

**“There Are No Mentally Handicapped!”<sup>1</sup>**  
**The Relation between the View of the Human Being and Inclusive Education**

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When I meet a „handicapped“ person,  
look at him and ponder, what he could be like,  
I describe myself: my perception of the other person.  
Whether I use the arising chance  
to know myself  
- that is a different matter.....!

## **1. Description of the Problem**

Using the term of „inclusive Education“, today many questions are discussed concerning the joint living and learning of handicapped and non-handicapped people, including every aspect of a person’s course of life.<sup>2</sup> Years ago we were anxious to establish inclusion in pre-schools and primary schools. Now we look for ways to establish and realize inclusion also outside the educational institutions, in the everyday life of handicapped and non-handicapped people. First signs begin to show, first steps are made. Especially those parents, who have again and again initiated and advanced these developments, have the right to feel a little proud of this.

Maybe we can assume that over the last years it has become clear, that inclusive education is not a luxurious demand of parents who are often said not to be able to cope with the handicaps of their children, but a cultural necessity and ethical obligation of the importance of a human right. But just as inclusive education is recognised as such, it gets trampled upon. Meanwhile, the assumption that inclusive education could be discontinued in the nearest future, is quite justified in the German speaking countries. A tendency to establish so-called remedial centres (for handicapped pupils in the sense of “special education”) can be observed throughout German speaking countries. Even more often we can witness the obstruction of efforts to develop inclusive education from cooperative projects or to continue inclusive education in other than those schools that weaker pupils are sent to - and beyond the years of compulsory education. Whoever feels committed to work for this goal, be it a father or mother, an expert or a member of the government, should advocate the enforcement of this evident necessity by law. If the principles of inclusive education we keep undeniable should not pass into law and should the old regulations persist, handicapped pupils will be invited into the regular schools through an open front door and be shoved out the back door the very next minute. This and the developing trend to stop inclusion in higher schools do not only trouble us, but demand the question of which possible factors are responsible - and whether this has got anything to do with us, because inclusive education - according to its definition and its interior logic - is indivisible.

We will easily agree on »social circumstances« to be responsible for this. We will also be able to agree, that today not only the zeitgeist but in its current also the health-, social and educational politics and the new ideologies which are produced by bio-ethics, human biology and human genetics in respect to the utility and value of the lives of severely physically or psychically ill and handicapped people, - that all these are extremely opposed to the idea of inclusive

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<sup>1</sup> Speech to the members of Nationalrat in the Austrian Parliament on the 29th Oct. 1996 in Vienna

<sup>2</sup> In the German speaking countries, “integration” originally describes the “inclusive education of handicapped and non-handicapped children and adolescents”. In many places the inclusion of mentally and severely handicapped persons in integration is discussed very controversially or hardly discussed at all. Also, the understanding of integration as a reform-pedagogic concern is not yet widely developed. For a basic orientation in the discipline of integration see FEUSER 1995.

education (and of human dignity!). At the same time, this makes the idea of inclusive education more necessary than ever - also the need to put it into practice. „Practice is the pivot“, says SARTRE to BASAGLIA (1980). „It is the vulnerable point of ideology“ (p. 40) - It is the vulnerable spot of those ideologies that keep our conception about human development and human learning and with it our view of the human being still on an almost pre-scientific level, being based on an antiquated view of the world. These ideologies sell us a continued selection and segregation of children and pupils as a measure to guarantee „equal opportunities“, they sell us segregation into special classes resp. cooperation classes as a necessity due to handicap, and the whole of this they sell us as „equality of education“. How but by joint, active togetherness of handicapped and non-handicapped individuals in all areas of life and of education could resistance be offered to the homicide of severely impaired life - because of the high costs and the little use to society, as it is coldly calculated nowadays - and how else can this development be stopped? I don't know any other way than inclusion. But this intimates, that the social practice, which we deplore, has got a background: It is the view of the human being in our minds, that produces social practice, which in turn constitutes and modifies the view of the human being. This dialectic is not to be denied. It comprises the two sides of our individual as well as social reality. As we point at society and its activities that are detrimental to inclusive education, our fingers point back at us, at our own conceptions of what a person is, and a handicap resp. a handicapped person. A view of the human being, that assumes an impaired person to be biologically-medically-psychically defect and educationally handicapped, can produce only selection and segregation in the social process, even if this social process calls itself „inclusive education“. In the same way the analysis of our view of the human being and of handicap - that we carry with us and that, whether we are conscious of it or not, directs our actions - remains a taboo and a myth to this day.

