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Area of Learning:

Self-Development through the Somatic Dialogue

The Somatic Dialogue is the main theoretical framework of my method PME. But furthermore it is also my theoretical framework of how I think about learning and reflecting in a somatic way, that I will try to use in this study to become a Master of Professional Practice.

After defining the process of the Somatic Dialogue and defining Self-Development, I will share my learning history with the Somatic Dialogue, followed by a reflection on the steps of Somatic Coaching and how they relate to the Somatic Dialogue. Summing up this essay I will share perceived professional advantages and my very personal learnings from the Somatic Dialogue.

The key statement of the Somatic Dialogue is that any human development or change only happens as a result of sensory input that I call question. To result in really helpful and healing developments the process of the Somatic Dialogue has to start even before the question. So the beginning of the process is being present with the client and listening in stillness. The question that is following is not only a verbal question, as it is a Somatic Dialogue. The question can also be asked in form of a movement, a touch or a physical sensation. According to Buddhist psychology and also according to my experience these questions should be asked in a certain quality. These qualities are for instance mindfulness, compassion, trust, enthusiasm, etcetera. (Rabten, 2003) There can be an immediate answer or the answer can take a little while that's why it needs careful listening and being present here again. The answer can take on manifold forms. It can be a change on cellular level, a small or big movement, a physical sensation, a feeling or a thought and philosophical realisation. These answers, these developments, need to be supported by giving them time and space to evolve. The next step in the process is finding stillness in a balanced position and reflect on what just happened to find words that describe the experience. Speaking this words to a listener or writing them down is important to make the physical experience also believable for the mind.

“what we make, or do, or say, grows and comes more alive for us as it is heard, received by another” (Tufnell and Crickmay, 2004, p. 42)

The Somatic Dialogue is cyclic in nature so it needs repetition and integration to make it a really sustainable and helpful and healing development. (see picture Nr.1)

Self-Development is the result of a successful Somatic Dialogue.

Self-Development is a helpful and healing Self-Organisation that occurs when there is a helpful and healing sensory input as a question and also when there is the possibility for self-expression as an answer. With no helpful and healing sensory input and oppressed expression the outcome of the Self-Regulation will be pain and suffering. (see picture Nr.:2) Self-Development is highly individual and does not necessarily mean bigger and better, but can also mean smaller and more balanced. Self-Development of a person includes the body and the mind and its specific way is designed by the self from the inside out. Self-regulation

can be triggered and supported by an outside guide to become co-regulation (Spinazola & Wilson, 2022)

Looking back on my formal learning history, dialogue was almost never an issue. In my professional training to become a performance artist art was not received as dialogue and not even contact improvisation was taught in the way that had dialogue in its focus. In my artistic training I was always forced to change but never asked to develop.

In my next professional educations I discovered that massage-touch and bodywork is also mostly not dialogical at all, and most somatic work is not dialogical. I first encountered the dialogue as an effective working tool in a workshop of continuing education in the Trager approach. (Psycho-Physical Integration according to Dr. Milton Trager, <https://www.trager.com/trager-defined>)

After working with a fellow student with touch I asked my teacher: "How do I find out if it worked?" My teacher was a psychotherapist in addition to being a somatic movement therapist, so she was used to talk with her clients and be in dialogue with her clients. Her answer was: "Ask your client about what they experienced".

This not only opened the door to have an assessment tool, but it started the process to have the dialogue as my main working tool. I soon started to put two chairs next to my massage table to have a verbal dialogue before and after my treatments.

Not much later I realised that the dialogue is not only an assessment and reflection tool but also a tool on a very physical level. When I treated both legs of a client I got a very positive feedback from the client after treating his first leg, so I decided to treat the second leg exactly how I treated the first leg. But my treatment for the second leg was not perceived well at all from the client. I realised that the second leg was different from the first leg and my decisions for the treatment were only made because of the history that I had with the first leg and not because of the dialogue with the second leg. I simply did not sense the second leg very well, and I did not base my treatment decisions on my sensations.

