

Viktorija Rubčić (Croatia)

Faculty of Education, J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek
viktorijarubcic2@gmail.com

Ivica Kelam (Croatia)

Faculty of Education, J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek
kelamivica@gmail.com

APPLICABILITY OF MEDITATIVE TECHNIQUES IN THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore different meditative techniques and their benefits and to open a discussion on the applicability of meditative techniques in educational institutions. Thus, the ability to apply meditative techniques to help develop self-control and regulation of emotions, as well as a form of prevention of problematic behavior in children. Upbringing begins in the family, and this is where the foundations for building a child's personality are formed. The social community and the environment surrounding us contribute to what we will become. Different religions have their upbringing principles, and given the origin of meditation, we will explore the possibility of its application in spiritual upbringing. This paper will show some meditation techniques and their connection with emotions, how they can help children, as well as the positive aspects of applying meditative techniques in various dysfunctional behaviors. We will explore how and in what way meditation techniques are applied in the world and how and where the application of meditative techniques occurs in children in Croatia.

Keywords: children, emotions, upbringing, application of meditative techniques

Introduction

In today's fast-moving world, there is a growing number of children and adults with social and emotional difficulties. Stress has become a daily occurrence for adults, and children encounter it increasingly. Different problems in schools, the environment, society, family relationships, and different situations that children go through significantly affect their socio-emotional state. Family and community behavior plays a crucial role in building a child's self-image and socio-emotional state. It often happens that parents do not know how to help the child in the stressful situations they are going through. We must not forget that children are like a sponge - they absorb everything. They may not listen to what is being said to them. Still, they will undoubtedly pull out the patterns of society's behavior, and thus confirm the famous saying of James Baldwin: "children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them."¹ Children are like family mirrors.

Applying a meditative technique to families and encouraging the children to do the same will improve their self-confidence and contribute to a peaceful and joyful family line. Although everything starts in the family as the main factor of upbringing, we must not forget the educational institutions where children spend a large part of their childhood. In addition to education through which the child acquires various knowledge, it is necessary to provide children with opportunities for the development of the spiritual component throughout the educational process. The involvement of pedagogues, teachers, and educators in children's lives is of great importance for their general human development and experience of the world. The growth of a child's spirituality and awareness is key to shaping their personality. By encouraging the development of consciousness, children learn to control themselves over time, which contributes to their self-development. The application of meditative techniques allows us to develop an awareness of the present moment. As a definition of meditation, we can say that this is a state of relaxation, through which we develop the skill of directing thoughts and the ability to control emotions. By training our minds, we learn to observe our emotions that intertwine with our feelings and behaviors. Our behavior functions automatically following the stimuli that occur. When we learn and become aware of how our mind works, we come to such a state that our behavior, emotions, and thoughts depend on our choices. Meditation techniques are a type of tool to help in the upbringing process. Children's upbringing is the most crucial task of the community. It includes various methods and principles of education, and

1 https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/10427.James_Baldwin, accessed 16 August 2020.

the introduction of meditative techniques in everyday life would greatly help both children and the community. The paper consists of eight chapters.

In the first chapter, we start from the notion of upbringing and its role in building a child's personality. In the second chapter, we emphasize the importance of building children's self-confidence. The importance of shaping and building a child's spirituality is the topic of the third chapter. Furthermore, in the fourth chapter, we deal with the phenomenon of meditation and its derivatives in Christian meditation and various Buddhist meditation techniques. The meditative practice of Mindfulness is the theme of the fifth chapter. After a short history of Mindfulness, we move on to the application of Mindfulness meditation in children. In the sixth chapter, we analyze how meditation can help a child to cope with their own emotions. How different meditative techniques can influence children's behavior is the topic of the seventh chapter. Finally, in the last, eighth chapter, we deal with the possibilities of applying meditative techniques in educational institutions, with examples from various countries and Croatia. The most significant emphasis will be placed on presenting the application of Mindfulness techniques in educational institutions.

Upbringing and building a child's personality

Upbringing is one of the oldest human tasks, and we can say that since man has existed, there has been upbringing. "Upbringing is as old as man." (Vukasović, 1995: 40) Upbringing is said to be the hardest but also the most beautiful job. Raising a child is a complex and challenging task of a society in which many life factors participate. Still, the family has the essential educational function - upbringing begins in the family. Parents often find themselves in situations where they do not know how to treat a child, so we can say that upbringing includes children and parents. Education has been a topic of conversation for more than two thousand years since the time of ancient Greek philosophers, and different visions of education have emerged from these various considerations. Nowadays, the upbringing of children is defined differently. There are different definitions of upbringing and how a child should be raised.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's definition of education says: "This education comes to us from nature, from men, or things. The inner growth of our organs and faculties is the education of nature, the use we learn to make of this growth is the education of men, what we gain by our experience of our surroundings is the education of things." (Rousseau, 1989: 12) Vujčić (2013) states that the fascinating

fact is that man is genetically the most complex being in the world, nothing is equal to him, and that he is still as dependent on upbringing as no other being - upbringing is actually his destiny. Furthermore, Vukasović (1995: 39) claims: “education is a process of forming a man, building and shaping a human being with all his physical, intellectual, moral, aesthetic and working characteristics. It has its general, universal, historical, and individual meaning. It is equally valuable in the life of society and the individual life of each individual, for it enables the human shaping of every man, just as it has enabled the development of human society throughout history.” Despite the many definitions, we believe that there is not only one correct definition of education but that all these definitions can be intertwined. Our definition of upbringing is more related to Vukasović’s interpretation because it states the overall shaping of a man with all his characteristics. Although it is difficult to determine the precise definition of education, we agree that education is a difficult task. Everyone’s goal is to raise a happy and confident child who will grow into an independent person. When we talk about upbringing, we should bear in mind that each child is a separate case. Unconditional love, support, and acceptance are fundamental elements towards the path of building a responsible and mature person.

