

Beit Issie Shapiro

**Psychological Treatment of Intellectually
and Physically Disabled Children**

Promoting complexity and self-organization

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Our Organization

- History
 - 1984: Spielzeit was a research Project...
 - at the Zurich Children's Hospitals
 - affiliation: St. Mary's University of Minnesota
 - ... and several Swiss foundations.
- Study and Research...
 - support of severely ill children and their families
 - study new methods to treat these children
- Today: Interdisciplinary Work with...
 - Pediatricians of the departments for Neurology, Internal medicine, Orthopaedics, Nephrology, Oncology

Our Organization

- Population: Children with...
 - Group 1: Intellectual and/or physical disabilities...
 - Congenital Oligophrenie, Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida,, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Spectrum Dysfunctions (like ADS or ADHS), Autistic Spectrum Disorders.
 - Group 2: Children suffering from...
 - Chronic or Acute Trauma, Depression and Suicidal Tendencies, Dissociative and Psychotic Disorders, Anxious and Compulsive Behaviour .

Philosophy and Revisions in Attitude

1. Philosophy and Revision

Humanistic
Anthropological
Attitude

Revision of
Traditional Views

- Psychological knowledge and instructions have derived from social interaction with psychologically impaired ...
- ...and not from congenitally disabled or handicapped healthy human beings.
- ↪ Traditional psychological treatment-methods do not work.

Humanistic Anthropological Attitude

1. Philosophy and Revision

Humanistic Anthropological Attitude

Revision of Traditional Views

- Reinhard Lempp:
Handicap is “a just so being different as a structural variation of the different psychic factors among themselves.”
- Ludwig Schlaich:
calls for the departing from views of disability and handicap as „devious deformity of human nature“ and defines it as an „exemplary appearance of human existence“.

The Spielzeit-Method

1. Philosophy and Revision

Humanistic
Anthropological
Attitude

Revision of
Traditional Views

- The totality of the psychological condition is not to be seen as deficient in spite of reduced physical or mental capacity.
- Psychic factors are in all children capable to keep a dynamic equilibrium.
- Despite high vulnerability for psychological disturbances, the psyche still contains the capacity for self regulation and self preservation through the means of dynamic homeostasis.
- Disabled and handicapped children have the right and ability to fully develop a healthy personality and need to be supported to become incomparable individuals.

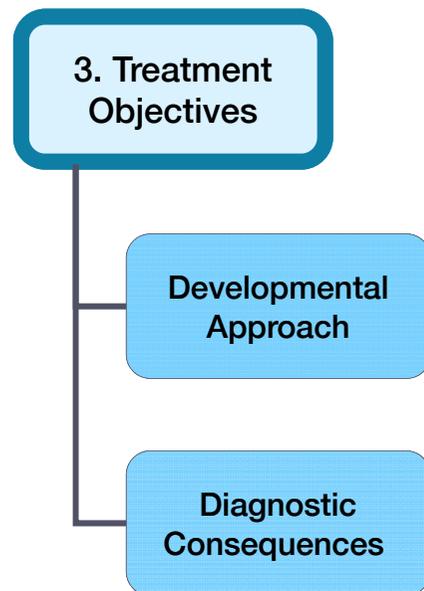
Findings

- Coping with a birth deficiency or early trauma constitutes an enormous challenge for the relationship of body and mind.
- Should the child suffer from physical impairment in utero or severe early trauma it will need to **develop in a different ways** than others.
 - i.e. Body-scheme / Relational-experience / Self-efficiency / Self-image
 - Accordingly - their developmental tasks are different and we need to relate our observation to this.
- These children often show an enormous variety of **bizarre symptoms** and strange behavior.
 - The behavior is bizarre only **as long as we cannot decode** it.
 - **Double and multiple diagnosis** are the result since disorders do not originate from the same background as in diagnostic manuals (ICD, DSM)
 - For therapy **bizarre symptoms should be the fundament** for successful treatment: They encode intentions that search for manifestation through disruptive behavior.