After encountering Buddhist psychology from the book : "The Mind and its Functions" by Geshe Rabten. (Rabten, 2003) I discovered, that the dialogical process works much better when the questioning is done in a helpful and healing quality. (See also my AOL "The Anatomy of Mind for Somatics")

The next big step in learning with, from and about that Somatic Dialogue came, when I coined my own somatic method and named it "Physio-Mentale Entwicklung". I had to clarify the steps of somatic dialogue to make it communicable and teachable. This process continues till today and can be seen on my website for my personal practice (<https://theorie.pme.or.at/dialog.html>), as well as on my website for my professional training program "The somatic Training" (https://www.somatic-training.com/uploads/4/3/1/8/4318959/this_is_pme_english_.pdf)

In my education to become a psychological counsellor I learned that in counselling and coaching it is state-of-the-art to work dialogical. But only in the method "Idiolektik" I found a deep and mindful listening and a defined quality of relationship similar to the Somatic Dialogue. (Bindernagel, 2022) . After becoming a practitioner in the method "Idiolektik", (see picture Nr.: 3) I incorporated practical skills to ask questions, but most of all the

realisation, that only the client knows the solution to its problems and only a good dialogue will enable the client to find its solution and a helpful and healing development.

Most recently, in september 2022, I got a WhatsApp message from a student of "The Somatic Training", where he describes in his own words his learnings of his last workshop. He is describing the Somatic Dialogue as: "Noticing the body asking for attention, listening mindfully and friendly, moving, waiting, listening, moving again." And he describes the effect of applying the Somatic Dialogue as following: "The increase in feeling pleasant so frequently makes the place of feeling pleasant much more familiar which makes it much more real." (see picture Nr.:4) When a student is experiencing the healing power of the Somatic Dialogue and is able to reflect on it to learn how to work with his own clients, it feels like the dialogue has been brought to a next step, from just researching yourself and having a tool to help my clients, to a wider dialogue that can bring a helpful and healing development in a broader social field.

The Somatic Dialogue is the most important theoretical framework for all of the different branches of my work, but most obviously it is applied in Somatic Coaching.

" In Somatic Coaching, private, professional and social problems and projects get physically centred and guided into a solution process through touch and movement.

Emotional and physical concerns can also directly transform in the body from confusion and suffering into helpful and healing development . Solutions for life can arise through

"Physio-Mental Development" ." (<https://www.somatic-training.com/somatic-coaching.html>)

I will share the steps of somatic coaching (see picture Nr.: 5) as I teach it to my students (<https://www.somatic-training.com/module-3.html>) and in addition I will reflect and point out to which phase of the Somatic Dialogue they belong:

Step 1: where does it need attention in your body right now?

This steps relates to the being present openly and focusing and listening on the body of the client.

Step 2: put attention to the needy place.

The process of asking the body is starting, with being a little bit more specific.

Step 3: put mindful and compassionate attention to the needy place.

A mind-factor (Rabten, 2003), a quality of perception is added to make the following change a helpful and healing development.

Step 4: touch yourself at the chosen place to help the mindful sensing.

(Self-)Touch is supporting and amplifying the questioning sensing process

Step 5: what are you sensing? is there anything changing? is anything developing?

These questions open the doors to listen to the answering process.

Step 6: start moving, slowly and gently, and keep sensing mindfully and friendly.

Movement initiates change and development, movement supports change and development, movement is the expression of change and development. The suggested movement quality helps to stay with the attention on the bodily sensations, the suggested mind qualities help to make change a helpful and healing development.

Step 7: follow your sensation in moving. what movement does feel good? what does it need there?

This step invites to trust the sensations (rather than rational planning) for the next action and encourages to just follow the positive sensations into a positive direction.

Step 8: collect more sensations in a mindful and compassionate way.

This step strengthens and supports the somatic dialogue in its cyclic nature and prepares for repetition.

Step 9: let a self-regulating movement happen.

This step is a guide from active moving to being moved and trusting and following the self-regulation process.

Step 10: come to a full body movement - free movement - change places of touch

This step invites to enlarge the place of development to the whole body and also into the outside space.