In the context of „democratic psychiatry“ in Italy, Franco BASAGLIA (1978) presented us a highly developed instrumentarium to analyse the social circumstances as well as our view of the human being. He writes - and this is applicable to handicap, too: *„If the ill (handicapped; G.F.) person is the only reality we have to deal with, then we have to concern ourselves with both sides of this reality: 1. with the fact, that we are dealing with an ill (handicapped; G.F.) person, who raises psycho-pathological problems (which are to be understood dialectically and not ideologically), and 2. with the fact, that we are dealing with an outcast, a socially ostracized person“* (p. 151). The following question arises: the question of the process of understanding the psycho-pathological problems we perceive in the other person - a fundamental process in inclusive education. This is a question, which does not deal with the myth of handicap, but with the creation of this myth. Thus the question is not the question of competing paradigms - namely „social practice“ versus „view of the human being“, concerning which it would not matter, which dimension we look at - but the question of the connection between the two, the dialectic relation. What we are primarily concerned with here, are not the patterns of behaviour of the single person, but *the relations between the patterns of behaviour*: their individual as well as collective meaning and function in our perception, in our thinking and acting. This is a basic requirement to understand that what we call „handicap“. It is a development-logical (and no „pathological“) product of a person's system-evolution, accomplished under the given circumstances of his biological being and his environment, that with the given means of his system he integrates into his system. Or put differently - and in anticipation of statements that will follow later: **What seems to us as a handicap could be understood as an expression of the adoption of (organically) impairing, (socially) handicapping and - as such - »isolating« conditions by a person who concretely acts under these circumstances. It can be understood as a formation of structure (⇨ development) by the means of available exchange-functions (⇨ learning).**

## 2. „There are no mentally handicapped!“

I would like to quote a poem. It was written by a person whose biography - in the mirror of our social valuation standards - classically matches a mental handicap. He says about himself: *„I like it very much in the sheltered workshop. In the workshop I am a poet. To be a poet is a fine job. In the workshop all are handicapped. I am not handicapped, I can talk.“* This is Georg Paulmichl<sup>3</sup>. With this statement he holds up the mirror to us in a double sense: Firstly, Georg PAULMICHL confirms that he does not perceive himself as mentally handicapped, which I found confirmed during all the years of my profession concerning all people I have dealt with who we think to be mentally handicapped. I especially remember two statements of people, who we would not hesitate to call more severely mentally handicapped. One statement said: „I am not mentally handicapped!“ and the other: „Mister Feuser, everybody thinks I am stupid because I go to Brettergymnasium, don't they?“ The girl's special school for mentally handicapped was called „Brettergymnasium“ (→ a gymnasium for persons who are very dense) in town. Secondly, Georg PAULMICHL deduces this statement of his identity from a „symptom“, namely that he can talk, which he attributes to himself as his „nature“, whereas he denies this to his colleges in the same way that we attribute „normality“ to ourselves as our „nature“ and deny it to those who in our perception show psycho-pathological „symptoms“. This shows how much these practices of society turn into obstacles in the forming of our identity, putting us at a distance from instead of into relation with other people. Now let me read Georg PAULMICHL's poem; another mirror he holds up to us. The poem is called *„Teachers“*:

*„The teacher's job is a weird job.  
The pupils are examined, exercised, watched over and sometimes chosen.  
To become a teacher, one first has to pass driving lessons, then frown.  
Some pupils are terribly afraid, their knees just shake.  
The teachers know everything, they are unbelievable and infallible.  
Some pupils sing the first voice, some the second and some the fifth.  
The teachers have a polite meanness and erase the copy-books till they are spick-span.  
A tidy copy-book is a fulfillment for the mind.  
The teachers are appointed by the country's bosses to make people out of the pupils.  
The teacher turns the thoughts in the head around like blazes.  
Some teachers are debauchees and nitwits.  
Jesus says you shall not make any wrong testimonial  
The pupils have to jump up and cry good morning through the class.  
Into the ears it goes in, out of the ears it goes out, that is the course of life.“* (1990, p. 26)

