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Stuff that matters to Wayne

Should Yoga be Taught in BC Public Schools?

Posted on March 09, 2016 by admin

UPDATES: RESPONSES below added The following is a real dialogue between a British Columbia parent who didn't like the idea of their child doing yoga without their permission in what they thought was a secular school. Note that the parent received no further communication after sending their time-consuming response below:

Original Email written by Teacher to Parent

Mrs. "Grade One Teacher" has expressed that you are concerned about 'yoga' done during Physical Education/ movement classes that I teach to the grade ones. I want to assure you that there is absolutely no religious/nor any teaching of where 'yoga' has come from. Instead, as per what the B.C. curriculum asks teachers to teach, 'yoga' or 'stretching' as we often call it, is focuses on stretching our bodies safely to prevent injury. Some of the stretches are a little harder to do than others, and the students are always told and reassured to try out the stretches but to listen to their bodies and not do anything that will hurt themselves. Part of the curriculum for Physical Education is to talk about 'healthy living' and students often talk about stretches that they do when they play soccer, baseball etc. The terms 'yoga' and 'stretching' have been used in class interchangeably, as many students practice yoga outside of school and recognize some of these stretches mimic yoga moves and stretches. Please let me know if you have any further questions,

Response from Parent to Teacher

Hello "Teacher" Sorry for the late reply. Thanks for your email and for taking the time to send us an email in regards to our concerns. You are correct that we are concerned. Here is a quick link to show that we are not alone in our concern about the introduction of yoga into the public school system: http://bismarcktribune.com/lifestyles/health-med-fit/school-adds-yoga-to-physical-education-curriculum/article_824bc80e-4807-11e2-8f30-001a4bcf887a.html Although I'm sure the Minister of Education wholeheartedly believes what you explain about yoga being 'non religious' a basic search will reveal that Yoga is absolutely rooted in Hinduism and eastern religious practices. We did not have any participation in the decision to implement yoga in the public school curriculum, nor do I recall being notified that this practice would be included in the curriculum, but I'm also very busy so it's absolutely possible that we missed the memo - and it's not like I'm on the PAC even though I really wish I was. For us it's not about whether or not the the historical teachings of the religions are taught or not with yoga that concerns us. In fact, a neutral, unbiased course on all world religions could be quite beneficial in helping kids understand more about the religious backgrounds of the students in their class and the world around them.t teach about different world religions at home for this very reason. We have several friends who have turbans, for example, so we explain about the turban and Guru Nanak before we go to their home so they are not without understanding and can even engage in meaningful cultural-crossing conversations. However, what is happening here at Gray Elementary is not the teaching about yoga, but instead the *participation in* the physical movements of yoga, which is a spiritual activity involving the union of mind, spirit, and body which is even deemed dangerous by people who practice yoga at the highest levels. Simply put, to ask a child to *participate* in yoga, which in its very name comes from Hinduism and such practices, should not be included in a secular school system curriculum. Incidentally,

I have several Indo-Canadian friends of said religions who agree with my position, even though they deem the practice to be beneficial to themselves. They understand and agree that it comes from these eastern religions and are also confused as to its presence in the public school. Our position is that because we enrolled our daughter in a *secular* school and we are not comfortable with our child participating in non-secular activities such as Yoga without our consent. This would include Tai Chi, and other similarly rooted activities. Stretching, in the way that a runner would stretch before a track meet, is absolutely fine, of course. That is, unlike Yoga, is "just stretching". We thank you in advance for understanding our position as it pertains to parenting in relation to our daughters participation in school activities. In a similar way, do not hesitate to let me know if you have any further questions and thank you so much for your hard work teaching our child. Sincerely, Parent

Response from School Principal cc'd to 'unknown other recipients'

Good afternoon Mr. Parent, Ms. Yoga-Teacher informed me of your concerns regarding the movement class. Please be assured that if you choose for your daughter not to participate in the stretching class, an alternate activity will be found for her. Please inform either Ms. Yoga-Teacher or Mrs. GradeOne-Teacher if that is your wish. Regards,

Response from Parent back to Expanding Party

Hello "Principal", Thank you very much for your attention to this matter. I'm very pleased with all the professional response we have received. "Nice" Elementary is undoubtedly a great school and we are very thankful for all of you and your hard work. We are still slightly confused, though. Is it a stretching class "Daughter" will be doing, or will she be doing yoga? As we have stated, we are fine with stretching (ie. track-and-field). However, we are *not* fine with yoga. (ie. rooted in eastern religion(s)) It seems as though the two terms are now being used interchangeably as if 'yoga = stretching'. But yoga does not equal stretching. Yoga is yoga. If we say 'it's fine for her to do stretching' and then she ends up doing yoga, this would be a 'challenge'. On another note, please rest assured that we are not trying to be a pain. My dad was a teacher and I know you don't need extra admin added to your jobs. However, I think we've presented a pretty good case here on the topic of secular vs faith-based activities. I should also state that I would not be whatsoever offended if Christmas activities were removed from the menu as well, and diwali. all for the same reasons. A kind of 'solution' that I was thinking about is to keep this kind of simple that would be permissible: When "Yoga-Teacher" is doing yoga-related activities, "Daughter" (and anyone else who wasn't comfortable doing yoga) could be instructed to do "standard track-and-field stretches". We would be fine with that. We don't want to make this annoying. And on a final note, how does a parent get involved in the decision-making processes that lead to activities like these being introduced into the curriculum? I won't deny that I was pretty shocked that yoga had landed in my daughter's grade one curriculum without even a consent form... Thanks again for all of your feedback and response. Sincerely, Parent

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