

Small and deep

One of the gifts of this year with the Yehudi Menuhin Foundation and the Relaciona project has been the work developed in the Valdemera school with several groups of children between six and eleven years old. We have held twelve sessions during school hours with the continuous presence of tutors.

1. Breathing and crazy monkey

The first phase includes four sessions.

From the first sessions they showed interest in the meditative practice and were able to remain in the proposed meditative position for approximately four minutes.

We begin to introduce the students to the contact with **breathing**, tuning into a state of silence and inner and outer tranquility.

We connected with the inner and outer silence **while our head kept talking. To become aware of this mental chatter, we baptized it as Mono Loco.**

From first to sixth grade, everyone knew the monkey very well and knew how to step back and return to the present moment.

This practice is the basis of meditation and they were quickly implementing it not only in the sessions but also in the rest of the classes.

This step led them to be able to differentiate when they were present and connected to their body and when there was a physical and spatial disconnection.

After the initial meditation we started working with theater exercises trying to maintain the state of connection.

When Mono Loco took control we would step back to return to the shared present.

The noise level decreased and they became familiar with a more relaxed and respectful classroom environment.

2. Body sensations and stage presence.

In this second phase we have combined stage presence and "**sensations**" in the meditative area. **Thus, through theatrical exercises where the body is more awake, the students have been identifying bodily sensations, which is one of the first objects of meditation.**

why is the awakening of sensations in the body important?

In meditative practice, the state of connection with the present and the body helps us to be aware of what we feel in each moment. The bodily sensations that we identify give us clear

clues of how we feel, thus giving us the first step to a better emotional management.

When Mono Loco took control, the students could not connect with what they really felt, but rather with what they thought they were supposed to feel. This disconnection with the body led them to be more irritable and have more dysfunctional individual and group behaviors.

We have worked on the awakening of sensations in the body through looking into the eyes, walking through the space while the group observes us and hugging. In these exercises it has become latent that we felt many things that we did not know how to name but we could point with our hand in which part of the body was the sensation; the throat, the pit of the stomach, the chest...

We have done the "**Sensation Test**" many times **until the body has woken up and it has become possible to feel sensations more easily on a daily basis.**

They have used names to define them very descriptive; to have in the throat land with water and even point out the amounts of solids or liquidity of the same ... water with bubbles, water, water with fire

Finally, in the "sensation test" I worked on whether the sensations were pleasant or unpleasant and how we related to those sensations. It became evident that when we connected with the sensation and opened a friendly space for it, the sensation stopped dragging us into silly laughter, uncontrolled

movements...we could walk through the space upright and slowly, look each other in the eyes without laughing hysterically or really hug each other. So little by little an "emotional authenticity" was generated in the group, and this may have been due to the descent **from the mental to the emotional.**

3. The birth of empathy.

The work with silence and sensations led to **empathy** being born by itself. The groups opened up to an intimacy where each member bared his or her emotionality. The class became an intimate space.

They all had similar feelings, and they observed how these feelings were related to the obstacles of everyday life.

When a classmate cried or showed emotions, we all stood in a circle and from a real emotion (not just stated) we sent respect and affection to the classmate.

4. From sensation to emotion

In the next block we will try to put names to our sensations.

How did the sand make us feel in our throat, or the heat in the pit of our stomach?

A fourth grade girl, after doing a meditation that connected us with the chest, described her experience: *first I wanted to feel my chest, but I saw myself all the time in my head and it (the head) told me that I was very well, very happy... I realized that it was the*

monkey and I went down little by little to my heart and then I knew that I was sad.

This step has opened up a richness and an enormous degree of sincerity among the students. During five classes we have worked on the expression between sensations and emotions.

There was a lot of sadness, agitation and fear and we have seen how emotions are not black and white but at the same time we could have joy and also some sadness. We have seen how there were strong taboos in relation to "negative" emotions.

The work we have done in this direction has been:

- Begin to break emotional taboos. Normalize emotional fluctuation and the appearance of "heavier states".
- Observing the relationship between sensation and emotion

The physical body of love

Following the method of joining basic meditative techniques and theater exercises we have investigated the physical sensations that connect with loving and empathic emotional states.

We have danced, drawn, sung and investigated the sensations associated with those moments of joy. we have moved from that feeling...

They have all agreed that **love is synonymous with space**. The sensations that lead to fear, agitation, used to be described as dense sensations that closed the body.

On the other hand, when we connected with bliss, the arms opened in large circles to express the inner state.

Finally, we practiced evoking simple phrases such as "may it fill me with love, above and below, around and everywhere".

With this simple practice we have discovered that evoking loving states is not always easy. In most classes, we found children who felt unable to feel love. Moreover, when trying to evoke an empathic state towards themselves, bitter and judgmental voices were highlighted.

A fourth grade girl with a history of family abuse expressed it this way: *I cannot feel love when we meditate and I say the words.... There is a voice that tells me that I have no right to feel love, that I have never done anything right in my life, that I have no right to anything.*

Her words sounded like those of an adult. It seemed that the gaze of the mother, a victim of abuse, had been introjected into the child and that voice came out in meditation as she tried to connect with love for herself.

Another child said surprised - *but when we do this meditation I just think I'm stupid, I'm stupid...* - it is a typical effect of this meditation, to highlight the state of self-esteem.

This was a breakthrough because we became aware of the state of our self-esteem and from there it was easier to work. Almost all of us discovered that we have that little judging voice.

How do we relate to our emotions?

In the last two sessions we worked on basic meditation techniques to relate to our emotions through experiencing the **transitory nature** of sensations and emotions.

The taboo of emotions, the rejection of emotions and the belief that they will never go away (that they are permanent) are often the unconscious beliefs that we pass on from generation to generation.

In the sessions we were breaking those taboos, and changing the way of approaching sensations/emotions. We tried to open the space and generate an attitude of investigation and calm towards our emotional world.

One of the keys was to investigate the transient state of sensations, how they sometimes moved rapidly and changed within the body.

We gave small examples; sensations, thoughts and emotions pass like clouds in the sky.

On the other hand, we investigated how our positioning to sensation and emotion was important.

Conclusions

Students developed a wisdom of their own through connecting with their emotions.

By becoming more aware of their internal states, they increased empathy and improved group coexistence.

They became more aware of their personal obstacles and developed tools to smooth out heavy emotional states.

According to the teachers, there were numerous cases of improvement in learning, and this improvement could be related to the development of emotional management.