The formulation „There are no mentally handicapped!“ that I have chosen here is not a rhetorical statement but meant very seriously. If one utters this opinion, instantly the oppositon is voiced: „Yes, but these people do exist, look at this or that person. You cannot deny that“ I do not deny it. Another answer is: „That is pure egalitarian mania.“ I think, these statements misunderstand the meaning of my statement. It could become clear in the following statement: There are people whom **WE** class in a category of people that **WE** call „mentally handicapped“ because of **OUR** perception of their actions (which are always human), in the mirror of norms that **WE** see them in.

For me, mental handicap, on a *first level*, labels a phenomenologically-classifying process -

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<sup>3</sup> Georg PAULMICHL (born on 18th Apr. 1960) lives with his parents in Prad (South-Tyrol, Italy) in the upper Vinschgau and attends the workshop for handicapped there. In colloquial usage, he is counted as mentally handicapped.

a process of registering the „symptoms“ that we see in other people and that we turn into a person's „nature“ by summarizing the „symptoms“ in categories of symptoms. The instant it is carried out, this process abstracts from the reality of its instrumentalisation in the historical-social context; it does not take into account the harm of segregation - that can go as far as physical extermination - which the concerned individuals have experienced, as if such a statement could be made „neutral of valuation“ or, put differently, purely scientifically. The label „mental handicap“ is a declaration which produces an effect on the other person.

On a *second level*, it characterizes a social reality - namely the reality of labelling and segregation - and a professional reality - namely the reality of the philosophical-scientific dereliction of special education for handicapped, which declares the »observable symptoms« as someone's »nature«, i.e. as their cause - conceptionally correct; but it does not characterize the individuality of a person, whom we declare „mentally handicapped“. The label „mental handicap“ abstracts from the individuality of the concerned person, from his being as a subject, and in the social context causes the opposite result of what we define as a educational goal for those people. It is impossible to integrate supposedly handicapped and supposedly non-handicapped pupils when the two groups are taught on the basis of different curricula and by exterior differentiation. It is as impossible to acknowledge someone whom I classify as „mentally handicapped“ as a fellow person of equal rights and value. This is the basic dilemma of inclusive education in the professional as well as socio-political field, a dilemma that it has not acknowledged, and certainly has not worked on so far. In other words: **When I perceive a child as „mentally handicapped“ and think he is the way I perceive him to be, I have segregated him, even if he visits an inclusive education class.**

What I have pointed out here, has got a historical tradition. It is anchored in a school of thought that I would call „pre-relativistic“. Believing in the „dynamic of mechanics of classical physics“, it is in accordance with NEWTON's view of the world and its predecessors, that does not know of any transitions, leaps and convergent systems in the course of evolution, and that postulates the principle of the reversibility of all processes. It derives also from a school of thought that interlocks with the above mentioned presumptions, which shortly can be called „social-darwinist“, „eugenic-racist“ and the „philosophical valuation of life“. Due to the association of the school of classical mechanics and those human scientific-philosophical traditions, the development of which reached their peak in the middle of the 19th century, an ontologisation of the results won on the ground of phenomenology took place.<sup>4</sup> I.e. what we, in a first step, notice about a person as classifiable appearances (as psychological symptoms) - our perception of the other person - we look at as his „inner being“ in a second step; we interpret them - *pars pro toto* - as his „nature“.