“There is a consensus that upbringing is specifically a human activity in which a man becomes a man.” (Bognar, 2015: 10) The question is, when does a man become a man? No child is the same. Childhood experiences will be reflected in the construction of their identity and later in their relationship to the world. “Without the help of parents or adults, a newborn could not be kept alive. The development of their physical, intellectual, moral, aesthetic, and work abilities, rational, emotional, and voluntary spheres of life - is the result of more or less organized systematic educational efforts. That is why we say that upbringing is a process of building a human being as a human being.” (Vukasović, 1995: 40) Education lasts a lifetime, and in parallel with it, the construction of one’s own identity, which is never wholly determined and completed. In other words, a human builds himself as a human all his life. He develops skills and abilities, builds attitudes, opinions, researches, acts, complements his pattern of knowledge transmitted to him by society. For if a human did not establish himself over and over again, if he also did not pass on his knowledge and skills as society passed on to him, if a human did not strive for constant discovery and experience creation, there would be no difference between a human and an animal. Without passing the experience from generation to generation, the experience of each new human would arise and disappear with him. Without

this transmission from generation to generation, every human would begin his life and experience with a stick and a stone ax, and it may be said that he would live in the Stone Age. (Vukasović, 1995)

A human is born, and his identity has yet to emerge in the process of upbringing. What makes a human a human is their personality. A personality is a unity, the identity by which a person differs from another person, making us different. Personality is continuously being built, reconstructed, and shaped through experience with others. If education does not strive to build a personality - one's own identity, then, what is the meaning of education? Virtues determine human's essence of existence. They are not innate but are formed only by getting used to them through experience. It is essential to develop children's awareness, which will contribute to children's self-government. Vujčić (2013) made this clear when he stated as the ultimate goal of education that the development of virtue is what enables a person to control themselves, that a human listens to themselves, not to obey and live according to the supervision of others. As we mentioned earlier, virtues are formed through experience, and society plays an important role here.

Education is a *vicious circle* where the child receives knowledge from society, upgrades it, and builds their own identity until they develop a sense of human needs and values. Then upbringing turns into self-education. Human learns all his life and passes on his knowledge to younger generations. Without education, there would be no human society, but nowhere else does it exist – “education is exclusively a social category.” (Vukasović, 1995: 42) Everyday encounters, different situations, factors, people, events, and processes, more or less in a certain way, participate in the construction of a person's personality or identity. The child builds an identity based on observing how others treat each other and how others treat them. Basic patterns are created at an early age, and personal identity is then gradually built up. As just mentioned, the family has an essential role in developing and shaping a child's personality, but socializing with other and different people contributes to recognizing the specificities of our own identity. The child needs to be encouraged to become aware of the different layers of personality that will be built into one unique system, which will give them a sense of individuality and uniqueness.

Child's self-confidence

Children start thinking about themselves as children and ask questions about their behavior: did they behave well; girls often ask themselves, “am I beautiful?”

during various games such as playing hairdressers, beauticians, and the like. With positive feedback, children build their self-confidence. People's behavior towards the child, especially in childhood, affects the child's self-image. It is essential to instill in the child a feeling and awareness that they are important, significant, loved, accepted, and to nurture these feelings in the child during their growing up, which will make children feel valuable and able to develop their potential. For a child to develop a positive image of themselves, they must first accept themselves as they are with all their flaws and virtues. Likewise, the child should be made aware that he or she is loved and accepted regardless of his or her successes and failures. The child must understand that they can make mistakes, that this is not always a bad thing, and that everyone makes mistakes. The child should be encouraged to look at life with optimism, and those bad things are an integral part of life. This will make it easier for the child to learn to deal with the challenges and teach the child something better than by example. "The surest way to create high self-esteem is for parents who have high self-esteem themselves and are a model for their children." (Bučević, 2015: 68) Parents and society should show by their example how bad things in life do not always have to be tragic. Thus the child develops a sense of optimism. When a child achieves some success, it is necessary to praise them because the child's self-esteem grows dramatically because of that.

An old Irish proverb says, "praise the children, and they will flourish." Just as we feel good when someone praises us, so do children feel good; praise is a form of emotional food. Moreover, to feed thoughts with optimism and build self-confidence, it is necessary to spend time alone. In silence, the child is alone with their thoughts. They reflect on their actions or behaviors, observe the practices of people around them, etc. It is crucial that children always think about the beautiful and what makes them happy in these moments of silence. To calm down, adults use different ways - prayer, meditation, visualization, and more. While prayer itself is most often associated with monotheistic religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam), meditation tends more towards Buddhism. Each religion has its principles, views, attitudes, and beliefs that characterize its spirituality.

Forming the child's spirituality

As in upbringing, so in shaping and building a child's spirituality, people from the immediate environment have the most significant influence. How a child will develop their spirituality is linked to the very question of the family's spirituality.

As we have already said - children absorb all stimuli from the outside. Therefore, the spirituality of the parents is essential. Children will question their attitudes, beliefs, views on life, and behavior patterns and later bring them back into the world. In what way the parents live, the child will absorb. Through education, children enrich and acquire spiritual knowledge, but the time spent in solitude also plays a significant role. Jurić and Srđanović (2017), in their research concerning the child's spirituality, state that in addition to adopting theories and facts, it is also vital to create an environment of solitude and silence and prayer and meditation, because in such moments can arise imaginative and creative ideas. This spiritual component must be included in the educational process from the earliest age. Children spend a large part of their childhood in kindergartens and educational institutions, so we must not neglect the influence of peers on the development of the child's spirituality. No one was born with hatred in their hearts, and this is best seen in children. Children learn to cooperate and help through play, first with siblings and then with other children.

Children are open, honest, and have sympathy for others. "They possess an abundant spiritual life from an early age, which is expressed in various ways according to their psycho-physical abilities." (Jurić, Srđanović, 2017: 471) It is up to us to direct that love that children already possess on building prosocial behavior, empathy, and altruism. We need to nurture and shape a child's spirituality for sociability and love. Whether a child develops their spirituality by believing in God as creator and savior and that with God's help, they will achieve whatever they want, or the child will shape their spirituality by understanding that they are alone and responsible for all the bad and good in their life will depend most on the environment in which they live.

