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HATHA-YOGA IN HIGHER EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Hatha yoga is a practice that connects. This connection could be considered metaphorically as a connection between Sun (Ha) and Moon (Tha). It brings together the two elements that seem to be opposites, but at the base they become ONE entity. This connection could refer also to connecting the body and mind. Higher education is generally based on a distinction between mind and body. When we learn sociology or philosophy we are concentrated on the mind and thinking. We deliberate and discuss many issues, including the body but not always using body as an *agency*, or even just remembering body and what it feels¹. The body is thus excluded from our pedagogy. We can say that the body is absent², although it could be used in teaching philosophy of the body, as for example in phenomenology of the body³. During our mental processes, we forget about the body, and when suddenly we become aware of it, it is usually because it is tired, in pain or shivering, and it becomes an obstacle for the thought processes in such a state. Generally, we aim to make conclusions only from mental assumptions, mental deduction, or mentally elaborated inductive procedures, without referring to our sensory processes, which could be mindfully

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¹ J. MORLEY, *Inspiration and expiration: Yoga practice through Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body*, "Philosophy East and West" 51 (Jan), 2001, p. 1.

² D. LEDER, *The Absent Body*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1990.

³ J. MORLEY, *Inspiration and expiration*, p. 3.

observed. In general, our body is absent. Though it is included in Physical Education classes at Universities. However, very rarely do we connect these classes with other subjects in the curriculum.

Generally, we teach theory without practice. We teach the theory of emotions, theory of social structure, theory of cultural reproduction, the concept of habitus, theory of stress etc., without practice. The practice (in the case described in this paper) could be an observation of our body (reactions, role, and structure of the body, feelings) in relation to many issues that are taught in many subjects and disciplines of science. We could fill the gap between the theory and practice, and see that the social and philosophical problems could have reference to real reactions of the body and mental reflections coming from them.

There is a group of educators in the USA oriented toward holistic teaching. "Holistic teaching and learning is viewed by its proponents as pushing education beyond the traditional acquisition of knowledge and skills. They see learning as involving cooperation, thinking creatively, including somatic or embodied learning, critical questioning, respecting diversity, and being open to change (often called – self-transformation)"⁴. Holistic teaching is some kind of reference to spirituality, although there is strong opposition to connecting the spirituality with religion. Yoga is included in higher education under umbrella of "holistic teaching"⁵. "Many educators are interested in incorporating *facets* of yoga into their curriculum, free of context"⁶. Some practice of *pranayama* (breathing exercises), meditation and *asanas* (special physical exercises where the stretching exercises are very important⁷) are

⁴ L. DOUGLASS, *Yoga in Higher Education: North American Educators and the Use of Yoga as Pedagogy*, dissertation for the degree of Philosophy, Lesley University, 2011 (<http://ir.flo.org>), p. 34; D. ORR, *The uses of mindfulness in anti-oppressive pedagogies: philosophy and praxis*, "Canadian Journal of Education" 27(4), 2002, p. 480-481.

⁵ L. DOUGLASS, *Yoga as a counternarrative: American higher education rethinks difference and interdependency*, „Pedagogy, Pluralism and Practice“ (15)2011, pp. 1-35; IDEM, *Yoga in Higher Education*, p. 34.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 35; IDEM, *Yoga in the public schools: Diversity, democracy and the use of critical thinking in educational debates*, „Religion & Education“ 37 (2), 2010, p. 162-169.

⁷ For more explanation of the meaning of hatha-yoga, asanas, and pranayama, see B.K.S. IYENGAR, *Light on Pranayama. Pranayama Dipika*, London: Unwin Paperbacks 1983; IDEM, *The Tree of Yoga*, Boston: Shambhala 2002; IDEM, *The Illustrated Light on Yoga*, New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India & The India Today Group 2005; IDEM, *The Illustrated Light on Yoga*, New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India & The India Today Group 2005; IDEM, *Light on Life. The Yoga Journey to Wholeness, Inner Peace, and Ultimate Freedom*, Pennsylvania: Rodale 2005; and also: M. SINGLETON, *Yoga Body. The Origin of Modern Posture Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010; IDEM, *Translations, Belief Frameworks and Modern Yoga Practice*, "The Magazine of Yoga" 2010, <http://themagazineofyoga.com/blog/2010/10/12/conversation-mark-singleton/> [September 04, 2011]; IDEM, *Yoga's*

included in the teaching, however they are disconnected with their historical and cultural background. If the cultural background would be included it could problematize of teaching yoga, because it seems to be for some educators something mystical or just exotic, without a serious scientific background to merit teaching it. So, the educators often exclude references to the original bases and assumptions of yoga⁸. However, yoga could become counternarrative in higher education to keep democratic values and plurality at place⁹.