Finally, in a third step, we value his „nature“ in the mirror of dominating social norms in which our expectations are manifested as to how a person of a certain age and gender has to be like and what he/she has to perform. Thus the statement emerges, that this person *is* mentally handicapped. This then leads right into the new debate about the value of life and into the discussion about „euthanasia“. The „euthanasia-argumentation“ as well as its biologicistic/eugenic-racist moments and broad fields of the special education for handicapped have, seen historically, mainly the same philosophical roots. (Feuser 1992)

A general result of this process is the ascertainment of „being different“ (literal translation from the German: »Andersartigkeit« = „being of a different kind or nature“) - one of the most

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<sup>4</sup> PHENOMENOLOGY is, among others, concerned with the systematic classification of scientific findings which only make it possible to distinguish between “reality” and “illusion”. ONTOLOGY is concerned with the existence, as far as it exists. Whether what seems to exist, does exist, would have to be clarified by phenomenology.

devastating terms in this tradition of thought, although it is highly favoured in the field of special education to this day. In spite of the historical and social fact of this term, employing it, it is intended to stress the individuality of the other person, which goes to show that the opposite of „right“ is not „wrong“ but „meant well“. If we look at the term closely, it becomes obvious, that it calls the person a different being, being of a different kind or nature, which constitutes a different genus (⇒ racism-component) and negates the person's belonging to the human race - and with it the code of legal rights, that people established to protect their own species, as it is also ethically expressed in the prohibition of injuring another person and in the commandment to help a person in need. The term also means - in the double sense of the (German) word - that the person is „kind“, or better: good in a „different“ way than it is generally expected of his (human) kind: respectively the way (a) to express one's human spirit (as far as it is granted at all that the handicapped person owns a human spirit), and (b) to follow the social conventions (»artig« = to be good, obedient).

When we sum up the process I pointed out here, we can also say the following:

1. We perceive a person as not to be understood and being (of a) different (kind), when we e.g. do not understand him or cannot accept that what he „has got“ could happen to ourselves.
2. Understanding the other person works only by the projection of our limits of understanding on him, i.e. we mistake our limits of understanding as the limitation of the other person whom we try to understand.
3. Our assumptions about the limitation of the other person that we now think to be his nature, but that - as I said - characterize our own limits of understanding, let us act in a way that we put the other person into systems of education and teaching, into dwelling-, working-, remedial measure- and therapy-situations, that match our assumption about his limitation. This guarantees, that in spite of remedial measures the other person stays the way that I can only imagine him to be. Our prognosis about his potentiality of development is thus fulfilled. This proves that we are right (and not the other person), proves our „normality“ and his „pathology“ and closes the circle.

The „mentally handicapped“<sup>5</sup> person is only allowed to be how we are able to think him, how we think him to be (and not any different from that). We try to ensure that these projections receive a long-lived validity by the social and educational reductionism, imparted, organized and controlled by the special education for handicapped. An example: The curriculum for primary schools in the Bremen (1st - 4th grade) intends: In regular primary school calculation up to one million, in special schools for slow learners up to one thousand, in special schools for mentally handicapped calculation is not mentioned at all, as if there were not a world full of things to quantify for people that we classify as such. When we assume that the other person cannot learn certain facts or a certain nexus, we do not offer him these facts to learn. This way he has got no opportunity to learn more about the world than what we present to him. Thus he must be and must stay what and how we think he is!

## 2.1 An post-relativistic concept

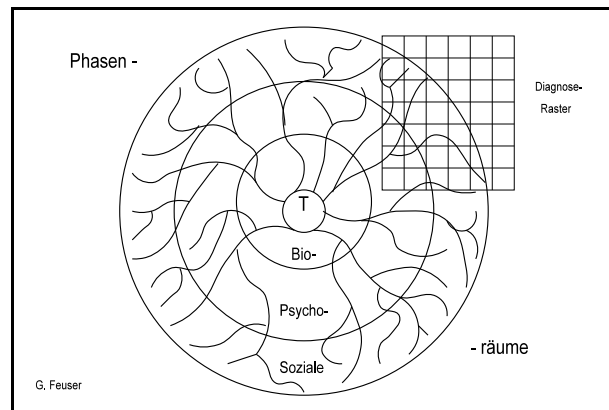
Let us now turn to an post-relativistic concept. Epistemologically, it is not rooted in the Arts, but in the sciences, that turn increasingly towards philosophy: physics, especially thermodynamics and quantum theory, chemistry and biology. The fundamentals of understanding and explanation of an according view of the world - and with it a view of life and of the evolution of life, including the development of the individual - are anchored in complex theories, that we term today with the catchwords self-organisation- and co-evolution-theory (and, mostly used wrongly

