

## MEDITATION WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

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Recently I experienced a time of great stress and change in my family life and felt a need for a stable means to center myself. I became interested in meditation and received some instruction in breathing and focussing exercises from an experienced meditator who introduced me to concentration and insight techniques. She told me to focus my attention on a center point between the eyebrows in the middle of my forehead. I practiced this every evening for six months and noticed a gradually increasing awareness of bodily relaxation, greater insight into my feelings and emotions, and a recognition of what seems to be an inner wisdom.

As I began to feel the benefits of this exercise, I included my children, then ages six and eight, in a nightly meditation. The three of us usually prepared for bedtime with a short meditation and meditated together enough on a regular basis to sense the importance of this "quiet time." They liked it, and it seemed to have been a source of strength for them in a difficult year. I also gained a deeper understanding of them and their feelings and felt that our relationship broadened immensely,

*beginning  
meditation*

As a result of this experience, I considered using meditation with my incoming class of 25 normal and highly gifted kindergarteners (I work as an elementary school teacher and high school counselor). My assumption was that it could help the children become more aware of their inner lives, while helping me to better perceive and know them.

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This study is based on research with the Kindergarten Class of 81. Augustine by-the-Sea School, September 1976-June 1977. An earlier version of this report was presented at the Children of the New Age conference, Fullerton, California, May 20, 1978.

Before school started that September, I tried several different meditations, first with myself and then with my own children. I chose a simple beginning meditation from Deborah Rozman's book, *Meditation for Children* (1976, p. 64), and taped it so that I could learn how to pace the instructions when actually working with a group of young children. Their breath rate is different from mine and I had to take that into consideration. My own children were very helpful in this respect; they were able to tell me afterward that I had either gone too fast or too slow and I could sense their reactions from the shift in their bodily positions. Taping and listening to several meditations also helped to improve the rhythm of my instructions.

*offering  
meditation  
in the  
school  
setting*

The week prior to the opening of school gave me the opportunity to share my ideas about meditation with the administration and faculty of our school, and to offer instruction in meditation. This was a very valuable experience-my first with a group exceeding three people. Their feedback was helpful; for example, I was still talking too fast. Many teachers sensed the value of meditation, but were dubious about how to fit it into their own schedule and were uneasy trying something so new to them. Two teachers, who had been interested in "centering," asked how to begin with their own classes and decided they would start. We discussed how we would broach the subject to parents, and I told them that I had decided to use the term "centering exercises." This was a more specific description of the exercises than "meditation." Also, the school, St. Augustine's, is non-sectarian, serving families of diversified religious backgrounds, and I did not wish to advocate or appear to advocate an ideology, religion, or identification with a guru or organization.

*a  
non-  
sectarian  
approach*

*the  
classroom  
environment*

We began meditating with the children from the first day onward, at the same time daily. Our school session ran from 8:45 to 3:00. On the first two days of school, only half the class was in attendance each day. The room itself was very bright, colorful, and open, with three large tables for art, math manipulatives, and writing activities, a library corner, listening center, housekeeping unit, large manipulative play area, and two smaller centers. I chose to begin our meditation at 9:00 because many children wander in between 8:45 and 9:00. During this interim period the children looked around the room, discovered our class rabbit, "Sophie," and our newts and salamanders, and some children were reunited with old friends from nursery school. My assistant, Jill, and I helped them get acquainted with the room and the other children. They were generally very excited but appeared apprehensive. At 9:00, I turned out the overhead lights, explained to them that this was their signal to stop all activity, to be quiet, and to listen. I told

them that it was time to sit on the edge of the rug. When we were all seated, we each introduced ourselves by saying our name and something we liked to do. Many children went on at length about knowing classmates from nursery school and that was why they were not scared. Others stated that they knew everything about the school from their older brother or sister. Those who knew no one looked worried and uneasy. I then told them that, before giving them a tour of the classroom, we were going to do something together called "quiet time."

