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**METHODOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF W. REICH  
PSYCHOSOMATIC THERAPY FOR THE CORRECTION OF MOTOR  
SKILLS DISORDERS IN CHILDREN**

The 20th anniversary of the Ukrainian independence enhanced the development of the national special education. It refers, in the first place, to the children of preschool age with health challenges. The vast majority of these children have musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). Children suffering from cerebral palsy, various forms of spinal paresis, mixed cerebral-spinal forms of motor skills disorders are among them. Unfortunately, nowadays Ukraine does not have a consistent state program of special physical education for this category of children. This emphasizes the importance of the research into the theoretical and methodological foundations of creating such modern system that would provide the opportunity for children to overcome motor skills disorders by means of physical education.

We believe that motor skills rehabilitation will positively influence the mental development of children with musculoskeletal disorders. A close connection between the bodily and the mental is well known. It is especially prominent in W. Reich and his followers' works on psychosomatics [6, 7]. They proved that the emergence of "muscle shell" (Body armor) leads to the development of a secondary mental block (Character armor). According to the Reich's system, each personal disposition has, as its counterpart, a physical disposition manifested in the muscle stiffness or, in other words, in the developed muscle shell. He came to the conclusion, that, essentially, *physical and character armors are one and the same* [emphasis mine]. Elements of the character armor should now be regarded as functionally identical to the corresponding elements of the muscle one [overstrain]. The concept of "*functional identity*" [emphasis mine] introduced here means that the personal disposition and the

muscle status have the same function in our mental mechanism: they are interchangeable and can influence each other. As such, they cannot be separated from each other. Their functions are absolutely identical [7, p. 270-271]. The armor can lie on the "surface" or remain in the "depth", it can be "soft as a sponge" or "hard as a rock". To destroy the armor, three tools are used: 1) accumulation of energy in the body through deep breathing; 2) direct impact on the chronically tense muscles to relax them (pressure, pincement, etc.); and 3) constant cooperation with patients, open discussions with them about each case of emotional resentment or tension. W. Reich used these three tools when working on each of the seven armor segments [2, p. 228-229].

Each segment is built of certain muscles and organs possessing similar expressive functions. These segments are located at the level of the *eyes, neck, mouth, chest, diaphragm, abdomen, and pelvis and make up seven horizontal circles arranged at the right angle to the spine*. They can be said to correspond to the seven chakras, known in Tantra and Hatha Yoga. It should be taken into account that, ideally, in a healthy, free, and harmonious individual, all seven chakras are open to the maximum. The afore-mentioned segments of the muscle armor, quite to the contrary, block energy channels and obstruct the flow of vital energy. This leads us to the conclusion about the main principle of the special physical education of the children with musculoskeletal disorders: *all of the available segments of muscle and, consequently, mental shell should be unblocked*.

Thus, the fundamentals of W. Reich's psychosomatics with regard to motor skills rehabilitation of children allowed us to distinguish the following methodological aspects:

- The thesis on deep breathing can be replaced with the idea of *antigravity release of the skeleton* (spine) achieved by taking *horizontal position* at the beginning of the class as an obligatory requirement. Such position automatically minimizes the total gravitation loading on the skeleton and, consequently, all organs and systems. The author of this article proposed in one of his works the theory of the gravity axle [1], which demonstrates that it is about 10 times easier to lie than to

stand. Just like after a good night sleep, energy flow in this position notably improves and accumulates in all organs (*inverse orthostatic effect*).

*Positional therapy*, for instance with the help of a fit-ball, can also be part of this approach: a child lies down on a big ball in the "embryo position" or "half-embryo position" and is moved back and forth, left and right, up and down. This position ensures total relaxation of the body, skeleton, and spine and positively affects the accumulation and flow of vital energy.

- The second of the Reich's theses - direct effect of kneading on spasmodic part of the body - can be applied almost without changes to children in a system of special physical education. Local muscle tension can be released by a *preliminary relaxation massage* before a special physical education class or an exercise therapy. A similar *accompanying massage* can be performed by an instructor during the exercise proper, for example, when a child is moving in a prone position on a gym bench by pulling up: the back and lower limbs are conveniently located for the massage and/or chiropractic treatment by the instructor. To remove muscle blocks, the instructor can also offer children in class to try a *self-massage*, especially using various *masseurs*. This section can be concluded with *stretching exercises for the spasmodic muscles* or muscle groups in the torso and limbs.

