

**HOLISTIC THINKING IN SCHOOL: THE CASE OF THE ITAPETININGA/SP
(BRAZIL) MEDIFTAÇÃO PROJECT**

***O PENSAMENTO HOLÍSTICO NA ESCOLA: O CASO DO PROJETO MEDIFTAÇÃO
DE ITAPETININGA/SP***

***PENSAMIENTO HOLÍSTICO EN LA ESCUELA: EL CASO DEL PROYECTO
MEDIFTAÇÃO DE ITAPETININGA/SP (BRASIL)***

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ABSTRACT: This article describes and analyzes the experience of two years of existence of the medIFtation project developed at the Federal Institute of São Paulo, Itapetininga campus, in the southwest of the state. It is a project emerging from the need to present high school students with some mental health tools to control anxiety. Nevertheless, based on this scenario, the project was elaborated and has been carried out beyond this instrumental proposal, raising the sense of meditation and holistic thinking as elements of self-knowledge and understanding of the complexity of life. The paper was organized in the form of questions and answers, with the purpose of making the explanation clearer about the specifics of the project. It is hoped, by sharing this story, to promote a (self) reflection of meditation at school and, who knows, to encourage other projects of a similar nature.

KEYWORDS: Meditação. Holístico. Ensenando.

RESUMO: *Este artigo descreve e analisa a experiência de dois anos de existência do projeto medIFtação desenvolvido no Instituto Federal de São Paulo, campus de Itapetininga, no sudoeste do estado. Trata-se de um projeto emergente das necessidades de se apresentar aos estudantes do ensino médio algumas ferramentas de saúde mental para controle da ansiedade. Não obstante, a partir desse cenário, o projeto foi elaborado e tem sido conduzido além dessa proposta instrumental, elevando o sentido da meditação e do pensamento holístico como elementos de autoconhecimento e da compreensão da complexidade da vida. O texto foi organizado na forma de perguntas e respostas, com o propósito de tornar a explicação mais clara sobre especificidades do projeto. Espera-se, com a partilha deste relato, promover uma (auto)reflexão da meditação na educação e, quem sabe, encorajar outros projetos de natureza semelhante.*

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Meditação. Holístico. Ensino.*

RESUMEN: *Este artículo describe y analiza la experiencia de dos años de existencia del proyecto medIFtção desarrollado en el Instituto Federal de São Paulo (Brasil), campus Itapetininga, en el suroeste del estado. Es un proyecto que surge de la necesidad de presentar a los estudiantes de secundaria algunas herramientas de salud mental para controlar la ansiedad. Sin embargo, a partir de este escenario, se elaboró el proyecto y se ha llevado a cabo más allá de esta propuesta instrumental, elevando el sentido de la meditación y el pensamiento holístico como elementos de autoconocimiento y comprensión de la complejidad de la vida. El texto se organizó en forma de preguntas y respuestas, con el propósito de hacer más clara la explicación sobre las particularidades del proyecto. Se espera, al compartir esta historia, promover una (auto) reflexión de la meditación en la educación y, quién sabe, fomentar otros proyectos de similar naturaleza.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Meditation. Holistic. Teaching.*

Introdução

[...] para trazar una circunferencia con un compás, lo primero que se hace es fijar el punzón en el papel y, luego se dibuja la circunferencia. No se hace al revés, aunque sea así como normalmente se procede⁴. (HÉRRAN, 2017, p. 30-31).

This article describes and analyzes the experience of two years of existence of the medIFation project developed at the Federal Institute of São Paulo, Itapetininga campus, in the southwest of the state. It is a project emerging from the need to present high school students with some mental health tools to control anxiety. Nevertheless, based on this scenario, the project was elaborated and has been carried out beyond this instrumental proposal, elevating the sense of meditation and holistic thinking as elements of self-knowledge and understanding of the complexity of life.