Meditation

Nowadays, people live a fast-paced lifestyle, and the consequences of such a rhythm of life are many. People become moody, exhausted, worried, stressed, nervous, etc. Everyone needs to find their way to preserve and maintain their inner peace, calm their thoughts and mind, and maintain calmness and composure to perform daily duties and solve problems, which can be achieved by applying meditation. (Comisso, 2003) The very notion of meditation is always most often associated with a state of relaxation. The term "*meditation*" comes from the Latin noun *meditatio*, which means *thinking, discussing*. In the general human sense, it can mean careful thinking over an object of thought of a religious, moral,

or philosophical nature to explore the content, understanding the essence, extracting the consequences.” (Podgorelec, 2017: 13). In some civilizations, meditation has been practiced for thousands of years and is based on breathing and relaxation. There are many types of meditations, depending on the society, religion, attitudes, and more, but we can divide them into several basic ones. “These are meditations for healing, for achieving goals, personal meditations, meditations on symbols, meditation to protect and recharge energy, meditations on chakras, meditations for *the third eye*, for planet Earth, meditations on mantras, i.e., prayers and meditations with visualization.” (Comisso, 2003: IX) Meditation can also be divided into subjective and objective. When we talk about objective meditation, a person meditates in front of some of his idols, images or statues of deities that are close to the meditator (Jesus, Mother of God, Krishna, Buddha, etc.). In subjective meditation, “the meditator meditates in accordance with the all-encompassing, highest Cosmic energy, which is both within the meditator and all around him, thus becoming one in omnipresent, constant vibrations.” (Comisso, 2003: IX) Regardless of what kind of meditation it is and what its spiritual purpose is, the goal of meditation is to connect the soul with that one source. Be it some Universal Deity, the supreme Source, God, or something else. The goal is to achieve constant flow and focus because meditation is just that state without thought. (Comisso, 2003)

Christian meditation

When we talk about Christian meditation, it is most often associated with reading and meditating on sacred texts. What makes Christian meditation unique is that Jesus Christ is at its center. For the Christian, Jesus Christ and his life are a model to live and a path to follow. “In the Christian tradition, meditating means getting to know Jesus through his words so that the believer can love him and make a serious effort to follow him. Christian meditation is not a technique that would lock a person into the realm of the property of the human spirit seeking its perfection but introduces the believer into a dialogue with God. In this sense, meditation begins with a slow reading of the text and develops in the direction of prayer.” (<https://www.monfortanci.com/osnovni-krscanski-vjeronauk>, 18 July 2020) Just as Jesus prayed in solitude, so Christians, following his example, immerse themselves in their inner world and pray. They say an oral prayer that leads to meditation. However, to achieve this, prayer is not enough just to say. First of all, prayer should be an activity of our consciousness. Podgorelec (2017) explains that meditation is a more spontaneous and diverse

prayer expression compared to oral prayer. It is more spontaneous because the person who prays will probably address God in their own words, as the word itself says. In this more spontaneous way, there is more focus on the inner state of the person who prays. At the same time, a more varied way involves more silence and stillness and various aids like paintings and music. Whether it is oral prayer or meditation, it is essential that the supplicant is focused and that his or her insides be included in addition to the outside. The person who prays must be entirely focused on what they are carrying out.

The applicability of prayer as a child's meditation

Each meditation has its own object; that is, what it will focus on; in Eastern meditative techniques, the focus is on the breath, while in Christian meditation, the focus is on prayer. In Christianity, prayer is the center of meditation. In the life of a child, prayer occupies a special place. During worship, the child expresses deep respect for God and experiences his presence. The child only prays for what is essential in their life, and in early childhood, these are most often prayers of a grateful nature and prayers in which the child asks something from God. The child prays sincerely and easily, using a few words. The secret of a child's prayer is precisely that for him. Prayer is not only a conversation with God but also a moment of silence that a child experiences discovering themselves. As a result, the child's prayer becomes spontaneous and straightforward and emanates from them with ease. Silence helps the child enter their inner center and thus to find the way to God. (Jurić, Srdanović, 2017) Many parents want to connect their faith in God with meditation and then pass on their experiences to their children. One of the most common traditional prayers is *Lectio Divina*, which many parents use to teach their children Christian meditation. "*Lectio Divina* is the reading of Holy Scripture with faith in an atmosphere of prayer and contemplation, believing that we are facing the mystery of God's personal presence." (<https://www.monfortanci.com/osnovni-krscanski-vjeronauk>, 18 July 2020) Missionaries of Montfort state that were were reading Holly Scripture can divide into three parts:1.) *Lectio* - just reading the sacred text 2.) *Meditatio* - meditating on the text we have read 3.) *Contemplatio* – contemplation.

We begin the prayer with the children by reading a text that should not be too long. During a slow reading, it is necessary to emphasize some sentences that we consider essential, take breaks, repeat the sentence and encourage children to "enter "as much as possible the text we read with them. After reading the text,

it is necessary to ask the child to think about what they have read in silence. During this meditation, we can ask the children some questions related to the text to make it easier for the children to get to know the beauty and power of the Holy Scriptures. Also, we can start and pray with children if the children want to express some of their thanks, emotions, or thoughts to God through questions. Finally, we rest with the children in silence for a few moments so that the children can enter their inner and find God who answers. (<https://www.monfortanci.com/osnovni-krscanski-vjeronauk>, 18 July 2020).

