

A photograph of a child's playroom. The room features white shelving units filled with various toys and objects. A large yellow giraffe toy stands on the left. In the center, there is a round wooden table with a tiger figurine on it. The room is well-lit with overhead fluorescent lights. The text 'spielzeit' is overlaid in large blue letters with yellow dots above the 'i' and 'e', and 'Child Psychotherapy SPKD' is written below it in smaller blue letters.

# spielzeit

Child Psychotherapy SPKD

# Psychotherapy with Mentally Challenged Children and Adolescents

The Inferiority  
of the Seemingly Superior

Robin Mindell

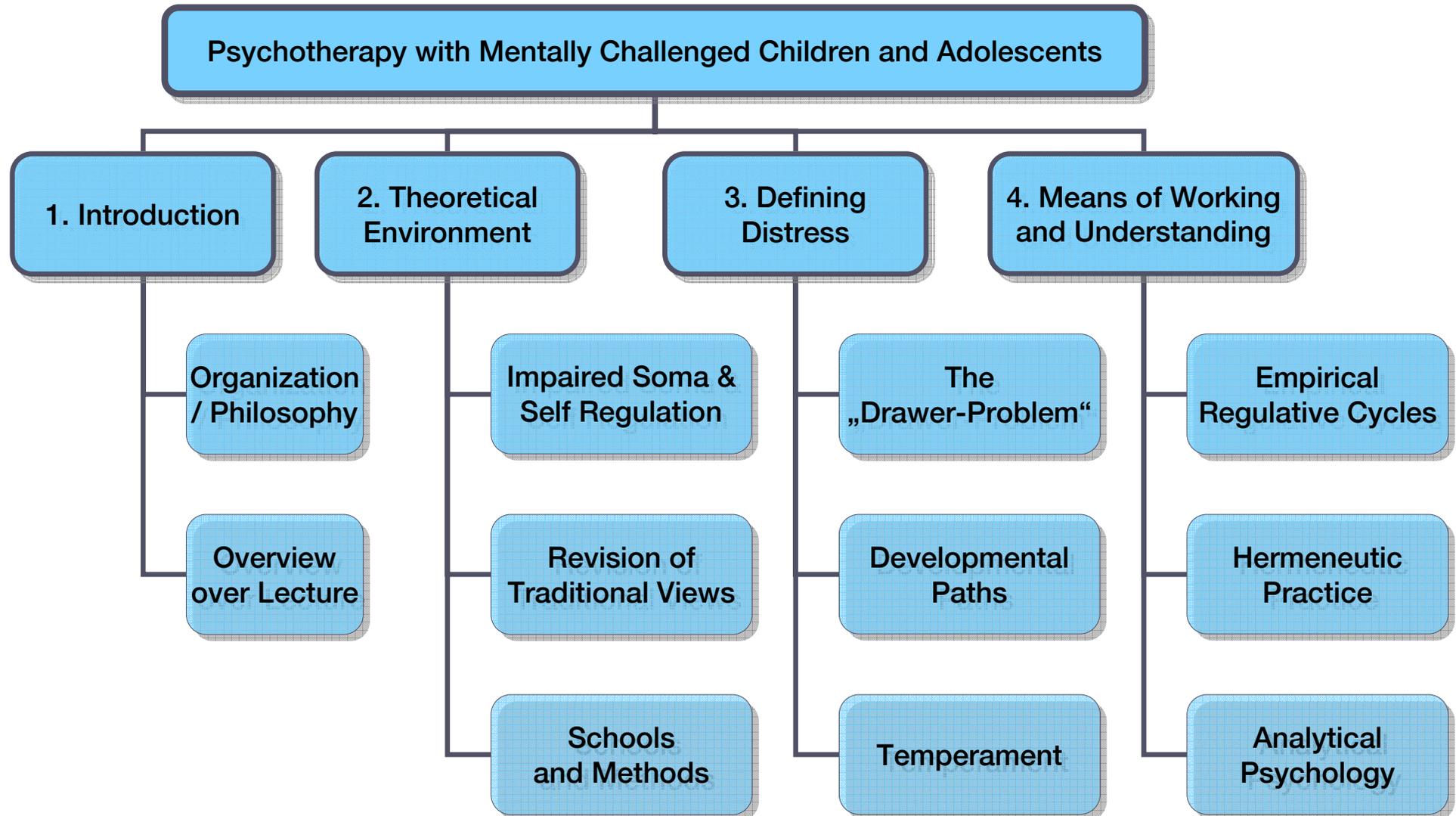


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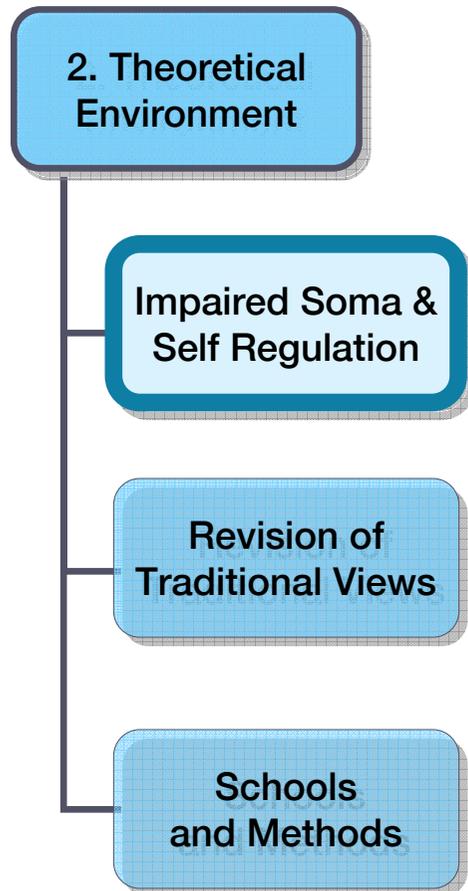
# Organization and Philosophy

- 1984: Research Project
  - Children's Hospital Zurich
  - St. Mary's University of Minnesota
- Population: Children with...
  - (physical) impairment,
  - disability (activity limitations) and
  - handicap (participation restrictions),
  - suffering from severe psychic disorders.
- Parallel path of treatment and research

