Kripalu Impact

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And breathe...
A YOGA TEACHER BRINGS THE GIFT OF INNER LISTENING TO HEARING-IMPAIRED STUDENTS

By bringing yoga to Deaf students, Genoveva Calvo Rey is helping them listen to the voice within.

"It can be scary to ask a Deaf person to close their eyes, but it’s also an opportunity to practice pratyahara, or going inward," says Genoveva, who teaches yoga at the Learning Center for the Deaf in Framingham, Massachusetts, which serves infants through high schoolers. "My focus is to allow the students to tap into sensation and inner awareness as they safely explore the poses, opening to the experience and trusting themselves."

Genoveva is originally from Spain and has taught Spanish in California and Massachusetts. She did her yoga teacher training at Mount Madonna Yoga Center in California, before landing at Kripalu in 2013 to serve as a volunteer. During that time, she taught yoga for Kripalu's Spanish-speaking staff, and also received a Teaching for Diversity grant from Kripalu to teach yoga to Deaf students. "I have relatives who are Deaf, and I know it's an underserved population that could really benefit from yoga," Genoveva says.

Putting together a yoga class for the Deaf presented some challenges, so Genoveva had to get creative. "I knew it was important for me to keep it simple and accessible," she says. She started with a sequence based on Sun Salutations and developed it from there, crafting a series of visual cues to facilitate her students' experience. For example, she used flickering lights to indicate when it was time to come out of meditation or Savasana.

Genoveva also teaches yoga to students in the Learning Center's Walden School, a therapeutic program for Deaf students with severe social and emotional difficulties. For these special-needs students, Genoveva emphasizes the importance of repetition and simplicity. She also uses stories and images from nature to engage her students. "When teaching Sun Salutations, I ask them to imagine an egg turning into a bird, then turning into a tree," she says. "Imagination opens them up when using intellect can be challenging." As the students become more comfortable practicing yoga and connecting with their bodies, Genoveva encourages them to use yoga props creatively, and gives them space to come up with posture flows together. This empowers them to make choices, and to find balance and freedom in their practice. "Your mat is your home," she tells her students.

Eager to broaden her teaching skills, Genoveva took the Kripalu Yoga in the Schools Teacher Training in June. "The training was powerful in many ways," she says. "It allowed me to bring to the schools new tools and an empowering curriculum that offers breathing, postures, and relaxation geared specifically toward adolescents."

Genoveva says it’s been a joy to be of service to this population. "I get to share the gifts of yoga, the gifts of compassion and kindness," she says. "Yoga unifies and cuts across dis-abilities."™