Buddhist meditation

“Buddhism, the Buddha’s teaching, or as Buddhists themselves call it, Buddha Dharma, is the teaching of awakening.” (<https://budisticki-centar.hr/tekst.php?id=1>, 31 July 2020) Buddhism and its basic understandings are extremely precise and practical in everyday life. All human errors, wrong moves and decisions, and unfavorable deeds arise from human ignorance, not from natural human malice. We were leading to the development of other unpleasant emotions like anger, rage, envy, jealousy, and fear, making our daily lives and our relationships difficult, tense, and uncomfortable for others. To emerge from this fast-paced river of life, whose currents we seldom understand and have almost no control over, Buddhism shows and directs us how to take life into our own hands by developing consciousness and silencing the mind. By building self-confidence, building an image of ourselves, setting our goals, becoming aware of our existence and our actions, we become actual human beings, a meaningful and happy life led by the first steps on the Buddha’s path of morality, meditation, and wisdom. (<https://budisticki-centar.hr/tekst.php?id=1>, 31 March 2020). The essential task of Buddhist meditation is to achieve wakefulness, which is achieved through the development of concentration and awareness. It should be borne in mind not to strengthen Mindfulness and awareness to get something but to see things realistically, as they are. Buddhist meditation allows us to see the same things from a different angle, a calmer and more stable mental center. Meditation techniques help us become aware of the present moment and be now. Leading a person to know oneself is the first step towards understanding the world around us. Although meditation is a significant feature of Buddhism, it should be emphasized that a person does not have to be a Buddhist, nor is his spiritual commitment essential to experience the benefits of Buddhist meditation. (http://www.shin.hr/meditacija_i_budizam.aspx, 31 July 2020).

Buddhist meditative techniques

Meditation occupies a central place in Buddhism, but it has developed characteristic variations in different Buddhist traditions. Although there are many different meditative techniques, they all have the same goal, achieving wakefulness. Below we will list and briefly describe the three most used meditative techniques in Buddhism.

Zazen

Zazen is a form of sitting meditation, as the name suggests. Namely, *zazen* translated into Japanese means *meditation in a sitting position*. It is at the heart of Chinese Zen Buddhism (ch'an), and Zen itself is still known as the "school of meditation" of Buddhism. It is most often practiced in the lotus or semi-lotus position, but keeping the back straight is most important. The hands are in the so-called *cosmic mudras*, and the eyes are half-open, lowered to the ground about two to four meters in front of us. The beginning of the *zazen* period is traditionally announced by ringing three times (shijoshō), and the end of the circle by ringing the bell once or twice (hōzenjō). The most considerable focus is on the breath and the practice of redirecting thoughts to the breath. (<https://zmm.org/teachings-and-training/meditation-instructions/>, 17 June 2020).

Metta

A metta meditation, or the meditation of kindness as it is often called, is a practice that cultivates benevolence, kindness, and compassion. Metta is an active form of meditation where instead of focusing on the breath, we focus on compassion and love, primarily for ourselves. Therefore, in this meditation, after calming the mind by breathing, we mentally begin to repeat expressions such as *I can be happy, I can be well, I can be healthy*, etc. First of all, it is an exercise cultivating love and kindness to oneself and then to others. The goal is to cultivate an unconditional relationship with oneself and others. (<https://mindworks.org/blog/getting-started-metta-meditation/>, 17 June 2020).

Vipassana

The word *vipassana* translates as *insight*, and in a broader sense, means to see things as they really are. It is one of the oldest meditation techniques and begins

with focusing on the breath, too. It is because of this *Mindfulness of breathing* that meditation is becoming increasingly popular among people. It is also practiced in a sitting position, emphasizing an upright back. Vipassana meditation begins with awareness of the breath and the establishment of concentration and attention, which leads to *pure insight* and open observation of things and moments without attachment. Achieving a liberated mind is the first step on the path to realizing the ultimate truth. (<https://tricycle.org/magazine/vipassana-meditation/>, 17 June 2020).

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a meditative practice that translates as *focused awareness* and is one of today's most well-known meditative techniques. It derives from the Vipassana meditative technique and is also associated with Zazen (ch'an). With Mindfulness, we develop the natural human ability to be aware of the present moment with a strong emphasis on focusing on breathing while accepting the thoughts and feelings that arise at that moment without resisting and condemning what we recognize. The goal is to be aware of what is happening right now. Our breathing, our emotions, our thoughts, and instead of the usual giving meaning to a particular thought, this technique is practiced to keep our consciousness entirely focused on one thought.

A brief history of Mindfulness

The roots of Mindfulness lie deep in Buddhist philosophy, and the very term Mindfulness is a translation of the Buddhist word for hours, which means *intelligence of the mind* or *vigilance of the mind*. Mindfulness meditation is the heart of the Buddhist tradition, which emphasizes intention, consciousness, and attention as crucial components of the world of the mind. It aims to deepen the awareness of the present moment. Although Mindfulness is rooted in Buddhist philosophy, the concept itself has no religious connotation, and meditative practices are becoming increasingly popular not only in Eastern countries but also around the world. (Glomb et al., 2011) "Mindfulness was brought to the West by teachers who emigrated to those areas and Westerners who traveled to Asia to study and practice ancient teachings before they became known in the Western world. Many individuals who have been intensively engaged in research, as well as psychologists and mental health physicians, eventually began to practice the Mindfulness method themselves, so it was only a matter of time before Western culture would thoroughly and thoughtfully address this phenomenon instead of

considering it a kind of Eastern esoteric, by a miracle.” (Niemic, 2017: 13) In the last few decades, interest in Mindfulness has begun to increase sharply, thanks in large part to the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn. He developed a stress reduction program based on Mindfulness in his 1979 work at the Massachusetts School of Medicine. We can say that Jon Kabat-Zinn and his associates are responsible for the global spread of interest in Mindfulness in different areas such as educational institutions, prisons, hospitals (psychotherapy and psychology), various jobs, and more. (Hyland, 2011) In one of his interviews, Jon Kabat-Zinn states that the biggest challenge and question is in which direction the Mindfulness method will continue to spread and apply through the next generations, as we live in a digitalized world where people spend more and more time online. “We’ve become very good at writing computer programs. The real question is how good we are at knowing ourselves.” (Life, Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2017:106)