I briefly explained that during most of the day they would be talking with others, playing, painting, building structures, their minds and bodies busy with an activity, and that there were very few moments in which they could be still, listening to themselves. I mentioned that "quiet time" was an important activity to me, one that I wanted to share with them. I explained that we would sit crosslegged, with our backs straight, our eyes closed, in our own place, hands palms up on our knees, and I demonstrated the position. I stressed that they must not intrude into anyone else's quiet time by touching, giggling, talking or moving about. It was important for them to respect their friends' desire to be quiet and peaceful.

*first-  
day  
instructions*

I asked them to get ready to begin and explained that I would be telling them to take a deep breath through their nose (inhaling) to the count of three; that we would hold it to the count of three, and then let the air out slowly, to the count of three. I told them that I would then instruct them to tense, or squeeze, certain muscles in their bodies. When we were relaxed and peaceful, I would ask them to think about, or concentrate on, a picture in their mind that I would suggest.

The first time we meditated together, I could sense that they could not keep their eyes closed, and they had difficulty keeping their breathing unexaggerated. They seemed to sense that this was an important activity, however, because most of the group remained quiet and a few actually tried the muscle relaxation exercises. When we finished, I asked the children if anyone wanted to share with the group what they had experienced during our "quiet time" or how they felt. The answers were sparse, but we had started.

*first-  
day  
responses*

I kept my eyes closed during all of our meditations as I felt my example was important to the process. I realized that it is difficult for young children to keep their eyes closed for more than a minute, but it was important for them to learn how to focus their attention inwardly if they were to become familiar with their inner life. Our first meditations lasted between three and five minutes.

On the third day of school, all of the children were present and we again began our day with a short quiet time. Our space was limited, but I emphasized the importance to them of sitting in their own spot, not touching, or in any other way interfering with each other's time to be with themselves. Meditating daily at 9:00 on a consistent basis aided the learning process.

*early  
comments  
by the  
children*

When I turned out the lights, the children learned to come to the rug, sit in a circle, and get ready to start. I noticed very early in the year that our quiet time had meaning for them; the children became very peaceful, concerned and caring about each other. As we came together, one could hear, "Where's Julianna?" and another would answer, "Oh, it's all right, she's probably only late." Or "Where's Devin? She wasn't feeling good yesterday." Their awareness of each other and of themselves expanded greatly. After several interruptions by late-comers, the children discussed and decided by themselves that those who were late could not come into the classroom until after the quiet time because it would interfere with and disrupt others.

Children also made suggestions to me, e.g., "Your voice is too low," "You make us hold our breath too long," "Use 'bottom' instead of 'buttocks'!"

During the first two months, the children reported that it was hard for them to *sit* still with their eyes closed, so I kept the meditation between three and five minutes. As we progressed, meditating as a group became more important to them, and during our time of discussion they would tell those children who talked or poked them that they were "interfering" with their quiet time. Those children thereafter responded positively to their friends' wishes of non-interference.

#### *MEDITATIVE TECHNIQUES AND CHILDREN'S RESPONSES*

Formal, directed or structured meditation is useful as a way of thinking about or perceiving, as well as doing, one thing at a time. Each meditation began with the same basic breath and relaxation exercise:

Find a comfortable spot. Sit up straight with your legs crossed, and with your hands palms up on your knees. *Now* close your eyes. Close your mouth and breathe in through your nose to the count of three (one ... two ... three ... ) and hold your breath to the count of three (one two ... three ... ); exhale to the count of (one ... two ... three ... ). Breathe in again to the count of three (repeating

this breathing exercise three times). Now breathe the way you normally do, concentrating on your breathing, being as still and quiet as you possibly can. In ... and ... out ... in ... and ... out. Now we are going to tense the muscles in our body. Each time we tense a muscle, we breathe out. Now squeeze (the children liked the word "squeeze" better than "tense") the muscles in your toes and feet, squeeze ... squeeze ... hold it ... and let it go. Squeeze the muscles in your legs, your calves and your thighs ... hold it ... and let them go. Squeeze the muscles in your bottoms and pelvic area ... hold it in ... and let them go. Squeeze the muscles in your stomach hold it and let them go. Squeeze the muscles in your chest hold it and let them go. Squeeze the muscles in your shoulders ... hold it ... and let them go. Squeeze the muscles in your arms, hands and fingers ... making a fist ... hold it ... and very slowly let them go. Squeeze the muscles in your neck and face: eyes, nose and mouth ... now hold it ... and let them go. Now your whole body is relaxed and quiet; you have let out all of your tension. Just sit quietly and go deep inside yourself:"

