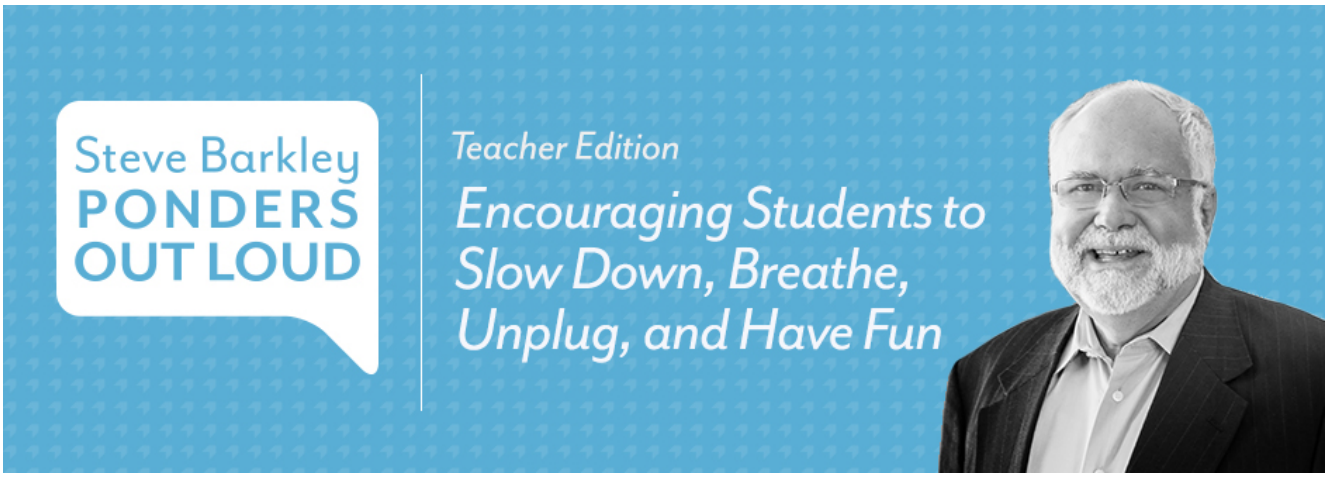
Podcast for Teachers: Encouraging Students to Slow Down, Breathe, Unplug, and Have Fun



Listen in as Steve talks with experienced teacher, Founder of Mari Fox Wellness, and author of "Yay for Yoga," Mari Irwin. Mari provides yoga workshops at schools and for participants of all ages throughout her community. Explore what teachers can take from an understanding of Yoga to create positive experiences for students that are empowering.

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PODCAST TRANSCRIPTSteve [Intro]: 00:00 Hello and welcome to the teacher edition of the Steve Barkley ponders out loud podcast. The complexity of teaching is both challenging and rewarding and my curiosity is piqued whenever I explore with teachers the multiple pathways for facilitating student engagement in the exciting world of learning. This podcast looks to serve teachers as they motivate and support their learners. Thanks for listening. I'M delighted you're here.

Steve: 00:36 Encouraging students to slow down, breathe, unplug, and have fun. Experienced teacher and founder of Mari Fox Wellness and the author of “Yay for Yoga,” Mari Irwin is joining us for today’s podcast. Mari provides yoga workshops at schools and for participants of all ages throughout her community. I’ve asked her to explore what teachers can take from an understanding of yoga to create positive experiences for students that are empowering. Welcome, Mari.

Mari: 01:14 Hello. Thank you so much.

Steve: 01:16 Thanks for joining us. I’m wondering if you’d start by giving us a little information about your introduction to yoga and the insights you gained.

Mari: 01:30 Oh, I’d love to. I took my first yoga class as a teenager. My mom brought me to a class, and I feel so lucky to have experienced it because it was an adult class at the time when I was younger. I don’t think there were young kids’ classes, so I was mixed with all different ages of adults, all walks of life, all ability levels. And there weren’t any special clothes or outfits or equipment or anything, but it was in a dancing studio, and I think I wore a sweater and some comfy pants. But it was so wonderful because I could just be myself and just show up as I was. And it was just what I needed. I had played competitive sports and done lots of different things like active work in school and things, but I really just needed a safe place to go to slow down and not only to slow down my body, but my mind. So it was just a really special experience for me. And from that, I learned how important it was to have yoga or some type of that type of movement in my life for my own toolkit.

Steve: 02:54 So help me with the words that I pulled from your website for the title of “Slow Down, Breathe and Unplug.”

Mari: 03:03 Yes. Well, the space and the safe space that I try to create when I’m when I’m teaching in people’s preferred

settings, schools,
conferences classrooms, camps is an opportunity for kids and adults and seniors to unplug from life's distractions as well as digital devices. So this permission to leave that aside in order to practice being present is just to practice a lifelong practice for all of us, I think. But it's one that I really work to encourage because there's a sense of relief sometimes when we're not multitasking and not using that type of energy and can turn our attention inward to our bodies and our minds taking good care of ourselves.