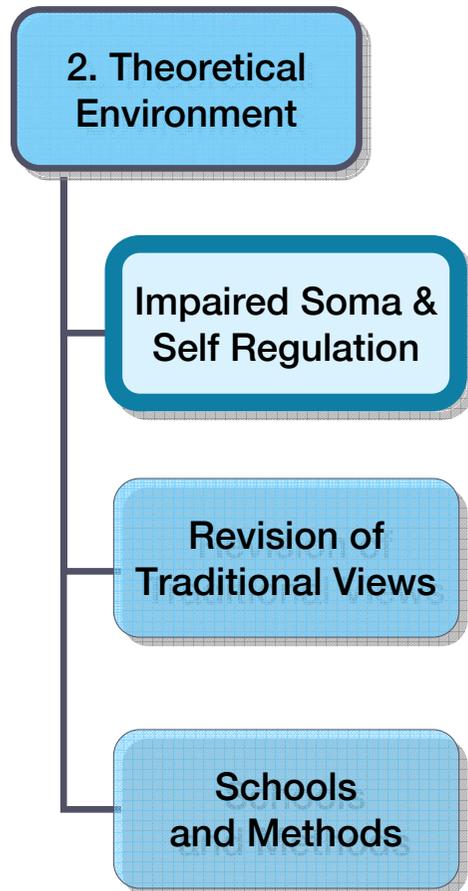
# Overview



# Theoretical Environment

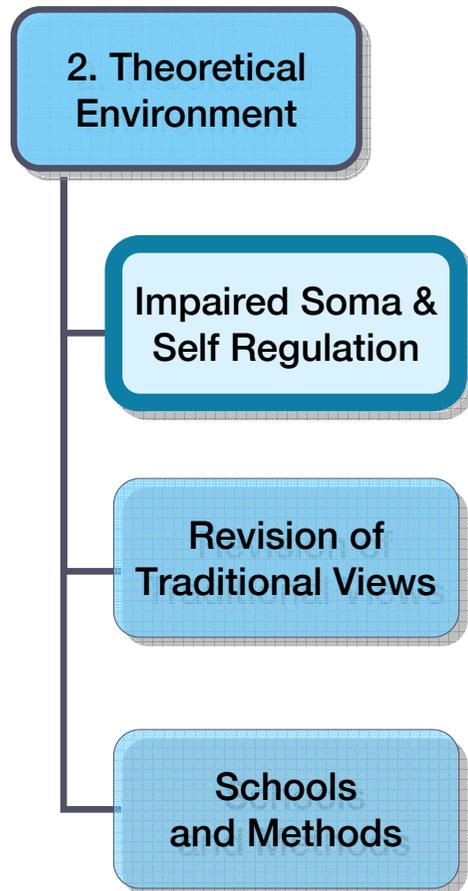


# Toward the acceptance of mental retardation



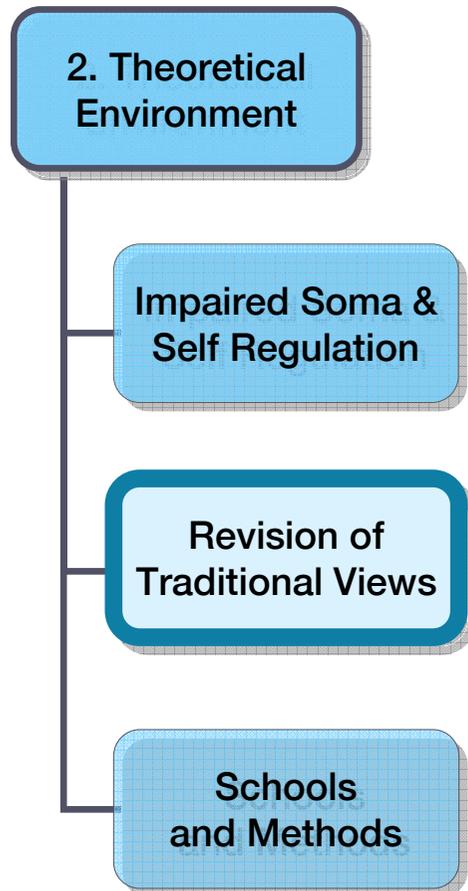
- Reinhard Lempp:  
Mental handicap is “a just so being different as a structural variation of the different psychic factors among themselves.” (Lempp, 2002, p. 109)
- Ludwig Schlaich:  
calls for the departing from views of retardation as „devious deformity of human nature“ and defines it as an „exemplary appearance of human existence“.
- Karl Neise:  
The psychology of the mentally retarded “is still in its beginnings and can therefore only claim preliminary results.”

# Non-deficient Approach: Self-Regulation



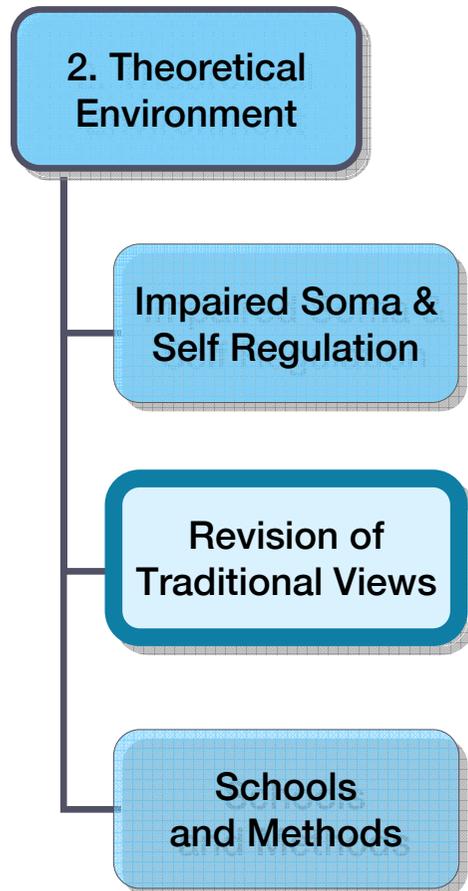
- The totality of the inner psychological condition is not to be seen as deficient in spite of reduced intellectual capacity.
- “Impaired soma cannot be equalized to a broken self.” (Christoph Leyendecker, 2006)
- The premise should be taken that psychic factors of retarded individuals are potentially designed to keep a dynamic equilibrium.
- The psyche still contains the capacity for self regulation.