Although the history of preparing and conducting the project has already been recorded in another text (SOUZA; FORTUNATO; CORREA, 2020), here we seek to expand the deeper meanings of meditation and its correlation with its constant practice in education contexto. In a way, the words reproduced in the epigraph present an eloquent synthesis of what we intend to expound: meditation can be metaphorically understood as the search for positioning the dry end of the compass, without which one cannot trace a circumference.

Obviously, it is not a question of meditating to promote a perfect life as the circumference drawn by a compass, as the vicissitudes of existence always tend to destabilize

⁴ Free translation: [...] to draw a circle with a compass, the first thing to do is fix the dry tip on the paper and then the circumference is drawn. It is not done the other way around, even if it is normally so.

the dry tip. Meditation, then, can collaborate with the constant and necessary re-stabilization of this symbolic axis, as we rely on it to calm our minds, making problems and solutions more visible, as well as allowing us to find ways to a healthier and happier life. Nevertheless, meditating is not a magic formula, it does not concern the secret of thinking positively, nor does it involve religious rites - although meditating does have something to do with it all.

Throughout the following pages, we aim to reveal our understanding of meditation as self-knowledge, regardless of any faith or belief that we have. Still, we aim to demonstrate the importance of working with a project focused on meditative practices in a context of formal education. Thus, the text was organized in the form of questions and answers, with the purpose of making the explanation clearer about the specificities of the meditation project, conducted by us since the beginning of 2019.

Question one: what is meditation?

Meditation is something very old, having its probable origin in Eastern philosophies (MENEZES; DELL'AGLIO, 2009). According to Barros and Luca (2004, p. 5) "to meditate is to seek the silence that exists within you, but that is lost in the hustle and bustle of everyday life, in the confusion of thoughts and feelings". Perhaps because of this notion of "inner silence", many people believe that meditation can only be practiced out of belonging to some religion or spiritual belief; however, according to Fábrica (2019), even though meditation is associated with Buddhism as a way of achieving what is believed, the practice need not be associated with religious character or faith.

Based on our own experience, but also on different readings (GOLEMAN, 1999; DAVICH, 2007; SHAPIRO; SCHWARTZ; SANTERRE, 2009; CORREA; KURNICH; FORTUNATO, 2020; DANIELS, s/d), we can say that the practice of meditation is quite folks. The ways of reaching the meditative, relaxing and / or concentrating state are different for each person, considering that the experience of looking at oneself, the perception of the present moment and the attempt to calm and organize the mind is individual. In addition, meditating is very beneficial and recommended in the process of self-awareness and self-awareness.

For us, to meditate is to enter a deep and constant state of yourself. The mentioned "meditative state" can be found in different religions, cults, rites, lifestyles, among others, sometimes with other names, although always considering how to meditate the act of focusing on something. Studying, praying, listening to music, reading a book, watching a movie,

participating in a therapy session, the seconds before falling asleep, a martial arts master taking his breath while giving strokes among others. All of these have several things in common: focus, persistence, difficulty in staying in this state for a long time, concentration and resilience. All of this can lead us to the “meditative state”.

We realized that to meditate it is necessary to persevere, either to focus on your breathing and your inner self or to focus on a textbook, or even on the lyrics of a beautiful song. When we start a meditative process, our body and mind try to fight it, whether it is an itchy nose or involuntary movements of the toes, whether it is the desire to crack the body or open the eyes, or the ease in losing the line of thought and ending up rambling about life. For this reason, there are conscious techniques aimed at facilitating the attainment of the meditative state, such as controlled breathing, chanting of mantras (words or significant phrase pronounced repeatedly), control of the clarity of the environment, the use of incense or aromatic candles, appropriate positions and so on - of course, depending on the context, each of these elements takes on an appropriate meaning, especially if related to faith or belief, or can be just facilitators of the process; it's all about the point of view.

The difficulty of reaching the meditative state, often requiring the use of external devices, shows us that meditating is directly linked to the control of one's own body and one's own mind. Therefore, to meditate is to be in control of oneself, recognizing oneself in the world, allowing oneself to know and perceive oneself in the complexity of life.

