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Relational plays of Developmental Movement (DM) as techniques of personality balance(shaping)

Teachers and therapists sometimes complain that psychological concepts are too abstract and don't contribute much to practical educational solutions. So I decided to look for connections between them. I decided to find the psychological basis of V. Sherborne's Developmental Movement efficiency since it is a widely spread method. It is used in different centres of rehabilitation and education for children, youth and adults. It proves that DM satisfies the needs of both disabled and healthy people.

The main theoretical basis of the method is of Laban's Movement concept which has descriptive but not explaining status¹. It seems that the mechanism of corrective emotional experience may help to explain the success of DM. Social and cultural contexts of personality development are emphasised by K. Horney². She especially indicates the role of early interpersonal experiences in personality shaping. V. Sherborne confirms the values of non-verbal contact in psychological development. However the first author emphasises traumatic feelings resulting in neurotic personality and the other shows the positive results of common interpersonal movement. In both cases the social experience is the key to understand personal attitudes towards other people.

Modern psychology describes man as a half-open system that balances between determination and freedom³. The role of different biological, social and psychological factors in person's functioning is beyond doubt. Nowadays psychological trends tend to emphasise or ignore some of them. As far as the formal traits of the aspects of human existence (energetic and temporal) of person's behavior depend mainly on biological structure, the cognitive contents especially the image of internal and external world correspond to external experiences. The feelings of early childhood concerning relations with referent person (

¹ The author was a dance theorist

² Horney K. (1978). *Nerwica a rozwój człowieka*. Warszawa. PIW.

³ Trempała J. (2003). *Koncepcje rozwoju człowieka*. W: J. Strelau. *Psychologia*. Podręcznik akademicki. Podstawy psychologii. Tom I. 256-283.

parent) create personal traits⁴. “Good -object” satisfying child’s needs improves positive self - image and concept of the world but depriving behaviour exposes a baby to fear and permanent anxiety. Most researchers agree that fear is one of negative emotions caused by objective or subjective threat situations which are placed in past, present or future perspective. The emotions appear in psychic, somatic and behavioural spheres⁵. For example psychic symptoms include conscious negative feelings of tension, helplessness, worrying, nervousness which generate attention, perception, memory and thinking disorders. Among somatic indicators of fear we enumerate- diarrhoea, tension of guts’ muscles, fingers trembling, headache, paling etc. The psychic and biological symptoms mostly make a person take avoiding or impulsive coping style.

K. Horney⁶. tries to penetrate the subjective world of a lonely, rejected child. The author grasps three components of the “basic fear” – isolation, helplessness and hostility. If a child is often exposed to such feelings it shapes them emotionality and gathers life’s scripts and patterns due to learning mechanism of repetition. What I mean is not natural developmental fears based on imagination growth but chronic anxiety generated by real social experiences such as excluding, rejection, intimidation or negligence. The disable or the unwanted children are especially at such negative situations risk. A child wants to reduce the basic fear and to protect himself against the threatening world. So it is motivated to use available means such as crying, avoiding, closing, looking for other protectors. It facilitates special models of neurotic adaptation. The main characteristic of such a timid child is inflexibility of behaviour. The child cannot use adequate attitudes to different interpersonal contexts. The basic fear is the prime regulator of functioning. Depending on which component of the emotion dominate we observe such interpersonal attitudes as – “against people”, “from people” or “towards people”. Each strategy can transform itself into drive or need of personality dynamics. K. Horney⁷. points out three categories of neurotic needs based on different ways of reducing fear. The pursuit of love (towards others) includes

- The need of acceptance and affirmation – shown as desire to be attractive for others and to fulfil their expectations. Such a person is very sensitive to signs of rejection

⁴ Mahler M.S., Pine F., Bergman A. (1975). The psychological birth of the human infant. New York, Basic Books.

⁵ Siek S. (1986). Struktura osobowości. Warszawa. ATK.

⁶ Horney K. (1978). Neurotyczna osobowość naszych czasów. Warszawa. PWN

⁷ Horney K. (1978). Nerwica a rozwój człowieka. Warszawa. PIW.

- The need of dependence – consists in desire of overprotection. Such a person tends to be in close symbiotic relation with a dominating referent person who “takes my life in his hands”
- The need of respect – means an essential correlation between self-esteem and opinions of other people about the person
- The need of perfection – motivates a person to hide self weakness’ and disadvantages. The perfection is protection against criticism and rejection.

The attitudes “against people” is the common feature of the second category which comprises

- The need of power – manifests in desire for over control of reality and glorification of willpower and contempt for any weakness. It is impossible to present trust, to be obedient or dependent on anyone
- The need of exploiting others – means instrumental relationships with other people
- The need of self admiration – shows lack of tolerance towards self-weakness’ and self-idealisation

Finally the last neurotic orientation –” to keep distance from other people - consists of:

- The need of low aspirations – inclines towards avoiding functioning life style
- The need of self-sufficiency and independence – shows isolation and the lack of ability to make a lasting friendship or marriage

So the individual tries to reduce the basic fear based on social threat by different ways: submission, domination or isolation. The neurotic person can’t integrate these attitudes and use them adequately to circumstances. The individual tends to protect himself and not to develop himself.