# Revision of Traditional Views



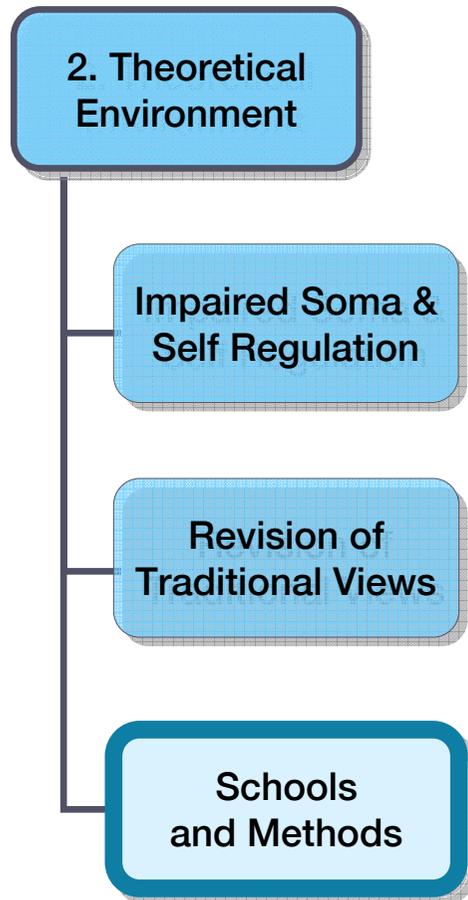
- Psychoanalysis (Freud, Breuer)
  - focus on consciousness as the mediator or working-ground upon problems.
- Developmental Approach
  - focuses on psychic phenomena through the means of (emotional) experience .
  - Different psychic factors in their “structural variation” can find equilibrium even with intellectual capacity being deviate or deficient.
- Consequences:
  - Psychotherapy is neither dependent on the spoken word, or the conscious working through,
  - nor is coping with stress and impairment dependent on these factors.

# The Nature of Development



- Development as process of coping to age specific social tasks (Havinghurst, Erikson)
  - emerging largely from the outside.
- Development as Self-Organizing Process
  - Sameroff (1995):
    - The human being is seen in an elementary way to be self organizing.
  - Maturanda & Varela (1987):
    - internal organization of a system that increases in complexity and displays new surprising properties.
  - Psychopathological Phenomena:
    - as a natural consequence of specific developmental paths that differ in their capacity to reorganize and self organize.
  - “Development is controlled by the inside and influenced by the outside.” (Ursula Haupt)

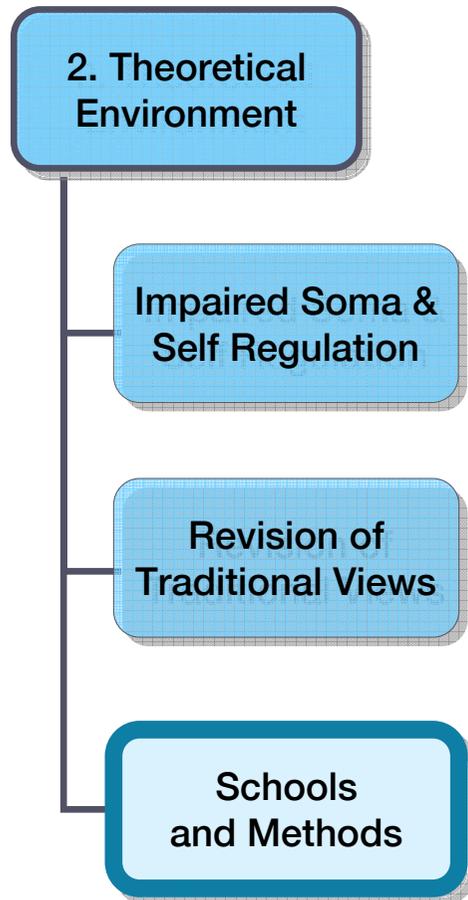
# Schools and Methods



## „Technical Eclecticism“

- Freudian Psychoanalysis
- Jungian Analytical Psychology
- Play Therapy
- Sandplay
- Cognitive behavioural techniques
- Integrative Body Psychotherapy (IBT)
- Special education
- Specialized psychopathology
- Client-centered play therapy

# Schools and Methods



## Characterization of Play:

- Positive emotions
  - Joy
  - Voluntariness
  - Flexibility
  - Variation
- Process-orientation
- Quasi-reality
  - „as-if“ reality

