

Developmental Movement: An International Perspective and Call for Participants

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The Mind-Body Connection and Global Approaches to Learning

On a recent visit to Warsaw in Poland I was fortunate enough to spend time with Dr Agnieszka Olechowska who is based at The Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education (APS) which is a public university established in 1922. This is the only higher education institution in Poland that offers a full range of programmes in personnel training for teachers and other professionals working with children with additional needs. It was founded by Maria Grzegorzewska who pioneered a holistic approach to additional needs including visual and hearing impairment, motor, speech and social adjustment difficulties, chronic illness and the needs of gifted children. Dr Olechowska told me that the Academy was only able to develop its global additional needs intervention strategies slowly as traditional perceptions in Poland were disability based and with little understanding or research to support holistic interventions. The Academy has developed over the years to include the training of specialist teachers, educational and vocational counselors, social workers and art teachers, art therapists and a strong commitment to the physical dimensions of addressing children's needs. It also hosts a speech therapy clinic and a clinic for pupils with multiple impairments. The Academy continues to develop its status and role as the home of leading experts in coordinating disciplines such as arts education, social work, sociology and psychology in relation to additional educational needs. At this institution, the training typically takes five years, with about 7,000 students in training in part and full time courses. Poland has one of Europe's youngest populations, with half of its citizens being less than 35 years old and has a strong tradition of students entering further education.

The Role of Movement-Based Programmes as Part of an Intervention Programme

The purpose of my visit was to discuss a joint venture between the Academy and the University of Exeter as part of my doctoral research. Dr Olechowska shares my interest in the role that movement programmes may have in addressing underachievement academically as well as its potential to support interventions for social and emotional issues. It is the Academy's holistic approach to additional needs that prompted her to contact me via a colleague known to both of us: Barbara Pheloung.

International Project: A Developmental Exercise Programme for Teachers: Call for Participants

Since my training with The Institute of Neuro-Physiological Psychology, I have become increasingly involved in the research and study of neuro-developmental delay programmes internationally. There is a growing interest in this area and, at the same time, a need to ensure that there is a good research base to support and validate this type of approach as I recognize that there is a degree of healthy skepticism about what could be characterized as unconventional approaches to interventions to special needs. The controversy surrounding the publication of one paper in 'Dyslexia' regarding the DORE programme, for example prompted the resignation of several members of the board and a number of critical commentaries from academics (Source: The Times 29/05/08).

This summer, a programme will commence which is intended to develop a greater international understanding of the research underlying a developmental exercise programme and to attempt a rigorous evaluation of its implementation in a number of settings. What we intend to do is:

1. To train up to 15 teachers selected from across Poland in a recognized (INPP) developmental exercise programme which will then be implemented and monitored in their schools. This will commence in Poland in August 2008.

2. To train a similar number of teachers from the U.K. beginning in October 2008 who will also participate in a monitoring and evaluation programme.

Teachers who apply for the course will be trained to carry out a comprehensive screening, assessment and intervention programme which includes measures of academic functioning as well as of fine and gross motor skills such as copying, drawing and balance activities. The associated research will form the background to this.

This is an exciting project which I now invite colleagues in the UK to contact me about if they would like to know more about this approach and/ or if they would like information about participating in the training. I would suggest this is suited to teachers working with pupils aged 7-13 primarily, in mainstream, special and independent schools.

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