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<sup>5</sup> Taking into consideration what we have said so far, using this term calls for apostrophizing.

and misleadingly, chaos-theory). In the mirror of the results available in this context it becomes obvious, that the fundamental psychological-social qualities of living systems cannot even be denied in people, in whom we are not able to perceive them (in a conventional, psychology-orientated way). Our classifying pattern orientates itself on a very small sector and only by a system-level of a person, which is developed in a certain way. Even other sectors on the same system-level stay disregarded here. We use these criteria, placed into observation-screens, with all people. They form the glasses, through which we exclusively see them. The parts of the whole that the screening registers seem to us as the whole, that then is valued as incomplete and defective. If the screening does not register any parts of the whole, then what is to be observed counts as non-existent.

As e.g. the utilitaristic - preference-utilitaristic based „practical ethics“ assumes, the severely handicapped human being would thus cease to exist in the flow of time, lack a consciousness aimed at the future, a preference for a further life, an ability to have meaningful relationships, sensitivity and a distinct entity<sup>6</sup>. Because of this, this kind of philosophy denies him the status to be, as a human being, a person. Against the back-ground of cost - utility - analysis there does not seem to be any reason not to kill him.



Contrarily, the mentioned epistemologies make obvious, that what we can perceive in a person on a certain system-level as psychological qualities, which can be interpreted psychologically, are not only existant specifically in the human system but in living systems in general as constituting qualities. It can be proved, that all bio- psychological-social qualities, that philosophies and philosophers in favour of „euthanasia“ do not concede to e.g. severely handicapped people, are not only existant and useable for these people (although not observable with classical methods), but were already starting and surrounding conditions for the genesis and the evolution of all living matter (Feuser 1994). What we cannot observe in a person, is not not there. It exists on different levels in complex and diversified (life-) processes as the elementary Human, that escapes our conventional controll- and test-mechanisms.

A drastic consequence of this is, that every diagnostic which is orientated at the status, in the mirror of these theories (of the complex and process), loses its justification to deduct a prognosis from its results. What I esteem so highly in myself, that distinguishes me so much from someone else that I consequently classify him as „mentally handicapped“, he owns, in his own way, as much as I. But as I have more power in this society than he does, because I count as „normal“, am known as an expert and am seemingly authorized, due to my position, I can label him that way, in a masterful manner. In this moment already I do not need to make any effort to recognize in him what he owns as much as I do. My work has been concerned with very severely handicapped persons for a long time, and over the last years also with people in coma after very severe brain injuries. Meanwhile we know, that people in coma are not only able to learn, but have consciousness of themselves, which corresponds with the process of learning that we classify as coma and in which the unity of space and time can be disconnected. Under the given

<sup>6</sup> “Distinct entity” means an existence clearly distinguished from others, as opposed to the substance of a thing (Duden, Vol. 5, 1982, 4. Ed., p. 193 and 219).

conditions of the system (in the sense of the logic of development), this is as „normal“ as if we e.g. can dream that the Stephansdom of Vienna is in Budapest.

An according fundamental study shows that every living system can only be understood as a system that is open to and orientates itself regarding its environment, so that it changes during each cycle of exchange with it. This referentiality to the world connects itself to the internal referentiality of the system, because of

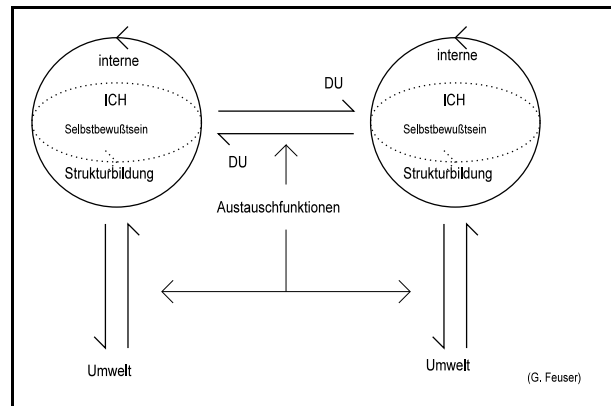
which it can, on the one hand, stay identical with itself and on the other hand reconstruct in itself the transacted and experienced exchange-process (by means of its system), i.e. it accumulates knowledge about the world in relation of the self to the world. Such systems are called dissipating and autopoietic, concerning their qualities; they are considered to be functionally open to their environment and, concerning the reconstruction of the world in the system, operationally closed (Maturana 1985, Maturana / Varela 1990). In the pre-biotic, physical-chemical structures already first traces of system-qualities exist, that we today call ego and self-consciousness on the level of human beings. „Time“, in this context, is the proto-organiser of living systems; it organizes the organization, causes the structural development. As we know since EINSTEIN, time is relative and constitutes individual biographies. Therefore we can say: **To expect something of another person in an identical way as I know it from myself, would thus be an inhuman action.**

