





Aikido's contribution to practitioner's health

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Abstract - Aim We developed an extension project at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN), and includes students, teachers, other servers and the external community. Our goal with this article is to present the reports of our project members and discuss about the contributions of the practice of aikido in relation with health as an existential phenomenon and with the care of the self. **Methods:** Questionnaires were applied to collect data about the following information: 1) if you are part of the internal community (server, student or professor) or external to the university; 2) age; 3) practice time; 4) your opinion about what health is; 5) the impact of aikido practice on the practitioner's health; 6) whether aikido can be understood as a health practice. and were analyzed by theme content. **Results:** 34 practitioners volunteered to fill out our questionnaire. From the external community, 14 members answered the questionnaire, and from the internal community, one is a teacher, two are employees, and seventeen are students. From the reports, we are allowed to perceive health as a dynamic phenomenon made up of social, cultural, biological, emotional, and spiritual aspects, among others. **Conclusion:** Aikido addresses many of these spheres and promotes self-knowledge and caring for oneself and others, reflecting about their experiences and their health through interpretative elaborations of their own condition. Such attitude strengthens the idea that there is a hermeneutic dimension of health that has elements that can be narrated and analyzed.

Keywords: Aikido, health, care of the self.

Introduction

Aikido is a martial way that originated approximately in 1942 in Japan, created by Morihei Ueshiba. One of the possible meanings of Aikido is that it is characterized as a “path of union of the spirit with the universe”, as well as the “path of harmony of the body and mind with nature”¹ (p. 28). In our research, we identified that this path was created by Morihei Ueshiba, who experienced several martial arts and received a strong influence from Omotokyo (a Japanese religious institution based on Shintoism) leader, and from a master of *Daito-Ryu Aiki Jujutsu* (a Japanese martial art diffused on the beginning of the 20th century), Sokaku Takeda. For the constitution of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba articulates the knowledge and practices about *ki*, *kotodama*, an esoteric science of spiritual sounds, and *misogi* (Shinto-based knowledge and practice of purification), in a path of spirituality, the *budo*².

Aikido is one of the martial ways, a *budo* (a path of personal and spiritual improvement through the martial arts). A Japanese concept, derived from Tao (path and philosophy of Chinese origin), used to define the path of personal improvement. The Aikido path states that there should be no competitions in its practice, since, as a *budo*, its goal is “the pursuit of perfection of the human being, physically and mentally, through cumulative training with kindred spirits in the martial arts”³ (p. 22).

The path of harmony of energies is an expression commonly used to mean Aikido by its practitioners. Some people start its practice as a way to promote health, or a healthy attitude; others look for discipline or even an approach to oriental philosophy. About Aikido, we notice that it makes use of the martial art, as well as other techniques and body practices, such as meditation, breathing techniques, stretching, among others, as tools to enable its

practitioners to develop the sensibility to themselves, to others, and to nature.

However, with a deeper meaning, the analysis of the term budo performed by Morihei Ueshiba² allows us to recognize the influences of Shintoism religious bases, when we understand that the particle “*Bu*” represents “a path established by the gods that is true, good and beautiful” and the particle “*Do*” means spiritual path² (p. 26). The purpose of Aikido, from the perspective of its founder, is to unite personal energy with the cosmic, or creative, energy of the universe³.

This understanding of budo is related to virtues such as bravery, wisdom, love, and empathy⁴. To develop these virtues, Morihei Ueshiba believes that austere training is necessary, in which each person is responsible for his/her evolution and movement to improve him/herself. In the founder's words, “each individual has his/her own role to play, his/her own spirit to improve”² (p. 54).

Thus, in Aikido, the union between body and mind can be translated as a way to express the truth of the subject, through which his feelings and actions are expressed sincerely, and not one different from the other; that the outside is the reflection of the inside. To this end, the founder encourages us to investigate how the world works and guides us to listen to wise people and feel part of nature, opening ourselves to the truth². Not all of these being mere allusions, they warn us:

Do this continuously and you will have constant progress. Observe how a river finds its way through the valley; the water gently flows around the stones, constantly transforming itself. The wisdom of the world is found in books, and by studying them we can create new technologies. Observe nature and learn the true nature of heaven and earth² (p. 128).