# Perceiving Phenomena as Gestalt

## 2. Theoretical Environment

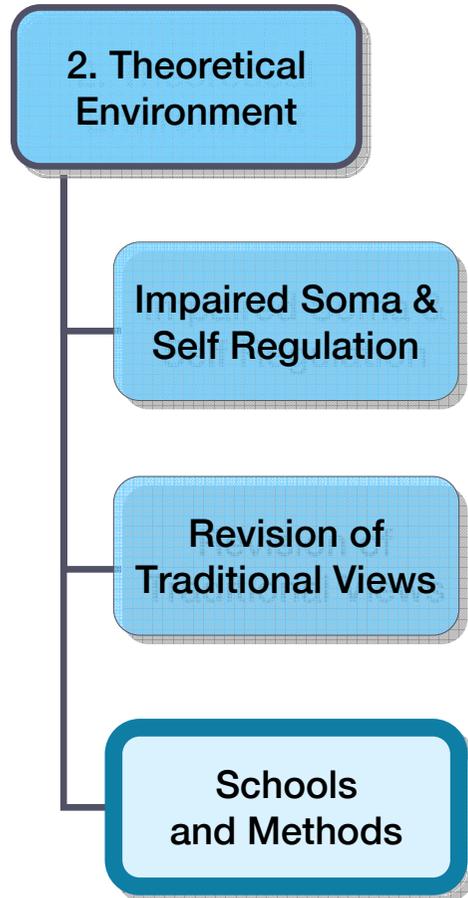
Impaired Soma & Self Regulation

Revision of Traditional Views

Schools and Methods

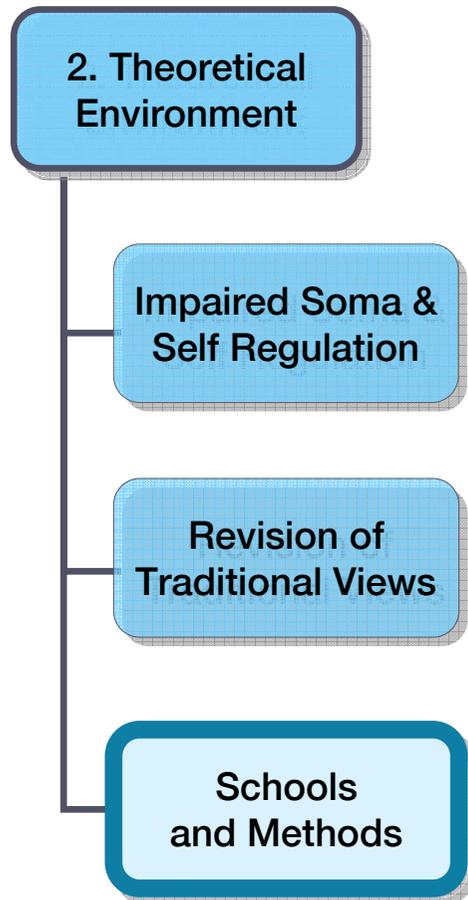
- Individuals create their psychic reality according to inner and outer stimuli in form of a pattern that can be circumscribed as Gestalt.
- Behaviour, emotion and social interaction always have a very specific quality.
  - E.g.: Aggressive hissing... like a tiger
- The finding of Gestalt in chaotic expression
  - relates back to an investigator's task of finding structure in spontaneously self-organizing behaviour.
- Do not confuse the premise of finding Gestalt with psychological interpretation:
  - Interpretation implies a framework of specific theory.
  - Deciphering Gestalt implies an unprejudiced mind.

# The Inferiority of the Seemingly Superior



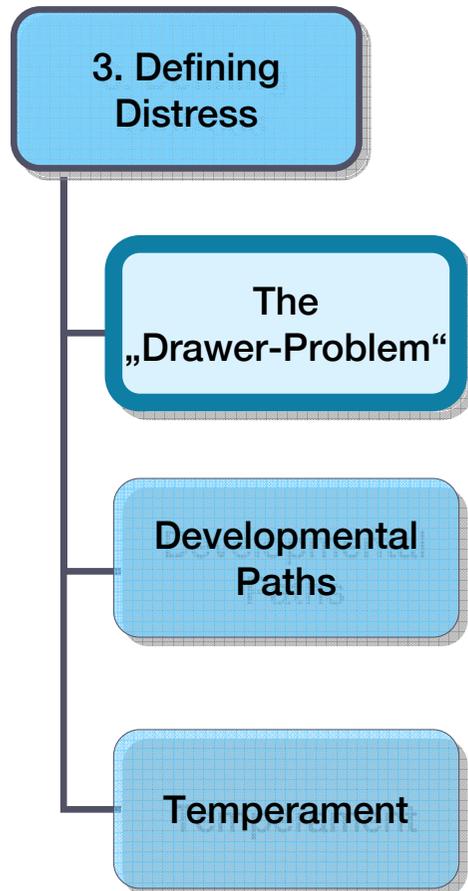
- The premise of an existing Gestalt implies the difficulty for the therapist of having to assume an inferior position... of an investigator who forgoes knowing in advance.
- Our professionalism asks us sometimes to contain the “technique of not knowing”.