And these were the benchmarks to think, at the end of 2018, about the creation of a project focused on meditation as a frequent practice. Although the project emerged from a specific demand for the coordination of one of the high school courses, as reported in another text (SOUZA; FORTUNATO; CORREA, 2020), it was planned to be made available as a place of meditation for the entire community of our campus. Federal Institute.

Question two: why is it important to meditate?

The project regarding meditation at the Institute was proposed, as we realized the importance of meditating when understanding its relationship with self-control, self-knowledge and self-perception. That way, aware of you, we can make decisions with greater caution, think more fluently and learn better about ourselves and the information in the world. When we meditate frequently, we have more clarity about the things of life and personal problems, being able to locate sources of stress, some triggers of anxiety or, more

importantly, identify positive aspects of life, also allowing the definition of goals and the creation of projects of personal interest.

In the work by Araujo et al. (2020) assessments were made with students in the health field, who are known to be stressed during graduation. With this, the authors applied mindfulness meditation - one of the techniques also used by our group during the two years of work at IFSP. The article features a nine-week paper, during which students practiced and learned about this meditation technique. When checking the effects of meditation, using an instrument for measuring feelings⁵, Araujo et al (2020) noticed a significant increase in relation to the control group, which did not participate in meditative practices. Following this idea, the importance of meditating comes together with improving feelings about life itself; if in nine weeks the study by Araujo et al (2020) pointed out significant changes, we can infer that meditation as a habit is fundamental for achieving and maintaining well-being.

In the book “The art of meditation”, Daniel Goleman (1999) makes an interesting relationship between meditation, stress and anxiety, stating that anxious people face the events of life as if they were crises. This tends to trigger an increase in tension with each small event, being seen as constant threats. The author's idea is to propose meditation as a way to go through these moments with the necessary energies to face them. “The person who meditates regularly,” says Goleman (1999, p. 12), “deals with stress in order to break the spiral of the coping or flight reaction. She relaxes much more often than she doesn't meditate, after a challenge has been overcome”.

In addition, the moment of self-awareness that meditation provides allows to calm and organize our thoughts to the point of prioritizing what needs to be thought at that moment. After all, we often think in excess of what is out of our control, like the past and the future. Meditation is a way of realizing what we actually control, the present. This perception has a direct impact on the way we deal with situations, with self-confidence and a sense of control over our own decisions in face of the perception of what is actually happening.

However, there is no single reason to meditate, and one can meditate just by meditating, as we have already written elsewhere: “there is no goal to be achieved with meditation, because meditation is the goal itself” (CORRÊA; KURNICH; FORTUNATO, 2020, p. 243).

⁵ This instrument was the PANAS (Positive Affect Negative Affect Scale), developed by Watson and Clark (1985).

Question three: how can meditation help studies and students?

We noticed, from our experience as teachers and students, that one of the most recurring problems when studying any topic is the lack of concentration and the ability to stay focused on reading or solving an exercise. In this way, we have seen that meditation helps to find focus, as well as helps to calm the mind to think about what we can actually have some control over.

In addition, constant meditation helps to find a respiratory rhythm more adequate to the oxygenation of the organism, helping in the control of anxiety - studying anxious tends to be a big problem, either due to the diversion of attention or the self-collection to fully assimilate all contents and immediate, among others. After all, school and university can become environments of great emotional and psychological pressure, by charging high marks and / or putting students face to face with the idea of a competitive society, in which it takes a lot of physical and mental effort to overcome too much and thus win in life. It is never too much to remember the “Charlie Brown law” regarding school education, it is very well portrayed in the chronicle written by Rubem Alves (1994):

Do you know why we have to get good grades at school? To move from primary to gym. If we get good grades in the gym, we go to school and if we get good grades in school, we go to university, and if we get good grades in this, we get a good job and we can get married and have kids to send them to school, where they will study a lot of things to get good grades and [...] (ALVES, 1994, p. 16).