Based on this warning, we can also pay attention to the construction of the path. Studying books, practicing listening, feeling part of Nature. Aiming for this knowledge is the beginning of the path. We can understand Morihei Ueshiba⁵ (p. 318), who wrote the “Five Points about Aikido”:

Aikido is a Great Way that lasts forever. It is a philosophy that absorbs and integrates all things.
Aikido is a truth conceived by Heaven and Earth. It is also important to make use of the Neno-Kuni [Netherworld].
The path and philosophy of aikido seeks to create harmony between Heaven, Earth, and human beings.
Aikido becomes complete when each person follows the path according to his/her own nature, practices ascetic training, and seeks to become one with the great universe.
Aikido is a path of great compassion, resulting in the glory and prosperity of the universe.

We understand, therefore, that the practice of Aikido stimulates the person to return to oneself, to know oneself and seek the feeling of inherence, of feeling part of Nature. For this, it considers that the practice prepares the practitioner for life situations^{2,6}. Return to oneself, as a

movement of “opening the eyes of the heart” and understand the “power of love”, because “love never kills, love nourishes. Love brings all things to a state of fruition. Love is the guardian angel of all beings; if there is no love, nothing can be accomplished. Aikido is the embodiment of love”² (p. 36).

To reach this point in aikido practice, to understand and perform the techniques of martial characteristics with an understanding of love, or *Takemussu Aiki*², takes many years of training and self-knowledge. In this sense, we draw on this understanding of Aikido and continue to seek its meanings and significance as we carry out our practices.

We realized that purifying the heart means to know our feelings and direct them to good and productive things. In other words, reducing our selfishness and attitudes that do not contribute to the construction of dialog and harmonious relationships. To this end, our project focuses on its members seeking to study this relationship between self-knowledge, caring for oneself and for others, and nature.

It is important to emphasize that the term spirituality term in this study is not synonymous with religion. We will be basing ourselves on Michel Foucault's reading of Self-Care, from which he points out that spirituality is related to the exercises of access to truth. The philosopher highlights “the need for the subject to modify himself, to transform himself, to displace himself, to become, to a certain extent and to a certain extent, other than himself, in order to have the right to access the truth. Truth is only given to the subject at a price that puts at stake the very being of the subject”⁷ (p. 17).

We also understand that Aikido does not end in these elements. About this martial path, we saw in our research ideas of love and peace being expressed, of a daily effort aimed at the development of character, of the subject's truth^{8,9,10}. The practice of the martial art, from Aikido's perspective, is a way for each person to know himself or herself, attentive to the wills and desires of the spirit (expression that can be understood in a perspective of attitude, of a person's willpower), to feelings, thus seeking serenity in life and inherence with Nature or the Cosmos¹¹.

As for the implications in daily life, the benefits of Aikido are identified in Morihei Ueshiba^{2,4,6}, through the impacts on health in an integrated way with the strengthening of body, mind and spirit. Specifically in Aikido, the health practices are present, especially in the work of Morihei Ueshiba², when he exposes that such art has techniques that should focus on healing properties. In this context, appropriating the precepts elaborated by the founder, Franco^{7,8} assures that healing serves for people and for the world, strengthening the body and the spirit, diminishing selfishness, wars, and discord, bringing us closer to the laws of nature and the divine. It is a way to connect with ourselves and with others, promoting harmony.

In this sense, the conception of health that leads our actions is the one assumed by Gadamer¹² (p. 109), that is, “health is not just a feeling, but being-there, being-in-the-world, it is a being-with-the-others, a feeling satisfied with the affairs of life and staying active in them”. This perspective of health demands a hermeneutic work, which allows us to conceive health beyond a diagnostic vision, which is established through merely objective or positive parameters. As an intervention in the field of Physical Education, we understand it from Mendes¹³, who considers it as the art of caring for the body, health and life, by understanding that health is an existential condition that overcomes the rupture between the biological and the cultural.

