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Abstract
Peaceful Ninjas is a Holistic Peace Education Movement Empowering Youth to Co Create World Peace by Merging Ancient and Modern Mindfulness Practices. This piece provides an overview of the activities and approach we use.

Author/Artist Bio
Zachariah was the youngest Physical Education coach in the Los Angeles Unified School District from 2003-2007. He founded Camp with Coach Zach which serviced over 1,500 kids during this same period and offered activities ranging from a wide variety of Sports, Dance, Yoga and Drumming. In 2007, Zachariah began to deepen his studies through his travels to South East Asia and India. He developed a great affinity for Eastern Philosophy, Arts and Scripture, Martial Arts, Taoist Qi Gong and a variety of Yogic disciplines. Zachariah is a certified Kids Yoga Teacher through the Rainbow Kids Yoga Teacher Alliance and has continued his Yoga studies with Saul David Raye as his primary teacher. He has dedicated his life to Empower Youth the World over and is fully committed to seeing that mission through as Founder of Peaceful Ninjas.
April Tucker is the organizational manager for Peaceful Ninjas. She is founder and Program Director at Eka Loka Yoga and Wellness, LLC. April is a Long Beach, CA native, receiving her first yoga teacher certification for children in 2007 and professional level 500-hour Interdisciplinary Yoga Teacher certification from the Nosara Yoga Institute (NYI) in Costa Rica. April is also a certified Pranassage® practitioner and Thai Yoga Bodywork Therapist. April has taught and developed yoga programming as a professor of Hatha Yoga at various colleges, created yoga, social outreach, and nutritional programming for youth at non-profit organizations, churches, and public schools and recently created and directed a 50-hour Aerial Yoga Teacher Training program for a benefit corporation. She is currently teaching at local non-profit YMCA facilities and graduated with dual degrees in May 2016, earning an MA in Yoga Studies at Loyola Marymount University and an MBA in Sustainable Business at California Lutheran University.

Keywords
Mindfulness, Yoga, Movement, Peace Education

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Peaceful Ninjas: Merging Mindfulness Education with Holistic Arts

Zachariah Z Fisher and April Tucker

Peaceful Ninjas is a holistic peace education movement empowering youth to co-create world peace by merging ancient and modern mindfulness practices. Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally (Kabat-Zinn, 2016). At Peaceful Ninjas, we foster and cultivate mindfulness through a variety of outreach programs and science-backed tools.

Our methods of mindfulness education are cooperation and holistic-based, centering on creating peace within ourselves, our communities and in the world. The Peaceful Ninjas curriculum draws from yoga, mindfulness, storytelling, Qi-gong, art, dance, Brazilian Capoeira, African drumming, Balinese Kecak chanting, youth peace councils, and Peace Sticks®. These practices encourage harmonious and experiential learning. The central teachings are to assist and care for each other, setting the tone for cooperation and connection.

The core of Peaceful Ninjas practices draws from indigenous ancient cultures, such as the Hopi, Lakota, Balinese and Brazilian arts, peace circles, talking sticks, and Capeoira. These
ancient practices have shown to increase neurocognitive awareness and sensory perception as well as the firing of neuro-network growth in the prefrontal cortex, with the highest increases found in children ages 4-12 years old. Neuroplasticity research has shown that the practice of being mindful reduces stress, increases focus and emotional regulation, as well as increases metacognition and cognitive flexibility (Tang et al, 2015). These studies also suggest that creativity and prefrontal development have a symbiotic relationship (Meyer, 2016). In fact, schools throughout the United States are now recognizing the importance of soft skills, which include non-violent communication, social-emotional learning, and reduction of social anxiety (García, 2014; Whitehurst, 2016).
A daily mindfulness practice has proven to be crucial to developing metacognition, thereby offsetting our ever-growing stressful world of unlimited sensory distractions. Teachers, administrators, and parents alike are realizing the essential urgency to learn the language and practical applications of mindfulness education (Rechtschaffen, 2016).

Our mindfulness tools draw on three years of field research feedback, as well as a comprehensive and integrative approach sourced in mindfulness education and direct interface with youth. Our curriculum draws from art and science, integrating the left and right brain apparatus and dual response. For example, playing Peace Sticks® with a partner while in a flow-state moving meditation practice increases hand-eye coordination and hemispheric integration (Nichols, 2016). Peace Sticks® are handmade of a light sustainable wood from the Guasima tree, native to Nicaragua. They are sanded and shaved down with round edges to ensure the highest levels of safety.
One of the outreach initiatives has been transporting inner-city middle school students from After-School All-Stars LA to Bhakti Fest in Joshua Tree, the largest yoga and mindfulness festival in the United States. The After-School All-Stars LA is a youth program that was founded by Arnold Schwarzenegger and is supported locally in Los Angeles by Kobe Bryant. At Bhakti Fest in September of 2016, Peaceful Ninjas facilitated the Youth World Peace Council, which welcomed the insights, voices and visions from students directly. Students were encouraged to participate in a tangible solution-based dialogue on how to increase peace within ourselves (inner peace), our homes and communities (outer peace) and globally (world peace). An 11 year-old girl named Pickles led a workshop to her peers on healthy emotional expression tools and overall well-being (Shires, 2016). She stated, “Me talking with them and being a kid with them, shows them anyone can express their emotions. I want to emphasize how important it is to express your emotions and not stuff them deep down inside of you.” After spending time with Pickles and the Peaceful Ninjas tribe of coaches, students reported that they felt increased sensations of peacefulness, happiness, and connection. We are dedicated to grow that momentum by following up with students we engage with, making multiple visits to their schools and offering free mindfulness and social-emotional learning programs (Norman, 2016).

Peaceful Ninjas is at the cutting edge of mindfulness education. Guardians and teachers understand it is essential we bridge the gap between future generations of society and current societal models, as well as the arts and sciences. We accomplish these goals by merging ancient and modern practices that promote wellness, connection, communication, and creativity. We use our power to empower through focused and tangible result-driven content. We facilitate playful and experiential learning spaces, which promote harmonious interaction within and between group structures. Peaceful Ninjas currently offers educational programs at a variety of schools,
festivals, yoga studios and at-risk centers throughout Los Angeles. Peaceful Ninjas is also spearheading mindfulness outreach at the LAPD's Hollywood Police Activities League, Watts Bears, St. Joseph Center Venice, and After-School All-Stars LA. Let Peaceful Ninjas know how we can serve your local community!

Learn more at [www.peacefulninjas.org](http://www.peacefulninjas.org)
References


