

Promotional Article for upcoming BCPTA presentation:
Movement, Gesture & Meditation:
Playful Clinical Yoga Skills for Professionals who Work with Children

By Joani Mortenson

Greetings! I am presenting on the use of playful clinical yoga skills for professionals who work with children in February. I am so excited to share my emerging theoretical matrix with the play therapy community. The BCPTA website offers a full description of the theoretical and outcome details for the workshop, though I wanted to provide a more finessed vision for the workshop in this newsletter. My primary intention with this experiential workshop is to create a safe and sacred space for individuals to explore some of the aspects of my practice that I have come to value the most: breathing, sensing, sounding, moving, being still, including nature, and exploring our therapeutic relationship with children with curiosity, connectivity and creativity.

As you will see with reading on, I am an enthusiastic proponent of theory. Yes. I am a theory geek. I believe that theory provides and clarifies both rationale and intention. However, despite my love of words, words, words, I assure you that this workshop will only focus on theory during the introduction. The emphasis of our time together is on playing with these therapeutic skills that I use in my every day work experience with children and families.

I have developed a theoretical and skills matrix that professionals can use to direct their work with children through four methodological lenses: sensory processing, play-based and expressive arts therapies, yoga philosophy and Buddhist meditation. It is a system of choice-making that I created for myself that evolves as I evolve as a practitioner. My matrix is adaptable as a living document to investigate and play within. In the workshop, I will be applying this matrix specifically to the following areas of embodiment practice with children: art & mandala play, movement, breath practices, brain-body scanning and meditation.

Every one of these areas provides multiple opportunities for individual professionals to choose activities appropriate and relevant to each child's needs. It becomes a veritable choose-your-own-adventure that you co-enter into with children. Embedded within each practice is the assumption that we as professionals are interested in: attuning to our child and youth clients with deep respect; holding therapeutic space with intention and loving kindness; tending to our own processes within our work through reverent, self caring practices; and offering children and youth opportunities to embody skills through experience that will support them throughout their lives.

I developed the matrix as 'evidence' for the practice that I was already providing intuitively. I conceive of it as 'practice based evidence'. The matrix is a way for me to organize and value my eclectic knowledge and skills, and it helps me direct my intention and my intuition depending upon each child's unique and shifting needs. In working this way, I am consistently surprised by the positive outcomes I have co-created with children and their families. I find that through this

matrix I work not only more effectively with children, but that the journey is so much more enjoyable for me as a practitioner.

Through my training in Kripalu yoga, I learned to develop wisdom through play. I have come to view 'play' and 'practice' as synonymous. I learned how important it was that I embody skills before teaching them to others, in fact, embodiment is the point. My primary intention with this workshop is to teach you some of the practices that I use with children, but that you then press these new skills through your own lenses. I will encourage you to innovate for two main reasons: 1) translating skills into your own language will ensure that you are more likely to use them as they will feel authentic to you, and 2) through the practice of actually playing with these skills, you will come to embody them through experience.

I learned the value of 'experience' as my teacher, and not to trust anything that didn't resonate within, no matter how expert the source. One of the biggest surprises for me as a yoga instructor and educator was how much I would incorporate this learning in my work with children, and how readily and exuberantly children would love playful clinical yoga skills.

I urge you to attend as a child-like autoethnographer, ready to play with me to evaluate your own resonance with the skills I have learned or developed and find ways to press them through your own voice as a professional.

I believe so passionately that self care is ethical practice. I will be encouraging you to adopt some of these practices as part of your own self care routines. Not only will your benefit holistically from yogic wisdom practices, but the more you practice and embody the skills, the easier it will be for you to teach them to your clients.

Helping me in the desire to embody your experience is my dear friend and special guest: Heidi McCurdy, an incredibly talented expressive arts therapist and singer. Heidi will be gifting us with a gentle, yet profound sampling of her own practice that will leave you feeling transported and transformed.

I hope to play with you on February 25, 2017 at the Italian Community Centre in Burnaby. Please bring something to take notes in, a water bottle, and a towel to learn how to create restorative yoga postures for children. No yoga or meditation experience is required. We will be doing some movement, but everything is completely adaptable for all mobility levels. All are welcome, and students are especially welcomed.