Application of Mindfulness meditation in children

Mindfulness meditation has proven to be the most effective and, therefore, the most common of the whole range of meditative techniques used in children. Although there is a lot of research related to the application of meditative techniques and their impact, very little research has been done on preschool children. However, various studies conducted with school-age children in schools, clinical and non-clinical institutions, and based on Mindfulness meditation, show a positive impact on their socio-emotional and behavioral functioning. Thus, a study by Napoli, Krech, and Holley (2005) conducted a 24-week Mindfulness training with a total of 228 school-age children, which included a series of exercises such as breathwork, physical activity, movement, and various awareness activities, i.e., Mindfulness training to the attention of students. The result showed significant differences between the control and experimental groups. A decrease in the adverse effect of anxiety and a substantial increase in selective attention in the experimental group are visible. The pilot study (Beauchemin et al., 2008) conducted a 5-week Mindfulness Meditation with 34 students aged 13-18 who had learning difficulties. Students, guided by the teacher, directed their focus on the breath through exercises, which encouraged the development of calm and stability. Also, during that calmness, students were encouraged to record thoughts and feelings as they appeared and thus increase awareness. All outcome measures showed significant improvement, and participants who completed the program showed reduced anxiety, improved social skills, and improved academic performance. A meta-analysis conducted by Zenner et al. (2014) suggests that Mindfulness-based interventions for children and

adolescents can increase their cognitive abilities and socioemotional functioning as well as coping ability and resilience to stress. The effect is more potent in studies in which more Mindfulness training was performed, and besides, it is carried out at home. All interventions based on the concept of Mindfulness, mental breathing, and body scanning and their combination with other methods such as imaginary travel and play were included in this analysis. Of course, when applying Mindfulness meditation, it is necessary to adapt it to the child's age and developmental characteristics. (Boričević Maršanić et al., 2015) Although many people think that the application of this meditative technique in children of early preschool age is impossible, it is still possible. Moreover, children at that age are closer to Mindfulness than we think. What else is building a castle out of cubes than pure meditation? In preschool, children spend most of their time playing. During the game, they do not think about other things. Their attention is focused on the doll, ball, book, or something else they are playing with at that moment. They are focused on the course of the game; they are relaxed and are present at that point in the game. In the practical application of Mindfulness, the exercises "breathing, senses, movement, body examination" are most often used. (Boričević Maršanić et al., 2015: 145) Short breathing exercises are recommended with the younger kindergarten group. A Kindergarten teacher from the Olga Ban Pazin Kindergarten, Maja Obućina, who participated in the training on the application of Mindfulness, lists several short breathing exercises for children. (Footwear, 2020: 3)

Ship and waves

Lie comfortably on the back and place the hands on the stomach. As a person breathes, their abdomen rises and falls. Imagine that person's hands are a ship rocking on the waves in the rhythm of breathing.

Plush toy

Lie comfortably on one's back, place the plush on one's stomach, and watch it rise and fall.

Breathing with fingers

One spreads the palm of one hand, and with the index finger of the other hand, one passes over the fingers of the other hand in the rhythm of breathing.

Place the index finger on the bottom of the little finger, on the *inhale*, move the index finger towards the tip of the finger, and, on the exhale, move it towards the bottom of the little finger. With the next breath, go to the ring finger and so on, all the way to the thumb.

In children of younger kindergarten age, crying is an almost daily occurrence. A soap bubble-blowing exercise is appropriate to make it easier for the child to learn to control their emotions. This is one form of Mindfulness exercise with movement. Instead of calming the child by distracting them with a toy or something interesting, we can take them to a place where they can blow soap bubbles. We wave and say something like *pa-pa tear* as we blow soap bubbles with the child. Blowing a soap bubble associates a child with a sense of relaxation. (<https://blissfulkids.com/how-to-practice-mindfulness-with-children-the-essential-guide/>, 19 July 2020) Children who attend school begin to develop their personalities and gradually establish control over their emotions.

Children begin to connect what they feel and experience with themselves and begin to realize that they are actually in control of themselves. Soothing Mindfulness activities, such as a *jar*, help children develop attention. The children simply shake the jar containing the water and the sequins and watch the sequins sink to the bottom, sitting in a quiet and peaceful place. This gives the child a chance to calm down and spend some time in their thoughts. (<https://blissfulkids.com/how-to-practice-mindfulness-with-children-the-essential-guide/>, 19 April 2020). The advantage of this meditative technique is the possibility of use in everyday situations. It can be used during a walk with a child during which we can talk to the child about the environment or, for example, the muscles that move us during the walk. Also, during hand washing, we can observe how soap foam is formed or change and feel the change of hot and cold water. First of all, the presence of parents in such activities is of great importance. (Obućina, 2020).

Meditation and emotions in children

Children often do not know how to deal with their emotions. It is our job to teach them how to recognize them and how to deal with them. Unfortunately, the number of children with socio-emotional problems is growing, and the causes are different - parental divorce, society, family breakdown, problems at school, and more. Of course, modern media, which affects the child's level of attention and ability to think, also have a significant influence. It is up to us to provide children with practical techniques and practices to deal with stress.

(Boričević Maršanić et al., 2015) The amount of literature on the effectiveness of meditation on improving emotion regulation is continuously growing. Today, more and more research confirms that meditation and emotions are connected.

One of these studies is a meta-analysis conducted by Goyal et al. (2014) using the Mindfulness meditative technique. "Our review shows that meditation programs can reduce the negative dimensions of psychological stress. Mindfulness meditation programs, in particular, show little improvement in anxiety, depression, and subjective feeling of pain." (Goyle et al., 2014: 364) Calming the mind through meditative practices is of great importance for developing the ability to regulate emotions leading to a calmer life. The effectiveness of meditative techniques in the regulation of emotions was confirmed by research by Holzel et al. (2011), which shows how regular practice of meditative techniques affects the areas of the brain responsible for regulating attention, learning, memory, activity planning and others. Let us not forget that children sometimes find it difficult and need to relax. Because of their curiosity and research spirit at an early age, they accept such practices and techniques that allow them to develop self-regulation. Thus, they become active in developing their lives. Meditation techniques help children distance themselves, move away from negative thoughts, and improve their socio-emotional resilience and self-regulation. The calm and stable mind that we achieve through meditation, and the focused awareness with which we accept and observe our thoughts and feelings without condemnation and resistance, allows us to accept the stressful events in life as a challenge. A calm and stable mind also increases the child's ability to cope with the current problem and future life circumstances. (Boričević Maršanić et al., 2015)

