

How to Reduce Overweight by Therapeutic Dance Education?

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The topic of this essay is overweight, more specifically a particular type of overweight. The type of overweight in question is characterized by compact and heavy tissue, occasionally in some parts of the body only, or the whole body may be affected. People who develop such heavy, compact bodies may convey an impression of being sensitive and resourceful, and as if they do not get an outlet for their resources. Viewed this way their condition may be seen as a resource management problem. In order to work with such a problem the task is to create a therapeutic relation within which to find out about the resources, and to get them mobilized and canalized.

Keywords: overweight, resource management, transforming concepts

Overweight

A case illustrates the problem; Mia was a 32-year old dance student in an adult education program, conducted by this educator/dance psychotherapist. Mia had danced ballet since she was three, and jazz dance since she was a teenager. She was slim, but her thighs and legs were thick, compact, and heavy. Her earlier dance training seemed to have caused the heaviness of her lower extremities. She said that she had trained through the common dance learning method, the student imitating the teacher's movements, not thinking much of what she actually is doing.

Resource Management

The question was how to slim the extremities. There was no question of a diet when trying to slim only a part of the body. To suggest more dance training or aerobic exercises had not helped, even though aerobic training burns fat. Slimming in case of heavy and compact tissue requires the unlearning of unhealthy movement habits and replacing them by healthy ones.

We worked together a winter to balance her body. Her earlier mechanical, instrumental dance learning was replaced by an interactive insight-oriented method. A formalistic concept of dance was replaced by a processual one, enriched by adding an inner dimension into her movement ideas. Her training began through teaching her passive relaxation to make her heavy. After having experienced heaviness she was taught active relaxation to experience lightness. To increase the circulation in her legs she got massage. After she was taught proper breathing she learned how to sequence her dance movements according to her breathing rhythm and tempo, and to ease her movements and let them happen.

This way of working with dance training required from her a change of attitude towards the work. When Mia learned to work more consciously and to put her mind into what she was doing, she gained more understanding of what this training was all about. Working against the gravity improved her ability to centre

herself. Centring improved her alignment, and based on that she learned how to lift her long muscles when moving. This in turn made her gradually to know her inner muscles and get them orchestrated into her dancing. Her dancing became a mentally active process. As her moving became more dynamic the tissues of her body changed in quality, and her thighs and legs slimmed. This change made the quality of her moving lighter, more dynamic, and effortless while more efficient. Her dancing got a breathing, musical quality. And finally she let her mind dissolve into her dancing. As her way of moving changed, her whole being changed, she radiated of happiness. A multilevel transformation had happened.

When working with a person's specific movement problem one works with the whole personality, not forgetting that a symptom may not be identical with the problem. When working with someone heavy and compact all over, the same method as described here can be used to treat the whole body. In addition to the concrete physical work, the teacher/therapist needs to be aware of possible psychological problems connected with the overweight problem. As the physical problem gets worked out, an underlying psychological problem may surface, it may then solve itself or get transformed. A problem transformed into personal warmth and gentleness may come as a surprise for the person herself—she has learned about her resources.

Transforming Concepts

Throughout this process of learning the common theatrical dance concepts were changed in to concepts that better correspond with the actual transformation process. Such was the concept of movement. Movement seen as “locomotion in space” that is from one location to another on a stage, was changed into an inclusive conception where the dancer's inner space too is moving (Parvia, 1991, 2024). Dance concepts of stretch, strength and ease of movement, usually kept separate, were fused into one inclusive and varying conception of moving, experience as a dynamic process. When the quality of one's moving changes and gets dynamic, the concepts used, in order to correspond with that which is done and what happens, need to change too.

The context of our work and the therapeutic changes that took place was the therapeutic relationship. Within the therapeutic relationship insightful learning was completed. Carl Rogers called the particular type of learning *significant*: “learning which is more than accumulation of facts. It is learning that makes difference...” (Rogers, 1959). One may also learn to learn (Bateson, 1985). One may learn to apply, —what one has learned in new situations. As a multi-dimensional process this type of learning tends to continue beyond the actual learning situation, perhaps throughout one's life.

The many levels of this dynamic learning process seem to form interconnecting chains or networks of processes. A connecting view aids in organizing multi-dimensional, ever-changing processes and surprising transformations into interconnected wholes, thus helping to make the complexity of the process comprehensible (Bloch, 1994).

Conclusion

It is hoped that this example of working with a specific physical problem within the whole of the human being, may inspire others to consider insight-oriented, therapeutic ways of education.

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