Step 11: notice your thinking and feeling in a mindful and compassionate way (the grid!)

In this step perception and development of emotions and realisations are invited according to the concept of poly-awareness. (see picture Nr.: 6)

Step 12: stop - come to a balanced position- reflect / get asked by the coach

This step allows to make a step back to notice in comparison to the beginning any changes and developments. This stepping back allows for both, a reflection on the process and a reflection-in-action about the present moment (Schön, 1987)

Step 13: find words for your experience - speak to a listener/ write

This is the place for outspoken reflection, from pure poetic reflection to highly philosophical realisations. Having a listener supports the co-regulation

Step 14: repeat

The last step provides depth, integration and sustainability.

Now I want to share some advantages I perceived from working with the Somatic Dialogue. I incorporate words that derive from a common brainstorm that I did with the students of my last training (see picture Nr.:7) , which shows that the Somatic Dialogue is already spreading out.

Through the described dialogical pathway the treatment becomes very client-centred and process-oriented, which makes it safe and trauma informed.

Because of being open to individual experiences the Somatic Dialogue really accesses resources of the client.

The Somatic Dialogue feels pleasant for the Client. Therefore the client can develop self motivation, trust and faith which makes the treatment longer lasting and sustainable.

In the Somatic Dialogue the client is the expert. Asking the expert and listen to its answer is empowering and also a political statement of emancipation.

The somatic dialogue is a meta-technique because you can do any other technique with a special quality in sensing and in an dialogical way. Technique and method are less important than dialogue. Technically simple things can be very helpful and healing if they are done clearly in all steps of the somatic dialogue.

The biggest advantage I think is the fact that the Somatic Dialogue works very well and is easy to do, as it feels quite natural to work in this way.

In the end I want to acknowledge also my very personal learnings I had through discovering, developing and working with the Somatic Dialogue.

Being able to distinguish between listening and leading and being able to equally sense the body and think at the same time were big achievements for me.
 And learning that not-knowing is trusting the “unbelievable” answer of the body, that not-knowing is trusting the self-regulation is still a beautiful everyday challenge for me.