This has, among others, drastic consequences for a new understanding of *development* which I generally see as a dynamically organized, structural system-change in progress, changing into the direction of increasing complexity and diversification. In the process of development - on the grounds of the already mentioned qualities of all living; this is the central point -

1. the complexity and differentiation of the (material and personal) environment, with which the system is in exchange, has more impact on the system than its own given means to realize and represent this exchange internally. The »own means of the system« are not just means and tools for the exchange with the environment, but substantially the product of this exchange.
2. Thus the possibility of change, i.e. what can become of a person according to his potential (which cannot at all be determined and prognosed exactly), is more important than his momentary situation.

This does not mean to think of the person in his momentary situation only as the not yet possible - on the contrary: A person is the momentary possible in his momentary situation regarding possible changes; thus he is competent, handicapped as he might seem to us (as he also likes to seem handicapped to us / although he likes to seem handicapped to us).

Really, it ought to be a very fundamental educational concern to orientate ourselves at what can become of a person regarding his potentiality and not at what we think he is in this moment. In spite of that we deduct our prognoses and educational schemes and with them our suggestions for the course of education largely unswerving from the rigid fixation on a person's momentary situation which we perceive as static, deficient and defective; because of status-orientated criteria. Once classified as mentally handicapped, this usually means a continuity in the course of life which resembles a one-way-street, finally leading into a dead end from where there is no escape. An example might illustrate how presumptuous and obsessed we are with this: If I cut

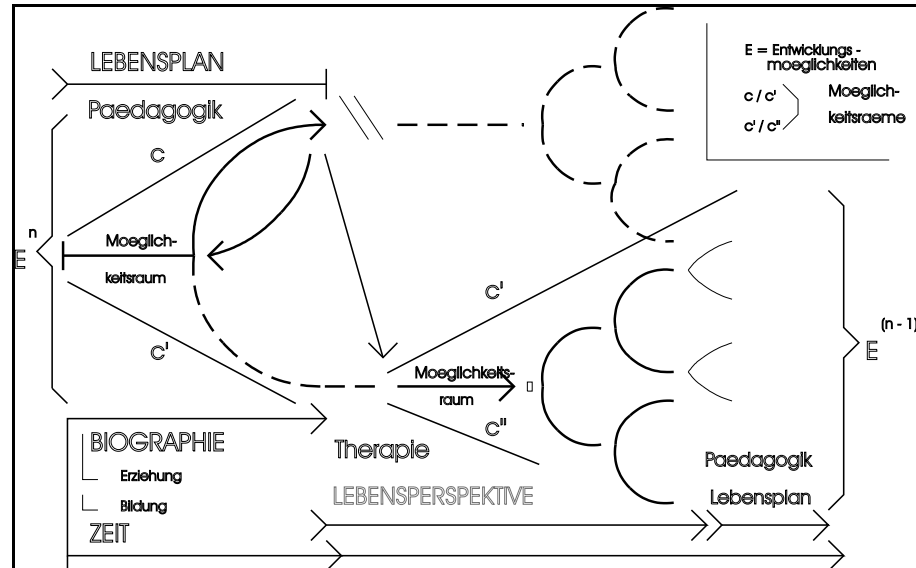


a single picture out of a film you do not know, and project it like a slide, you would be very unlikely to find out exactly which scene led to this picture and which scenes will follow, not to mention guessing and judging the end of the film. But we test a person at some point in his biography and then think we know which further course his life should take and which education should be made available or denied to him.