This formula tends, in fact, to cause intense emotional, psychological and even physical pressure on students, since it is understood as follows: without good grades, there is no university and without university there are no good jobs; and without good jobs, you can't enjoy life. Of course, this formula is just an allegory of school life, not effectively representing their daily lives, but it carries a background of truth capable of even causing anguish and anxiety in students, making them think insistently about the future. And, as we have seen, we have no control over the future.

Thus, as meditation involves concentration and relaxation at the same time, it can present great techniques for students, including those who are preparing for an exam, such as entrance exams and the like. If the beginning of studies can be a time of excitement and euphoria, involving new plans and expectations for the future, maintaining your daily routine requires a certain physical and mental effort, which can lead to exhaustion and a consequent decrease in focus and anxiety. For this reason, it is essential that we are kind (to ourselves), to

the point of understanding that the events in life are not linear, that things most likely will not go exactly as we imagine and, despite all that, everything is fine; looking at yourself and understanding yourself in this process is fundamental, especially for mental health.

In this perspective, meditation can be adopted daily before starting studies, closing your eyes, breathing consciously and gradually include other techniques such as mantras, as a form of self-affirmation, such as, “I can, I get, it's done”, used extensively throughout our meditation project. It is a matter of seeking an intensified state of attention, because “this sharpening of attention lasts beyond the meditation session itself” (GOLEMAN, 1999, p. 14), that is, the meditative state tends to remain even after the reserved moment to the practice of meditation.

Question four: what is the difference between meditating alone and in a group?

Throughout the development of the project, we noticed that group meditation is considered easier to be performed by several factors. First for motivation, because you are in a group of colleagues, friends or acquaintances who, together, are focused on learning and developing meditation skills. Thus, the group's joint engagement can motivate each of its members, individually. A second point that makes group meditation easier is the possibility of a guided meditation by one of your group members. This is because, obeying commands of relaxation, breathing and confidence is more comfortable than creating them alone, while we struggle with our own body and mind to achieve a meditative state.

Meditating alone, compared to group meditation, can be a little more difficult, mainly because, as already described in this text, the body and mind tend to show signs of discomfort, be it discreet itching or the incessant reminder of things to do, with short deadlines. Thus, unlike a meditation guided by a third party, when we are alone, it is easier for our mind to take us to distant memories, memories of the past and expectations of a future, that is, factors that become obstacles during practice. There are strategies to overcome these discomforts, such as slow and rhythmic breathing, or the aforementioned chanting of a mantra. Still, one can make auxiliary use of objects called holistic, which bring calm and comfort, such as incense or the flame of a candle, or even a container with water and plants.

Despite the facilities indicated for collective meditation, there are those who prefer to be alone for this moment, in silence, in an environment of preference. The important thing is to understand that, regardless of how and / or where one meditates, the experiences are always unique and, with time and persistence, each one finds the best way for themselves.

Question five: what is the importance of a meditation project within an educational institution?

By bringing discussion and practice to an educational institution, we can develop and adapt effective ways to make meditation part of the lives of students and teachers, bringing greater comfort, quality of life and benefits to the educational community in general.

According to Fábrica (2020), there are many benefits of meditation at school, among them, the recognition of potential self-knowledge and, consequently, self-esteem, the development of independence in choices, as well as dealing with feelings of frustration, fear and rage. Therefore, spaces such as the meditation allow participants to feel welcomed in some way, given that, often, the institution itself is one of those responsible for triggering the state of stress and anxiety. That is why it is important to create spaces that offer people, especially for those who spend a lot of time inside the institution, a moment of relaxation, physical and mental rest.

In this sense, the meditation is a space created intentionally to promote collective well-being, since topics such as pressure, anxiety and stress related to studies (and other life contingencies) are treated in a conscious, free and very honest way among the participants. In addition, many stigmas about meditation are deconstructed and reframed, starting with access to scientific research that corroborates to stimulate critical thinking on topics related to so-called holism and to the feelings and emotions themselves.

Question six: what are the biggest challenges of a project of this type?