It is under these understandings of health and Physical Education that we determined that the activities of the Aikido extension project at UFRN should have as guiding principles the care of the self and of the other. The beginning of the activities dates back to 2015, together with the construction process of the master's research developed by Prof. Marcel Alves Franco in the Postgraduate Program in Physical Education at UFRN, under the coordination of Prof. Isabel Mendes, defended in 2017, also under the guidance of Shihan Wagner Bull 7th Dan, consigned by the Aikikai Foundation, the official entity of Aikido worldwide, recognized by the Ministry of Education of Japan.

In the following sections, we describe how our project works, what health is and its impact on the integrants' lives.

Methods

Our project was executed on the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, Natal, Brazil, and it was evaluated by the Pro-Rector of Extension, considering the ethical matters, under the register number: PJ210-2020.

Knowing the need for inter-relation between extension, research and teaching, there is a need to investigate what is health for the practitioners of this extension project and the impacts on their lives. To collect data for this research, we used questionnaires. In the mention of Marconi and Lakatos¹⁴ (p. 86), the questionnaire is a tool “for data collection consisting of an ordered series of questions, which must be answered in writing and without the presence of the interviewer”.

To wit, 34 practitioners volunteered to fill out our questionnaire prepared on Google Forms platform. Andres *et al.*¹⁵ ensures that the benefits of this digital platform are the ease of dissemination and the possibility of local, regional, national or international coverage, agility, practicality, sustainability, in addition to collaborating with the teaching-learning process. In the dynamics of creating the questionnaire, it is possible to modify with colors, different types of questions, view results individually or by association in groups, add videos or illustrative images,

among others. In the questionnaire, we ask for the following information: 1) if you are part of the internal community (server, student or professor) or external to the university; 2) age; 3) practice time; 4) your opinion about what health is; 5) the impact of aikido practice on the practitioner's health; 6) whether aikido can be understood as a health practice.

In total, 34 volunteered to answer the questionnaire. As a way to preserve the identity of the members throughout the reports, each form was identified as “P”, accompanied by a corresponding number. For example, P1 being practitioner one, P2 being practitioner two, and so on.

Result

From the 34 practitioners, 14 were members from external community, and from the internal community, one is a teacher, two are employees, and seventeen are students. The age of the members varies from 14 to 51 years. Regarding the time of practice, it ranges from one month to five years.

Analyzing the reports, it was identified that all participants understand aikido as a health practice. In general, health is perceived as a care for the body, with harmony in the organic functions, the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects, associated with quality of life, well-being, good habits, absence of diseases, vitality, enjoyment of the self and the world, good relationships, satisfaction with oneself, autonomy, access to culture, leisure, and study. With the results, it adds to the premise of the art of the well living.

In general, all practitioners reported that aikido contributed positively to their health. The impacts on the practitioners' health are described through the relationship with the physical development and interpersonal relationships, in the reduction of sedentariness, improving flexibility, relieving pain, making people more willing and more careful with themselves and with others, helping in the construction of a daily discipline, improving self-confidence, humor, character and sociability, trying to know themselves, understanding and overcoming personal limits and fears, making an inner peace possible.

In order to better describe how these reports are representative for the studies of physical education and especially for the body practices of fights, we have promoted a discussion based on Gadamer's theoretical reference about health as an existential phenomenon and the care of the self in Michel Foucault, establishing direct relations with the practitioners' reports. This discussion can be followed in the following topic.

Discussion

The project, which began in 2015, continues to the present day. During this period of time, it has had more

than 50 registrations, whether from people from the internal community (students, servers or teachers) or from the external community to UFRN. Currently, the classes take place from Monday to Saturday at UFRN's Sports and Events Complex (COESPE).

