

Developing Contemplative Children for an International Social Service Program



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Abstract

This research study is about The Effect of Contemplative Practices in Children from the Peraj Program of the University of Quintana Roo. The participants were children in the range age of 10 to 12 years old that were part of the Peraj Program of University of Quintana Roo during the spring of 2012.

The main purpose of this research is to identify the changes that might have occurred in the children that were exposed to contemplative practices during a period of six weeks, according to their own perceptions and the observations of the researchers.

There are other important purposes such as

- To discover if children, after having experienced contemplation, are interested in continuing to apply contemplative practices in their life and in what places they would like to practice them.
- To identify who they would like to practice them with: their family, their friends, their classmates or new people.
- To investigate children's opinion about contemplative practices and about their emotions during their experience.
- To identify what practices were the most accepted by these children, if that was the case.

Background

Peraj is the name of an active international program created in Israel in 1974 in the Weizmann Institute of Science. Its main objective is to reinforce children capacity to overcome adversity through the establishment of a meaningful relationship between the child and a university student, who carries the role of tutor of that child, to support his academic, social and emotional development.

A research made by Randy J. Semple, Elizabeth F. G. Reid and Lisa Miller in 2005 was taken as base of this study. The method they used was followed, but some adaptations were made in order to adjust it to the particularities of the Peraj Program of the University of Quintana Roo.



Method

- **Context:** At the University of Quintana Roo, Campus Chetumal.
- **Participants:** A group of 10 children with an age range of 10 to 12 years old (4 girls and 6 boys).
- **Intervention:** All materials were provided by the instructors (yoga mats, mandalas, pebbles, pencils, etc)

Sessions plan:

Session 1: Introduction to contemplative practices by sharing information and visual materials with them.

Session 2: Presentation of mindfulness by telling them a story about the use of a pebble for meditation in order to encourage them to live in the present moment (Nhat, 2013).

Session 3: Introduction to mindful eating by giving a talk and having some practice (Shapiro & Sprague, 2009).

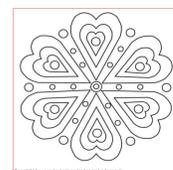
Session 4: Identification of symptoms of stress in our bodies, so that children become aware and do something about it (Shapiro & Sprague, 2005).

Session 5: Yoga postures for children that are beginners. The benefits of each posture are shared with them.

Session 6: Talking about feelings through a game. The objective is to make them realize how alleviating it is to talk about them.

Mindfulness in everyday life:

A weekly experimental home practice exercise was assigned. In each session, we invited to discussion of their experiences of their practice.



Preliminary Results

Semi-structured interviews were carried out to children and parents. Observations on part of the instructors were also considered for the description of the experience.

Three main themes and subthemes emerged:

Themes	Perceptions about contemplative practices	Opinions about sessions	Reported changes
Subthemes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • -Before experiencing the practices • -After experiencing them • -The easiest practice • -The most difficult • -The favorite practice • -Intention to keep practicing • -Places where they would like to practice them • -Persons they would like to practice with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • - On time • -On number of sessions • -Involvement of tutors during the development of the program (reported by parents) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • -After sessions (reported by children) • -Changes in children's attitude and behavior (reported by parents)

Theme 1: Perceptions about contemplative practices

- **Before: Bored, funny, different, good but difficult.**
- **After: fun, nice, relaxing.**

By order of preference:

1. Mindful eating
2. Coloring mandalas
3. Walking meditation
4. Meditation with a pebble

• **The easiest practice:**

• **The most difficult practice:**

• **The favorite one:**

1. Sitting meditation
2. Mindful eating
3. Emotions game, yoga and meditation with a pet

- **Places to practice: School, home and parks.**
- **People they would like to practice with: Family and classmates**



Theme 2: Opinions about the sessions

- **Time:** Most said that they would have liked the sessions to last longer than 45 mins (8 children) The rest said that the time of the sessions was enough (2 children).
- **Number of sessions:** 9 out of 10 said that they would have liked to have more sessions and more days of practice, 1 of 10 said that the number of sessions was fine.
- **Involvement of tutors:** All children said that they would have enjoyed the sessions more if they had their Peraj tutors as members of the class.
- **Behaviour at home during the program:** Some children shared contemplative practices with their family and asked them to join in. Most of them reported to have enjoyed the activities of the intervention. Some asked their parents to sign them up in yoga classes. A few of them seemed to be getting along better with others.

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