- The third Reich's thesis about the necessity to keep constant contact with the patient in the situations of his/her resentment or tension can be implemented in special physical education through *role-play (fairy tale therapy)*. This approach allows the instructor together with the psychological counselor to organize special motor games that spark positive emotions in the child via physical movement and verbal support.

W. Reich's ideas were developed by his students and followers A. Lowen and J. Pierrakos, who created Neo-Reichian therapy named *bioenergetic analysis* [4, 5]. The main attention is paid to the role of the body in establishing patient's psychological characteristics and in psychotherapy. The authors added the concept of "grounding" to W. Reich's original concepts. Traditionally, in Reich's approach, *the patient would lie on the couch*, while in the process of bioenergetic analysis the

authors proposed other positions, for example, standing position. In this position, special attention was paid to the feet as a support of the standing patient. "A. Lowen uses also a variety of exercises and positions, causing tension in the body to charge its blocked parts with energy. These positions are designed *to increase tension in the chronically strained parts of the patient's body and make it so strong that it will have no other choice but to relax the grip of the shell* [emphasis mine]. The exercises include bending body with touching the floor with fingers, backbends with hands, fists tight, resting on the base of the spine, and body arch on a banquette" [2, p. 273]. Perhaps, the ideas of A. Lowen and J. Pierrakos formed the basis of modern methods of *post-isometric muscle relaxation*.

We prefer the traditional Reich's approach when the patient is lying on the couch. We also believe that it is a universal initial original position of a human being since babyhood. Back posture (on the floor, rug, or pad) ensures the best relaxation of the skeleton and spine, as well as a significant decrease in the muscle and vascular tone. A major psychical excitement of a person lying down calmly is almost impossible. Back posture as an initial position is the foundation of our *method of the antigravity release of the skeleton, muscular and mental systems*.

We cannot but mention the F. Matthias Alexander technique [3] intended to establish conscious control over personal movement habits. "Alexander believed that *lengthening the spine* [emphasis mine] is a necessary condition for easy and efficient movements. He did not mean a forced stretching, but rather a soft lengthening upward. Students of Alexander's school work primarily as follows: relax the neck so that the head could move freely back and forth, while the back is lengthening and widening. The balance between the head and the spine releases physical tension, improves posture and muscle coordination. On the contrary, everything that impedes this balance ruins the posture, causes stress and poor coordination" [2, p. 238]. Alexander also developed a method of teaching/learning complex movement patterns based on the balanced head and spinal relationship.

The most appealing for us in the afore-described Alexander's technique is its main thesis that the basis of a free movement is a stretched spine. We also believe

that *meditative (relaxation) phase is most advantageous at the beginning of the class*. In our view, methodologically, relaxation should always precede physical stress and not vice versa. If exercises are performed when lying down, a *soft traction of the spine* (its natural lengthening) takes place automatically. This natural lengthening of the spine can be increased using *special devices and positions*, as we have mentioned above when talking about positional therapy. In this regard, it is also reasonable to use gravity force and torso and limbs weight to achieve traction effect faster and easier (*gravity auto-traction*). This can be done, for example, by gently moving back and forth a child lying face-down (half-embryo position) on a big ball (fit-ball), plastic barrel, or shaft.

Another appealing facet of the technique is a set sequence of exercises "from the head, down along the spine" which is known in the medicine as craniocaudal (cephalocaudal). We also abide by this sequence of children physical development: from top to bottom, "*from top - to toe*". This approach is to become one of the leading methodological strategies of the modern system of special physical education of children with musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs).

Continuing the analysis of body-oriented techniques, it is important to mention *the Feldenkrais method* (Moshe Feldenkrais), by means of which a natural grace of movement, common in childhood, is brought back. "In the method by Feldenkrais, a variety of exercises is used, changing from one class to another. These exercises usually start with subtle movements, gradually developing into more rigorous ones. The purpose of these exercises is to develop ease and freedom of bodily movement" [2, p. 239]. The mentioned before important methodological pattern is observed as well: from meditative, calm, almost unnoticeable movements (*total relaxation*) to more vigorous (intense) exercises (*total concentration*).