Each meeting lasts between 1h30min and 2h and the participants are instructed to attend as many days and times as possible, respecting the dynamics of each one's life, and also the etiquette established for Aikido's practice:

Integrity, faithfulness, respectfulness, and a compassionate, good and sincere heart. Truth, goodness, and beauty are our core; we must preserve these virtues. But we must do more than just preserve them - they must be led to help us sharpen our senses and become wiser. Above all there must be sincerity² (p. 93-94).

COESPE's fight room became our dojo (martial arts training place), that is, where we seek to carry out our practices of study, living, and improvement. In each meeting, we get to know a little more about each other and their life stories. As a study group that seeks to know and practice Aikido, we also end up forming a care and support group for people who are suffering from anxiety, depression, obesity, people with disabilities, among other existential conditions. This is the scene that people who come to our Dojo are faced with on a daily basis (Figure 1).

In the *dojo*, one seeks to perform the austere training, that is, the countless repetitions of the movement tend to its naturalization. According to Sasaki¹⁶ (p. 47), this naturalization has the intention of “dominating the forms”, and, completes the author: “unique and creative techniques can be accomplished when the subject learns a series of forms in a repetitive and devout way”.

We can see a bit of the group in training dynamics (Figure 2). The instructor demonstrates what must be studied and, right after that, the other practitioners start their practice.

Sometimes in pairs and other times in groups, Aikido tries to promote several experiences and stimulate



Figure 1 - The dojo. Source: collection of the Aikido Project at UFRN.



Figure 2 - Aikido group class. Source: collection of the Aikido Project at UFRN.

respect for one's own body, also doing studies on fall prevention or fall techniques, which are the ukemis, where one takes care of the other.

The practice of Aikido in this project is associated with the perspective of caring for oneself and for the other. Our theoretical contribution is Michel Foucault, a French philosopher who, in his studies on the hermeneutics of the subject and the history of sexuality, promotes discussions on how the theme of caring was approached in different social and historical contexts, how it was configured, transformed, and how it suffered certain ruptures.

In the care of the self there have been several practices and knowledge that refer to the care of body and soul simultaneously. These exercises of asceticism, or askesis, have been called spiritual exercises⁷. Pierre Hadot¹⁷ (p. 20), a scholar of the practices of antiquity, from whom Foucault appropriates in his discussions, explains that the expression “spiritual” makes use of: “It reveals the true dimensions of these exercises: thanks to them, the individual rises to the life of the objective Spirit, that is, he puts himself back in the perspective of the All (eternizing himself by surpassing himself); moreover, it is used because the other possible adjectives or qualifiers: psychic, moral, ethical, intellectual, thought of the soul, do not cover all the aspects of the reality we want to describe”.

In each of the periods, we can perceive different recommendations of exercises, as well as their objectives. In order to weave closer relationships with self-care, the actions that we carry out in our extension project are expressed in the understanding that Aikido can be considered a modern practice of the self⁸.

As we saw earlier, Aikido makes use of other techniques and body practices, such as stretching, self-massage, concentration techniques, breathing techniques, among others. It is important to point out that all body techniques,

according to Marcel Mauss¹⁸, are specific and have their form. Each dance has its own peculiarities, the way of transmitting traditional knowledge is initially given by imitation, by repetition, and by the correction of body gestures. Body techniques, therefore, are subject to learning.

About the stretching practices, we can notice it in the training, mostly at the beginning of the meetings. We can see it in [Figure 3](#).

In our understanding, the role of stretching is important not only for body preparation, but also for self-knowledge. Geoffroy¹⁹ indicates that the use of stretching to prepare the body as a form of prevention also helps in the development of body awareness through musculature and postural tone. As a common practice in *dojos*, stretching can help in the understanding of technical gestures and in the performance of the exercise to be performed, besides improving recovery and prevention of injuries to tendon and muscle tissues, as well as helping joint mobility¹⁹.

Another common practice at the beginning and end of the meetings is meditation. Practiced by Morihei Ueshiba as *Chikon Kishin* (a sitting meditation practice learned by Morihei Ueshiba in his studies of Shintoism), within



Figure 3 - Stretching in pairs. Source: collection of the Aikido Project at UFRN.