I have offered a course on yoga at the University level (graduate course), however I taught only the external sociological interpretation of hatha-yoga in the contemporary world, even though I practiced hatha-yoga and had personal experience with it¹⁰. Sometimes during the course, I held classes wherein I, together with the students, practiced *asanas* (physical exercises) and *pranayama* (breathing exercises), to show the students how they could experience the body and connect it with the mind, and how they can deal with emotions by associating these two realms. However, it happened very rarely.

Yoga has been included in elementary school curricula in a number of schools in the US, Canada, Europe, India, Australia, and South Africa. The teaching of yoga is based on the scientific proof that yoga helps in concentration and has positive effects on muscle power, dexterity, and visual perception¹¹. Also, there are reports of positive results of teaching yoga in high schools. They show a greater kinesthetic awareness, a greater focus on the body and an improved self-image, better management of emotions, and stress reduction is also noted; children show more optimism, and there was an observed decrease of use of drugs and alcohol and increase in social cohesion with family and peers¹². There is an increase in research on the effectiveness of yoga in the school setting, showing that yoga improves mental, emotional, physical, and behavioural health¹³. Participants in other research studies

Greater Truth, "Yoga Journal" 2010, <http://www.yogajournal.com/wisdom/2610> [September 03, 2011]; N. SJOMAN, *The Yoga Tradition of the Mysore Palace*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications 1996.

⁸ M. SINGLETON, *Yoga Body: The Origin of Modern Posture Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010.

⁹ L. DOUGLASS, *Yoga in the public schools*.

¹⁰ K.T. KONECKI, *Is the Body the Temple of the Soul? Modern Yoga Practice as a Psychosocial Phenomenon*, Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press 2015.

¹¹ J.B. COHEN, *The missing body – Yoga and higher education*, "The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives in Learning" 12 (winter), 2006, p. 17.

¹² L.A. CONBOY, J.J. NOGGLE, J.L. FREY, R.S. KUDESIA, S. Sat Bir KHALSA, *Qualitative evaluation of a high school yoga program: feasibility and perceived benefits*, „Explore. The Journal of Science and Healing“ 9(3), 2013, pp. 171-180.

¹³ S. Sat Bir KHALSA, B. BUTZER, *Yoga in school settings: a research review*, "Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences" 1373(1), 2016, pp. 45-55.

have described symptoms such as a decrease in anger, depression, and fatigue from before to after participating in yoga, compared to Physical Education classes¹⁴. So, with respect to primary and high schools we can see some interest on the part of educators in teaching and using yoga in their work. However, at the University level there is not much interest in it.

1. YOGA IN HIGHER EDUCATION

“When it comes to body awareness, the business world is ahead of universities”¹⁵. Generally, we do not use the body to teach sociology, ethics, philosophy or psychology at the University. In the teaching, language and talks dominate; everything is covered by language. Use of the body happens very rarely. ‘Embodied education’ requires courage, self-assertiveness, and experience in some body practice on the part of the educators. It does not necessarily have to be yoga practice – it could be dance, painting or sculpting. These kinds of activities or art need physical effort and concentration on the body and mind at the same time, so the envisioned result of action is experienced *here and now* and embodied as in meditation¹⁶.

If we look at the Polish context we see that mainly yoga (exactly hatha-yoga) is taught at the Universities of the Third Age¹⁷. It is thus not in the mainstream curricula at the University. However, there are extracurricular postgraduate study programs that teach yoga. They are mainly taught at the Universities of Physical Education or the Faculties of Physical Education or Recreation and Sport or Physiotherapy at other Universities. The connection with the sport seems to be obvious from the location of such courses at these kinds of Faculties. Below I mention about only few such programs:

1. Postgraduate studies, “Relaxation and yoga” – Jozef Pilsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw¹⁸.
2. Psychosomatic Practices of Yoga – Wrocław, Academy of Physical Education¹⁹

¹⁴ J.C. FELVER, B. BUTZER, K.J. OLSON, I.M. SMITH, S. Sat Bir KHALSA, *Yoga in public school improves adolescent mood and affect*, “Contemporary School Psychology” 19(3), 2015, pp. 184-192.

¹⁵ J.B. COHEN, *The missing body*, p. 18.

¹⁶ See M. PAGIS, *From Abstract Concepts to Experiential Knowledge: Embodying Enlightenment in a Meditation Center*, “Qualitative Sociology” 33, 2010, pp. 469-489.

¹⁷ Universities of the Third Age in Poland are special courses prepared at the Universities for elderly people.

¹⁸ <http://www.awf.edu.pl/uczelnia/oferta-edukacyjna/studia-podyplomowe-i-kursy/aktualnosci/Relaksacja-i-joga>

¹⁹ <http://cdk.awf.wroc.pl/index.php/studia-podyplomowe/psychosomatyczne-praktyki-jogi>

However, we have also postgraduate studies in other kinds of Universities:

1. “Yoga and management of emotions in business” (Lodz University, Faculty of Economy and Sociology)

2. “Holistic Management of Human Capital. Yoga for family business” (Opole University of Technology, Sulislaw Institute, Opole University, ICAN Institute, Harvard Business Review Polska)

3. “Yoga in prophylaxis and treatment – Upper Silesian Academy of Entrepreneurship in Chorzów²⁰

Yoga is also taught beyond curricula, when teachers invite students to practice yoga and do the work voluntarily to propagate hatha-yoga among students²¹.

