



**Yoga Classes at Lo Wu Correctional Institution
March 11 to May 6, 2017 (8 classes)**

General class structure:

- Attendance and check-in
- Basic Integral Beginners Class, consisting of warm-ups, postures (Asana), deep relaxation (Yoga Nidra), breathing techniques (Pranayama), sitting still (Meditation practice)
- Q&A's

Aim of this beginner's module is an introduction to yoga and teaching students enough to enable them to maintain a simple regular practice on their own, such as the Sun-Salutation sequence, one or two poses, and two breathing techniques. Each session they are given a pose or technique to practice during the following week. In this course we aim to get the students to connect with their bodies and their breath, creating a foundation for self-respect and self-care. Aside from various health benefits that any exercise provides, yoga students will learn how with movement and breath the mood can be controlled/balanced and the mind calmed.

At the last of the module, students were presented with a Certificate of Participation issued by YAMA and with a copy of a description of the whole basic class as can be found in the book "Bound To Be Free" by Swami Satchidananda. The book itself has been given to the prison library for reference.

Reflection on first module:

Venue: Indoor Gymnasium

Time: Saturdays, 4.30 - 6 pm

Material provided: Mats for everyone

Students: 14 (later 11) female inmates from B Wing (will be released within coming 2 years) from two different workshops, estimated age 25-50.

Teachers: Gabi Baumgartner (group leader), Leigh James, Helen Mahtani, Lulu Taylor

Challenges: Acoustic in hall made it difficult to hear a soft voice. Fan had to be turned off which was a bigger undertaking, as it is centrally controlled, so sometimes it was turned off and sometimes not.

Teaching method: One main teacher and one or two assistants, sometimes we broke into smaller groups where all teachers led simultaneously. Students enjoyed to have more than one teacher each time. However for long term it might be easier to have one or two teachers max. To give teachers a rest in between.

Students progress over eight classes: reluctant and a bit lazy the first two classes, finding it strenuous and saying they were tired to start with. The more they got to know the structure of class the more they were engaged. Engagement went up with a teacher they had a link to but also the other way round, a consistent teacher increased engagement. By the 5th class they started to really look forward to the class.

Student feedback:

Most uttered comment: "Eight classes is not enough"

Other comments included:

"slept really well the night after class"; "practiced every day for the whole week and feel great" however,



the same person said the following week “I stopped practicing because I was sad last week”; “I noticed that the deeper I breath the longer my breath becomes”; “this is my favorite time of the week”

Welfare Officer’s feedback: “I like what you do with them and to watch the class was so touching”.

[Comment: It was well received that two or three teachers came every time, it gave them the assurance that the group “can be controlled”. I feel that they were impressed at how focused and calm the classes went.]

Teacher’s Comment:

It feels good to teach those who are forgotten by the community. As soon as class begins, it feels like any other yoga class, all surroundings become secondary.

Creating modules of eight classes allows more people to attend and rotate groups. Ideally the first group coming back after a few months to refresh and continue their learning. The weakness of this is that it is easy for the institution to stop classes after one module, like what happened now.

However, I still believe a module of eight or ten classes makes sense. Ongoing classes are fine as well as long as the prison is happy to offer it! However with an ongoing class there is more fluctuation. With modules and thus more structure the learning can be more efficient. However, an 8 or 10 class module should be followed up by a second and third module.

Sadly, the Lo Wu Institution does not have capacity to continue the course at the time being as they have other courses on offer and only Saturdays available for so called “Interest Classes”.

The Tai Lam Correctional Institution is interested to offer yoga classes on a regular bases, to women in remand (detention awaiting trial), preferably on a weekday morning. It may mean to have shifts within the class, which is not ideal but on the other hand it will be a good tool to teach them right from the beginning....

Prepared by Gabi Baumgartner. May 19th 2017