After these preliminary breath and relaxation exercises, I would continue with one of various directed meditations or "guided images":

*directed  
meditation*

#### WAVE MEDITATION

Imagine you are a wave on the sea going up ... and ... down ... up ... and ... down ... as you breathe in ... and, .. out ... in ... and ... out. Imagine how you feel, what you see (after a minute's silence I would continue). Now concentrate again on your breathing. (After 30 seconds) I'm going to count slowly to the count of three and when you are ready slowly open your eyes (one ... two ... three ... ) (Rozman, 1976, p. 65).

After all the children had opened their eyes I would usually ask if anyone had anything to share with the rest of the group. The following are some responses from February:

"I felt like I was surfing on top of the wave ... it's fun ... I'm laying on my surfboard."

"I'm all different colored waves."

"My wave was green, blue, and red ... when a bigger wave came I became black, white and red."

"When I was a wave I saw rainbow colors as the ocean."

"I felt cold and then I got all warm."

We ended our meditation by focussing our attention on our normal rate of breathing and slowly opening our eyes to the count of three.

A favorite of the children's was the following:

CIRCLE AND DOT MEDITATION

Still with your eyes closed, concentrate on the center between your eyebrows inside your head. Now in that center put a dot ... and around the dot put a circle. You are the dot and the circle is the world around you. Notice what color your dot is ... notice what color your circle is. Now put love in your dot with you, Fill your dot with love. The more you love the bigger your dot gets ... bigger ... bigger ... and bigger until it is one with the circle. Now look and see what color the circle is. Has it changed? .. , is it the same? (Rozman, 1975,p. 74).

*sharing  
experiences*

The children loved to share their experiences of this meditation. The following responses are from February:

"My dot was pink and my circle yellow and when it got bigger outside it became rainbow colors."

"My dot was black and my circle green and they grew as big as this room."

"I saw a whole bunch of circles, Inside the dot was green and outside was red and then it all turned white."

"Mine was silver and grey and then it all turned white,"

"My dot was yellow and my circle blue and when it got bigger it turned into all the colors of the rainbow."

Responses from March:

"My dot was light pink and the circle was red and blue. The dot got bigger and bigger and changed to a lighter color until it was a large ball of white light. Like a balloon."

"My dot was red and my circle light blue and when it got bigger it turned around, Moving slower and slower."

"My dot was pink and it shrunk."

"My dot was lonely, then the sun came up and it got happier. There was a rainbow around it and flowers began to grow,"

*instructor  
responses*

I must admit that I never saw any colors myself other than a black dot which turned into a ball of white light, which overwhelmed me with a deep sense of peace. I was skeptical of the children's responses until another adult who was a consistent meditator sat in with us and reported experiencing a myriad of colors.

WHITE LIGHT MEDITATION

Imagine a beautiful waterfall of white light entering through the top of your head. Now it is pouring into your face ... your eyes .. your nose .. your mouth ... over your chin ... down your neck and chest .. down your arms and hands. The white light flows into your stomach ... your bottom ... your thighs ... knees, .. and calves. Now it is entering your feet and going out through your toes. Now you are a waterfall of white light .. , every part of your

body is filled with white light. Stay in this peace for awhile ... concentrating on the white light (Rozman, 1975, p. 80).

Some of the responses recorded in February were as follows:

"I felt the waterfall going all the way down to my toes."

"The white light followed the waterfall and I had a wet feeling."

"The waterfall went all the way down to my knees and then there was a block. It wouldn't go any further." (We later discussed that this might be because she was sitting crosslegged and, if she wanted to, she could sit with legs outstretched.)

"The waterfall came down and splashed up and down and it kept going over and over from my head to my toes,"

"I felt the waterfall of light going down the back of my legs and it joined the rain and it all became one."

The following *energy meditation* (Rozman, 1975, P:76) is also appropriate for adults. I eliminate the muscle relaxation exercise and start first with the breath exercise.