2. APPLICATIONS OF HATHA-YOGA IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Hatha-yoga could be used in teaching the relationship between discursive thinking and elaborating problems beyond the discursive realm of everyday life, i.e. the body’s condition and being²². Internal experiences could be observed during the physical exercises (doing the postures that are called asanas) and breathing exercises (pranayamas). “Writing/Yoga” retreats could also be organized whereby, with the help of yoga classes, students could improve their writing skills by liberating knowledge that was locked in the body. They could also get into contact with their emotions²³. The above-quoted author included yoga exercises in her diverse classes, for example, the class “Ways of Knowing: How We Make Meaning” in a Master’s course. Students try to integrate somatic experiences with their academic work, and thus integrate the body with the mind. Sometimes she brings body activities into the real class time. They help in listening without judgment during interactions, and also help in free writing. Breathing exercises support coming back to the present moment. Students practice the stretching of the body or breathing while changing the topic of learning or before transition to another one²⁴. Breathing exercises also help break mental blockages. Cohen underlines that the exercises can be done almost anywhere and everywhere²⁵.

²⁰ <http://www.gwsp.edu.pl/oferta-edukacyjna/studia-podyplomowe/joga-w-profilaktyce-i-terapii---nowosc>

²¹ <http://awf.katowice.pl/uczelnia/katedra-rekreacji/aktualnosci/joga>

²² J.B. COHEN, *The missing body*, p. 19.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 21.

²⁵ J.B. COHEN, *The missing body*.

Laura Douglass, in her research on the use of yoga in higher education (117 educators participated in the research), shows that some practices of yoga are integrated by educators with some academic disciplines. This happens mainly in Art & Humanities, Education and Social Sciences²⁶. The most often integrated practices into the curricula are breathing practices, meditation, yoga postures, and physical exercises. Chanting and the study of spiritual texts related to yoga are the least often included into curricula²⁷. The reasons to integrate yoga into the curriculum are mainly aimed at integration of mind-based practices (meditation, concentration techniques) and to integrate body-based learning²⁸. From these results, we see that yoga is instrumentally used in Western pedagogy, at least in the North American context. “Both the modern postural yoga practitioners and those who defined yoga as a philosophical orientation felt that three values of Western epistemology were extremely important and worth retaining: secularism, the biomedical model and rational thinking”²⁹. The educators want to stay far from the religious connotations connected with introducing yoga to the Universities. They stress traditional Western values, where the scientific and rational approach to the exercises of body and mind are most important. Neuroscience is often included in argumentation for the use of yoga in education.

At the same time, it may be that the justification for use of yoga is included in some kind of Western culture that is tainted by post-colonialism³⁰. Post-colonialism could be identified as contemporary not only with the domination of one nation over another, but also by the state of the mind. “This state of mind was further articulated by the educator Breault to include broad categories: feelings of superiority, feeling powerless to change the system, lack of trust, fear of loss of control, the need for stability and dualistic thinking”³¹. Maybe, the culture of educational institutions and societies around them is pervaded by this post-colonial thinking.

The important thing in postcolonial thinking is **understanding of self and other**. An interesting thing is that the educators that defined yoga mainly in postural and physical terms considered that knowledge comes from outside (books, data, people, phenomena). Those that consider yoga as a philosophy, rather seek knowledge inside the self. Dichotomous thinking is a feature of post-colonial so-

²⁶ L. DOUGLASS, *Yoga in Higher Education*, p. 123.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 129.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 126.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 139.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 149.

³¹ R.A. BREault, *Dewey, Freire, and a pedagogy for the oppressor*, “Multicultural Education” 10(3), 2003, pp. 2-6; quoted in: L. DOUGLASS, *Yoga in Higher Education*, p. 149.

cieties and also “the hidden logic of pedagogy in the Western World (mind-body binarism)”³².

Fear is expressed by the anxiety of being in permanent competition, and an unclear promotion and students’ evaluations. Educators also fear the evaluations of their colleagues and of those who do not accept their yoga practice in the classroom. Eventually, the practice of yoga generally helped them in getting rid of these fears.

