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Marte Meo:

A powerful tool to support children with special needs in school

I'm working in a private practice in Freiburg, Switzerland and treat children and adults with a wide spectrum of speech and language difficulties and developmental problems. Besides children with early speech and language problems, adults with aphasia and the treatment of some dyslexic school children, pediatrician, parents and teachers announce quite a few children with autistic spectrum disorder. Marte Meo has proven to be a very useful approach to enhance social attention, support language and communication development and social interactions. Specially children with autism lack all these competences and they have to be developed. Marte Meo is also very useful because the approach guides parents and teachers and develops natural supportive behavior, which is used all the time. Children get daily support and not only once a week during therapeutic sessions. The intense collaboration with the parents is based on the newer ecological and interactive concepts of child development, which emphasizes the importance of the environment and the interaction that takes place in it.

Marte Meo a powerful approach to guide teachers

As some children grew older and where integrated in public school, I was asked to guide teachers in their difficult task to teach children with special needs in a normal classroom environment. Marte Meo guidance showed to be very powerful in all these cases. The video pictures made information so visual and concrete and the link to child development and didactics gave the teacher a theoretical orientation. In this way I have been guiding several teachers working in Kindergarten, 3rd and 4th, 6th grade. This year one of the students has attended 7th grade. But specially the Kindergarten teachers wanted to know more and asked me to give them a Marte Meo Basic course. During one school year, once all six weeks, we worked together getting to know the Marte Meo basics and applying them to their daily teaching work.

Clear structure

Although the children have special needs, the focus of guidance mostly is the teacher, who needs advice on how to support development and how to deal with behavior problems. The first look in the classroom is always a check on the balance of structure and atmosphere. Then I look closer on structure, since this is one of the main problems of autistic children. To show the concrete steps of positive leading is an information teachers find very useful. Clear beginning and end is not only a Marte Meo element, but also a didactic concept teachers should rely on. Children with autism have problems with

transitions. Therefore it is important to anticipate for them and name what will be coming next. They also need to get clear structure, often they don't know when a task begins, the steps you have to go through and when it ends. Teachers need to be very clear with these structural elements: Clear beginning, step-to-step guidance and clear end. Emphasizing these steps visually is necessary and helps children with autism to be more initiative.

Step-to-step guidance develops problem-solving strategies

When introducing the step-to-step guidance, teachers are often uneasy with this element. They feel the children should be able to discover themselves ways to solve problems. Here, the information that autistic children have not the capacity to do so is very important. Autistic children more than others need this step-to-step guidance in order to learn how to bring a task to an end. Here again the visual and concrete information but also the link to the theory of autistic information procession helps the teacher to use this guidance.

Building up social information

The information on how to build up a focus, how to develop more social attention, name the children by their name, to build up and keep eye contact are guiding points teachers find very useful and integrate very quickly in their teaching repertoire. After the second or third reviewing, teachers told me that these elements were effective too for the other children in the classroom. "I have less problems with hyperactive children." "Somehow I have less difficulties with behavior problems." "All of a sudden we had a better and more peaceful atmosphere." "Suddenly eye contact was not a problem anymore although I never have trained it." were often comments of teachers during reviewing sessions. But comments like: "I never felt criticized, but all of a sudden I could see and perceive how to deal with certain situations and I asked myself why didn't I see it myself?" "I never thought that something that looks so easy, can be so complex in application, but so efficient in daily work" illustrate feelings of teachers during the interactive guidance.

The powerful aspects of Marte Meo

Marte Meo has proven to be effective in the school environment. It doesn't only support children with special needs, but enhances the teaching strategies also for all the other children. The following elements are often pointed out to be especially helpful to deal with difficult situations in school: Images make information concrete and clear and help to focus and name the situation. Communication is easier, because concepts get to be evident. We know what we mean, when we talk about structure. Theory can be easily explained, because it is linked to the concrete situation we have observed. The transfer to other similar situation is much easier. Teachers haven't just gotten recipes but helpful elements, which enables them to see the opportunities of development in other situations or other environments. The approach is resource and not problem oriented. Teachers can build on their strength and get more positive reinforcement, build up self-confidence and more assurance. In this way burnouts are less frequent and motivation builds up. There is not only a benefit for children with special needs, but also the other children; teachers and the parents get out positive returns. Marte Meo has proven to be a very powerful program for teachers.

Fribourg, June 2006