*energy  
meditation*

#### ENERGY MEDITATION

Now concentrate on your toes ... really feel your toes ... now feel them disappear into light. No toes, only light. Feel your feet ... really concentrate on them ... now let them go ... feel them disappear into light. Feel your legs, feel their heaviness, now let them go, feel them disappear into light. Feel your bottom, feel the weight of your body on your seat ... now let it go ... feel it disappear into light. Feel your stomach ... let it go ... feel it disappear into light. Feel your chest ... let it go ... feel it disappear into light. Feel your arms and hands ... your fingers ... now let them go, ... feel them disappear into light. Feel your shoulders and neck ... now let them go ... feel them disappear into light. Feel your chin and mouth ... your cheeks and nose ... now let them go and disappear into light. Feel your eyes and forehead ... now let them go and disappear into light. Feel the top of your head and now your whole head disappears into light. Now there is no body, only light. Now in that stillness, go deep inside the real you, that which is you without your body. (I would sometimes add "and ask the question 'who am I?' ")

**In** November, the responses of the children were as follows: "I felt like I was floating in the air." "I felt like I dissolved part by part." "I looked down from the ceiling and saw my body here." "I felt like I was in a helicopter," "... like I was swimming under water," "... like I was in a parachute,"

Later in the year (February) the responses changed: "My hands were beating and [ was tingling." "I was tingling all over." "I felt warm, then tingling, then weightless." "A piece of turquoise was inside me in the middle and as my body disappeared into light the turquoise got bigger and bigger."

### Responses from April:

"When my arm disappeared, it felt as though I was falling asleep."  
"When everybody was quiet, I felt blood rushing through my body."  
"I became very warm and my body disappeared, I was quiet, dark, peaceful; and then there were lots of colors; rich, warm bright colors, purples, yellows, greens. I felt very peaceful and relaxed. I am the nucleus of a cell. I am the world."  
"The white light was real big like a wave. Air added onto it and it went through my body. The wave went through my body. The light went away like night and I started to feel cold,"

### Responses from late May:

"I had lights all around me ... I was shimmering with white light and then I started to get warmer and warmer and hotter and hotter and I started to sweat. When we stopped I started to get cold."  
"I like it cause I always feel warm at quiet time."  
"I started to tingle all over and when I stopped tingling my whole body went away."  
"I saw Sophie (our rabbit) vanish into white light."  
"When it came up to my neck, it went back down and I couldn't let go of my head,"  
"When you said to feel your body again, each part of my body that I put back started to get warmer,"  
"When all of my body vanished into white light, I felt there was a rainbow going all over me."  
"When I was a raindrop of white light, I was smiling. When I went down, there was more of me because there were lots of other raindrops and when it stopped there was a smiling sun and it was David (his best friend)."  
"When I asked who I was, I answered that I was 'Sophie'. "  
"When I asked who I was, I answered that I was a rainbow."  
"When I asked who I was, I answered I'm way down in my body."

*consistent  
body  
sensations*

In this particular meditation the children almost always reported, in different ways, a warm, tingling sensation in the presence of the white light as their body disappeared, and a cold sensation as they again focused on their normal breathing and became one again with their bodies. (Deep relaxation is usually accompanied by a sensation of generalized bodily warmth due to the psychological perception of vasodilation in the peripheral arteries [Pelletier, 1977, P:230].)

I did not always ask the children to share their experiences and never asked anyone who did not volunteer. I also rarely commented on their responses except to clarify what I did not



understand. As the year progressed, our meditations became longer (they lasted 15-20 minutes in May and June), and our periods of silence after the spoken guided imagery increased in length. The children also took longer to end their quiet time. They reported fewer images, and many more physiological changes: "I felt warm and tingly" ... "I could feel my heart-beat slowing down" ... "My breathing got so quiet I couldn't hear it" ... "I felt peaceful" ... "I felt very light" ... "I felt *love*" ... "I felt relaxed."