# ...when children are unable of Speech



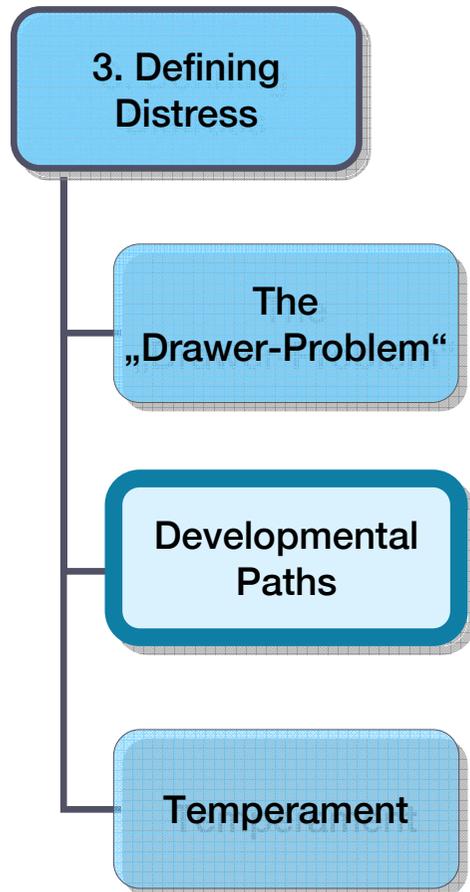
- Paul Watzlawick's model of communication
  - non-communication does not exist
  - contextual and relational aspect
  - symmetrically or complementary
- Any kind of behaviour can be deciphered to its contextual meaning.

