

**Kirsti Määttänen**

**MELODIES OF FEELING & PATTERNS OF MOVING MEDIATING THE  
ORIGIN OF  
UNDERSTANDING IN EARLY INFANCY -**

**Experiences with BDM BABY DANCE METHOD®**

**Summary of a presentation in the conference Applying Peirce , Helsinki 2007<sup>i</sup>**

In the paper I present outlines of BDM BABY DANCE METHOD® a practical method for initiating and engaging in a dialogue with infants from the age of 8 weeks on. The method subverts the unanimous belief, prevailing through history, that it is we adults who teach the infants how to communicate. The method is basically about *teaching adults how how to "speak" babyese.*

The basic idea, out of which the method gradually grew, I invented thirty years ago, by then studying developmental psychology (and philosophy), and having become a mother myself. Starting from the then prevailing basic assumption that a newborn, with only rudimentary and primitive capacities, lives in a world of chaotic sense impression for several months to come, I asked: Would it be possible to actively create order and consistency into the experiential world of an infant a few months of age? I then started experimenting with structured use of very simple movement sequences in a playful interaction with my child. - As Peirce states, experimenting is experiencing the thing. The "thing" here being the way the child responded. not only with keen interest & attention and clearly discernable joy, but also with an amazing skill to learn the sequence.

The puzzling experiences with the method, inexplicable by any existing psychological theories, are by now validated with well over thousand infants (e.g. in primary health care and in foster homes)<sup>ii</sup>. The key to the puzzle, gradually opening a more and more clear understanding, I found in the philosophy of C.S. Peirce, especially in the principle of continuity, and the triad formed by the three elements of experience: Feeling, Reaction and Mediation. Using these as guides in framing hypotheses, which then lead to observing specific aspects in the mode of interaction generated by BDM BABY DANCE METHOD®, The observations then lead to new hypotheses, and refinements in the method. Gradually I was able to develop a consistent theoretical and conceptual view of the nature of the interaction, from the subjective standpoint of the infant, As such, the theory may be seen as a continuation of the work of V. Colapietro on Peircean perspective on evolving self and human subjectivity.

The basic insight on the nature of the interaction in BDM, on which the theory is based, is that the method provides the infant a systematic, consistent opportunity to gain a sense of understanding the intentions of the adult, as they unfold and are revealed in and by the sequence of movements initiated by the adult. With repetition, the infant (usually in a

minute or so) acquires a sense of a pattern, unfolding as a process the child is able to anticipate. The anticipation is then once and again confirmed by the adult. A highly regular pattern of change, with almost no exceptions, is revealed in the quality of the responses of the infant. At first, the infant resists. Then s/he begins to join in actively. Which is first revealed in actively accompanying moves of the child. These the adult can clearly feel in his/her fingers, while guiding the moves. Then, very soon, the infant takes the lead in initiating the moves, IF given a chance by the adult to do so. In a few days, the infant leads the whole sequence, and the task of the adult changes from leading to actively accompanying the lead of the child. This, then, is interpreted as offering the child a systematic, consistent sense of being understood by the adult participating in the interaction, in which the infant is given the role of an active and equal partner.

As the child develops, new movements are added to the end of the sequence. Then the same pattern of qualitative changes will be observed in the responses of the child in respect to the new moves.

In my theory Peirce's three elements of experience are given a new form, a new conceptualization. They are presented as triadic elements of Experiential (i.e. subjective) Meaning, unfolding in Experiential Time. The elements of Experiential Meaning are conceptualized as melodies of feeling and patterns of moving, mediated by a sense of understanding. The relation of the concepts of experiential meaning and experiential time to Peirce's concept of habit, as well as his views on the nature of the unconscious and/or the instinctive part of the mind are considered.

The nature and quality of the interaction in BABY DANCE is shown to display all the basic characteristics of ordinary polite conversation. It is shown to be a true dialogue, though not with words, but with moves.

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<sup>i</sup> With minor revisions in 2012 by the author

<sup>ii</sup> Määttänen, Kirsti 2003: Tunnot ja liikkeet sanattoman ymmärtämisen perustana.[Feeling and movement as the ground for wordless understanding.] Kirjassa: Niemelä, Pirkko & Siltala, Pirkko & Tamminen, Tuula (toim.) *Aidin ja vauvan varhainen vuorovaikutus*. [The Early Interaction of Mother and Baby.] ss.58-69. WSOY, Helsinki.

Määttänen, Kirsti 1999: Dialoginen vauvatanssi psyykkisen kuntouttamisen menetelmänä lastenkodeissa.[BDM as a method of therapy in foster homes.] Suomen lääkirilehti [Finnish Medical Journal]. vol 54, 32, ss. 4022-4027