We meditated on many different themes, often in concurrence with the state of the weather that day or our subject matter; e.g., a raindrop sliding down a flower petal, the wind, a cloud, a ring of water in a pool, becoming a rocket ship, a monarch butterfly, a sea anemone opening and closing, a ladybug on a blade of grass, a bird flying, a seed being nurtured by the sun. We identified with many aspects of our "oneness" with nature and each other. One particular meditation often requested by the children was the "Wagon Wheel" in which we lay on our backs, feet in the center of the circle, our bodies the spokes of the wheels and our heads the rim. We would then imagine moving first to the left and then to the right to "move" the wheel.

We often chanted the "am" and the children's first reaction to it was one of self-conscious giggles. They soon, however, joined in and filled the room with vibrations that stilled their minds and laughter. The "om" was effective especially when the children were restless or unable to focus on an image. At times we would sit in the meditative posture and quietly listen to *Music for Zen Meditation* (Verve) which is soothing and peaceful. Anyone who has listened to the sound of the waves crashing on the beach or to the sound of a waterfall high in the mountains, knows the calm meditative effect such sounds have.

*using  
"om"  
and  
music*

I found that it was necessary for me to be aware of the tone of the group each day and to adapt to it. I observed that my voice tone and speed had an impact on the children's concentration, as did my mood. The weather would often affect our quiet time. Coughs, sneezes, and sniffles could often set off a wave of the same. One restless child could ruin it for all, so I would sit next to that child if I sensed the restlessness before we started. I would make an effort to separate particularly chatty friends or would ask children, "Do you think you can sit next to ... today?" Eventually, they would volunteer without my asking: "I need to move. I can't sit next to ... and concentrate!"

Meditation can be considered initially as an attempt to turn off conceptual activity temporarily, to shut off input processing for a period of time, and to take a vacation from the external environment. A result of turning off our input selection system is that when we reintroduce the same input later, we see it differently, with a new perception (Naranjo, 1971, p. 193). We attain another way of perceiving and relating to reality and begin to grow toward a new comprehension of a way of being in the world (LeShan, 1974, p. 27).

*children  
respond  
in the  
moment*

Listening to the children's responses to our meditations, it became evident that they see things the way they appear to adult poets and visionaries, brimming with light and color, growing and changing. They do not react automatically to their environment. The commonplace is new and alive to them. They also do not worry about the past or future; they are living in the present, a state in which everything that is happening in the present moment enters into awareness.

Although factors other than meditation may have contributed, my assistant and I noticed the children's concentration on tasks immediately following meditation became longer and more intense as the months progressed. They increased their ability to shut out distractions. Their use of color in their art projects became more intense, free and alive. Many drew or painted intricate mandalas, or worked them out in clay. They began to treat each other with more concern, interest, and love. "If I know that you and I are both one, that we are not separated and that I am not only my brother's keeper, but also my brother, I will treat you as I treat myself-with care" (LeShan, 1974, p. 37).

*implications  
of  
using  
meditation  
in the  
classroom*

The implications of using meditation in the classroom are vast. If a child could learn to alter his own physiological responses as he now learns to manipulate his external environment, he might prevent stress and tension from interfering with learning. Behavior problems could be dealt with in a new way by encouraging the child to relax, expand his awareness and find more healthy ways with which to identify himself. Some of the benefits of meditation with children are described by Joseph Morris (1976). "One study of an 18-week course in which a group of disadvantaged urban third graders practiced meditation for 20 to 25 minutes twice a week showed a significant lowering of anxiety and more articulated thinking, although no increase in academic achievement was discovered." Perhaps if the study had been extended on a *daily* basis be-

yond 18 weeks, academic achievement also would have been improved.

We found the use of a short "quiet time" very effective before a problem-solving session involving interpersonal relations. The children became relaxed enough to talk about hurt feelings in a productive manner. They could identify the bothersome behavior of the other child and state clearly why that behavior affected them negatively.

*effects  
on  
interpersonal  
relations*

One example of this repeatedly centered around three girls who were close friends but who manipulated each other as well as other girls who were not part of the triangle.

*Julianna:* "Anya, you really hurt my feelings when you didn't let me play outside with you and Jennifer and Michelle."