The special education for mentally handicapped grounds almost exclusively on the projections I have just pointed out. It thus fundamentally lacks a „justness“ towards its clientele. The modification of developmental processes results from a system's environmental conditions, and these, not the system itself, can be optimized educationally and therapeutically according to the subject's biography and to general principles of human development. This is the only responsibility to be taken care of legitimately as education and therapeutic. It does neither require the existence of any special education nor any special schools nor would it be essential to postulate these. Only as long as we deal with people, that we classify e.g. as „mentally handicapped“, in the way I have pointed out (tolerated or even authorized by society), this can legitimately call itself »special education for mentally handicapped«. But when the person, classified as „mentally handicapped“, enters into society (from which he has never been absent, but in which he was highly isolated and mystified) with equal rights and without social discredit, which means having an equal part also in education, we cannot speak of special education for mentally handicapped anymore. We are talking about nothing more or less than a general - and thus inclusive - education.

Development follows attractors<sup>7</sup>. Environmental as well as starting conditions<sup>8</sup> of a living system can be such. A trisomy 21, which has got nothing at all to do with „mental retardation“, but describes a chromosomal starting condition of a system's evolution, *can* (does not have to) be a special biological attractor for a human development.

In the sense of the bifurcation-hypothesis, a dissipating system has got at least two opportunities of change, when a critical point of instability of the system is reached - already on the level of chemical evolution in pre-biotic contexts. Analogically, we can assume (considering what



<sup>7</sup> Attractors are operators that give structural development inside a system a »certain direction«. E.g. the development will progress into the direction of a personal structure that we then perceive and classify as a mental handicap or as autism-syndrome.

<sup>8</sup> Environmental conditions are all quantities that influence a person's exchange with his environment during the course of his development; this includes conditions that lie in the system, between the exchanging systems and that surround the systems, which are in the process of exchange.



has been said), that a human being has got a finite, but not in number predictable amount of developmental opportunities ( $E^n$ ). Due to the irreversibility of a biographical (life-) time, he is only not able to use those opportunities, that he has lived through already. Even for a very severely impaired person,  $E^{n-1}$  opportunities remain for change and for an unpredictable number of further developmental opportunities. If we follow this thought further, the person potentially - depending on which attractors have the biggest impact - is able to achieve a result in development that can be very much alike one, that he possibly might have achieved without start conditions like e.g. trisomy 21. It becomes clear: an education that is restrictive socially and in the choice of subjects of education, as e.g. the special education for mentally handicapped is, curtails the potential developmental opportunities of people classified as mentally handicapped immensely by segregation and educational reductionism, and works as an attractor to reproduce behaviour, intellectual performance etc. that causes us to classify someone as mentally handicapped. The experiences in „inclusive education“, in lessons not restrictive socially nor in the choice of subjects, clearly prove that. They also show just how important a very heterogenic group of pupils is regarding the function of every individual as an attractor for the development of the others. No means and methods of any special education or therapy, and be they ever so perfect, are able to compensate this single factor. There is no time though to elaborate this any longer.

## 2.2 Education in Segregation is a kind of apartheid

The tragedy and the dilemma of our faculty might become even clearer by another illustration. I think the cosmologist, physicist and mathematician Stephen HAWKING (1988, 1993; Ferguson 1992) whose theories have also influenced my thoughts, is widely known due to his popularity and the film about him. His achievements certainly equal the achievements of great physicists like EINSTEIN and others. If we had not any knowledge of him (he appears severely handicapped, needs a wheelchair and extensive equipment and personal help, is largely unable to move and not able to talk anymore) and if we had to give some expert advise, we would probably - with the motive to help - discuss which nursing home or other special institution would be suitable for him. Certainly, we would not discuss with him problems of the great unifying theories, that concern questions about the origin of the universe, and not try to use quantum theory for macrocosmic phenomena with him or discuss „black holes“ or „time“. But that is what he works on and what he publishes. I ask: What gives us the certainty to know so exactly what goes on in the minds of children and adolescents whom we send to special schools for mentally handicapped? As long as we cannot prove that none of them has got the answers in his or her head that HAWKING is looking for, we have to treat all of them like geniuses, even if they appear to us as severely handicapped. The problem I have pointed out here is a question of dialogue, communication and interaction, that can only thrive in co-operative togetherness of equal rights and value; it is not the question of a person's certain way of being in the whole of human existence. Differently put: Not a person's „handicap“ is the problem, but the quality of the relationship that we establish with him or that establishes itself. In a speech he held in 1990 at the University of Southern California, HAWKING stressed: *“It is very important that handicapped children can meet non-handicapped children of the same age. That is decisive for self-assessment. How should it be possible to feel as a member of human race when separation starts in early childhood? That is a kind of apartheid.”* (Ferguson, 1992, p. 214)

