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Pedagogical approach to a small child receiving early - interdisciplinary help (the programme of early intervention)

In 21st century child's good is undoubtedly important value, especially in countries with well-developed culture and civilization. This is why, in situations dangerous for its life, health and growth, special preventing actions are undertaken.

In Poland, 2005, two important legislatives were issued, both concerned children whose development is or might be incorrect.

The first one - the result of almost two-years preparation – is called the Government Pilot Programmeme (planned to realize in 2005-2007) and described as “*early, multi - expert, complex, coordinated and continuous help for the child threatened with the disabled child and its family*”¹. Premises of the programme were created as a result of cooperation between departments (Ministry of Health, Ministry of National Education and Sport, Ministry of Work and Social Policy) and non - governmental organizations under the auspices of the Ombudsman for Civil Rights. The character of proposed actions was defined: ‘under *early, multi - expert, complex, coordinated and continuous help* we understand simultaneous, mutually completing reactions of medicine, rehabilitation and therapy (early intervention) and revalidation and educational ones (early developemental enhancement) covered by one programmeme, created, implemented covered by adequately prepared experts indispensable for the given child together’.

The authors of the programme draw attention to some features of proposed help for the child and its parents, which may influence its functioning and usefulness:

- **starting help as early as it is possible**, which is connected with early diagnosis of the problem;
- **continuous care**, which means leading the child from the moment of recognizing the threat until the child becoming 7 years old (or to the moment of starting school) by the same multi-expert team cooperating in the process od diagnosing, programming reactions, their implementation and evaluation;
- **coordination and complexity**, in the document described as:
 - combining medical as well as psychological and pedagogical diagnosis with indications of necessary actions,

¹ www.men.gov.pl

- combining the diagnosis with creating and implementing an individual programme of rehabilitation and therapy,
- combining the implementation of a programme of rehabilitation and therapy with its modification by an interdisciplinary team of experts and the financing of the programme from various sources.
- helping and supporting child and parents in the same time
 - **interdisciplinary**, which is based on helping child and its parents by cooperating experts working in a team composed of – depending on the needs – physicians from various expert fields, a psychologist, a physiotherapist, a logopaedist, an occupational therapist, other therapists, a pedagogue and a social worker.

The second document concerns the organization of early developmental enhancement. The act is formed as the Minister's of National Education and Sport Decree and was issued on April 4th, 2005². The conditions of such help are enumerated in this document.

As in the first legislative, disabled children under school - age and their families could be receivers of help. Realization of early growth – support is placed in institutions, which possess appropriate financial background and a group of specialists prepared to work with small children, whose development is incorrect. The team's makeup, described in the document, shows the advantage of pedagogic and psychological support over other forms of intervention. Team's tasks are connected with preparing and organizing an individual help programme for every child and its family.

I am about to describe, in the next part of this article, the actions taken up by pedagogues (mostly special pedagogues) towards the youngest children, who take part in early – intervention programme.

According to physicians and physiotherapists (involved in the programme) there is no need to engage special pedagogues to work with infants. They believe that medical support and physical treatment are the most essential in this period of life. This is where the mistake exists. Obviously, it is true that for an infant, the most important thing is to maintain basic biological balance. Also taking care of physical development has considerable meaning because there is tight connection between physical growth and mental maturation. This straight dependence was described many times by many researchers and was appreciated by parents, especially the ones whose babies' delays in one area have influence on other areas of functioning.

To show the importance of pedagogue actions in child's therapy in the first life period, it is essential to draw attention to the fact how the word 'development' is understood. I am not

² Dz. U. Z 2005, Nr 68, poz. 587

going to present lexical definition. However, I will enumerate important factors, which have influence on the whole process:

- child's abilities
- social environment (family) and emotional atmosphere produced by it
- material surrounding

First factor may be described in many different ways. As child's abilities, Brzezińska (2003, s. 10-37) understands it's internal resources, which let it gain certain competences at it's growth level. In medical essays an often topic are genetically programmed human possibilities (Jaczewski, s.23), which signifies inborn biologically – psychological properties determining it's development. Abilities of a child, who at the very beginning of its life experiences failure caused by pathological factors, might be limited or not fully developed. Pedagogue's role should depend on actions, that create, support or intensify small child's competences to gain experiences, in other words – to learn. Due to existence of those problems, the experiences may be:

- not complete, because visual, aural or other perception might be incorrect
- negative, which, if repeating, may lead to appearance of withdrawing and avoiding attitude
- might be lack of them, which stops development

Such early supporting of child's abilities could be named, after Pestalozzi³, *the elementary education*. According to mentioned aboved distinguished pedagogy precursor, bringing up and educating should be in "tight connection with natural order"⁴. How shall we nowadays understand this "natural order" in relation to the youngest children threatened with incoret development? Surely, it is important to maintain biological rhythm of a day. That is not only the aspect of health. Constancyof the structure helps to keep the sense of security, because the baby is able to foresee the activity of surrounding. M. Kościelska⁵ considers this issue in a very interesting way by describing the process of incorrect relations between a mother and a child, when the signals from the child are incomprehensible or wrongly interpreted by the mother, who sees herself as an inadequate, "bad mother". Consecutive attempts made by the child, if not satisfying, deepen the discord – by establishing its mother in her incapacity and making the child resign from the contact. Keeping a day rhythm lets a mother predict a lot of her baby's needs. At the same time an infant will start to understand that his actions are giving effects. It guarantees both sides conviction that mutual understanding is being built.

³ Pestalozzi J. H., *Łabędzi śpiew*, Warszawa 1973.

