

The Methodology and Practice of Formative Psychology

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Abstract

The human soma learns about itself through the language of primary motility, an excitatory organization that has pulses of intensity and duration. The Formative process of shapes coming into being, forming and fading teaches us how to influence our individual shape; to grow, change and deepen our lives. When we learn to influence inherited or habitual behaviors, we are able to participate in the forces of creation.

Keywords

Body Shape – Formative Method – Voluntary Muscular Model

Life makes shapes. Life is an evolutionary development in which a series of shapes are continually forming. This shape making process creates anatomic structure that embodies emotions, thoughts and experiences. Our shape is our embodiment in the world. We are the body we inherit, the one that lives us; the social body, shaped by our community; and our personal body, the one we live and shape through voluntary effort.

Shapes manifest protoplasmic history. Molecules and cells organize into clusters, and these organize into layers, tubes, tunnels and pouches. These, in turn, become the complex tissue of organs, nerves, muscles, and brain and set the stage for embodied human consciousness. Through the act of living, our human shape grows, and is influenced by the challenges and stresses of life. This inherited process of changing shape can, to a degree, be voluntarily invoked and repeated. When we can modify by voluntary effort the shapes dictated by inheritance and social learning, we are creators of a personal world.

Formative Psychology is based in the process by which life continually forms the next series of shapes, from birth through maturity to old age. At conception each person is given a biological and emotional inheritance, but it is through voluntary effort that this constitutional given fulfills its potential for forming a personal life. Form gives rise to feeling. Over time, voluntary effort brings forth the existential truth of our own bodily experience as the basis for creating value and meaning in our life.

The methodology of Formative Psychology is voluntary muscular-cortical effort. It is a method based in a universal process of organizing and reorganizing shapes. When we voluntarily assemble the muscular pattern of a somatic emotional shape and then increase and decrease the intensity and duration in a measured sequence, we create variations in body shape, emotional behavior and patterns of thinking. This changing of shape by the increase and decrease of muscular intensity is a powerful engagement of our Formative process. It generates a pulsatory dialogue between muscle and cortex.

Communication from muscle to cortex and from cortex to muscle encourages the growth of new neural connections that generate increasingly complex dimensions of experiencing. These neural structures form patterns of sensory and emotional images that we experience as thinking. When these patterns have duration, they are experienced as memories.

When we change our internal anatomic structure by building new neural pathways, there is a shift in our body shape, a shift in how we are present in the world, a shift in our body's relationship to itself. The ability to influence our shape through increasingly subtle muscular-cortical differentiation is a skill we learn with practice over time.

The method of voluntary muscular-cortical effort mobilizes the body wall to make a series of distinct muscular shapes. First, there is the assembling of a muscular pattern. Next, increments of increasing pressure organize a compressing or stiffening of the muscular shape. Then a slow incremental disassembling of pressure allows the shape to become porous, and to swell. When the compressed structure is disassembled in this measured way and an expanding shape appears, it can be given an edge of containment by applying small doses of rigidity. Each effort to increase or decrease pressure creates a distinct somatic shape. These distinct shapes morph into one another and back again, giving rise to a continuum of connections and shapes—a pulsatory pattern that forms the basis for growing a personal adult.

The practice protocol consists of five steps:

1. Recognize a somatic pattern and make a muscular model of it.
2. Assemble a continuum of shapes by increasing muscular intensity, pausing between increments.
3. Disassemble the muscular pattern in distinct stages by decreasing intensity, pausing between each decrease.
4. Wait for a pulsing, swelling shape. Then give it an edge of rigidity to form a boundary to contain the pulse.
5. Give duration to new shapes and use them for social and personal activities.

Using the practice protocol of Formative Psychology, we can learn to grow the varied possibilities within our given structure. This is how we grow a personal soma with its own meaning and values, and a way to sustain and mature our adult life.