SDM – Sherborne developmental movement – a holistic method for training social and motor skills

Description of EGP

SDM – a method for training social and motor skills was developed by Ms. Veronica Sherborne (1922–1990) and it is based on the theory of movement analysis by Rudolf Laban. This method was developed first for the needs of children and adults with intellectual disabilities, but because of its variability and possibilities for adaptation it is widely used in general and special education in schools and kindergartens and also for adult and elderly people. Teachers, trainers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists and other professionals working with children and adults use the SDM-method in teaching and in individual and group therapy. Many children with special needs have problems in motor control and academic skill but also in senses, perception, controlling the level of activation, attention and concentration. All these problems make acquiring the socio-cognitive skills (social perception, role taking, problem solving and accuracy of self-evaluation) very complicated. The ability to communicate is based on neural development and the neural connections need training in order to develop. We need social-cognitive skills, self-competence and communication skills in all kinds of social interaction and social relations, also in every lesson and learning situation. In normal PE-lessons there are lot of people, motion, disturbance, demands of fast learning, hidden or open competition, maybe even frustration. In SDM-lessons we try to avoid these hidden problems by analysing and comparing the demands of situation and abilities of the children. Children with special needs are often rejected from the group due to their problems. The subsystems in the classroom's non-controlled situations may exclude those who would benefit most from the interaction that occurs in the group. In PE it means a lack of training of both motor and social skills during the lessons and free time. This segregation happens mostly during the years which are the most important for the child's development. In SDM-lessons the teacher and the supporters control the learning environment very strictly. They help the child to control the situation and emotions and help solving the problems. How ever, they do not do the things the child has to do in order to learn! Affective atmosphere supports learning and is especially important for children with learning problems. The more the child enjoys, the more he/she is willing to train. The SDM-method includes training of basic motor skills, which enable learning complicated motor skills. Most sports skills demand combining motor skills and they are difficult, if the child can not perform simultaneous movements or movement chains. The objectives of the training are not special sport skills, velocity, muscle strength or fitness. raining concentrates in skills and the elements of motor control process, but it is in any case physically very versatile and can also be straining. The exercises form a progressive system. The first ones are very simple, like those children have always done with each others or with their parents. Later on the exercises become as demanding as possible –without the upper limit. The method does not use any equipment, just people, space and bodies.

The objectives of SDM and their background
• Supporting the child to work in a controlled way so that he/she can discriminate and integrate

Being able to use sensory information for starting and correcting the movement is the basis of skilful moving. The impairments of sensory organs cannot be corrected by movement exercise, but the problems in sensory integration and using the sensory information can be diminished.

• Supporting the child to seek developmentally important experiences on his/her own initiation.

When the child masters the basic skills, he/she starts to train motor skills almost all the day. The normal motor development needs more training than just therapy sessions or PE-lessons. All children must have possibility to play with other children.

• Creating safe conditions and situations for developing strong self-competence.

The exercises are selected so that the child can succeed in them. In the beginning the child can have support, but as soon as possible training will be independent and on child’s own initiation. The is a lot of possibilities to differ objectives and level of demands, so every child can find the suitable exercise without the fear of failing or loosing in competition. The more the child gets positive experiences the more he/she enjoys and wants to try more demanding tasks, like peers do.

• Creating situations where the child can train socio-cognitive skills.

Pear learning is a very remarkable part of development both in motor and social skills. The teacher’s task is to support interaction between children and between children and adults. The objective is that interaction transfers also outside the lessons.
• Supporting the development of child’s learning abilities.

Aside from training motor skills SDM concentrates on supporting the development of orientation, observation, perception, concentration, memory, time concepts, planning, problem solving and controlling activity level. All these skills are important also in classroom situations, in games and other peer relations.

The Themes of the SDM-programme

The exercises are grouped under the basic movement elements. In the beginning the child trains the basic skills, simple single movements. The exercises become more and more difficult according the development of skills. Actually the themes cannot be totally separated, because all elements exist in every movement, the question is just in the focus of training.

The body awareness is the background of all movements. The theme includes body parts and size, personal space, laterality etc. The child learns to name his/her body parts and find their possible movements. The child learns to control and use them on the way he/she wants to. The most problematic issues seem to be body size, awareness of the trunk, laterality and crossing the midline.

