INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

DIDACTIC REFERENCES – SECONDARY LEVEL II

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to . . .

1. name and distinguish the characteristics, effects and goals of Buddhist meditation.
2. place the effects of Buddhist meditation in the context of scientific research.
3. relate their theoretical knowledge to the practical experience of Buddhist meditation.
4. reflect on whether and to what extent Buddhist meditations can have a practical benefit in everyday life.

INTRODUCTION

The teacher projects **Material 1** using a suitable medium, which motivates the students to express their prior knowledge and assumptions about meditation. A quotation from neuroscience offers a further incentive. In the class discussion, a first approach to the topic of meditation takes place.

EXERCISE

In the following, the knowledge about Buddhist meditation is worked out by the students in individual and group work on the basis of **Material 2**. According to the three Buddhist paths Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana there are the variants 2 A, 2 B, 2 C, whereby basic statements about meditation are identical, a last part differentiates according to the three paths. On the corresponding **Worksheet 1 A, 1 B, 1 C** the results are entered.

The students divide into several groups of four, each choosing one of the three topics. In each group, the students first work individually on the corresponding material and worksheet, followed by an exchange in the group of four:

- **Material 2 A and Worksheet 1 A:**
  Meditation on the Way of the Old Ones / Theravada
- **Material 2 B and Worksheet 1 B:**
  Meditation in the Great Way / Mahayana
- **Material 2 C and Worksheet 1 C:**
  Meditation in the Diamond Way / Vajrayana

In addition, each group receives another copy of the respective worksheet in preparation for the presentation, in order to record the cleaned-up results after the exchange process in the group. The results are presented orally in the plenary.

The **Answers to WS 1** (identical for A, B, C), which is handed out as a copy, is compared and saved so that all students now have an overview of the three paths.

RESEARCH

Note: If there is not much time, it is a good idea to skip this section and try a simple Buddhist meditation right away (see APPLICATION).

The students research the results of scientific studies on the effects of meditation on the Internet. They distinguish between physiological and psychological effects.

Note: In the Buddhist context the goals of meditation are liberation and enlightenment, in the scientific context it is mostly about stress management and processes in the brain.

Depending on the technical equipment of the school and the size of the course, internet research can be done individually or in small groups. It is also possible to have a research assignment in the form of homework.

Possible sources:

Englisch:

- *http://www.investigatinghealthyminds.org/*
- *http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2840837/*
- *http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1361002/*
- *http://www.hindawi.com/journals/ecam/2012/350674/*

SECURING KNOWLEDGE

Two large posters or flipchart papers are hung up. The headings for the posters are: "physiological effects" (related to the processes in the body) and "psychological effects". The students write their researched results in bullet points on the posters; relevant phenomena are pointed out and clarified in the class discussion, taking into account the findings from **Worksheet 1 A, B, C**.

The following results about possible effects of Buddhist meditation are only a selection.

PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS	PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS
• Decreasing blood pressure, slower breathing and heart activity, tone (tension) of skeletal muscles decreases. • Abnormalities in EEG (brain wave measurement) and MRI (brain structure imaging) in meditators. • Gamma (y) waves are stronger and more widely organized, testify to high mental activity, concentration and attention are increased, presumed connection to human consciousness. • Gray matter in the brain increases especially in the left anterior part of the cerebral cortex (orbitofrontal cortex) (situation-appropriate action control and regulation of emotional processes). • In general, the brain structure of the areas trained by the focus of meditation (e.g., on self-awareness, on compassion/love or attention) changes. • More density of brain structure in the hippocampus: these regions are responsible for learning and for storing memories, but also for the development of self-awareness and compassion. • Immune system: the activity of cells after weakening or illness normalizes through meditation.	• General well-being, relaxation, stress reduction. • Dealing with chronic pain and severe organ disease: Pain and suffering are perceived as less intense and less unpleasant. • Cognitive abilities (attention, concentration, clear thinking, learning) are improved, anxiety and restlessness are reduced. • Control of emotional processes (awareness and mindfulness): conscious awareness of bodily needs as well as feelings, thoughts, impulses and actions is improved (this involves only observing and then letting go, breaking chains of thoughts). A small gap is created between a stimulus and the reaction to it, one gets distance to one's feelings and understands that they are transient: thus, a (harmful) behavior pattern does not have to run automatically, but the reaction to a stimulus can be co-created. • One feels less like a victim of external circumstances and more like a shaper of one's life. • Not only is stress reduced, but a resistance to stress is developed (stress resistance). • Compassion, love and goodwill, feelings of gratitude and contentment are increased. • Likewise, the ability to empathize with other living beings (empathy) increases.

APPLICATION

The students are given the opportunity to have a hands-on experience with a Buddhist meditation. **Material 3** offers two variations, the first of which is a bit more difficult. When conducting meditations with students, the teacher's sensitivity and also his assessment of the class are required. As a general rule, participation in all meditation exercises is voluntary. If individual students do not wish to participate, they are given the opportunity to simply watch - as long as this does not disturb the students who wish to meditate - or to engage in other activities in another room.
Students sit on their chairs in meditation posture. It is important that their backs are as straight as possible. The teacher reads the meditation text aloud and the students simply follow what the teacher reads. It is advisable to take small breaks between the paragraphs so that the students can better visualize the text.

NOTES

Every experience is individual. The usual tendency is for students to vacillate in their minds between the past and the future, or to think of another place. The trick is to stay in the here and now. It is important not to judge a meditation and at the same time to let each thought pass instead of attaching another thought to the first, etc. Perhaps in conclusion there is a need to talk about the experience, but this should not get out of hand, it is simply about the experience.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Worksheet 2 builds on the positive effects of meditation that have already been developed. In group work, the students find concrete everyday situations and reflect on possible practical effects of meditation. They are asked to reflect to what extent difficult situations change when one meditates regularly and reacts differently. The effects on the environment should also be included. In the class discussion the results are introduced. **Answers to WS 2** offer possible solutions.

NOTES

In short form, results are presented here in case the students have not done the research on the Internet. Regardless of a particular spiritual path, meditation exercises have positive effects that show up in daily life. The experience of everyday life changes when one meditates regularly. Possible repercussions can be seen above all in increasing relaxation, which can also be seen in the increase of joy and compassion in the environment.

- The ability to concentrate is increased; one can persistently deal with a matter without being distracted.
- One gets distance from mood swings and disturbing feelings. One gets angry, jealous, etc., but can contemplate the feeling without immediately reacting with words and actions.
- One can relax in a very short time, relieve stress

and then be fit for new activities.

- Meditation can have a positive effect on numerous disorders such as nervousness, sleep disorders, anxiety, etc.
- Awareness and mindfulness develop, one becomes more aware of one's own feelings, thoughts and reaction patterns and can therefore deal with them more appropriately. At the same time, you become more mindful of what is going on around you. This can be very useful especially in interpersonal interactions.