Some educators said *that they cannot change the system*. The system is so competitive, that yoga could only help to reduce stress, but not change the system *per se*. Another feature of the postcolonial state of mind is *lack of trust*. This refers to the negative reactions of colleagues toward educators that use yoga and of supervisors who could not see value in classes with yoga, and this creates distrust between educators and management of schools. Another feature is *the fear of loss of control*. The educators fear losing control of the students, that they can refuse their teaching, for example because of their Christian faith, or that educators will be not accepted by their peers. They also fear losing control of their beliefs, because practicing yoga could make one doubt the basic assumptions that they share and keep actual³³. Another feature is *dualistic thinking*. The educators challenged the dualism, especially dualism of body and mind, and emotion and mind. Emotional intelligence is seen as embodied intelligence and is not separated from cognitive ways of knowing. Another kind of duality could be the division between students and teachers, which should also be challenged³⁴. *Superiority and the need for stability* is another feature of the postcolonial state of mind, according to the author. Some practitioners of yoga felt their superiority above other educators and it was for them positive idea; they also used yoga as a pedagogy. They also positively evaluated the need for stability (an ability to resist the stresses of life in higher education). These educators also experienced the feeling of being powerless to change the system or feeling a lack of trust, or a feeling of fear of losing control and feeling of a need for dualistic thinking to be jettisoned³⁵.

A very interesting case of using yoga in higher education can be found in the paper of Helberg, Heyes, and Rohel³⁶ (2009). It contains a description of an upper level undergraduate course entitled “Thinking Through the Body: Philosophy and Yoga.” The course was aimed at connecting physical education courses with

³² D. ORR, *The uses of mindfulness*, pp. 478-479.

³³ L. DOUGLASS, *Yoga in Higher Education*, pp. 150-158.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 161.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 164.

³⁶ N. HELBERG, C. HEYES, J. ROHEL, *Thinking through the body: Yoga Philosophy, and Physical Education*, “Teaching Philosophy” 32(3), 2009, pp. 263-284.

philosophical ones, where phenomenology was mainly taught. The goal was to fill the gap between theory and practice, and the assumption was that the philosophy could be taught by physical movement. The course was also aimed at free writing and avoiding the inner critic. The course was explained in the syllabus, presented below in shortened form:

“One 90 minute class per week will consist of a yoga practice to include meditation techniques, breathing (pranayama), and postures (asana). This will be taught using mindfulness techniques and contemplative pedagogy to invite critical reflection on proprioceptive and kinaesthetic experience. The second 90 minutes of weekly contact will consist of a meditation practice and classroom discussion of texts as they relate to practice. The literature for the course will focus on: phenomenological accounts of physical activity and lived experience, philosophical discussion of the practice of yoga in the west, critical comparative analysis of the psychological, philosophical, and phenomenological bases of different exercise and movement modalities, and the politics of bodily aesthetics”³⁷.

The author of the course tried to overcome the tradition of teaching philosophy of the body without the experience of physical activity. The course challenged the attitude of judging themselves and created the witness consciousness. It came from practicing *asanas* and *pranayamas*. The students in the classroom became embodied subjects. They could experience also what “absent body” meant³⁸. While practicing, for example, the *dog facing down* pose some parts of the body could recede from attention (hips). The parts of the body out of visual perception are forgotten at that moment. Practice of mindful observation of the body (for example while scanning of the body) was aimed on fighting the corporal absence. The theory was incorporated. “Contemplative practices of reading, writing, and sensing (as well as meditation *per se*) seem to improve students’ comprehension, retention, and enjoyment of ideas in uncontroversially positive ways...”³⁹. As we can see, somatic experiences were important in the teaching and learning philosophy. Students could get embodied knowledge instead of only intellectual and mind-produced knowledge that had a purely theoretical provenience.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 267.

³⁸ See D. LEDER, *The Absent Body*.

³⁹ N. HELBERG, C. HEYES, J. ROHEL, *Thinking through the body*, p. 279.

3. YOGA PRACTICE AT THE COURSE OF “MEDITATION FOR MANAGERS”

At this point I would like to introduce some descriptions of my own experiences in teaching yoga in a course that has been called “Meditation for managers” (see Appendix for the Syllabus). During the class I have taught the techniques for dealing with stress and negative emotions in the work of managers, using, *inter alia*, techniques, mainly hatha-yoga practice and meditation that is also a part of the yoga tradition (30 hours, 32 students; 2015-2016). The course was listed for Erasmus Programme students that came to University of Lodz, predominantly from European countries, but also some from Asia (e.g. Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan) and South America (e.g. Ecuador). The students had diverse majors: Management Sciences, Public Relations, Economy, and Political Science. The intercultural context was important in the teaching. I had an introductory class where I presented some knowledge about stress and emotion management, and after that I had a class with hatha-yoga asanas practice, followed by breathing exercises, and the students sat and meditated for at least 15 minutes at the end of each class. Classes were held every week for 2 hours. While practicing the asanas, students were taught to concentrate on parts of the body, being attentive to some parts of the body that they usually do not notice. There was always one topic for each class, for example: forgiveness, gratitude, dealing with negative emotions, visualisation of negative events from the day and dealing with them, concentration on breathing, concentration on breaks between breathing out and breathing in, etc. Each topic was elaborated by work on the body and breathing exercises, and finally by guided meditation. Emotional problems were touched upon (and sometimes solved) by the work on the body and breath and meditation practice with some cognitive practice, i.e. reflection on the feelings coming from the practice.



