

The Swedish Association for Contemplation in Education and Research

– A collaboration with researchers from various faculties using meditation as contemplative inquiry on research questions

Osika Walter¹, Stenfors Cecilia², Bojner-Horwitz Eva³, Taloyan Marina¹, Baltzer Maria¹, Zajonc Arthur⁴

1) Stress Research Institute, Stockholm University

2) Department of Psychology, Stockholm University

3) Department of Public Health and Caring Sciences, Uppsala University

4) Physics Department, Amherst College, Amherst, MA, USA

Participants have been able to apply their meditative experiences directly to their ongoing research projects. We find that subjective or first-person reports show increased insight after meditation.

Background

The effects of different meditative practices have been the object of an increasing number of studies using various techniques such as psychological measurements and brain imaging (i.e. third person perspective, with external measurements). The first person perspective available through meditative introspection has been less used. By adopting a scientific, phenomenological approach to experiences that arise during meditation, and also use qualitative interview techniques, new insights can contribute to the research process of the meditative researcher.

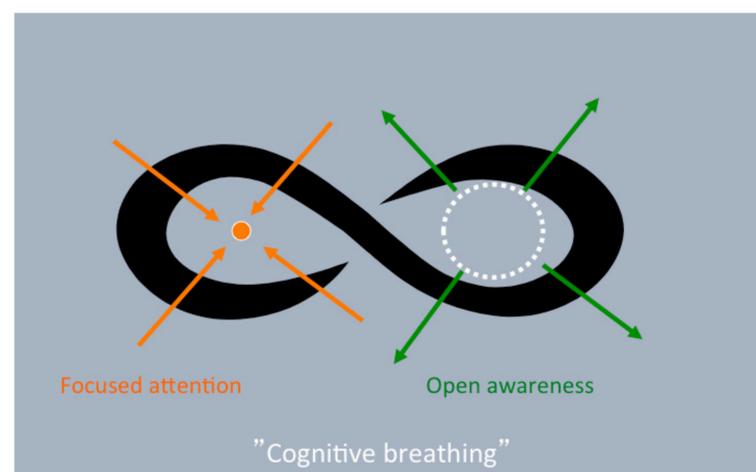
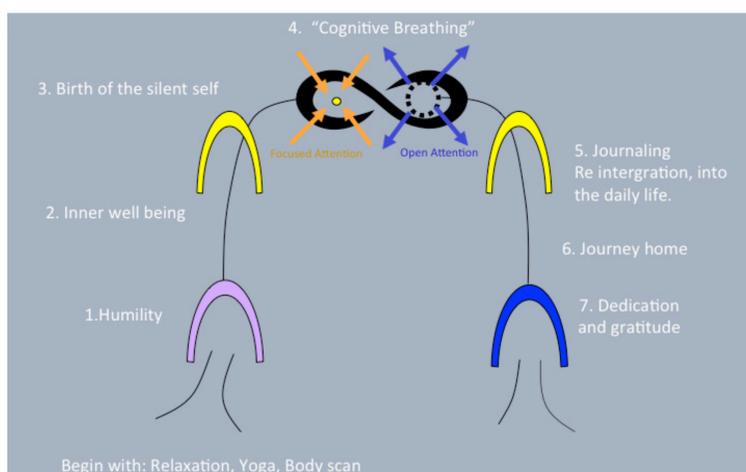
Using meditation as a form of contemplative inquiry, a new research methodology has been developed over the last several years among a network of researchers from various disciplines, mainly in the Stockholm area.

Methods

Researchers (n=15-20) have met monthly (10 times) during the last year. At these sessions they have practiced different contemplative exercises designed to:

- 1) Deepen and clarify their understanding of their research questions, and
- 2) To explore mental and emotional processes directly.

The research method practiced within the group stays close to the varied phenomena that arise in meditation and resists the tendency to see them as neural mechanisms only. Journaling has been used to document and explore the meditative content and also as a way to track the development of the different researchers' projects during the year. Semi structured interviews have been performed in order to identify helpful and aggravating elements/components of the group meditations.



Results & Discussion

It is possible to use meditation as means of contemplative inquiry in a group of independent but mutually supportive researchers. Participants have been able to apply their meditative experiences directly to their ongoing research projects. We find that subjective or first-person reports show increased insight after meditation, e.g. identifying personal, relational emotional processes that interfere with research aims and progress, and thus being able to handle these, finding new angles on research problems and possible solutions. Better stress management skills have also been reported.

However, since one of the tasks of the meditation is to produce new insights in the participants own research projects, an element of performance demands and competition has been present in the process. This might hinder and discourage an atmosphere of mutual trust and safety which is essential for the creative processes which are aimed for. Such aspects that complicate the process should be observed and managed carefully. The results on the different components / elements of first-person perspectives on practicing contemplative inquiry in research should be studied in a systematic, phenomenological way.

CONTACT