*Anya:* "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings but I just didn't want to play with you then,"

*Julianna:* "But you said that I could play with you when we went outside and that really made me feel left out."

*Anya:* "I forgot. You can play with us at lunch."

This level of exchange is unusual for five-year-olds and probably would not have occurred without a quieting process beforehand and the children's trust that their feelings would be heard and responded to.

In late March, we began to videotape our meditation sessions on a once-a-week basis. The videotapes of sessions over a three-month time span showed that the children were quite involved in the meditation. Because my eyes were always closed during the "quiet time," my measure of their involvement was based on their verbal responses at sharing time. Many boys did not share their feelings or images, and I had assumed that they were either not involved in the meditation or were already responding to the cultural tendency for boys to not share feelings. However, I saw (happily) that they were concentrating intensely. Also, three very quiet students who never volunteered information about themselves, their families, their interests, or our current curricula at other group discussion times, consistently shared at quiet time their feelings and very rich images.

*video-  
tape  
confirmation  
of  
concentration*

Meditation could be a self-centered withdrawal. This is the worry of many teachers who strive to build a cohesive group. However, if through meditation both child and teacher learn to increase their awareness, and balance their inner and outer life, then the result is more likely to be a centered-self, with qualities of respect and love for ourselves and others (Easteott, 1969, p. 13).

*self-  
centered  
or  
centered  
self*

*parents  
in the  
classroom*

The parents were informed at the beginning of the year at a parent meeting of my intention to use "centering" exercises at the beginning of each day with the children. I had ten parents who consistently volunteered their time and skill in the classroom each week and some would be present at our "quiet time." They would either participate in the meditation or sit outside the group area, according to what they found comfortable. Many of these parents enjoyed sharing this experience with the class and voiced their own response and appreciation.

Over the course of the year, I was told by three different families that their kindergarten children had spontaneously initiated quiet time at home with the entire family. These children would lead their respective families in the meditation we had done at school that day, or in one they particularly liked. These parents were *very* pleased and felt that it had added a new dimension to their family life. In one of these families I had suggested to the mother that she and her daughter try meditating together, as the child had difficulty focusing on one thing at a time and was in emotional turmoil over a negative classroom experience in a previous school. This child became calmer over the year, and seemed to clarify her sense of self. Several parents who requested additional information, or who had a child whom I felt could benefit from more relaxing time at home, were referred to the Rozman book (1976). I received no negative feedback from these suggestions (There is very little non-sectarian literature on meditation for children. Although Rozman's text is practical in providing exercises, it also includes the author's personal views on education, moral and social values, etc.), Other less extensive meditation suggestions may be found in Hendricks & Wills (1975) and Hendricks & Roberts (1976).

*meditation  
with  
administrators  
and  
other  
teachers*

During the second semester I led a Thursday morning meditation for those administrators and teachers on our faculty who wished to meditate. The director and several teachers came on a consistent basis and we discussed different approaches that worked with our classes. During that time of the year, one teacher was having a very difficult time with her class. They were clique-oriented and extremely negative toward those children not in their group. This teacher used yoga and meditation once a week for the rest of the year and found an enormous change in her class. They became a caring, cohesive unit. Two other teachers had similar results although they were not willing to attribute the change solely to meditation. This is understandable because as teachers we alter our programs to fit our class situations, and it is difficult to attribute change to

anyone program. Nevertheless, meditation seems to have the effect of opening up the young child to a sense of acceptance of self and others that can only prove to be advantageous to the classroom teacher. I also use meditation in the counseling work I do with high school girls and have found it to be very effective in calming their troubled emotional and physical lives and in giving them insights into their problems.

We plan to continue our school meditation program next year, beginning our Wednesday morning faculty meetings with meditation and continuing in the classrooms where teachers are comfortable with this approach.

### *Some Questions and Answers*

I have been asked by many people, teachers, educators, and friends, "Why use meditation with children?" Why spend time sitting quietly when there is so much to learn, so many concepts to be understood, so many improvements in reading and math that are necessary? The following paragraphs attempt to answer some of the questions that teachers may have when they consider beginning meditation with their classes.