Pict. 1. Hatha-yoga in the Park, “Meditation for managers” class. Tree pose.
Topic-looking for body/mind balance (Photo by Kamil Głowacki, 2015)

Because there was an international and intercultural context to the practice, sometimes I had interesting issues to solve. The female students from Turkey opposed taking off their socks and showing the skin of feet, some of them also practiced in a long gown to cover the body, and covered their hair by a *hijab*. Hatha-yoga poses are easier and safer to perform without socks and in sportive dress, however I agreed to their choices. They could practice or not, as they wanted, however they were obliged to practice somehow and follow my instructions according to their possibilities and in accordance with their religious or ideological *weltanschauung*. Sometimes some of them (Muslim men from Turkey) ask me for space to pray during the day, because they could not do it at the University (there was no special space for religious praying). This was an expression of their trust in me. I gave them sometimes the key to a classroom to make it possible for them to pray.

I asked also students to write about their experiences. They described what they felt during the exercises and after them. This is not proof of the effects of the practice, but it is some proof of the work that they did on their mind and body.



Pict. 2. Hatha-yoga in the Park, “Meditation for managers” class. Mountain pose. Topic-looking for the connection with the earth (Photo by Kamil Głowacki, 2015)

The students wrote auto-reports to get credit; this was obligatory. I analysed these reports (14 autoreports). From these reports, I obtained the following excerpts.

At the beginning of the practice some of them were **confused**. They could not understand for what reason they did the poses and why so many diverse students agreed to do it:

“My first impression of yoga was nothing short of confused. I honestly didn’t get the point of all of it when I was starting out. How was all this stretching and bending going to make someone lose weight? Well, I saw how people who would regularly practice yoga got thinner so there must have been something yoga was doing right. One of the things that has always impressed me is that when I walk by and see students waiting outside for class, they have been of all different shapes, sizes and ethnicities.”

The students received the tool for self-observation. I gave them four questions that they should follow. The first one was:

– How did you feel before the exercises? (Please describe your thoughts, emotions and body feelings, attitudes to other people)

“Before exercises I was sedentary, not hardworking. Most of my days passed by boringly. I was angry at the unimportant things for me, I also hated people for their acts. Every time when I went outside, I was unhappy. I think I made little problems big.”

We could notice that they started to have a more detailed awareness of daily life and their emotions that appeared in it. This self-observation is a very important element of self-development and also of dealing with stress and negative emotions. The awareness of anger and hate is the starting point for dissolving these negative emotions.

The second question was the following:

– How have you felt during the exercises? (Please describe your thoughts, emotions and body feelings)

“Firstly, it was hard to do these exercises. My body is not accustomed to do these kinds of exercises. Also, it was funny during the exercises, because some poses were strange for me. Sometimes, I felt uncomfortable in some poses when there were students behind and in front of me.”

During the practice students could have some problems with doing asanas. It requires physical strength, which the students did not have if they have not practiced sport or physical exercises before, and some stretching could create discomfort in the body (especially in the tendons, muscles and joints). Moreover, the practice was of a collective character, so it required an adjustment to the presence of others, especially when we bend our body in front of others and feel the gaze of others. The *looking-glass self* works in that moment and we are living usually in the mind of others without knowing it, as it is described by the classic author of sociology⁴⁰ (Cooley 1922: 208; see also Scheff 1990, 2014). The practice of yoga makes awareness of the *looking-glass self* possible; we become more aware how the mind works in every moment. The experience of the working mind becomes embodied.

Another question that I gave the students was the following:

– Have you solved a problem/task from the meditation exercise? (Please describe it, the kind of emotions, thoughts and body feelings, and the final solution)

– “Not exactly, but most of them, because most of my problems were psychological. You know that euphoria after a long time cycling or running. So, I felt myself like this: free, easy, unobstructed, happy etc. Also, I started not mentioning acts of other people, became calmer, had a good time with my friends, and paid more attention to the beautiful things around us.”

Some of the students noticed a change of attitude toward life and toward other people. The calm mind can notice and perceive more. One student noticed also the

⁴⁰ Ch. COOLEY, *Human Nature and the Social Order*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1922, p. 208. See also: T. SCHEFF, *Microsociology. Discourse, Emotion, and Social Structure*, Chicago: The University Press 1990; IDEM, *Role-taking, Emotion and The Two Selves*, “Canadian Journal of Sociology/Cahiers Canadiens de Sociologie” 39 (3), 2014, pp. 315-329.

connection between work on the body and mind. This is a very important step in the progress of the yoga practice.

The last question was the following:

– How did you feel after exercise? (Please describe your thoughts, emotions and body feelings, attitudes to other people etc.)