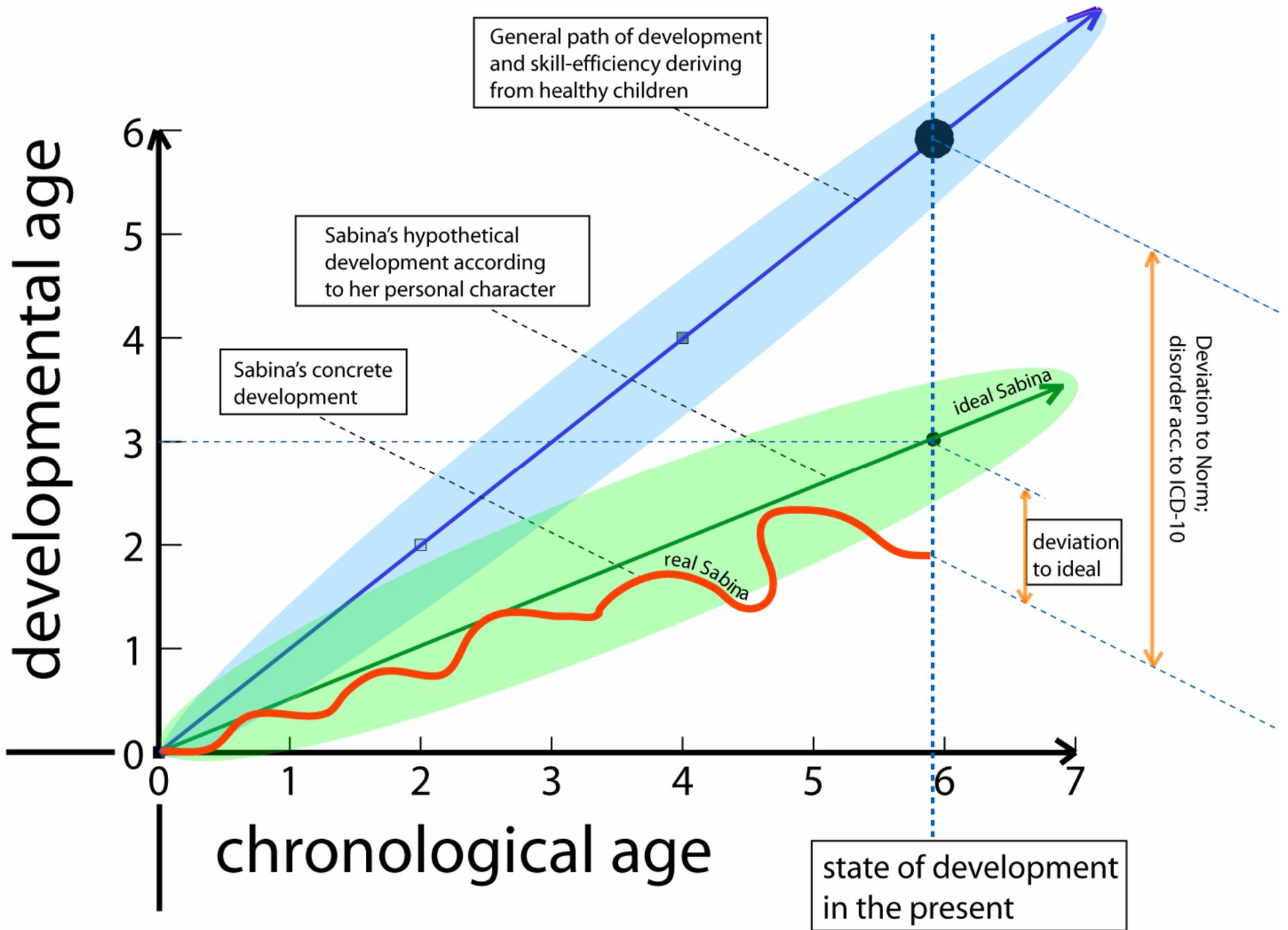
# Defining Distress



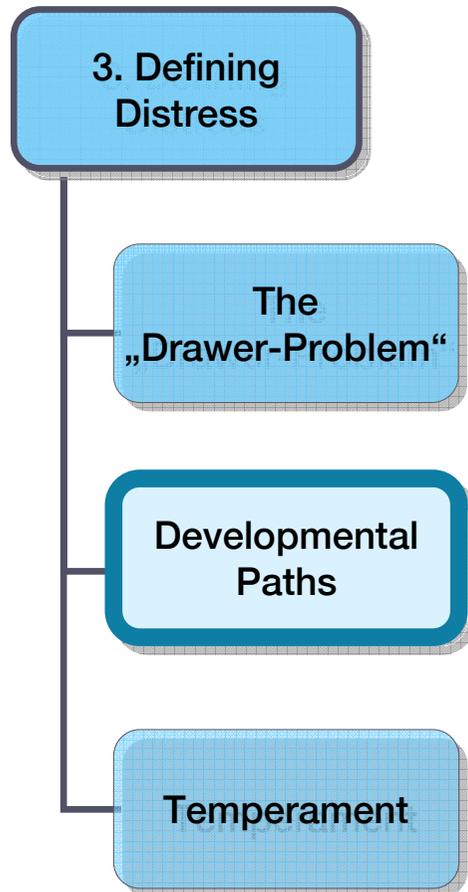
- Most of the classification systems for mental disorders derive from the adult personality.
- It is questionable whether they are valid for children.
- Petermann (2004):  
The generalization from adult to youngster “proves to be barely reasonable”.

# Developmental Paths





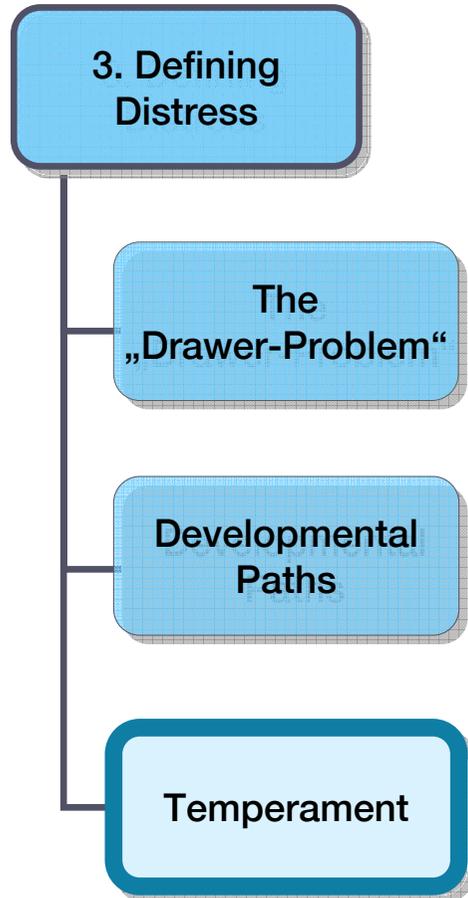
# Intra-individual Differences



“The [quality of development] in children can take on such an enormous diversity that normative beliefs become misleading. The knowledge of diversity in all of its dimensions and the acceptance of it as a biological reality is an elementary precondition - if one wants to do justice to the individual need and nature of children”.

(Remo Largo, 2007, p. 44).

