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Optimal Performance in Means-Ends Activities: On the Emergence of Self-Other/World Differentiation in Infancy

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ABSTRACT

We know little about the role of background positive affectivity and flow experiences in early development concerning means-ends activities and their possible contribution regarding symbolic functioning and the consolidation of the self as agent. The theoretical argument presented here is that a deeper appreciation of the benefits and challenges of optimal experience may help built a more unified account of optimal functioning in development. That is, the paradox of control in flow, and its relational/mirroring structure, wherein the demands of the structure (means) are entities in themselves (ends), mark possibilities for the temporal organization of experience when fine motor tuning and gross motor intention overlap. When means-focused action/temporal regulation (I) and ends-focused action (Me) become synchronized in an integrated embodied system, the system shifts experience to the experiential gear. Means-ends dynamics, then, via mirroring processes organized in turn-taking flow structures between formative action (means) and production, push the child' s primary reactive space to be converted into the child' s interactive experiential space and in turn mapped on and gradually transformed to the " secondary," communicative/expressive space, which also controls its manifestation, initiating in line conscious control and self-referential intentionality.

KEYWORDS

" Means-Ends" Dynamics; Optimal Experience; Background Positive Affectivity; Self-Referential Intentionality; Symbol Formation

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