“After the first exercise my body was aching, because a long time had passed since my last exercises (doing sport). Also, I was happy, because every time after doing sport you feel yourself free and happy. For the first one hour, I was kind to people, happy, but after this time passes you become as you were before the exercises, because I can’t feel these feelings, until end of a day, like others. After the class, my thoughts started to change slowly.”

The above comments are interesting here because they show the awareness of the rhythm of the day and show the changeability of feelings. Nothing lasts forever. However, the awareness of this helps in dealing with mood changes, that just happen, and when we are aware of them we can deal with them more easily. Acceptance of the changes is one of the choices that students can make.



Pict. 3. Hatha-yoga in the Park, “Meditation for managers” class
(Intense Forward-Bending Pose – Uttanasana).
Topic-Awareness of the stretch of back of the body (especially hamstrings)

Perceived effects of the practice

We could notice also in the above reflections some effects of the practice. We try to concentrate more on the students' perception of effects and their awareness of the connectivity of the practice with changes in the mind and attitudes.

The most often perceived effects were, of course, **relaxation and stress reduction**. These perceived effects are a consequence the theme of the course, and the introductory class explained the concept of stress and effects of yoga, breathing exercises and meditation on feelings. Students used this knowledge and language of justification to explain the effects of yoga practice. However, some physiological changes also had an impact here. Students reported the experiences of **relaxation, feeling of happiness, and influx of energy**:

– “In those few minutes, I felt such a feeling of calmness in my mind, and complete relaxation in my body like I had never felt before. That was a novel and precious experience for me. There was also a subtle feeling of satisfaction, of ease. I was hooked.”

– „When I am practising yoga I forget about all my problems, I feel very relaxed and at peace with myself and the world. When I finish, I am happy and ready to reach my goals and continue the day with energy and a happy mentality.”

Some students got a **new impression about how mind works**. They started reflection on the role of the mind in their being. The idea that they are not mind is very interesting here, because it could start some deep changes in the self, although it was not the goal of the course:

– “One of the greatest gifts meditation has given me is the understanding that I'm not my mind, and that there is a space of detachment from whatever is happening, inside or out. I know deeply now that whatever I'm thinking or feeling is just another temporary movement inside my consciousness. I had no idea what that meant, but I just followed the instruction without questioning.”

– “As a result, there was a deep transformation in several aspects of my life. I've also learned some things about myself and about what works through meditation. Just like I observe my breathing going in and out during meditation, I observe the mind getting irritated, the body warming up, and the impulse for action rising. Another experiment that worked well for me was to bring about my strongest emotions inside meditation. For a while I used to take any strong emotion that would come as an opportunity to meditate, go deep into it, and find out what it is.”

Other students underlined **the changes in their life**. It could happen in many aspects of everyday life, for example, in *planning* of the future activities:

– “There wasn’t any class which made me feel more nervous than previous. I felt always after meditation class happier, more relaxed and with the mind more able to organise plans.”

Some students noticed that our practice was not only done for relaxation but stressed the importance of *self-development*:

– “For me, meditation is not just relaxation, but mainly a purpose to develop myself and my capacities to respond skilfully to life’s difficulties – as well as its joys.”

Below we can notice very interesting perceived effects of practicing yoga: *improving relations with others*. Especially meditation is useful here. The students were mainly 20–23 years old. That age is often the time of strained relations with parents:

– “It helps me to keep calm and make logical decisions and also helps me to maintain healthy relationships between me and people in my life. The main reason for me to come on Erasmus was actually to run away from my life. I was very intense on the relationship with my parents. I couldn’t stand them and we could barely speak without fighting, it was really hard for me, but now with the help of your meditation classes it is easier for me to talk to them. Now I can keep calm and maintain normal speech. I try to understand them more. Moreover, the problems that I had in my life and the things that I was getting upset about – I learned to look at them from the other side, differently, so that now they don’t seem to me as problems anymore (at least most of them). Meditation helped me a lot in this sense. In addition, you always say: forgive. It was something that I was not doing at all.”

There are also some more *practical effects of the practice*; for example, breathing exercises help in falling asleep, dealing with anger, acrophobia, sadness, and taking decisions:

– “And I have kept doing breathing exercises at home and realized that I can fall asleep easily, at least easier than before.”

– “The second thing that I learnt also, how to use my breath more effectively. I realized that I could control my anger, fear and sadness when I control my breath. That’s really important for me. When I am angry or sad or when I’m afraid of something, I try to control my breath, and it lets me control everything. For example, I have acrophobia. In other words, I am afraid of heights. That’s why I am afraid of flying by plane. Before I took that course, I flew a couple of times and the flights were difficult for me. I was feeling so nervous. But after I took the course, I flew a couple of times again, but this time I had the knowledge how I could be relaxed. It doesn’t make me completely perfect; but at least I can control my fear.

Meditation and controlling my breath, not only helps my fears and sadness, but also effects my decisions. I can control my stress more, so when I’m in a stressful situation, I can control it and decide better.”

