

Teaching Contemplative Practices in Mexico: Towards a Historical Account

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Background and objectives

Contemplative practices might be understood as systematic ways of training the mind which involve meditation such as mindfulness, development of qualities such as loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity, and which also might include forms of contemplation related to religious beliefs and spirituality such as Buddhism. Compared to other countries, little is known about the pioneers who started introducing Buddhism and contemplative practices in Mexico; and no empirical research has been conducted so far. The objectives of this paper are to map the introduction and appropriation of Buddhist philosophy and the implementation of contemplative practices historically in Mexico and to understand how these have influenced the pedagogical approaches of contemporary experts in the field.

Methods

This pilot study comprised conducting open-ended semi-structured interviews with five experts and pioneers in Mexico based on purposive sampling. The data was analysed in light of the pioneers' life histories and according to the archives search and document analysis performed in Mexico.

Results

The preliminary results point out the diversity of approaches regarding the pedagogy currently employed to teach contemplative practices and Buddhism in Mexico which is spread in different settings from Higher Education Institutions such as UNAM and training institutions, to non-profit associations for the general public. The main influx comes from three countries considered as the leaders in the world. For instance, the use of protocolised programmes such as .b and Respira Vida-Breathworks developed in the UK, the MBSR and Compassion training originated in the US and the Eastern influence of Tibetan Buddhism teachings as taught by Dr Alan Wallace and H.H. Dalai Lama.

Discussion

Although the expansion of these practices has grown in the last decade in Mexico, the understanding of the development of this movement is still poor. Thus, the relevance of studying further the implications of different pedagogical approaches in the Mexican population from a historical and critical perspective within social psychology. This paper emphasises how the study of indigenous practices in Mexico (e.g. Shamanism) has been overlooked.

Conclusion

It is imperative to bring attention to underexplored social and cultural aspects of the spread, appropriation and commodification of Buddhism and contemplative practices.