Conceptual Consequences

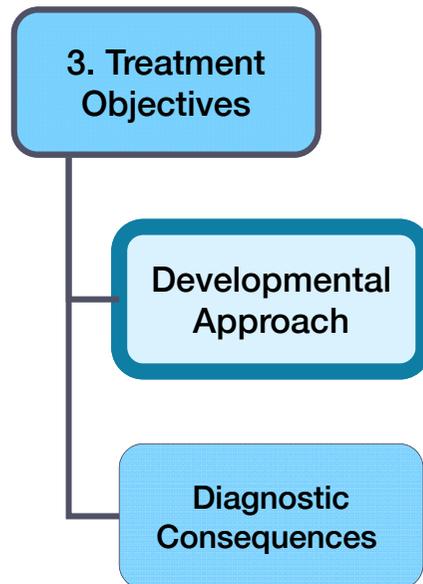
- The child as a complex living system, organism
 - In modern more systemic terminology we can conceptualize all children as complex living systems or organisms.
 - All children contain the capacity to look for a quasi-stationary equilibrium. No matter how severely impaired the child may be, he contains a whole potential knowledge, like any other human being.
- Development as an active type of Self-Organization
 - In our view, development derives from an inner self -organizing center **that we have to foster in therapy by providing favorable conditions.**
 - Development must be thought of as an active system that constantly tries to unfold, towards its own true nature.
 - It thereby follows the basic principles of living systems: Self-organization and Emergence.

Treatment Objectives



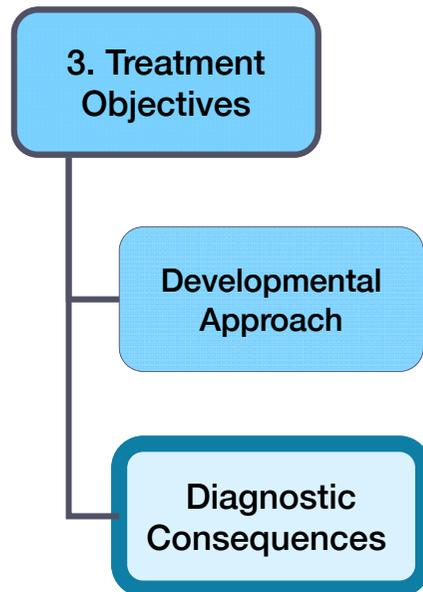
- How can we foster more complex interaction with the child so that the child can start to self-regulate and develop beyond its present state of being?
- What is the right proportion and “variation” of emotion, communication and cognition for this child, in order to keep a balance of the personality as a whole?
- What is the correct intra-individual norm for this child that we want to reach with him: What is his potential?