Aikido, and possibly in other martial arts of Japanese origin, we identify as *Mokuso*, a form of contemplation and meditation²⁰. This practice can be observed in [Figure 4](#).

According to Melo, Antunes, and Schneider²¹, meditation is very old and involves an exercise of concentration. In Aikido, in turn, we associate it with the idea of “emptying ourselves”, since we are often mentally fatigued, too busy with work, with the speed of daily life, bogged down with stress, among other issues. Besides these reasons, it is important to recognize the importance that we will be dealing with each other's bodies, and we need to be attentive, because this is what is most precious: one gives in to the other, so that we can evolve.

The practice of *mokuso* is important to also reconnect with nature, feeling part of it. As the founder himself suggests, we should observe rivers, read books, and understand how Nature works^{2,6}. For the contact with nature, we eventually hold meetings at the beach or even at the grass field of UFRN. We can visualize one of these moments of training in nature in [Figure 5](#).

Another form of caring for the self and the other is the practice of Reiki. Currently, it is recognized as one of the integrative and complementary practices in Health since 2016²². According to Brazilian policy, Reiki is a “therapeutic practice that uses the imposition of hands to channel vital energy, aiming to promote energy balance, necessary for physical and mental well-being”²² (p. 107).

Reiki is “a centuries-old practice, which acts on the global rebalancing of the individual, mainly through the stimulation of the endocrine-immunological system, promoting self-restoration, according to the personal state”²³ (p. 4-5). We can observe in [Figure 6](#) a little of this practice, which is characterized by the imposition of hands of people who will be “channels” or conductors of *ki*, the cosmic energy, for the person who will be cared for, in order to promote an alignment in the individual energy.

Finally, in Aikido, several practices are inserted together with those of the martial sphere. In the daily



Figure 4 - Mokuso - meditation and contemplation. Source: collection of the Aikido Project at UFRN.



Figure 5 - Aikido practice at Ponta Negra Beach - Natal/RN. Source: collection of the Aikido Project at UFRN.



Figure 6 - Reiki for caring for self and others. Source: collection from the Aikido Project at UFRN.

training, we try to incorporate principles that are the drivers for other knowledge, but mainly for self-knowledge and character development. Every semester, the group and its collaborators make an effort to bring an instructor for a technical update and to be able to evaluate the project's development, as well as to conduct our studies and the understanding of the Aikido practice.

In **Figure 7** we can see the application of an aikido technique. The *nague* (the one who will perform the technique) gets in touch with *uke*, who starts the aggression, and leads it back to the person, promoting a projection. The importance of training for falls (*ukemi*) is essential. Not only for care and to avoid injuries, these are body techniques that also promote knowledge of the body and a certain discipline regarding the perspective of “falling and getting up” for life's difficulties.

For this reason, Aikido is also known as the art of non-resistance^{2,3,6}. Both practitioners understand the risks of a martial art. However, it is not the goal of Aikido for anyone to leave injured. Everyone should come out of each encounter intact.

Relaxing the body is a must. It will sharpen your perception and sensitivity to the flow of energy, the direction of movement, and the intention of the person you practice with. In this way, it is possible for both of us to prepare our bodies for the dynamics that will be performed or the technique to be executed, thus helping us to know our own body, our mentality and attitudes, our feelings, and other elements that vary according to time and evolution in the training.

Based on this knowledge of Aikido, we sought to know from our members how they perceive health and how the practice has impacted their lives. Namely, in the questionnaire, we requested information regarding age, time of practice, and we asked questions about what health is and how the practice of Aikido has impacted the practitioners' health. If positively, negatively, and in what way. In addition, we questioned whether Aikido can be seen as a health practice. And if so, why.



Figure 7 - A technique performed by an aikido instructor. Source: collection from the Aikido Project at UFRN.