Encouraging children to explore their own emotions through Metta meditation

One way for children to become acquainted with their emotions and their power of mind and thought is through Metta meditation. Metta meditation is the discipline of redirecting and achieving an awake awareness of love for oneself and others. Although it refers to many seemingly different ideas, Metta is, in fact, a particular form of *love*, i.e., a strong desire for the happiness of others and care for others independent of all personal interests. This energy is often difficult to describe in words. Still, in the practice of Metta meditation, we recite certain words and expressions (*I can be happy, I can be good, I can be healthy*, etc.) to evoke that feeling further and to awaken and nurture the kindness that is within

us. We recite the expressions first for ourselves, and then for others, *he/she can be well, he/she can be healthy*, and so on. That is why this meditation is also called the meditation of kindness (https://medicine.yale.edu/spiritualselfschema/training/manuals/APPENDIX_160547_284_19318_v1.pdf, 15 June 2020). Meditation is becoming more and more popular, and more and more parents are starting to use it in their upbringing of children. It is necessary to help children, teach them lifelong skills and allow the development of the spiritual component in the child. Meditation has proven to be one of the skills for mind and body intervention that provides relaxation and emotional regulation and the development of attention circles. Metta meditation or meditation of kindness leads children to calm and direct their minds and their positive energy and love first towards themselves and then towards other people and children. Most importantly, this meditative technique allows children to come into contact with their emotions. Early preschoolers are more open and accept well the idea of expressing feelings in their hearts and giving birth to love. The younger children are, the freer they are in expressing and accepting love. "Scientists agree that if Metta meditation starts to be encouraged from the early preschool years, children are more likely to grow up as more positive and balanced individuals." (<https://positivepsychology.com/loving-kindness-meditation/>, 7 July 2020). In children of early preschool age, we can easily and quickly determine how to express their feelings because, with a few questions, we can discover their whole range of experiences. This can sometimes be a problem for adults, as children quickly turn the conversation in another direction and move away from the original intention of expressing their feelings. When practicing this meditative technique, after several cycles of calming breathing with the children, we can ask the children some questions: How does love feel in your heart? Does it have a color or temperature? What does love look like in your heart? Children need to be encouraged to explore independently and freely how love feels in their bodies, minds, and hearts. (<https://yogamedicine.com/loving-kindness-meditation/>, 7 July 2020). At the same time, we encourage children to be creative and make sense of their love. The words that children choose can change over time, but the intention to get in touch with their emotions is always present. While children thus acquire a sense of love for themselves and others, they also develop a sense of power. We can also encourage the development of kindness in children by suggesting that they send a few of their wishes to different people or some of their favorite objects, such as toys, a cartoon character, a pet, a plant, or something else. Children nurture their emotional health and develop inner qualities such as love, empathy, and compassion through this practice.

Influence of meditative techniques on child behavior

Today, more and more scientific research confirms that different meditative techniques can influence children's behavior. Although the original purpose of meditation is to improve inner qualities such as compassion, understanding, kindness, self-control, and self-confidence, meditative practices can help and reduce symptoms in many disorders and dysfunctional behaviors. The results of research conducted by Harrison et al. (2004) show improvements in behavior in children with ADHD, and there are visible shifts in their relationship quality as well as self-esteem. The treatment, which lasted six weeks, used the technique of Sahaja yoga meditation and involved children with symptoms of ADHD aged 4-12 years, as well as their parents. In the conversation, the children described that they have better sleep, less anxiety, are more able to concentrate, and are less likely to get into conflicts. Parents reported that they were no longer so stressed that they felt happy and were able to manage their child's behavior. (Harrison et al., 2004) "The results of this experimental program show that Sahaja Yoga meditation has the potential as a promising therapy for children with ADHD, if approached as part of family treatment and in combination with existing medical treatment." (Harrison et al., 2004: 491).

Research conducted by So and Orme-Johnson (2001) on the effects of transcendental meditation on the cognition of children aged 14 to 18 years has shown very positive results. Seven tests were used to monitor changes, and the group that practiced transcendental meditation showed improvement in all seven tests, unlike the other groups that did not practice transcendental meditation. The study involved 154 children (78 boys and 76 girls) who practiced transcendental meditation for 20 minutes twice a day for six months. After six months of follow-up, practical intelligence, creativity, decreased anxiety, as well as anxiety, increased significantly in children. Meditation seems to have great potential, and more and more research shows significant psychological, physiological, and therapeutic effects. When applying meditation techniques in children, adapting the chosen technique according to their age and cognitive abilities is essential. The chosen meditative technique should be simple, time-adapted to children, fun, and engaging, and it is undoubtedly recommended for parents to be involved.

Preventing the development of problem behavior by using meditation

The aforementioned scientific research shows how and to what extent meditative techniques positively impact socio-emotional regulation, behavior,

and cognition. It is these positive effects that give meditative techniques great potential in the very prevention of behavioral problems. Prevention programs include a variety of approaches that try to prevent problematic behaviors in children. The application of meditative techniques as prevention implies solving smaller problems to avoid larger ones. We can say that this is a principle of *better safe than sorry*. Because of its simplicity, it is convenient and applicable to anyone. It does not require any knowledge, special skills, props, or going to some places and is quick and easy to learn. We can meditate in any position, be it sitting, lying down, or moving at any time of the day when we want and need it. It has been shown that meditative practice in the context of prevention is most often used in addictive behaviors and depressive disorders. A study conducted by Hamidi and Kheiran (2019) on the impact of the Mindfulness meditative technique on methamphetamine addicts confirms that its application reduces addiction. They used the Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP) therapeutic approach based on Mindfulness meditation. The study involved 30 men and women diagnosed with methamphetamine addiction divided into two groups - an experimental and a control group. The experimental group performed eight treatments over an hour and a half over two months, while the control group did not undergo treatment. After two months, all respondents went through several questionnaires. The results showed that this method of prevention helped the respondents increase their ability to cope with temptations and risky behaviors, as well as the reduction of desire and aggression. An essential effect that widespread attention has on anger and aggression is that, as a coping strategy, it separates anger from its painful condition and acts effectively and realistically in dealing with problems.

