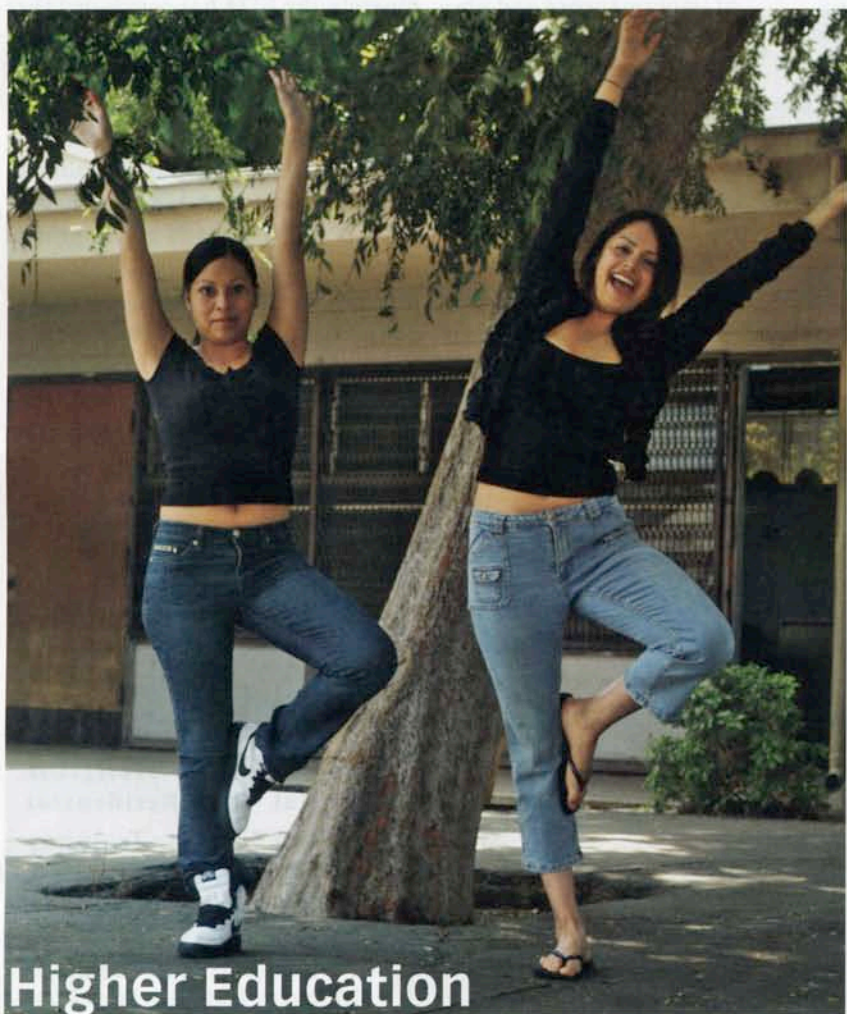


community



Higher Education

Inner-city students find a refuge and life lessons in yoga.

HOUSING PROJECTS AND an empty lot face the halls of Dolores Mission Alternative School in the Boyle Heights section of East Los Angeles. The place seems worlds away from the serenity of a yoga studio, but near the back of the school, light filters through barred windows into a small gray weightlifting room where purple and green yoga mats are scattered on the floor.

I came here two years ago to teach yoga in urban L.A. schools. In the beginning, laughter and fidgeting dominated the girls' hatha class I created and taught twice a week. But eventually one student, a single mother named Stephanie Davila, took a leadership role. Her open

The author's students in Vrksasana.

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER

KRIPALU INSTITUTE FOR INTEGRATED LEADERSHIP

A four-month immersion in yoga, effective communication, and financial consciousness for 18- to 25-year-olds. Accepting applications for spring semester. www.kripalu.org, (413) 448-3582.

FREE YOGA CLASSES held throughout Houston and Austin, Texas, Sept. 4. www.freedayofyoga.com.

THE DALAI LAMA U.S. TOUR through Vancouver, Los Angeles, Colorado, and New York. www.dalailama.com.

CELEBRATE THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE

Sept. 21. www.internationaldayofpeace.org.

YOGA JOURNAL'S 11TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

in Estes Park, Colorado, Sept. 25–Oct. 1. www.yjevents.com.

INTEGRAL YOGA INSTITUTE MARKS ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY

Sept. 29 with a weekend of events in New York City and New Jersey. www.iyiny.org.

OCTOBER

GREEN FESTIVAL Oct. 14–15, at the D.C. Convention Center in Washington. www.greenfestivals.org.

LOUIE'S KIDS SALUTE THE SUN FOR KIDS HEALTH yoga fundraiser, Oct. 28, in Charleston, South Carolina. www.louieskids.org, (843) 343-5746.

NOVEMBER

YOGA JOURNAL'S 2007 CONFERENCE SCHOLARSHIPS

For more information on how to apply or donate to the fund, go to www.yjevents.com/scholarships.

attitude helped the others to relax. Before long, I introduced pranayama and hung a poster of an eight-limbed yoga tree.

A few weeks later, boys with shaved heads and elaborate tattoos started asking about this strange class where students paired up to exercise, took long breaks lying on the floor, and sat in silence to meditate. Initially I thought their interest was a ploy to get out of history class, but it was obvious when I organized a boys-only session that these young men were serious about yoga. Juan Perez, in particular, seemed comfortable with the Sun Salutations and was respectful during meditation. He told me later that he had learned to meditate during his time in juvenile hall. Now his experience was helping his peers.

Class went on like this for months, featuring a mix of asana, pranayama, and even some yoga philosophy. Then one day, as

TAKE ACTION

Asana Alphabet (www.asanaalphabet.com) in New York offers workshops to help new public school instructors plan a semester's worth of fun poses. Asana Alphabet also suggests using games and coloring books that help illustrate poses to keep younger yogis moving and focused.

the girls' class wrapped up, another teacher stood outside waiting to tell us that Juan had been shot and killed in a nearby park. Students and teachers talked about how nearly all of the kids had lost someone or been grazed by the violence in the community. I was struck by the way that the yogic concepts of impermanence and unexpected change were all too familiar in their daily lives.

When the semester came to an end, I invited graduating seniors to participate, on scholarship, in my teacher-training workshop. Stephanie was the youngest student to sign up, but she completed the four-day training and went on to teach children's yoga in an after-school program nearby. Today, I drop by her class every once in a while to watch her first-grade yogis delight in animal-inspired poses. They seem to look up to her, and it gives me hope. ANNIE BUCKLEY