Developmental Approach

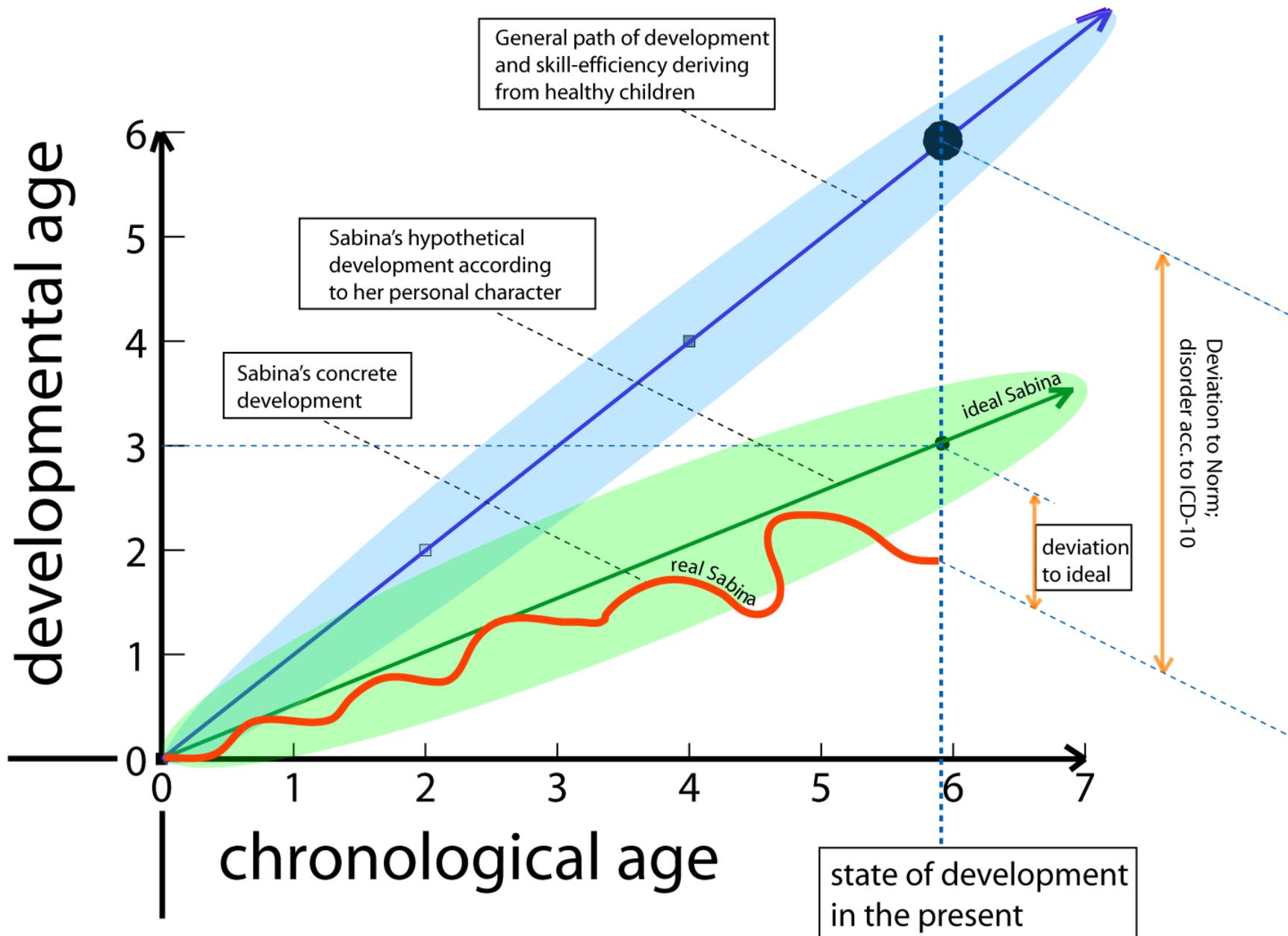


- Development as process of coping to age specific social tasks.
 - Havinghurst, Erikson
- Transactional dynamic and interaction-oriented model of the development.
 - Sameroff
- Psychopathology can be seen as a natural consequence of specific developmental paths that differ in their capacity to reorganize and self-organize.
 - Maturanda & Varela
- Behavior is the consequence of genetic and environmental factors and preceded physical and emotional experience.
- “Development is controlled by the inside and influenced by the outside.” (Haupt)

Diagnostic Consequences

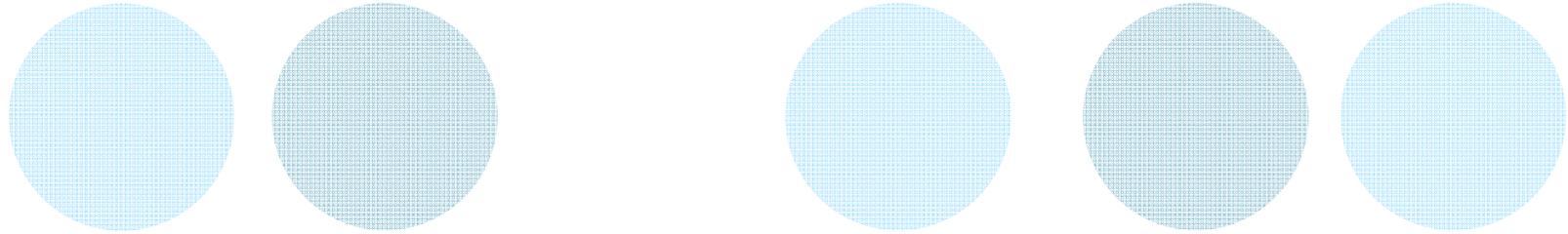


- Behaviour in reality relates to clusters or trends of intentions rather than to normative ideals.
- We focus on the deviation between existing phenomena and individual path of development.
- What is the intra-individual norm of development? What developmental path can be expected to be the “healthy one” for the specific child?



A case example: Fausto

- Fausto (9), Down-syndrome child
 - & Severely mentally challenged
 - & Barely any communication skills (nonresponsive in any communicative way that we could perceive to input we would give him).
 - All activity dominated by stereotyped behavioral patterns.
 - Only phonetic answer to any active approach (if he responded at all), was just: "iiii".



**Thank you
for your attention!**