Although the study involved adult men and women, the application of such and similar meditative techniques is undoubtedly proper for children to prevent the development of some form of addiction in adolescence. The application of meditative techniques in the form of prevention can be applied independently, but it is undoubtedly better in groups. Schools are the most appropriate in this case since there are children of all ages whose behavior is still being formed.

Application of meditative techniques in educational institutions

Educational institutions are places where children spend a large part of their childhood and growing up. Educators, teachers, professors, psychologists, special educators, and other professional teams of the educational institution

have a high and significant impact on the child's life. Sometimes, we do not know and are not aware of what the child is going through - in society, in the family, with themselves. While, for some children, educational institutions are the only place where they can have peace, for others, they are a place of fear. Like adults, children go through stressful and awkward moments. By applying meditative techniques in educational institutions, we help children govern themselves and develop the ability to express their own, understand other people's emotions, and exchange opinions. As early as the 1970s, Linden showed through his research that the application of meditative techniques in educational institutions helps children develop their independence as well as reduce anxiety (Linden 1973). The introduction of meditation-based relaxation methods into the curriculum can be one of the ways to prevent the development of problematic behavior in children and also aid children to develop self-esteem and self-confidence, as well as the acquisition of social skills. In an exciting and fun way for children, carrying out some meditative technique during the day or several times a week for a few minutes (depending on the child's age) contributes to a more relaxed atmosphere and increases children's success. (Boričević Maršanić et al., 2015) For the application of meditative techniques in educational institutions to be possible at all, it is, first of all, necessary to educate educators and teachers and educate parents about the meditative techniques themselves. Many people view meditation as a form of Buddhism and do not want their children to *practice another religion*. But as already stated, meditation does not know religion, age, gender, geographical destination, and one does not have to be a Buddhist to practice meditation, nor does someone who practices meditation mean that they are a Buddhist. Therefore, parental education is urgently needed to remove prejudices and ambiguities and become familiar with meditation techniques' positive aspects. Indeed, the support and involvement of parents in such programs contribute to a better application and implementation of meditative techniques with children.

Application of meditative techniques in the world

Although the application of meditative techniques is most commonly used in the fields of applied psychology, school psychology has not yet introduced this into regular practice. However, the introduction of meditative techniques in the curriculum is slowly reviving and appearing in more and more educational institutions.

We have one such example in the UK where a project called “Mindfulness in Schools” is being launched by professors Chris Cullen, Richard Burnett, and Chris O’Neil. They created a curriculum known today as *.b* (dot-be), which means “Stop, Breathe and Be!” This program is designed for use in the classroom as a tool for teaching mindfulness techniques to children aged 11 to 18. For those younger than 7 to 10, the program *Paws b* (Pause, Be) was designed, which is also based on Mindfulness meditation (Simpson, 2017). The *.b* program includes a ten-week application, while *Paws b* consists of seven one-hour sessions. Both programs involve the application of various skills based on Mindfulness and are conducted by educated professors and teachers with the help of visual aids and practical demonstrations. (McGeechan, 2016) Shortly after Cambridge professor Felica Huppert declared the *.b* program “well-accepted” and students showed various improvements, the implementation of the *.b* program became mandatory in Hampton and Tonbridge. Today, the *.b* program is adapted for use in a dozen countries. (Simpson, 2017)

A survey conducted by the National Health Service on children’s mental health in England confirms that the number of children with mental disorders such as depression and anxiety increased from 1999 to 2017. The British Government has decided to expand the curriculum by introducing Mindfulness in as many as 370 schools to improve children’s mental health. Several innovative techniques to promote mental health will be implemented with children through one of the most extensive studies of its kind. “Children will benefit from awareness exercises, relaxation techniques, and breathing exercises that will help them regulate their emotions, along with student treatments with mental health professionals. The study will run until 2021 and aims to provide schools with new, strong evidence of what works best for students’ mental health and well-being.” (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/one-of-the-largest-mental-health-trials-launches-in-schools>, 25 April 2020). Some countries, such as the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Iceland, and Denmark, have already introduced the practice of meditative techniques in the educational system.

Denmark has been practicing this for years, and in 1993 they introduced a mandatory empathy course in the curriculum. The empathy program begins at age six in the first year of school and continues until age sixteen. Children have empathy classes for an hour each week during the so-called *Klassens tid*. Children can present personal problems or problems among students and initiate a discussion about school-related problems, but it does not have to be. Together with the teacher, the children learn to listen and understand each other

by discussing possible solutions. If the children do not have a topic to discuss, they gather regardless and just standstill. At rest, children observe their thoughts and feelings. With this approach, children are taught to express their opinions and attitudes. Thus children receive encouragement and, at the same time, learn to respect each other. (<https://educateinspirechange.org/inspirational/empathy-is-taught-to-students-ages-6-to-16-in-denmark-schools/>, 25 July 2020). The program of empathy contains various meditative techniques. Children standstill when they do not have a topic for discussion. In silence, they sink into their thoughts and watch what happens. Just as in Metta meditation, we instruct children to nurture a genuine relationship with themselves and others, so during empathy classes, children focus on a positive attitude, not only towards themselves but also towards others.

Application of meditative techniques in Croatia

The introduction of meditative techniques in the regular curriculum in Croatia still, unfortunately, has not happened. However, a project was recently launched by the Mindfulness Initiative Croatia, which in cooperation with the British association Mindfulness In Schools, invited primary schools to apply for this project. (<https://mindfulnessinicijativahrvatska.com/2020/02/17/projekt-mindfulness-a-u-hrvatskim-osnovnim-skolama-produljeno-vrijeme-prijave-do-31-ozujka-2020/>, 28 April 2020) Since the project has just started, information on the number of registered primary schools is not yet available, and the period the project should be implemented. In agreement with parents, some schools and kindergartens voluntarily hire various mindfulness trainers, psychologists, and therapists who are educated for these types of workshops. A large number of kindergartens that are not able to hire an educated person to conduct a workshop of this form encourage and offer parents a lot of brochures and various manuals on the benefits of meditative techniques. Although meditation has not yet been introduced into the educational system, in Croatia, we have a considerable number of different centers, associations, and programs that conduct workshops for children based on Mindfulness meditation. One of these associations is HUBIKOT (Croatian Association for Behavioral-Cognitive Therapies), which organizes and implements the Mindfulness program, which includes eight experiential workshops for children, held once a week for an hour. The children are led through the workshops by an educated psychologist and introduced to Mindfulness and how to practice it. Children in the workshops learn how to deal with stress, achieve a sense of calm, and more. (<http://cabct.>