Despite the pointed benefits, several problems and barriers can be encountered during the project, among which we can list the lack of commitment due to the disbelief of the method, the lack of time to mobilize and engage a greater number of people to participate in meditation and meditative situations and the conservative view of many scholars when considering meditation as a pseudoscience or an act of faith.

The fact is that many people believe that meditation is only practiced out of belonging to some religion; however, according to Fábrica (2019), although it is associated with Buddhism (and other Eastern philosophies) as a way of achieving what is believed, the practice does not necessarily need to be associated with the religious character. According to the author, this makes meditation timeless and reaches many people, regardless of place and belief. In addition, according to Goleman (1999), it is possible to notice that people who meditate frequently tend to be, in general, more active than those who do not meditate.

“Meditation trains the ability to pay attention. This sets it apart from many other forms of relaxation that allow the mind to wander at will” (GOLEMAN, 1999, p. 13).

During the time of execution of the meditation project, we can include as obstacles the difficulty of finding time, during the week, to gather teachers, students, technicians and others interested in the practice of meditation. The existence of an ideal place was also a certain obstacle, because, although we said it was possible to meditate anywhere, we also explained that holistic elements, in addition to adequate music and lighting, make the process more friendly to beginners. Gradually, these two obstacles were overcome, until we were surprised by the pandemic of Covid-19, in March 2020...

Question seven: what is the role of meditation in the context of social isolation from the pandemic?

Meditating can assist in the progressive development of mental, physical and emotional well-being (MENEZES; DELL’AGLIO, 2009). On the other hand, we are at a time contrary to well-being, as we are experiencing a Covid-19 pandemic, bringing pain and suffering collectively to practically everywhere on the planet. Beyond the disasters caused to physical health, the pandemic has caused intense emotional and psychological malaise. As we can see on several news sites such as R7⁶, Uol⁷, CNN⁸ and Diário do Nordeste⁹, cases of depression, anxiety and stress have grown around 70% to 90% compared to the same period in previous years.

With the official statement by the World Health Organization on the pandemic state due to the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) in March 2020¹⁰, many changes were made necessary to contain the virus. Social isolation has become paramount and many who have had the privilege of being able to stay at home have done so. However, it is a fact that this isolation, although extremely necessary, triggered different psychological impacts on people, mainly due to the change in routine and loss of freedom. According to Schmidt et al (2020) the fear of being infected and of infecting other people, the feeling of loss of control, and the unpredictability about the end of the pandemic, are factors that directly impact on the individual's mental health.

⁶ Available at: <https://encurtador.com.br/dhG29>. Access: 22 nov. 2020.

⁷ Available at: <https://encurtador.com.br/ftw00>. Access: 22 nov. 2020.

⁸ Available at: <https://encurtador.com.br/AIIS3>. Access: 22 nov. 2020.

⁹ Available at: <https://encurtador.com.br/rtSWX>. Access: 22 nov. 2020.

¹⁰ Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/geral-51842518>. Access: 18 set. 2020.

In this sense, meditation can rescue this sense of control, from conscious breathing, self-perception, concentration in the present moment, in the organization of the mind in priorities of thought, in an attempt to avoid concerns that are beyond our control, and also, to keep calm at a time when everything is even more uncertain.

Far from presenting meditation as a solution, what we are proposing is an auxiliary way of (self) (re) organizing in the face of a new context, not favorable to life. As Menezes and Dell'aglio (2009) argue, when analyzing subjective meditation experiences, different cognitive, emotional, physical, spiritual and social benefits can be listed in the constant habit of meditating. According to the authors, therefore, “it can be concluded that the meditation experience is positively reflected in different domains of the practitioner's life [...] contributing to a healthy psychological development” (p. 572).

We understand, then, meditation as a positive adjunct to the preservation of mental health in this perverse context of a pandemic. For this reason, we have chosen to maintain the constancy of the medIFtation project through the social network *Instagram*®, in the profile */mediftacao*, with well-being and anxiety posts, in addition to regular virtual meetings through *GoogleMeet*®.