*why  
spend  
time  
sitting  
quietly?*

I. Were the children really "meditating"? A general definition of meditation is to "center" or focus one's attention on a particular theme with a corresponding withdrawal of attention from outside stimuli. This usually results in a state of relaxation and heightened alertness. My observation of the children over a nine-month period convinced me that most were, indeed, meditating. There were certainly different levels of concentration and responses, but all of the children seemed to achieve a focused, relaxed state.

*were  
they  
meditating?*

II. If they were meditating, what are the benefits? The most obvious benefit is that the children learn to concentrate on one thing for extended periods of time, which in turn promotes more rapid learning potential. Through consistent meditation the child may expand his awareness and creative imagination. Paul Brandwein, at a conference in Los Angeles on April 30, 1977, entitled "Educating Both Halves of the Brain," encouraged teachers to stop teaching *solely* for intellectual-verbal expression, usually associated with the left hemisphere, and to reduce teacher talking by 5 percent each year. He encouraged teachers to offer a more balanced curriculum which includes activities associated with right hemispheric brain activity such as art, poetry, music, dance, and drama. He also asked the question, "When do we teach love?" To me, meditation is one very strong answer to this question.

*what  
are  
the  
benefits?*

what  
are  
required  
conditions?

### III. What are the required conditions?

1. An atmosphere of love and acceptance, with the awareness that children come to the meditation exercise from different backgrounds and experiences.
2. An atmosphere of patience, realizing that change may occur slowly.
3. An atmosphere of honesty and understanding which will encourage honesty and understanding in the child.
4. A pre-arranged signal with which to begin your meditation, e.g., lights out, a bell, soft music, a gong, the chime of a triangle, etc., depending on the preference of the teacher.
5. A time of preparation. It is important that the children understand that this is an important time for themselves and their friends, and that they must not talk or in any way interfere with anyone else.
6. Consistency. After experimenting with different times, I found that daily meditation, in the morning, at the same time was most effective for the kindergarten age group. (The fifth-sixth grade, ages 11-12, meditated immediately following lunch. The third grade meditated in the morning after physical education.) The time will be dictated by the rhythm of the class, but consistency is vital to the success of group meditation. I particularly liked starting the day together with a few minutes of group silence.
7. Class size. A small group of six or seven is ideal, though most teachers do not have an ideal situation. Once a week I had a split class for one period and was able to meditate with a group of 12 or 13 children. This was a very rich experience, but impossible most of the time. Class size is not as crucial as attitude and consistency. I have meditated with groups of over one hundred high school students at a time, and these have been effective, relaxing, and highly productive experiences.
8. Follow-up. Sharing experiences after a meditation is not imperative, but seems to be very valuable to the children. (They were always disappointed when we did not share.) This can be done verbally or through art, language, or movement experience. It seems to be good to follow up the meditation session with a specific activity.

### IV. How much understanding of meditation is necessary?

I did not have a very clear understanding of meditation. When I began I only knew that it helped me relax and "listen" to myself, skills which are of life-long importance and necessary to personal growth. I learned *from* the children as we went along. However, to provide appropriate instruction

beyond these introductory levels requires more experience and preparation by the teacher. This usually means training with other meditators, as suggested in most meditative traditions (Goleman, 1972).

Anyone may feel uncomfortable and uncertain the first time meditation is attempted, and the important thing is to not be deterred by that. In the process of leading a meditation for others one gradually becomes more comfortable. A useful approach is to *practice with oneself first*.

*practice  
with  
oneself*

If you work with children, above all, *enjoy* meditating with them and don't expect instant success. It is a growth process like any other with both successes and failures. The results will become apparent as you listen to their responses and notice their increasing care and respect for themselves and each other.

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Celestial Arts, 1976. Both Rozman books are appropriate for adults in close contact with children. They explain why meditation is beneficial to children and give many meditation, relaxation, and concentration exercises. *Meditating with children* includes children's yoga exercises and is a handbook in which one can write reactions to particular meditations.

#### RECORDINGS

*The golden age of English lute music.* Julian Bream. RCA.

*Music for Zen meditation* (and other joys). Verve.

*Renaissance of the Celtic harp.* Alan Stivell. Philips.

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