*The structural integration system created by I. Rolf* [8] is noteworthy as well. *Rolfing*, in the first place, deals with the muscles and ligaments and includes methods of body and posture improvement by means of *stretching muscular fascia and connective tissue*, which support and connect muscles with the skeleton. "I. Rolf found out that a psychological trauma or even a slight physical damage can cause

subtle but relatively persistent changes in our body. Once a bone or muscle tissue is displaced, connective tissue thickening localizes and fixes this change. Imbalance can be observed not only in the injury adjacent areas, but also in the more remote parts of the body with no compensation whatsoever. For example, over-protecting of a sick shoulder can affect, over time, the neck, the other shoulder, and the hip" [2, p.241].

This system is focused mainly on the physical integration of different biological body links, whereas the author almost didn't study psychological aspects of this process. However, it has been noted that some patients who applied Rolfing in combination with psychotherapy techniques experienced a substantial relief from psychological and emotional blocks [2, p.241].

Practical application of a *system of stretching in the adapted (simplified) form* suggests that this system can be used in special physical education of children, for example, with spastic forms of paresis. It involves *special poses and positions (including equipment-mediated), passive stretching of spasmodic muscles in adults, extensor torso and limbs exercises, securing a child at the desired position using special equipment (e.g., Tekorius devices), etc.*

The analysis of the foundations of the psychosomatics by W. Reich confirmed the feasibility of applying a series of methodical steps to ensure the release of muscular and mental armor in the system of physical education and motor skills rehabilitation of children with musculoskeletal disorders. We believe that, in the future, methodological achievements of psychosomatics (with the required adaptation) should be applied more comprehensively and systematically in special physical education of children with disabilities.

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**Yefimenko M. M.** Methodological Potential of W. Reich Psychosomatic Therapy for the Correction of Motor Skills Disorders in Children

The article discusses the methodological potential of some findings by W. Reich and his followers in psychosomatics applied to the development of the national system of special physical education of children with musculoskeletal disorders. The emphasis is on the study of the relationship between the bodily and the mental, particularly, on the presence of a "muscular armor" and its impact on the mental development of children. In this regard, the primary task is seen in relaxation (total psycho-physiological relaxation) of children with musculoskeletal disorders.

*Key words:* psychosomatics, the bodily, the mental, "muscular armor" mental blocks, psycho-physiological relaxation, correction, motor skills rehabilitation.

**Єфіменко М. М. Методичні можливості психосоматики В. Райха при корекції рухових порушень у дітей**

У статті розглядаються методичні можливості окремих надбань психосоматики В. Райха та його послідовників в руслі розробки вітчизняної системи корекційного фізичного виховання дітей з порушеннями опорно-рухового апарату. Особлива увага приділяється дослідженню взаємозв'язків тілесного та психічного, зокрема, наявності «м'язових панцирів» і їх впливу на психічний розвиток дитини. В цьому плані першорядною бачиться проблема розслаблення (загальної психофізичної релаксації) дітей з порушеннями ОРА.

*Ключові слова:* психосоматика, тілесне, психічне, «м'язові панцирі», психічні блоки, психофізична релаксація, корекція, рухова реабілітація.

### **Ефименко М. М. Методические возможности психосоматики В. Райха при коррекции двигательных нарушений у детей**

В статье рассматриваются методические возможности отдельных разработок психосоматики В. Райха и его последователей применительно к разработке отечественной системы коррекционного физического воспитания детей с нарушениями опорно-двигательного аппарата. Особое внимание уделяется изучению взаимосвязей телесного и психического, в частности, наличию «мышечных панцирей» и их влиянию на психическое развитие ребенка. В этом плане первоочередной видится проблема расслабления (общей психофизической релаксации) детей с нарушениями ОДА.

*Ключевые слова:* психосоматика, телесное, психическое, «мышечные панцири», психические блоки, психофизическая релаксация, коррекция, двигательная реабилитация.

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