Continuing the outlined train of thought (leaving out necessary intermediate steps and explanations; see Feuser 1994) we could finally say that what seems to us a physical and/or psychic illness or a handicap, is the expression of system-integrative balancing of starting and environmental conditions by a living system that organizes and structures itself, far away from being in balance. I.e., regards the concrete individual: What we see as a „handicap“ and dismiss

or despise in a person and usually look at as deficient, is the expression of competence; the expression of competence to integrate life-impairing (bio-psychological-social) conditions - self-compensatory and self-regulative - into the system for the survival of the individual existence in its environment. This means that every form of handicap, psychic and also physical illness is human and humanly possible and under certain circumstances existentially necessary. For the human being it is as »normal« to be „handicapped“ as it is »normal« not to be „handicapped“. Not to be „handicapped“ is not a sign or attribute of »normality«; we just claim it as a social attribute by the means of our defining power. „Handicap“ defines »normality« in the same way as non-handicap; »normality« here does not refer to a social code of norms, but to the logic of human development under existing starting and environmental conditions of a person in his biography.

What we perceive e.g. as the „mental handicap“ of a so-called „Mongoloid“ child, a person with „Down-syndrome“, is the expression of a regular human development considering the fact of his starting conditions that are characterized by a trisomy 21 and the environmental conditions as social and family background and institutional circumstances which we create for the person and burden him with. Every living child with Down-syndrome has proved that he can live humanly with a trisomy 21. None of us has ever proved that, but we presume to value this child and his life. We would still have to prove that we are able to do that. Who has got the right to ascribe something to another person? Is the situation not inverted when we claim such a right referring to „handicapped“ persons? Special education turns out to be dominating pedagogy as it grounds on this right of the non-handicapped to ascribe and classify - and it will remain such as long as it segregates or lock the segregated and practices reductional education as putative „handicap-specific“ measures. Classifications of special education we have allowed ourselves to use due to a misled psychology and a biologicistic psychiatry, striving for scientific methods, are nothing but artefacts of a view of the human being that derives from a pre-relativistic-mechanistic school of thought and view of the world into which biologicistic, eugenic-racist and moments of the philosophy of life are deeply involved.

I think, every person has to be important to humanity, otherwise humanity has not got a chance of survival. The last task of an ending special education for mentally handicapped could be to impart to regular education to take the people, that the special education for mentally handicapped has been concerned with up to now, seriously and to acknowledge them without prejudice as pupils of equal rights and value. To impart to the so-called general education a sense of this kind could be the sense of a special education for mentally handicapped whose responsibility today is not anymore to help „mentally handicapped“ people in special institutions<sup>9</sup> but to create in co-operation with the people we classify as mentally handicapped a common fund of experiences, supported by solidarity, i.e. to create a joint culture.

VYGOTSKIJ, whose 100th birthday in the year 1996 was the occasion for many congresses and an intensive discussion of his work, formulated already in the thirties: „It lies in our hands to act in a way that the deaf, the blind and the slow learning child is not defective. Then the word itself will vanish as well, the true sign of our own defect.“ (1975)

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<sup>9</sup> Historically, we have to remember here, the segregating education of mentally handicapped had its justification due to the fact that it represented a socially higher level for these persons by enforcing the right of education for “mentally handicapped” persons and by freeing them from psychiatries and institutions only orientated on guarding and nursing - especially because the step from the institutions directly into “inclusive education”, which to many experts even today does not seem imaginable, not to mention practicable, was not possible.

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