The over generalization may be corrected by emotional corrective experience⁸. The crucial characteristic of such experience is discrepancy between individual’s expectations and real referent person’s behaviour. The different unpredictable situation may be the turning point which can modify personal beliefs of the individual. Such experience may be connected with the situation when for example a teacher notices and praises positive behaviour of an “aggressive boy” or when unattractive girl is asked for a dance or when

⁸ Kratochvil S. (1981). Zagadnienia grupowej psychoterapii nerwic. Warszawa. PWN

mother “catches “a contact with her autistic child. These unexpected positive situations may change person’s bias and then behaviour as well. A distinctive feature of the *ece* is intensive expression of emotion which is a critical chance for reevaluation of the self image and images of others⁹. So there it is a chance to improve personality balance (the integration of the three attitudes towards, against and away from others). The healthy person can use the state of loneliness to develop himself because he does not feel rejection. Moreover he is able to come into assertive confrontation without pressure of domination or submission. Finally he can make the intimacy lacking in fear of abuse.

The therapeutic proposition which gives a chance for emotional corrective experience and then helps in integrating different attitudes to people is the Developmental Movement according to W. Sherborne¹⁰. The relational plays “with”, “against” and “together” with partner may modify personal relationships. A shy person that keeps distance from others (tendency to be away from people) expecting to be abandoned may experience care and fondness during the plays such as *cradle*, *pulling* or *tunnel* with a partner. The individual may also feels the communion and partnership taking part in common plays such as *rowing*, *balancing* or *pendulum* (together plays). Similarly the aggressive, dominating person has the possibility to “wake up” his natural trust and submission during the plays “with” and “together”. On the other hand the neurotic overdependent person may find it possible to control others during such plays “against” partner as *package*, *rock* or *prison*. It may give him the corrective experience of power.

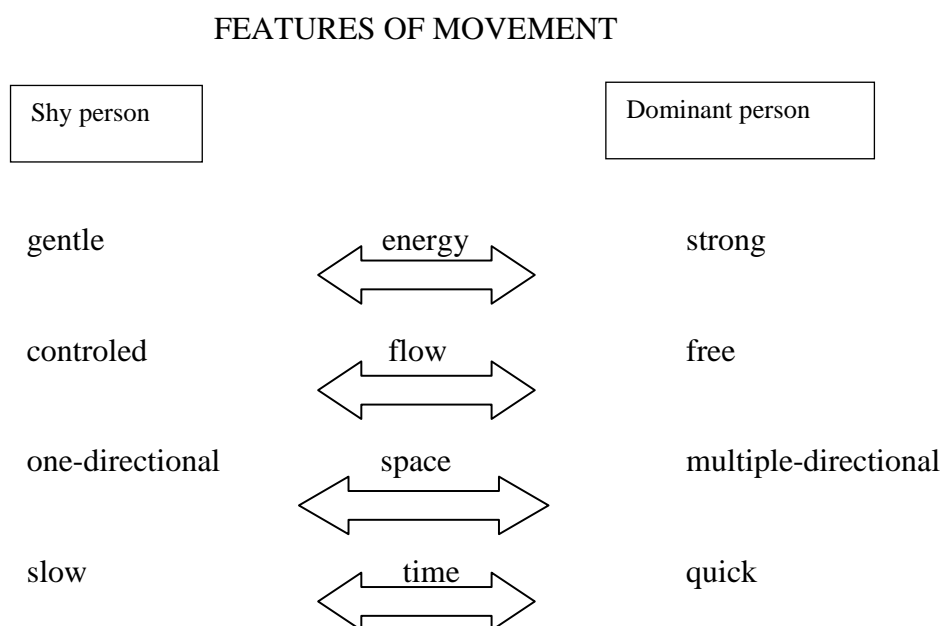
However it would be a mistake to offer the neurotic person activities not adjusted to their actual preferences. Suggesting submissive child to express his physical power or dominating man to follow another person would generate anxiety. So in the beginning of therapy we should choose plays corresponding to present models of functioning of a person who is to use them .Thus an isolating person needs plays called “aside” partner so as to get him acquainted with his own body. A very “dependent boy “ should be introduced into caring relation and a dominant girl should be allowed to express her courage during so called plays :”against” partner. The plays adjusted to individual type of interpersonal behaviour satisfy the individual's needs of safety and unconditional acceptance and then open them to developmental motives.

⁹ Prochaska J.O., Norcross J.C. (1994). Systems of psychotherapy. A transtheoretical analysis. 3rd edn. Pacific Grove, Brooks-Cole.

¹⁰ Sherborne V. (1990). Developmental Movement for Children. Mainstream, special needs and pre-school. Cambridge University Press.

The conduct of the DM as therapeutic techniques requires updated diagnosis and leader's flexibility. He ought to monitor the actual client's body languages, motions and follow them, not only the prepared session script. The theoretic basis of movement's diagnosis constitutes the R.Laban's concept¹¹. I am not going to explain precisely the theory but to show the characteristic features of a shy (away from people attitude) and a dominant (against people relation) person movement according to Laban's model

Figure 1. Specific features of a shy and a dominant person movement



There is the evidence that a shy person's movement is opposite to the aggressive one in the range of energy, flow, space and time. A shy individual prefers gently, controlled, one-directional and slow movement while a dominant one requires strong, free, multiple-directional and quick movement. Adjusting the types of plays to actual personal movement tendencies and then experimenting on new ways of interpersonal contacts may be the turning point which will facilitate the integration of the different attitudes.

¹¹ Laban R. (1980). *Mastery of Movement* 4th edn. Northcote House Publishers.

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