What was sometimes difficult with managing the course for me was the lack of punctuality of the students. They come late, sometimes even at the end of the class. When I asked them why they were so late, I would sometimes listen to the answer: ‘I’m sorry but I overslept.’ One day I decided to lock the door of the classroom fifteen minutes after the start of the class. It helped to discipline students. So, they also learnt *organizational discipline*. It interesting that this reflection appeared together with the perception of the connections between the body, mind and spirit:

– “Yoga is a discipline. You start on time and end on time. It is considered disrespectful to walk into a class late. There are different flavours of yoga and not everyone has the same taste. However, you might surprise yourself. I used to think I was only in it for fitness, but when I opened my mind to the full mind-body-spirit connection, I felt content.”

Another interesting effect of practice was that some students experienced **the distortion of time** during the practice:

– “One hour passed in 10 minutes, especially when we had the chance to do meditation outside. Feeling close to nature made the relaxation even more emphasised and effective than doing it in a silent room alone. Nowadays, I am listening to slow music as well.”

Generally, the course “Meditation for managers” was **a surprise** for the students. They had never experienced such a course before:

– “I consider this course very interesting and useful because it isn’t the typical class that I’m used to attending in my country. I’m used to studying much theory, so this kind of experience made me appreciate how to calm down and feel myself and be in peace. It was satisfying.”

I can summarize the perceived effects of the yoga practice by quoting two students’ reflections. The course was positively evaluated. Nor have I received negative feedback in formal channels of communication and evaluation of the course:

– “As a result, I am happy to choose this class. I cannot practice every day, but sometimes I try to practice what I have learnt. Especially, throwing poison out of my body and breathing control is important for me. This movement allows people to get rid of stress. *Meditation for managers* is the most useful lesson for me in the second semester. Thank you, professor, for the useful information that you taught me.”

– “I had never done yoga or meditation before and I will continue practising it because it really helps me in my life.”

CONCLUSIONS

We can conclude after analysis of the experiences of teaching yoga (and reactions of students) in the higher education context that it is a practically and theoretically useful tool of pedagogy. Hatha-yoga can be effectively used as a tool of managing the class as a change of topic, as an aid in getting more concentration, and also in relaxing after intensive intellectual work.

Yoga practice also allows for observing the relevance of body in perception and the creation of knowledge about the so-called 'external' world. The body is experienced directly by each student and not only as an experience of the object of theoretical reflection, as it often happens in study at Universities. The direct experience of the body by observing it mindfully is important in teaching philosophy and sociology. However, it could be also useful tool in teaching psychology. The all these pedagogical endeavours should be connected with the real problems that students experience or are witnesses in their life, as dealing with negative emotions. The everyday life should be natural environment with which they interact and learn. It should not be an insular and abstract environment about which they only learn from the second hand⁴¹.

Yoga is important in the self-care, that is preventing diseases, limiting illness and restoring health⁴². Yoga practice could be used as a practical method of emotion management and stress reduction or improvement in health. I noticed this also while teaching my "Meditation for managers" class. As I could infer from my experiences and the students' experiences reported to me, students learnt something more than just stress reduction techniques. They noticed even the changes in life attitudes and their life course after practice. Some got a new outlook on the mind and self. The yoga class become in this moment a visible counternarrative to a dominant pedagogical narration that promotes passive knowledge acquiring⁴³. Some of them drew some practical lessons from the yoga course, such as techniques for improving falling asleep.

Teaching yoga is important also for creating the counternarrative of educational system. We can observe that this system is based on stress⁴⁴. On the other side yoga practice could support the educational system as it is, because it helps to reduce stress of students and does not change the system.

⁴¹ See J. DEWEY, *Experience & Education*, New York, NY: Kappa Delta Pi 1938.

⁴² C. DAUT, *A Case for More Yoga on Campus: Yoga as Self-Care for Higher Education and Student Affairs Professionals*, "The Vermont Connection" 37(6), 2016, p. 51.

⁴³ See L. DOUGLASS, *Yoga as a counternarrative*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*; IDEM, *Yoga in the public schools*.

So, the practice of hatha-yoga and meditation helps in finding the bridge between theory and practice in the real life of the students. It becomes a real experience⁴⁵. It also helps to challenge the “oppressive pedagogy”, where dichotomization of the body and mind is a basis for other social distinctions and social discrimination⁴⁶.

The skill of self observation is the most general effect of yoga, i.e. when the inner realm connects with the external realm and becomes one. Emotions are in the body, in mind, and in external stimuli. The observer become witness of the here and now. Observation of our breath can connect our internality with our externality, because the *external world* is in the background of the point of observation (breath). Temporary withdrawing from the world gives the more control over the process of perception⁴⁷.