What is health for the project members

Regarding the question about what health is for the participants, we came across a variety of answers that, in our understanding, comprise the social, psychological, spiritual, and biological spheres. As it is a complex matter to separate these elements amidst their answers, and for many times the information also repeats itself, we selected some narratives that may represent the majority among them. Many of the accounts point to health through elements such as the absence of disease and/or pain, a good diet, vitality, autonomy. These answers can be contemplated with the following sentence, for example, "Health is to have in harmony the organic and mental functions" (P1).

Other answers have already demonstrated a greater complexity in understanding what health is, intertwining the individual, the social, the biological, the cultural, and also the spiritual. (P19), "being well in body and soul" (P33); "the variant condition in which the body, mind, and spirit meet, but which is influenced by the various environments in which we are inserted and the various ways we lead our lives" (P34).

Being well with myself, in my relationships, and with the environment around me. For this, I try to perceive how I am physically, emotionally, spiritually, and having this awareness, I build day by day changes in habits, behaviors that relieve and help me in this well-being that I wish or determine for myself. In short, it is to feel good, in a balanced, integrated way, using the tools I have available: feeling light, clean, in flow with life (P27).

With these statements, we can, from Gadamer¹² (p. 109), conceive health as the search for a state of equilibrium in constant movement, understood as "the rhythm of life, a continuous process in which equilibrium always stabilizes anew. We all know it. There are breathing, metabolism, sleep - three rhythmic phenomena whose course gives rise to vitality, rest, and energy". In the author's conception, health goes beyond being just a feeling or sensation. The idea that something may not be right does not contemplate the breadth of this concept. The mystery of health is permeated by the idea of being-in-the-world and being-with-others. This means that the understanding of health from an existential perspective must take into account the human being in its entirety, as a biological, social, psychological, emotional, cultural and social being¹². In Brazil, researchers such as Nogueira²⁴, Mendes¹³, Ayres²⁵ and Aguiar *et al.*²⁶, defend the concept of health in the existential perspective proposed by Gadamer, especially in studies related to the field of Physical Education.

This search for balance has a homeostatic nature, which is not reduced to a merely biological reading. It is part of a perspective of openness to the elaboration of meaning in life, thus having an interpretative nature. In this sense, approaching Gadamer and Foucault, we can

understand with full force the idea of caring for oneself and for the other around a hermeneutic of the subject.

The impact of the project on the practitioners' lives

Regarding the way the practice of Aikido impacts health, all members affirm that the project impacts positively on their lives and highlight elements arising from a social practice that forms new friendships; It is also a form of physical activity, helps to build discipline, reduces muscle and joint pain, reduces stress through body and mental relaxation; it provides knowledge of another culture and stimulates reading, improves self-esteem, helps to overcome fears, sharpens the space-time perception, stimulates the development of serenity and inner peace.

We can observe some of their reports as follows: "It has made me more willing, not to mention the self-esteem that improves too" (P8); "In Aikido, we acquire wisdom to deal with stress, bad mood and laziness, factors that directly affect my life, and with the body, we develop awareness that allows us to discover our limits and overcome them as a martial athlete" (P16); "Positively, because Aikido works a lot on stretching and body movements and, as a result, I am getting better from pains in my joints and spine, due to the stretches I learned to do" (P28); "Aikido helped me to know myself better, both physically and mentally, helping me to recognize habits that harm my health, in addition to preparing me to deal more positively with the unexpected things in life that could harm me" (P13).

All the reports expose the impacts in different ways. Among them, we highlight P11, which symbolizes all our efforts:

Aikido helps me improve:

My sociability. I feel more outgoing.

My posture. Besides the exercise helping me, the teachers emphasize the importance of posture and help me discover muscles I didn't even know I had, and activating them improves my posture.

My character. I feel that I have more insight into ethical issues.

This guides me to take healthier attitudes.

My mood. Both by being with other people and by doing the exercises.

My self-confidence. Developing martial skills makes me feel more capable of doing things like presenting work in public and dealing with other people in a more assertive way. Aikido has taught me breathing techniques and postures that help me stay calm and reduce stress. Also, knowing that I am more capable of reacting to some attack on the street - not assault, because it is not worth reacting to that and I am not yet capable - makes me feel less afraid.