The spatial awareness is very important in our everyday life, including games and traffic. This theme deals with personal and shared space. Personal space is more part of movement elements. Shared space means the space you share with other people during the activity, relationships with people and objects.

The child learns the spatial concepts and how to use them: in front, forward, backward, sideward, under, over, to the left, to the right etc.

Awareness and control of movement elements, which means ability to control space, time and strength. The spatial form of movement includes levels, directions and wideness of movement.
and positions, e.g. the direction of steps or arm and body movements, small and large, straight and round movements.

In controlling the time elements the child learns to recognise different rhythms and control the rhythm of movement, time sequences (how long the exercise lasts, time to exercise and rest etc.) and the velocity of the movement. Controlling strength concerns the appropriate amount of power used in movement and differences between relaxed and active muscles. In movement element themes the objective is to be able to vary and control one element at time, the tasks are very easy.

Movement flow is the result of controlling simultaneously all the elements of movement appropriately and being able to connect the movement patterns and chains. In the movement flow theme the objective is to control more complicated movements and situations. This theme is the basis of special sport skills. Working in pairs and groups may be the most enjoyable theme and it is combined as a method to training former themes. The group may be formed of one child and one adult, many children and adults or children without adults. Forming the group depends on the functional level of children. In particular when the children are severely disabled, very impulsive, withdrawing etc. the ideal is to have an adult partner or an older child for each child to help the child in crossing thresholds. The roles of the partners are supporting or assisting (to you), doing together (with you) and opposing the partner (against you).

The adults’ activity diminishes all the time and the responsibility of the initiation, contact, solving problems, forming and obeying rules etc. is transferred to the children little by little, yet as soon as possible. Steps or items in working in pairs and groups start from being aware of other people in the group.

This objective concerns mainly most severely disabled or some autistic individuals. Almost all children need training in tolerating the presence and disturbance of other people’s voices and moving. Making contact with a partner and other people (eye contact, speaking, touching), communicating and being in close contact with them are the next steps. Little by little the tasks contain more working in groups, problem solving elements, creativity, expression, helping each others etc. The result will be fluent working in different roles in the partnership and as a member of productive team. This is normal play.

**Controlling one’s level of activation**
The ability to work with appropriate intensity, calm down and relax and change these levels fluently and at speed according the demands of the situation are the preliminary demands of successful action. Without the appropriate control of activation attention, observing, gaining information, planning and implementing the tasks in an enjoyable way are not possible. Many children need help in learning these skills, especially the most impulsive children. This theme exists in every task and the teacher must plan all tasks so that the child gets the needed support for controlled performance. Like in all other themes the responsibility is transferred to the child little by little. Concentration, exertion and even emotions vary a lot during the lesson. Maybe the most visible exercises in this theme are the real 3–5 relaxations during the lesson. They are as important exercises as all the others. There are also “minibreaks” between tasks helping the child to move from one task to another.

Conclusion

It is very important to take time for real learning, repetitions and training again and again. The programme stays almost the same for several lessons. The elements can be added to the same exercise. When the basis becomes strong the training gives a very positive impulse to the child’s development, because the skills will follow the child to playing outside of gyms and classrooms. The SDM-method is easy to start and rewarding to use. The teacher can use one’s own creativity in planning tasks and lessons, he or she is not bound to ready made programmes. SDM is a very reflective method and the teacher must be a very active observer during the lesson to be able to follow the individual needs of children. You need just a basic education, (a few days), to start. Further education takes you to more and more advanced levels and international gatherings give support for continuing.

Relevance of EGP to EUSAPA project

This is an excellent example of specific programme, which has been used in an adapted physical education setting. It can be considered as part of psychomotorics activities sometimes also called movement activities. We believe that all APE professionals should be aware of basic principles of such programmes and can become specialists in licensed programmes as part of life-long learning.

EUSAPA competencies presented in this EGP
1. Ability to use appropriate instructional strategies (e.g., physical/verbal cues, prompts, feedback, reinforcement).
2. Ability to use task analysis for desirable skill
3. Ability to provide positive/negative reinforcement of desirable/undesirable students’ behaviours where appropriate
4. Ability to counsel/guide students towards adopting more appropriate behaviours
   – choice
5. Ability to use appropriate alternative and augmentative communication tools
6.

Example of good practice was described by Kaisu Laasonen, Research Manager in Saimaa University of Applied Science in Finland.