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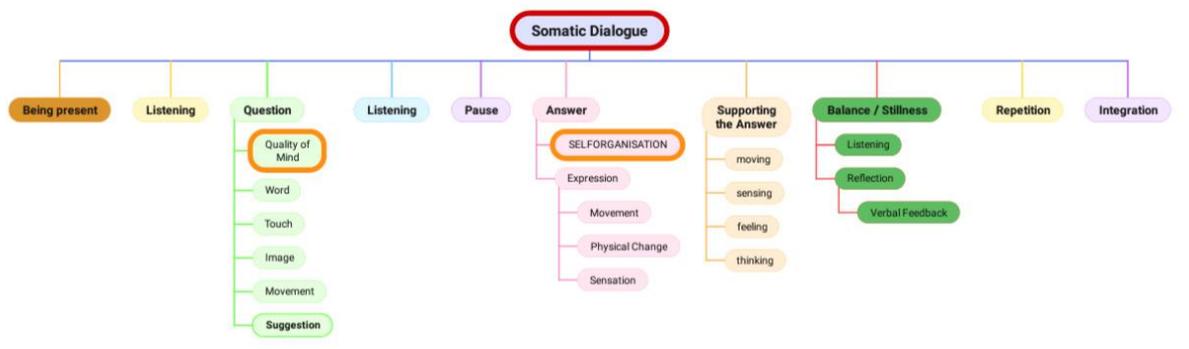
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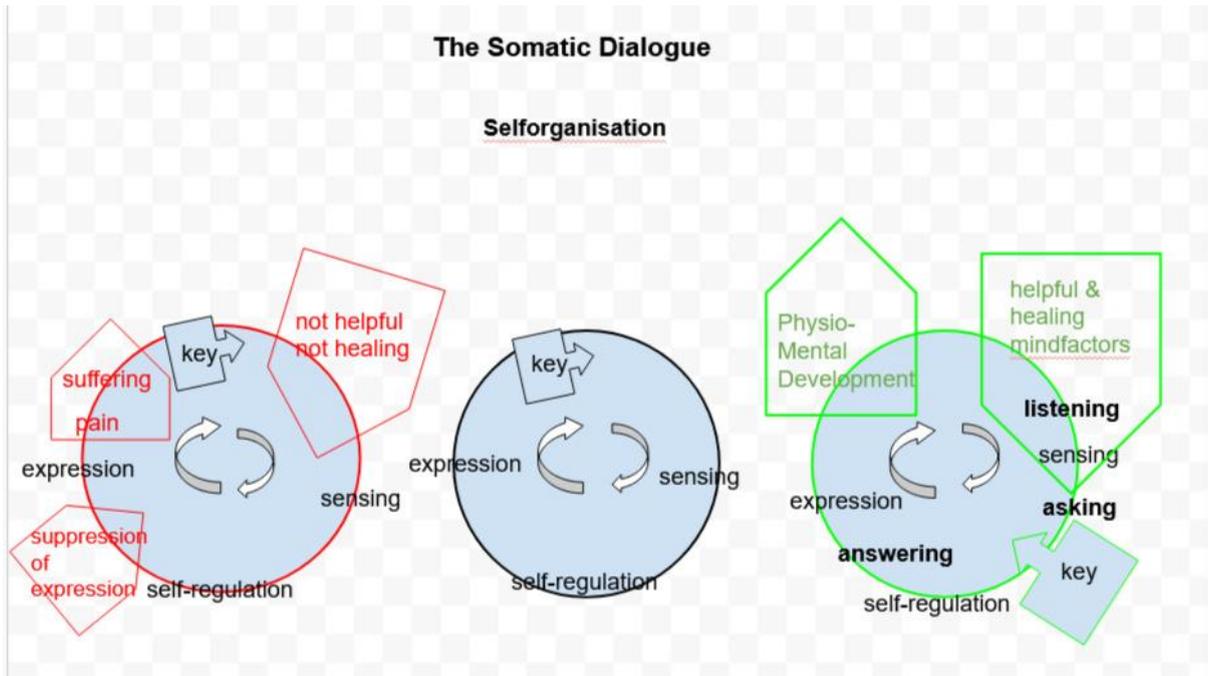
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picture Nr.: 1



picture Nr.: 2



picture Nr.:3



picture Nr.: 4

I feel much more pleasant in any given moment. 

I learned two things from the workshop that I believe make this so.

1. The somatic dialogue:

Noticing the body asking for attention, listening mindfully and friendly, moving, waiting, listening, moving again.

I've been doing this without the reflection piece, which will be interesting to add on.

2. The increase in feeling pleasant so frequently makes the place of feeling pleasant much more familiar which makes it much more real.

I'm now remembering and imagining what it's like to be in incessant physical discomfort and how the feeling of despair is so real and so familiar.

 Thanks for sharing 

picture Nr.:5

Steps of Somatic (Self)-Coaching

*Client - Centered
Process - Oriented*

1. where does it need attention in your body right now?
2. put attention to the needy place
3. put mindful and compassionate attention to the needy place
4. touch yourself at the chosen place to help the mindful sensing
5. what are you sensing? is there anything changing? is anything developing?
6. start moving
7. follow your sensation in moving. what movement does feel good? what does it need there?
8. collect more sensations in a mindful and compassionate way
9. let a self-regulating movement happen
10. come to a full body movement - free movement - change places of touch
11. notice your thinking and feeling in a mindful and compassionate way (the grid!)
12. stop - come to a balanced position- reflect / get asked by the coach
13. find words for your experience - speak to a listener/ write

Focus of Attention Poly-Awareness

(own your perception !)

**me
coach**

**you
client**

mindfulness

past	present now	future
	sensing	
old patterns	moving action	
remembering	thinking talking/writing	planning idea/image
old feelings	feeling	feeling about image

mindfulness

past	present now	future
	sensing	
old patterns	moving action	
remembering	thinking talking/writing	planning idea/image
old feelings	feeling	feeling about image

Picture Nr.: 7

Reasons for the Somatic Dialogue

