

Introduction

The type of actions to further the development of a healthy child or a child with special needs is different depending on whether I assume imitation or assimilation processes as the basis for development.

In previous publications assimilation was described in terms of tactual interaction as the roots for development (see also AFFOLTER & BISCHOFBERGER).

The current publication attempts to compile previously discussed topics relating to the question about development of learning: Imitation or assimilation and to add examples from our collection of video clips. This became possible due to the close interaction with Neckar-Verlag under the direction of Ms. Holtzhauer and the editorial work by Mr. Bernd Ade.

Since several decades the “Root model of tactual interaction” has been applied in educational and clinical environments. Furthermore additional research resulted in a wealth of observations and considerations. Based on this abundance of practical observations and scientific analyses, we will try to relate important aspects, which we have elaborated from the issue of the connection between roots and branches.

This publication is the first of several publications in a series with the title “FROM ROOTS TO BRANCHES” and provides an introduction to this aspect.

Thus, we hope, that this publication will be followed by others with different topics such as:

Development of a REPERTOIRE of tactual interactions in healthy children
– Compare with long term observations of children at risk

STRUCTURE of root and structure of branches in the development of:

- transport
- social interaction
- language

SINGLE ASPECTS of this development:

- stick phenomenon/tactual input
- locomotion

- hands/feet and the unity of environment
- problem solving

EFFICIENCY OF THERAPIES

- long term studies of children and adults

Problem

In 1976 F. Affolter published first results of a long term study with a group of autistic, non-speaking children. These children were examined regularly over a period of five to ten years. The observed changes in performances could be matched to various stages of development, similar to those observed in healthy children. However, if one compared the sequence of appearance of these developmental stages, one found important differences. If for example one compared healthy and autistic children in their capacity to imitate as well as conducting and managing everyday events, there are extremely important differences relevant for our discussion: healthy children start with direct imitation at the end of their first year of life (PIAGET, 1962/1945), before they start at about 18 months to produce everyday events (see also description of “Geschehnisse” in AFFOLTER, BISCHOFBERGER, HOFER & NEUWEILER (2010)). Children with autism omit the stage of direct imitation, instead they start with producing everyday events. The conclusion was that direct imitation cannot be considered a precondition for production of everyday events, as has been assumed by educators (FLAMMER, 1988). If direct imitation is not a precondition, then what is?

How, in other words, can one explain the difference in the sequence of stages of development?

It is important to pursue this question, once it comes the overall support of the development of children. However, it becomes especially important for “deciding about enhancing actions for children with difficulties in perception”. This is the targeted objective of this publication.

1. Nonverbal problem solving and tactual interaction



SCHWEIZERISCHER NATIONALFONDS ZUR FÖRDERUNG DER WISSENSCHAFTLICHEN FORSCHUNG

Thanks to the SNF (Swiss National Science Foundation for the support of scientific research) it was possible to collect data in the area of language and perception in two parts over a period of 10 years. The data could be collected thanks to the long lasting support by the SNF (Projects 3.327.69; 3.448.70; 3.902.72; 3.2050.73; 3.504.75; 3.711.76; 3.909.078).

Part I: Language with perception as a preceding performance

This part is based on the assumption that children with impairment in the development of language are already conspicuous in preceding developmental performances such as perception. There were significant differences between language-unimpaired and language-impaired children for performances of perception in different stages of organization of perception (see AFFOLTER, BISCHOFBERGER, HOFER & NEUWEILER, 2010):

1. A significant increase in performances of perception, of the visual, auditory and tactual type, with increasing age is observed in healthy children. Furthermore this increase in performance is observed in various stages of organization.
2. Significant lower performances of perception were observed in those various stages of organization in children with severe behavioral disorder and impaired language development in comparison to healthy children and children with sensory impairment (blindness, loss of hearing).

Part II: Nonverbal solving of problems in everyday life

During the research period II “nonverbal solving of problems in everyday life” we investigated the nonverbal problem solving activities with seriation tasks in a group of 240 healthy children at the age of three to fourteen years and compared them with 50 children at the age of four to nineteen years, who had problems of perception (see “Studienprojekte mit Unterstützung des SNF”).