⁴ Tamże, s. 6

⁵ Kościelska M., *Oblicza upośledzenia*, PWN, Warszawa 1998, s. 190-192

The second aspect of bringing up a child in harmony with nature is connected with regarding its development as a process proceeding in definite cycle. Even if it is delayed it has to go through particular stages, that can not be omitted as they are connected with gaining new experiences.

From personal resources extremely important for growth process are certain features of character and personality, that every human has possessed since he was born and which affects his fate, even if he experienced trauma during first life stage. Personal characteristics may not be easy to notice in the earliest life period, however almost every parent can precise them. Mothers say that, *child despite deep illness looks around swiftly or she has the character, she will not stop crying, unless she gets what she wants*. Father states: *he is a real brownie, trying to stand up although he is not able to control his feet*.

According to Z. Kułakowska⁶ (1998, s. 49-50), learning process depends on gaining new information by central nervous system and on creating new sensual representations (or processing them thanks to experiences).

Stimulating of learning process's is connected with revalidation enhancement. In case of children who have difficulties with acquiring positive development experiences, memorizing and storing them are connected with multiple repeating the same actions, to introduce 'synaptic convenience' (as it is called by neuro – physiologists). It is very hard and monotonous activity. Here we can also notice a great importance of pedagogue's influence. While preparing lessons he should create a positive climate. It is also important – even for babies – that proposed exercises should be attractive, so that the child will feel the pleasure of creating and will discover its creative possibilities and as a result consider itself as a distinct person. I will again cite Pestalozzi, who repeatedly underlines the fact, that forming child's development should be in accordance with natural order⁷. If children act consistently with their natural desires, they engage emotionally. Positive feelings help to overcome difficulties. Parents should be aware of that, because child's internal motivation depends on parent's desires and expectations. Disproportion in this area may have a slowing – down effect, when requirements are excessive, or, if they are under the level of child's abilities, do not motivate. While preparing therapeutic programme for the child, educator should take into consideration also this important aspect of forming its emotions and psyche.

All matters create the area of special pedagogue's work, both with a child and with its parents (mother mainly). Understanding by minders the importance of the problem will help to open the way to proper growth stimulation. Pestalozzi, using his 19th century language,

⁶ Kułakowska Z., Neurofizjologiczne podstawy uczenia się, W: Współczesne tendencje w rehabilitacji, red. Tomasik E., Mazanek E., Warszawa 1998, s. 53

⁷ Pestalozzi J. H., op.cit., s. 6

describes child's needs with following words: 'eye wants to look, ear - to hear, legs – to walk, hand - to grab, heart desires to love and believe and mind – to think'⁸. How pedagogue can stimulate young organism for improving these functions, so that the child could achieve a certain sum of experiences on every stage of its development? To answer this question, one needs to point the necessity of adequate influence on senses to achieve right reception from the inside and outside world. Disturbations concerning this area may be varied. Correct stimulation has to regulate sensual channels in three ranges: perception, conduction and processing information. Pedagogue's task, within the framework of sensual stimulation, is to organize stimuli supply from the environment to provide a child with their optimal amount. Coming back to Pestalozzi's idea of bringing up in an natural order, proposed stimuli for perception should have the character of natural stimulants, the ones which a child of certain age would experience, if there were no problems with its development. So creating material surrounding for a small child has meaning, and parents should know it, because a family house is the most important therapeutic sphere in the first life period.

Parents, who understand condition and needs of their child, who are sure of adequacy of their actions, will be able to ensure their son or daughter correct emotional atmosphere. Considering themselves as competent parents will give them mental comfort to them and the sense of security – to their child. And here another important function of special pedagogue, who working with a child, works also with its parents, is visible. While spending lot of time with a mother and/or a father, he becomes the most predestined person to provide them with abilities essential for correct nursing, feeding, organizing suitable surroundings and possible exercises and remedial treatment. He has to put a lot of patience into continuous explaining and persuading that their actions are right, which is possible only after building a bond between both persons, who look after the child.

Among individual features, motivation to overcome learning problems is very important.

Specialized pedagogue's work (who belongs to expert team) depends on taking part in every stage of therapeutic process. From the moment of meeting a child, through constructing he programme, then carrying on the therapy – in the form of development stimulation, evaluation of the programme and of course helping parents. This process is very long, laborious, demanding patience and the ability to work out deep contact with child's parents. That is why pedagogue's work needs permanent cooperation with the rest of the experts, and pedagogue's person becomes a sort of a "bridge" between all of them. If described conditions

⁸ Pestalozzi J. H., op.cit., s. 8

are fulfilled, pedagogue's work in early – intervention and early developmental enhancement programme might be very satisfying.

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14. www.men.gov.pl

Summary

Specialized pedagogue's work (who belongs to expert team) depends on taking part in every stage of therapeutic process. From the moment of meeting a child, through constructing the programme, then carrying on the therapy – in the form of development stimulation, evaluation of the programme and of course helping parents. This process is very long, laborious, demanding patience and the ability to work out deep contact with child's parents. That is why pedagogue's work needs permanent cooperation with the rest of the experts, and pedagogue's person becomes a sort of a "bridge" between all of them.

To show the importance of pedagogue's actions in child's therapy in the first life period, I will enumerate important factors, which have influence on the process of development of the youngest children: child's abilities, social environment (family) and emotional atmosphere produced by it, material surrounding.

In this article I am about to describe the actions taken up by pedagogues (mostly special pedagogues) towards the youngest children, who take part in early – intervention programme.