

“Festina lente”: Body awareness intervention in a blind girl - a case study

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With approval from “Alice’s” parents.

Background: A blind girl with increased muscular tone in her legs, “Alice”, is described from a physiotherapeutic intervention view. As the contact started, she was observed to have little awareness of especially the legs. She did not move around, but sat on the floor with a crouched back and legs tensely outstretched. When placed in standing, she got tense and locked up.

Vision makes sense of oneself, the world and interactions¹. Visual spatial perception is necessary to understand a scene before other aspects may function, e.g., recognition or motion². Spatial perception brings information to the sensorimotor system, which needs input to develop. The sensorimotor system brings body awareness, a concept describing how we relate to and understand our whole bodies from within³. If lacking vision, the body awareness of one’s body may be affected.

A child’s development depends on the parents and how they understand the child’s abilities and difficulties⁴. Hence, tutorial guidance to them is essential.

Objectives: To introduce body awareness aspects in a blind girl, to optimally create foundation for positive development in, and via, her body and movements.

Methods: Physiotherapeutic observations and treatment of “Alice”, during the ages 2-3,5 years, were performed, some filmed. They focused on body awareness and movement quality, not quantity (achieving motor milestones). Among the techniques were: i.) sensorimotor exploration with feet, ii.) using positions that eased tension, iii.) initially stimulating proximal muscles, iv.) multimodal stimulation and v.) using small “rooms” to inform “Alice” about her body in the world and vi.) letting maturation and increased body awareness, increase demands on activity – “festina lente”. Journal records were noted.

Tutorial contacts with parents were held.

Results: “Alice” quickly adapted to this new practicing. In the less tense position sitting on a stool, she investigated materials with her feet, and bending forward to feel her feet with her hands. Playing in kneeling position often ended in sitting on the mat with gently bent legs. “Alice” enjoyed using a play tunnel, in which she also crawled backwards, allowing the legs to lead the movement. At 3,5 years, “Alice” recognized her legs and asked for walking activities.

The parents described how the body awareness perspective made them recognize their daughter better. Also, they could relax from demands to rushly learn “Alice” to walk.

Conclusion: Body awareness aspects when treating blind children are important. With vision missing, the “festina lente” approach may make them understand themselves from within.

References:

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