Steve: 03:54 What are some of the things that you think educators might not know about yoga that have possible impacts for learners?

Mari: 04:04 Well, yoga is ancient, and it's an ancient technology, which is fun to think about, and it's something that is so effective. And there are lots of different kinds of yoga, just like there's all different kinds of food. But there's all different kinds and it's fun to explore the different types. But the great thing about yoga is that it's more than poses. It's more than being flexible and touching your toes. It's a lot about, and it connects well with the habits of mind. So flexible thinking and managing impulsivity and gathering data through the senses and finding humor, thinking independently. All these different things that seem separate, are really connected to yoga and movement and movement in working as a group and pairs and just in doing yoga on your own.

Steve: 05:06 What are some things that you've observed when you're have done yoga with young kids like preschool, K1-2, maybe?

Mari: 05:15 I would say that for the most part, that kids are really open and ready to try something new, and they're ready for fun and they
make it fun. So yoga doesn't have to be serious and it's a

good reminder for everyone. And it's about we, working as a we, as a group. It's a shared experience. With K1-2 for example, we have circle time and we practice listening to each other and being patient and taking turns and also just moving and having fun. And sometimes the kids are the teachers, or sometimes I'm the teacher, but it's really about a fun way to learn and release stress from the body and the mind.

Steve: 06:03 Now, how about switch to teenagers. What do you observe when you work with a teenage group?

Mari: 06:09 Well, I would say that it's so fun to see what happens at the beginning of a class and then at the end of the class. And what I've noticed is the change in mood for the better. If you think about the center of our nervous system is our spine, and when we do certain movements, we're releasing stress from the spine and releasing stress in the muscles and the mind and breathing and there's just this sense of feeling better. So they may not understand why they feel better, but there's really something to proper posture and sitting up, creating space in the chest for air and for your heart to beat, that creates this sense of, I can take a breath and I can just feel some sense of lightness. It's a little optimistic for sure.

Steve: 07:14 So I know that focus is an element of yoga and focus is a critical element of learning. So I wondering if you can kind of make a connection there for us with focus in both those spots.

Mari: 07:34 Yes. Focus is something that we have to practice just like yoga and yoga poses. And it's easy to tell someone to focus, but that's not so easy to practice and to do.

Steve: 07:49 All the teachers listening in could tell you that telling seldom works [laugh]

Mari: 07:57 [laugh] It's so true. And so the great thing about yoga is that it's about being mindful. And so when we're in a

yoga class, for example, it’s a lot about paying attention. So tuning into the senses and present moment awareness. So when it comes to paying attention and focusing, tuning into the senses can be helpful. And then tuning into breathing and our breathing, our unique pattern of breathing breath pattern, is really a good anchor in order to focus. And what I understand as being an educator and a trained yoga instructor, is that in order for kids to learn anything, they have to come from a relaxed state and also be able to focus. So it’s very important to learn how important it is to connect with the fact that we’re breathing, first of all, and focus on that to start with and then go from there. So just like within a classroom, if kids are just super, super stressed and not present, they’re not gonna be able to learn anything. So to start with an anchor, to start with a focus, including the breath and with the poses, for example, to release stress from the body, then you can start from a great place to learn from.

Steve: 09:39 So talk a little bit about your your book, “Yay for Yoga” and maybe what it is that educators could find there.

Mari: 09:48 Yes. I wrote this book, a children’s book called “Yay for Yoga,” and I am so happy to have a teaching tool as well as a story that
can reach more people than I just can. So it’s an audience member book, it’s meant to be read aloud to kids, it’s meant to encourage a “we” experience, and it’s a story about me and my friend Ronnie, who’s a frog, and we talk about this little word called yoga, which is way more than poses. Andit is all about, yes, movement and healthiness, being healthy, but also about diversity and inclusion and mindfulness. And it’s a wonderful way to introduce yoga and also encourage community and kindness. So it’s something that grandparents can read with their grandkids or parents can read to their kids, or teachers can read in the classroom, but it’s meant to be a helpful tool to help kids learn about tuning in, breathing,

breath awareness, and just overall mental health and wellbeing.

Steve: 11:13 Well, I appreciate what you've shared with us here. And how about what's the best way that that listeners could could find out more about what you're doing, find out more about your book?

Mari: 11:27 I can be reached on my website, marifoxwellness.com.

Steve: 11:30 Well, thanks again, and we'll be sure to put the website in the lead-in to the podcast.

Mari: 11:38 Thank you so much.

Steve: 11:40 You bet.

Steve [Outro]: 11:43 Thanks for listening in folks. I'd love to hear what you're pondering. You can find me on Twitter teve @stevebarkley, or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.