Generally, we can conclude that yoga practice could be a useful tool for teaching some classes in higher education. It was useful in reported research and in the described experiences of the teachers and students. Yoga shows the possibility of change and innovation in higher education. The use of other cultural achievements could be inspiring and checking our openness for “otherness” not only outside of our mind, but also inside. However, more research on it is needed and it needs international comparative studies to see how the dominant narrations and counternarrations clash and profit from the dispute and if they create democratic context for teaching.

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⁴⁵ J. DEWEY, *Experience & Education*.

⁴⁶ D. ORR, *The uses of mindfulness*, p. 479; L. DOUGLASS, *Yoga as a counternarrative*.

⁴⁷ J. MORLEY, *Inspiration and expiration*, pp. 78-79.

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APPENDIX

PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

Subject: „**Meditation for managers. Stress Reduction Techniques.**”

Type of studies: **ERASMUS Program**

Year/Semester: 2015/2016, summer semester

Type: laboratory/ seminar

Number of hours: 30

Tutor/ Lecturer: Prof. dr hab. Krzysztof T. Konecki (see www.krzysztofkoncki.prv.pl)

I. PREREQUISITIES – none**II. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES****1. Knowledge**

- Knowledge of basic knowledge about emotions.
- Knowledge about interpersonal communication in organizations.

2. Skills

- Improving communication skills of participants.
- Improving skills of reducing negative emotions by work on the body and the mind (physical and breathing exercises).
- The skills of meditation as a way of dealing with negative emotions and development and expansion of consciousness.

3. Attitudes/Competencies

- An awareness of self.
- An openness and empathy.
- A sensitivity to the ethical aspects of communication in culturally diverse organizations.

III. COURSE CONTENTS

- Lecture on the ability to create conditions for the development of creative talents and attitudes.
- Laughter as a method of unlocking your energy, intuition, and talent.
- Learning acceptance and tolerance for one's own and others' disturbing emotions.
- Practice of stress reduction and personal development by practicing hatha-yoga (physical exercises, breathing and meditation practice).

IV. COURSE EVALUATION

- Attendance at classes and activity during the class.
- Knowledge of reading and participation in discussions during classes.
- Participating in the physical exercises (practice of hatha-yoga, *asanas* – postures), breathing (pranayama) and meditation practices.
- Solving problems in given case studies.
- Writing auto-reports from the experiences during the class.

V. LITERATURE**a. compulsory**

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HATHA-YOGA W SZKOLNICTWIE WYŻSZYM

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł porusza kwestię adaptacji praktyki hatha-yogi do systemu szkolnictwa wyższego. Autor opisuje problemy, jakie występują przy włączaniu jogi do programów nauczania uczelni wyższych w odniesieniu do USA i Polski.

Ciało zostało prawie wyłączone z programów nauczania. Istnieje jednak duża różnica między teorią a praktyką, a ciało może być aktywnym podmiotem (aktorem) w uczeniu się i postrzeganiu rzeczy-

wistości. Może być używane do nauczania filozofii, psychologii, socjologii i zarządzania oraz innych kursów. Studenci mogą uzyskać ucieleśnioną wiedzę, a nie tylko możliwość zdobycia intelektualnej wiedzy pochodzącej z umysłu. Jestem socjologiem i opisuję swoje doświadczenia z włączaniem jogi w nauczanie przedmiotów socjologicznych i psychologicznych na polskim uniwersytecie. Wyniki autoraportów studentów pokazują, że poprzez praktykę hatha-jogi studenci mogli dostrzec związek ciała i umysłu w zakresie wytwarzania emocji, co może być ważne w nauczaniu technik redukcji stresu, socjologii emocji, psychologii emocji, filozofii ciała, zarządzania, coachingu lub innych przedmiotów, w których emocje i ciało są ważnymi czynnikami aktywności.

Słowa kluczowe: hatha-yoga; szkolnictwo wyższe; B.K.S. Iyengar; pedagogika; medytacja.

HATHA-YOGA IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Summary

This paper deals with the problem of adaptation of hatha-yoga practice to the system of higher education. There are some problems with including yoga into the curricula of higher education institutions, and these are described with respect mainly to the USA and Polish context.

The body has been almost excluded from programs of teaching. There is a large gap between the theory and practice. However, the body could be an active subject (*actant*) in learning and perceiving the reality. It could be used to teach philosophy, psychology, sociology and management, and other courses. Students could achieve embodied knowledge, and not only the opportunity of gaining an intellectual knowledge coming from and through the mind. I am a sociologist and I describe my experiences with including yoga in teaching sociological and psychological subjects in a Polish University. The results from auto-reports of students show that by hatha-yoga practice students could see the connection between the body and mind concerning the production of emotions, which could be important in teaching of techniques of stress reduction, sociology of emotions, psychology of emotions, philosophy of body, management, coaching or other subjects where emotions and the body are important factors of activity.

Keywords: hatha-yoga; higher education; B.K.S. Iyengar; pedagogy; meditation.