hr/online-program-mindfulness-za-osmase-i-srednjoskolce, 28 April 2020) In addition to children, HUBIKOT conducts education and courses on Mindfulness for adults, too. Also, the ALOHA mental arithmetic program (Abacus Learning Of Higher Arithmetic), implemented in various speech therapy and language education centers throughout Croatia, is becoming increasingly popular. The program is open to children from 4 to 13 years of age and serves to strengthen and develop children's mental abilities. Through various tasks and activities, children train the skills of imagination and visualization, photographic memory, concentration, logical and sequential thinking, the ability to listen, and much more. They have introduced Mindfulness into their program as part of regular classes conducted by trained ALOHA trainers. The implementation of the Mindfulness meditative technique is conceived through shorter activities where children would be encouraged and directed to breathing exercises, developing conscious attention and visualization, as well as controlling thoughts and emotions. (<https://aloha.hr/mentalna-aritmetika/>, 30 April 2020) Mindfulness DAR is another, in a series of centers, offering a Mindfulness course for children and adolescents. Parents can enroll children from 5 to 18 years of age in the course, and the course is based on eight workshops and one meeting with parents. The course is mainly attended by children from 5 to 10 years, especially adolescents from 11 to 18 years. The workshops are adapted to the children's age and developmental abilities, and the exercises are conducted through various games. (<https://www.mindfulness-dar.com/program>, 30 July 2020) It is worth mentioning the Mental Training Center, which also offers 8 Mindfulness workshops that children can attend from 8 to 14 years of age. The implementation of the workshops is based on similar principles as in other centers. (<https://www.mentalnitrening.hr/djeca/mindfulness-trening-za-djecu/>, 30 July 2020) Looking at the application of meditative techniques in Croatia, we can say that the knowledge about the effectiveness and benefits of Mindfulness in children is growing. This is confirmed by the growing number of centers that offer customized Mindfulness workshops for children. Still, a significant drawback is the high cost of such workshops. Unfortunately, almost all associations and centers charge for these workshops, which is why we come to a limited number of children whose parents can finance enrollment in Mindfulness workshops. By introducing some meditative techniques in educational institutions, they would solve the problem of a limited number of children and enable all children to be treated equally.

Conclusion

Meditation has been an Eastern millennial technique associated with a state of relaxation and helps in various situations throughout life. There are many types of meditation, depending on the society, religion, attitudes, and more. However, it applies to all people, regardless of origin, religion, color, age, or social class. Recent research points to the positive effects of meditation on children, and it is becoming increasingly popular, both among families and in educational institutions around the world. (Burk, 2009; Lack et al. 2020; van der Oord et al. 2012; Abrams, 2008; Fisher, 2006) Given the full range of forms and types of meditative techniques, it can be adapted to everyone. The most common are various adapted Eastern (Buddhist) meditation techniques, but prayer as a form of meditation is also becoming increasingly popular. The strong connection that occurs between emotions and meditative techniques, through the application, helps children learn to deal with their emotions that they often do not know how to recognize or regulate them. Undoubtedly, the enormous potential of meditative techniques, which is being confirmed by more and more research, offers the possibility of practicing either in the form of independent practice or group practice. It does not require props or ample space to be adapted to everyone. Due to its simplicity and economy, it is accessible to anyone who wants to practice it, and it is possible to integrate it into various systems. Programs based on the application of meditation in schools and kindergartens and the inclusion of meditative techniques in the curriculum can be one of the ways to reduce symptoms in many disorders and dysfunctional behaviors, so teachers, educators, psychologists, and pedagogues must begin to explore its application in education, i.e., educational institutions and educate themselves about its potentials. Through meditation, the individual delves into their thoughts and their inner self and discovers that everything they need is, in fact, in themselves. Encouraged to meditate, children introduce themselves to all their flaws and virtues and learn how to deal with different situations, knowing that whatever they go through will pass quickly. This way of thinking leads to a fulfilled life, and happy and self-confident children are the goal we strive to achieve.

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Viktorija Rubčić (Hrvatska)

Fakultet za odgojne i obrazovne znanosti, Sveučilište J. J. Strossmayera u Osijeku
viktorijarubcic2@gmail.com

Ivica Kelam (Hrvatska)

Fakultet za odgojne i obrazovne znanosti, Sveučilište J. J. Strossmayera u Osijeku
kelamivica@gmail.com

PRIMJENJIVOST MEDITATIVNIH TEHNIKA U OBRAZOVNIM USTANOVAMA

Sažetak

Svrha je ovog rada istražiti različite meditativne tehnike i njihove dobrobiti, te otvoriti raspravu o primjenjivosti meditativnih tehnika u odgojno-obrazovnim ustanovama. Mogućnost primjene meditativnih tehnika kao pomoć pri razvijanju sposobnosti samokontrole i regulaciji emocija, kao i oblik prevencije problematičnog ponašanja kod djece. Odgoj započinje u obitelji i tu nastaju temelji za izgradnju djetetove ličnosti. Društvena zajednica i okolina koja nas okružuje pridonose onome što ćemo mi postati. Različite religije imaju svoja načela odgoja, a s obzirom na porijeklo meditacije istražiti ćemo mogućnost njene primjene u duhovnom odgoju. Prikazati ćemo nekoliko meditativnih tehnika i njihovu povezanost s emocijama, te na koji način mogu pomoći djeci, kao i pozitivne aspekte primjene meditativnih tehnika u različitim disfunkcionalnim ponašanjima. Na samom kraju sagledati ćemo kako i na koji način se primjenjuju meditativne tehnike u svijetu, te kakva je i gdje se javlja primjena meditativnih tehnika kod djece u Hrvatskoj.

Ključne riječi: djeca, emocije, odgoj, primjena meditativnih tehnika