga could be taught to children with ID by trained teachers who understand the philosophy and principles of practice. The results also pointed to significant changes in the health status of the children as well as in many of the areas pertaining to their adaptive behavioural skills. The study also showed unpredicted results namely changes in many of the associated symptoms that many of the children had. Another set of spurious results were changes in the health status of the special educators as they had to practice yoga themselves in order to teach the children

Since then yoga for the intellectual disabled has come a long way. In 1986 yoga was incorporated as part of the curriculum for the National Special Education Training in India—a project sponsored by UNESCO.

Teaching yoga to children with intellectual disability involves going beyond physical stretches. It incorporates integration of the senses by using tools such as sound and breathing along with *asanas*. Individualized adaptation of the *asanas* as well as the use of various aids along with understanding of where

the person is, what the person knows and where he/she needs to be guided to move towards is an important aspect.

To cite a few case studies, differential yoga programmes were designed and implemented for clients based on their age (6 years, 13years, 39years), their associated conditions (ADHD, Cerebral Palsy and Autism) and severity of disability.

The author has been teaching yoga since 1983 to many people with intellectual disability as well as conducted many training programmes to special educators in the theory and practice of yoga for people with Intellectual Disability

Learning Outcomes

- Understanding the meaning of yoga as applied to the definition of intellectual disability
- Individualization of yoga practice
- Use of breath in *asanas*
- Use of sound and chanting in asana practice
- Concept of *vinyasa*
- Variations and adaptations of *asanas*
- Case studies