

Marte Meo in Early Intervention for Children with Developmental, Speech, Communication and Language Delay



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Early Intervention programs are common all over the world and have developed since the fifties. In Switzerland the first program was developed in 1957 in the French speaking part. Today they are widely spread all over the country and every child with special needs, can be oriented to one of these programs. This type of special education is dispensed either in institutions or in private practices and is financed by the national social security ("*Invalidenversicherung*") and free of charge for the parents.

THE CONCEPTS OF EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

The first concepts of early intervention were clearly child oriented and parents were considered being co-therapists. There was a large orientation to behavioural therapy and therapeutically work concentrated on the stimulation of the child. Even if in most of the programs intervention took place at the child's home, the family-involvement as well was very child oriented and did rarely consider interactions between the child and his environment.

Considering the newer theories of child development, concepts of early intervention programs have changed. Child development therefore takes place in a constant process of interaction between the child and his environment. This process, in which the information treatment takes place, cannot be ignored in intervention and therapy. Education can no longer work on only one aspect of this process and has to take in account the importance of the environment and the interaction that takes place in it.

EVALUATION A STARTING POINT OF INDIVIDUALISED EDUCATION

Children with special needs have to get a very individual, ecologically oriented special education. In such a concept we need to analyse, evaluate and interpret the child's problems, capacity and his limits, as well as the environment in which he lives, the interactions that take place in it and the resources the environment and the child can activate. The daily interactions and their analysis, is a very important component of early intervention and individual education.

The evaluation of the child's capacity is largely based on developmental screening and tests. The testing materials are very efficient to analyse the child developmental delay and his potential. Instruments that evaluate developmental capacity have hardly any items, which take in account interaction between the child and his environment. This evaluation needs to be screened with different materials and methods.

USING VIDEO FOR INTERACTION ANALYSIS

In the early intervention service I directed several years in Fribourg, Switzerland, I became aware of the importance of working on the interaction between the child and his environment. Since intervention takes place in the child's home, the professional could point out the problematic point in interaction and help the parents work on new educational strategies. Working this way brought some

amelioration, but somehow the information was not concrete enough, and did often not look for the positive points to restore the process of interaction. That's when we decided to use video to do analyse children's behaviour and interaction. We had used video analysis while doing the testing of the child, but did not use it yet in other situations. Since the work with the child takes place in his natural environment, we felt this was a perfect setting for video analysis. The children's interactions were taken on videos while they were playing with the special education teacher, the parents or the siblings. The camera was placed in the "working room" and the whole intervention time was filmed. There was no special effective system to use the video recordings. And the amount of material that had to be analysed was too much and it was time consuming to handle.

There was a need to find a new way, which was more effective and less time consuming. We needed better systematic and specific criteria's for evaluation. During my search for a more efficient video-analysis Professor Flammer, working in the field of developmental Psychology at the University of Bern, Switzerland, told me about the Orion experiences in Holland. While looking for Orion, which was the first program initiated by Maria Aarts and a colleague, we found Marte Meo, a further developed program also set up by Maria Aarts. This program based on the people's own strength has the following central focus "...identify, activate and develop skills to enable and enhance constructive interaction and development" (Aarts, M., p.42).

MARTE MEO - USING IT'S OWN STRENGTH

The Marte Meo program was exactly what we had looked for: A video interaction analysis which encourages people to use their own strength in order to stimulate the developmental process of the child. The practical model for developing skills in daily interaction takes in account the basic elements of communication and development. The video analysis enables parents, special educators and other professionals to show interactions in a very concrete and clear way, in order to put new child raising skills into practice. It takes in account the developmental initiatives of the child in order to use it to activate and restore the developmental process. It gives parents and educators the possibility to view a problem as an opportunity to grow. Besides this, the microanalysis enables professionals to take only a few minutes video, which is less time consuming than what we had done before. Interactive analysis has made special education teachers more aware of the potence parents have.

USING MARTE MEO FOR CHILDREN WITH SPEECH LANGUAGE DELAY

In my private practice I work with small children having developmental disorders, autistic conditions and specially speech and language delay. I have observed that parents having children with speech and language delay tend to have less verbal interaction with their child. Most of the time they also less confirm children's positive behaviour and take less notice of their means of non-verbal communication. Parents need to become aware of the importance in their child's speech and language development and their communicative behaviour. Therefore parents are associated to the speech and language therapy concept and one of the parents, usually the mother, is present during speech and language therapy. This enables the therapist to point out opportunities to learn new skills. Besides the direct information given to the parents video-analysis is used at different times in order to enhance the competence of small children with developmental problems especially with speech and language delay and communication problems.

Besides the evaluation of the child's overall and language development, which is screened with different tests, the initial evaluation takes also in account the interaction between the child and his parents. The mother and the father or both parents are present during the whole evaluation. The session is usually started with the filming of a systematic play situation between the child and his parents. The play situation lasts about ten minutes and the family, who consents to be filmed, is not aware when the filming starts or ends. I try to get the video going when the parents and the child feel at ease. It is amazing to see how fast the child co-operates with his parents and how little notice he

takes of other people in the room.

In the second part of the evaluation, developmental tests are administrated. This part is also taken on video. I pursue different goals with the video material. First it gives an initial view of the child's behaviour and capacity. This enables to design an individual developmental program and is a good starting point for treatment. The materials are also useful to show children's progress later on. Further types of interactions with a not familiar person can be observed. The video can also be a good support during interpretation of the test results and is also used to pass on the information to the parents in a more concrete way.

Both parts of the evaluation process are very important and complementary. Interaction analysis adds a very important factor to the view of a child and gives the speech and language therapist a new dimension in her therapeutical work. Video-analysis of the daily interaction is not only solution oriented but provides the parents with concrete visual information about developmental level and supportive child-raising behaviour. It enables professionals to look for positive starting points in intervention and to design the step by step process of intervention. Parents have in this way not only problems but opportunities to grow in some new way.

Since I have used this combination of analyses, developmental process seems to progress faster. Parent's work in daily interaction on the specific working point that has been fixed, they enhance their educational competence. Children on the other hand seem to realise their own capacity and get to be very interested in interaction and communication. This again motivates parents to work with the child, which shows the beginning of a positive spiral. The positive side effect is a good co-operation with the family.

My experiences with Marte Meo has shown the benefits of this concept in speech and language therapy and early intervention and has motivated me to use the Marte Meo program consequently in my daily work in different fields and settings and in my work as a supervisor of professionals working in day cares, kindergarten and schools.

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