Question eight: what are the most important results obtained over the two years of the project?

The first substantial result of the medIFtation was the very approval of the project to be developed within the Institute, because, as we have seen, one of the obstacles to meditation in formal education is its non-science stigma. In the same direction, we consider it positive that the project has been awarded for two consecutive years with a grant from the institution itself. These two elements form a solid basis for all activities carried out in this 2019-2020 biennium.

Of the activities carried out in the weekly meditation meeting at the Institute (and its continuity through the virtual world), involving an average of 30 students and teachers in a positive way by the group, thus bringing more tranquility and, who knows, even one more possibility to reach control and balance in their lives. Several reports of thanks from the participants corroborate this statement, motivating us to maintain and continue the project. Reports such as how much the meetings contributed not only at the moment, but also during the week during classes, activities and tests; as well as, reports on how the practice was

understood (as religious, for example) before seeing it within the Institution as a beneficial technique and independent of any faith or belief.

All this involvement throughout 2019 led us to the organization of the First Holistic Practices and Mental Health Meeting at the Institute. A very important event, firstly for its pioneering spirit on campus and, mainly, for the participation and engagement in lectures and practices not only from the internal community, but also from the community external to the Institution. In the year of 2020, the results were much more in the development of research than practical results, considering that the experience with the virtual environment was very difficult, considering that the participation of students decreased a lot.

In addition, if we also consider the information already collected and written about the project, we have two important presentations at congresses, in the year 2020 - the IFSP Innovation, Science and Technology Congress (CONICT), which is a congress involving all campuses from the state of São Paulo, and the USP International Scientific and Technological Initiation Symposium (SIICUSP), which is an international event promoted by the University of São Paulo. Added to the congresses are two chapters of published books (SOUZA; FORTUNATO; CORRÊA, 2020; CORRÊA; KURNICH; FORTUNATO, 2020), strengthening the idea that meditation should be incorporated in the Proceedings of Science, including in education - not as an instrument, as already stated in another essay (FORTUNATO, 2020), but as a process of self-knowledge.

Question nine: why should you continue?

From everything that has been reported throughout this article, we have no doubt that we must continue to strive for the maintenance and expansion of the meditation project. If there is a possibility of controlling anxiety and improving concentration, then we need to involve more students, teachers and others interested in the project's practices. If there is anything to improve the quality of life in constant practice aimed at achieving a meditative state, then it is worth expanding its reach, benefiting more people.

The continuity of the project is necessary at the Institution, as it is one of the ways to provide the community with a space in which to find ways to promote self-knowledge and strengthen the protective factors to deal with the different events in life - including the group itself as a collective that works without judgment and with the sole objective of promoting well-being. Continuing is important, as mental health needs to be an agenda to be discussed more frequently, not only within our Institute, but everywhere.

Transitional considerations involving meditation, the project and the current situation

When considering the benefits provided by meditation, primarily because we encourage ourselves to travel within ourselves, it is undoubtedly a path to self-knowledge, self-awareness, self-confidence etc.

As mentioned, constant practice does not promote a full existence, in view of the inconstancy of life's events. However, through meditation, we have a way to stimulate essential habits so that we can see our thoughts more clearly and organize them according to our priority. Recognizing the priority levels of each thought is an act of kindness towards ourselves, enhanced by meditation.

It is noticeable how subjective meditation practices are, because the experiences are unique, precisely because of the way each person experiences his moment. The year 2020, undeniably, brought us several reflections about anxiety, considering that social isolation resulted in the feeling of loss of freedom, breaking expectations, together with uncertainty and at the same time hope for a better future.

In this sense, although the ways of dealing with stress and anxiety are different from person to person, this fact does not exclude the existence of points in common between participants on the same subject or feeling; For this reason, we have seen that the conduct of meditation as spaces for exchanging experiences (dreams, anxieties, etc.) is very significant to those involved, especially because it is a moment of listening and understanding and in this case, within one of the bases of the structure of the country: education.

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