My attention. Perception of my surroundings and my own body.

My physical conditioning. Besides the exercises practiced in the dojo, the teachers teach us stretching, warm-ups, and exercises that can be done at home.

Among other things.

In Aikido, we encounter situations and also construct senses and meanings beyond technique. Morihei Ueshiba

points out that it will provide us with a foundation to undertake successfully, allowing us to move forward, create opportunities, and form our character.

By training in Budo, one will build a true spiritual path, which will lead to enlightened actions. Moreover, those who sincerely train in other forms of Buddha show teachings that reflect the great plan of heaven and earth, leading to enlightenment. Thus, the virtues of bravery, wisdom, love, and empathy are united in body and mind, creating a beautiful and valiant sword that will always lead us to great realizations. The law of the Great Way is established, the earth is protected, and each person becomes part of this process⁴ (p. 36).

We see that only through daily effort and training with the spirit of budo will it be possible to develop what Aikido proposes: to soften the heart, practice sincerity, and realize misogi^{2,4,6}. For this, we must understand that it is our individual duty to seek our improvement in this path.

Aikido as a health practice

Finally, we asked if Aikido can be seen as a health practice. In this sense, the answers showed that all members point that Aikido is indeed a form of health practice. As we saw in the words of Morihei Ueshiba², we must focus on the healing aspects of the techniques present in this martial path. As for the reports, we identified that they consider it to be a health practice because it has a self-preservation characteristic of caring for the other, besides contemplating the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual aspects.

It is a practice or tool that leads us to improve our state of health, well-being, self-knowledge and, in this way, allows the person to look at himself, love himself, and self-care. This perception of self and the other, since we build this practice in interaction with other participants, integrates body awareness, mental power, emotional and spiritual side, working on our health in a broader way (P27).

We can observe in their narratives that “its techniques and stretches bring countless benefits to the body, such as elasticity, improved endurance and physical” (P5); “physical exercises such as aikido bring several benefits to our health, besides the practice teaching means of concentration, breathing, and other techniques that help the mental health of those who practice it” (P10); “Yes, because it contributes significantly to getting to know yourself better, respecting your needs and, consequently, exercising the care for your well-being” (P15); “Aikido can be considered a health practice, since it enables, besides the physical benefits, new ways of dealing with life and conflicts, helping to reduce levels of anxiety and stress” (P21).

We acknowledge here the importance of perceiving health practices as a form of caring for the self and the other. The perspective of care as a social practice that, as in Foucault and his epicurean-based reflections, values friendship and reciprocity in this relationship⁷. The prac-

tice of self-care is not a solitary practice, although the individual responsibility to carry it out is understood. Epictetus’ being communal allows us to reflect on the present day and modern practices of care.

Conclusions

Our practice is guided by the principles of self-knowledge and caring for oneself and for others, without diminishing its martial aspects. In general, we think we are making a joint effort to make our project a space for those who seek to know Aikido and its philosophical, or even mystical, context. This project is an example of how dynamic and complex health can be. In the participants’ reports, we identified that, when discussing health, we are also reflecting on the organic condition of the body, such as tone, muscle development, flexibility, on the harmony between mind, body, and spirit, on social relationships, on the improvement of self-esteem, on moods, on the reduction of anxiety and stress, on pain relief, and on the exercise of tolerance, discipline, and serenity in dealing with adverse situations and conflicts that arise in life.

In our understanding, the impact on health is a reflection of the care for oneself and for others, of the feeling of harmony, of union, and of a serene life. In the case of aikido, there are concentration exercises, meditation, stretching, among other practices and body techniques that help promote knowledge about one's own body and also about the relationship with others and with nature. Within it, there is no separation between mind, body, and spirit, between body and nature. However, we need to investigate more about budo in future works in order to better understand this element, so remarkable in Japanese education, and discuss it from the perspective of Physical Education.

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