

Bringing the Results of Spiritual Scientific Research into Practical Life: Development of a Colour/Light Therapy

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Summary

This report is based on a keynote presentation given at the “Evolving Science 2015” Conference at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland, September/October 2015. This keynote was chosen to address the theme “Science in Society” by exemplifying how something that was developed out of spiritual science can be brought into a practical therapeutic setting and the challenges involved in doing so. (The keynote also contained a Power Point presentation with video clips that are referenced here.)

The presentation covered three main aspects of a project to develop a colour/light therapy for children with autism:

- A description of the work
- How the ideas arose through the meditative approach of spiritual scientific research
- Bringing the project to the wider world

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Bericht basiert auf einem Vortrag, der an der Konferenz «Evolving Science» am Goetheanum in Dornach / Schweiz im Oktober 2015 gehalten wurde. Er sollte das Thema «Goetheanismus und Gesellschaft» mit einem Beispiel adressieren, wie etwas, das aus der Geisteswissenschaft heraus entwickelt wurde, in eine praktische therapeutische Situation eingebracht werden kann, und welche Herausforderungen damit verbunden sind. Der Vortrag umfasste auch eine Power Point Präsentation mit Video Clips, auf die hier Bezug genommen wird.

Der Vortrag behandelte drei Hauptaspekte eines Projektes, das die Entwicklung einer Licht/Farben-Therapie für autistische Kinder beinhaltet:

- Eine Beschreibung der Arbeit
- Wie die Ideen durch einen meditativen Zugang in geisteswissenschaftlicher Forschung entstanden sind
- Die Integration des Projektes in der Welt

The work

This project involves working on a 1:1 basis with children with profound autism. It is an original approach based on insights gained from a spiritual scientific/Goethean outlook. The project has been running for about 15 years at Sunfield, an independent special school in central England.

There are two main strands to the work. Firstly it is believed by this researcher that autism manifests as a “Threshold phenomenon” where,

among other problems, Thinking, Feeling and Willing are to some extent separated and do not coordinate properly. Secondly, it is postulated that changing colours of light can augment the child's soul life, helping bring it to consciousness, and therefore reconnect Thinking, Feeling and Willing.

The work takes place in a small, specially designed room with white padded walls, a light grey carpet, and LED lighting in the ceiling. The advantage of LEDs is that they give a general diffuse light and the faders are quiet, something which is important for individuals with autism because of their noise sensitivity. The light operator works from a booth and accompanies the spontaneous interactions between the child with autism and an adult by augmenting the mood of what is taking place with changing colours. This is similar in principle to music therapy where the musician accompanies the child's actions and vocalisations.

Goethe describes how colour affects the feeling life and how different moods are created by the different colours (Goethe 2006). For example Goethe says that colours on the "plus" side (red, orange, yellow) excite feelings which are quick, lively, aspiring and on the "minus" side (blue and violet) feelings which are restless, susceptible, and anxious. Rudolf Steiner also describes how colour affects the "I" and astral body (Steiner 1971). Furthermore Rudolf Steiner suggests that alternating between a red and a blue room can have a therapeutic effect and that it is the change between the colours that counts (Steiner 1989). Now, with modern technology, changing the colours in a room through fader-controlled coloured lights is much easier, more adaptable, and has far greater scope for development.

Overarching postulation behind the project

It is well known that the main problem in autism is the inability to achieve "social connectedness" with other human beings. This might be explained by the separation of Thinking, Feeling and Willing leading to the following problems with social integration. Firstly an individual with autism may not understand their feelings, because feeling does not connect to thinking. This can be very frightening. It will often then lead to an inappropriate act of will, because of the further disconnection between thinking and will. Also, if they do not bring will into thinking then the forming of concepts to understand the world does not take place, and this again can be very frightening. This might explain the need for "sameness" i.e. consistency in the environment. There are probably numerous other variations in the degree and consequences of this separation. (This perspective is not to discount the many other possible factors involved in autism e.g. genetic, biochemical, trauma etc.)