

Movies by Emmi Pikler (1960s – 1970s) among others:

All by Themselves

More Than Mere Play

Me Too (Converted into DVD in 1991)

Movies made in the Institute since the 1990s among others:

Anna Tardos – Geneviève Appell: A baby's Attention at Play (1990)

Anna Tardos – Geneviève Appell: Paying Attention to Each Other (1993)

Anna Tardos – Ágnes Szántó: Freedom to Move on One's Own (1996)

Mária Vincze – Geneviève Appell – Judit Falk: Babies and Young Children with Each Other (2002)

For further information on the Pikler Institute and the list of publications by Emmi Pikler and her colleagues, please visit www.pikler.hu.

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Being in movement

Alberto Konicheckis, Psychoanalyst

Université Paris Descartes

First, let me thank Anna, Julianna and Bernard from the Pikler-Loczy Institute for giving me the opportunity of sharing our experiences. As a psychoanalyst working with young children in institutions, I really appreciate the possibility of sharing our thoughts around the care of children at the Pikler-Loczy Institute.

In contrast with what we have been used to observe in institutionalized infants, those at the Pikler-Loczy Institute are amazingly active, sociable, curious and at the same time calm and relaxed. They are in good psychic and physical health. They move harmoniously in their body. They give the impression of being in a state of satisfaction rather than frustration. They enjoy their discoveries and their experience whilst maintaining a relationship with the other children and the adults. They appear to illustrate Winnicott's paper, *Living Creatively* (Winnicott, 1970): For Winnicott, living creatively implies having the feeling of creating the world. Not that it exists and is being discovered but that it is to be invented at each moment.

In order to be able to experience such psychic states, children, of course, need to feel sufficiently secure about their environment. It cannot be overemphasized that, at the Pikler-Loczy Institute, children's creative activity can develop only through the attentive and caring presence of the adults around them. It is important for the child to experience a continuity of being. He is autonomous enough so that he can modify and transform psychic and emotional experiences that threaten this feeling. But if he is preoccupied with his own existence, he cannot make himself available for creative activities such as Winnicott describes them.

The Pikler-Loczy Institute was first introduced in France through Geneviève Appell and Myriam David who, in 2002, received the Serge Lebovici award at the 8th WAIMH World Congress in Amsterdam. When Myriam David was nearing the age of 80, we organised a conference in Aix to honor her. It wasn't only a celebration of her past, but a projection of her contributions for the future. She stated

then: "If I were to observe babies today, I would pay attention to motor activity. I would wonder about the way motor activity constitutes the psychic foundation of the person". I took my inspiration from this statement of Myriam David to approach the "being in motion" in relation to free and spontaneous activity in the way that it is facilitated at the Pikler-Loczy Institute.

One may wonder about what is meant by free and spontaneous activity, what is supposed or implied by it, what it brings to the infant. At the Pikler-Loczy Institute, free and spontaneous activity is considered as the baby's own resource. It is not a response to external entreaties or demands. It unfolds in relation to the child's own sensations. It is not about pleasing a surrounding adult. In free and spontaneous activity the child takes the initiative of his own movements, making use of his personal capacities and thus becoming less dependent on the people around him. The child finds personal sensory-motor sensations without leaning on an external object.

In their famous paper on the value of the baby's free activity for the elaboration of the self, Tardos and David (1991) consider that movement, inasmuch as it participates in the formation of the body image, constitutes the very foundation of the individual. Motor activity brings out the individual and the subjective. It seems to me to be an indispensable complement to the experience of the skin as discussed by Esther Bick (1967). Motor activity is not split and opposed to the feeling of being gathered and enveloped from the outside by skin. It brings the feeling of being gathered from inside. It allows for thinking about what Myriam David also wished to consider at the end of her life: in that sense, a baby can also exist alone.

In free and spontaneous activity, the body and its sensations constitute the main object of interest and attention for the child. Referring to observations at the Pikler-Loczy Institute, Roussillon (2008) considers free and spontaneous activity as "the first experience the child has of himself being, of feeling himself being" (90). Movement gives experiences a shape and contains one of the first modes of thought. Through movement, the child is linked both with the external world and with himself.

Free and spontaneous activity also implies discovery and exploration. It allows for the experience of sensations that have not yet appeared in the mind or been represented. Just as in the experience of illusion, the child practices the “found-created” with his own body. In paradoxical terms, in movement the body contains an hallucinated reality.

Free and spontaneous activity also allows the transition as well as the oscillation between unintegration and integration. The child assimilates psychic experiences of dispersion and appropriates parts of the self. Space and time complete one another. A time sequence allows for the setting up of a continuity in space. Movement creates the space where the psyche is going to unfold. Movement makes drawings in time and, in return, the psychic space of the child grows.

Movement contains one of the first forms of symbolisation of the child’s internal processes. It makes visible the way the child feels about his environment. The space the child moves through corresponds to the area he shares with the environment. The environment is not just of a physical and material nature, but is also inhabited by psychic sensations. The space of play is created on the traces left by the interaction with the environment. In this way potential space becomes habitable, explorable and livable.

Movement may be decomposed and analysed in particular around points of balance and imbalance. Dance is only possible on the basis of imbalance. Of course pauses are necessary. The ship needs a harbour. But by definition movement supposes a certain tension between the known and the unknown. Even when walking one knows where one foot is resting but the other one is necessarily in the air.

An important opposition can be found between movement and posture. For the child posture may be a refuge, a position of safety. Being in motion implicitly supposes letting go of this reassuring posture. When she analyses the first times the child rolls on his back, E Pikler pays particular attention to the point of contact between the body of the child and the ground. Movement supposes a pulling away from the ground (Pikler, 1969). It could be added here that movement has within it the separation from objects in the external world as well as from oneself, in a reassuring posture. It also supposes coming out of a refuge that could become a prison.

Oscillations between movement and

waiting postures thus contain experiences of loss and of coming together again with oneself. The relation to time can be seen here again: the child moving towards the future pulls away from his past. These oscillations show the importance of these transitionals movements as emphasised by E. Pikler (1969) and her successors (Tardos et David, 1991). From a psychic point of view the transitionals movements potentialize uncertainty and the unknown. When the child undertakes a movement he takes the risk of imbalance and destabilization. At that point movement may have a reassuring function.

Movement therapists know that postures themselves are not reached all at once, but through oscillations either laterally for the middle position or back and forth for bringing the torso upright. It is the same in relation to horizontality or verticality. The body image is formed through latency. The present of the sensation rests upon the virtual of preceding movements. Any manifest experience contains the seeds of other latent ones, liable to become manifest in their turn.

Body rhythms offer an evanescent surface – it is here for no longer being here. They make marks and leave marks behind. Rhythms thus require endless alternating between presence and absence. As he draws absence through movement the child also creates his first psychic objects. In his analysis of the child’s free and spontaneous activity in Loczy, Golse (2002) suggests that the presence of activity comes to symbolize the absence of the staff.

There is a whole range of pathologies derived from movement. We know of course the risk of muscular second skin noted by E Bick (1967). We also know hyperactivity in the child. After having researched this subject for many years Victor Guerra,¹ a colleague from Uruguay, has come up with the idea of a motor false self. In these cases, the child, through movement, creates a kind of pseudo-independence. Bodily movement fits the place of a possible external object. The child would thus become his own mother through movement, but through moving too much.

As far as I am concerned I would like to emphasize the importance of the emotional resonance of movement for locating to what extent it receives and integrates affects or, on the contrary, it is an attempt at evacuating them. Overall the pathology of movement would thus be defined according to whether it is

1 Oral communication, 2002

closed upon itself or, conversely, open to what is external to it.

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