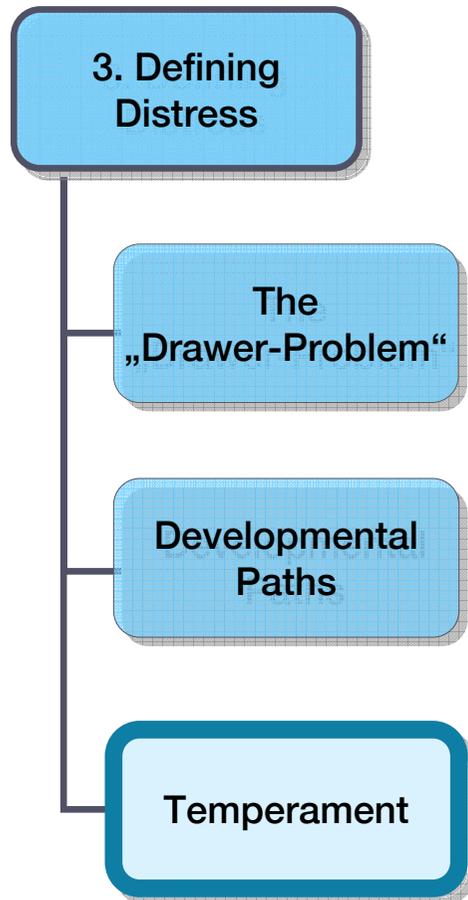
# Temperament



**“The need for emotional security and protection and personal devotion thereby plays an equally important role as the need for nourishment and caregiving.”**

**(Remo Largo, 2007, p. 44).**

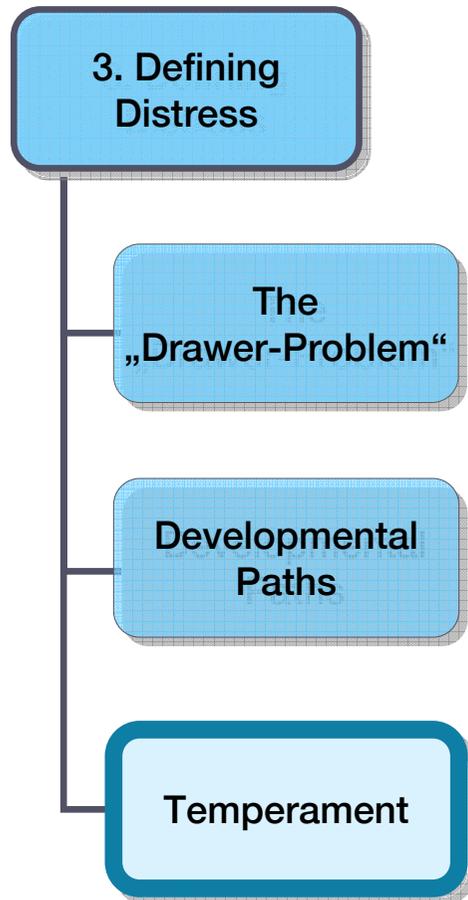
# Temperament



Temperament is “an expression for individual peculiarities in emotional and formal aspects of behaviour that can be observed in early development and contain a relative high temporal stability and a close relationship to physiological mechanisms.”

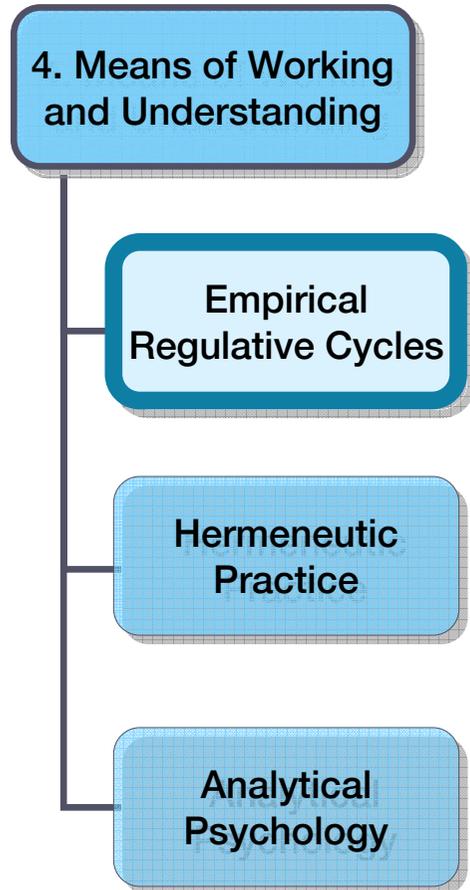
(Marco Zentner, 2000, p. 260)

# Temperament



- Study the child as a natural phenomena of observation at the beginning.
- Hypotheses and theories may arise from direct observations.
- Diagnosing children according to the ICD-10 at a later time in therapy.

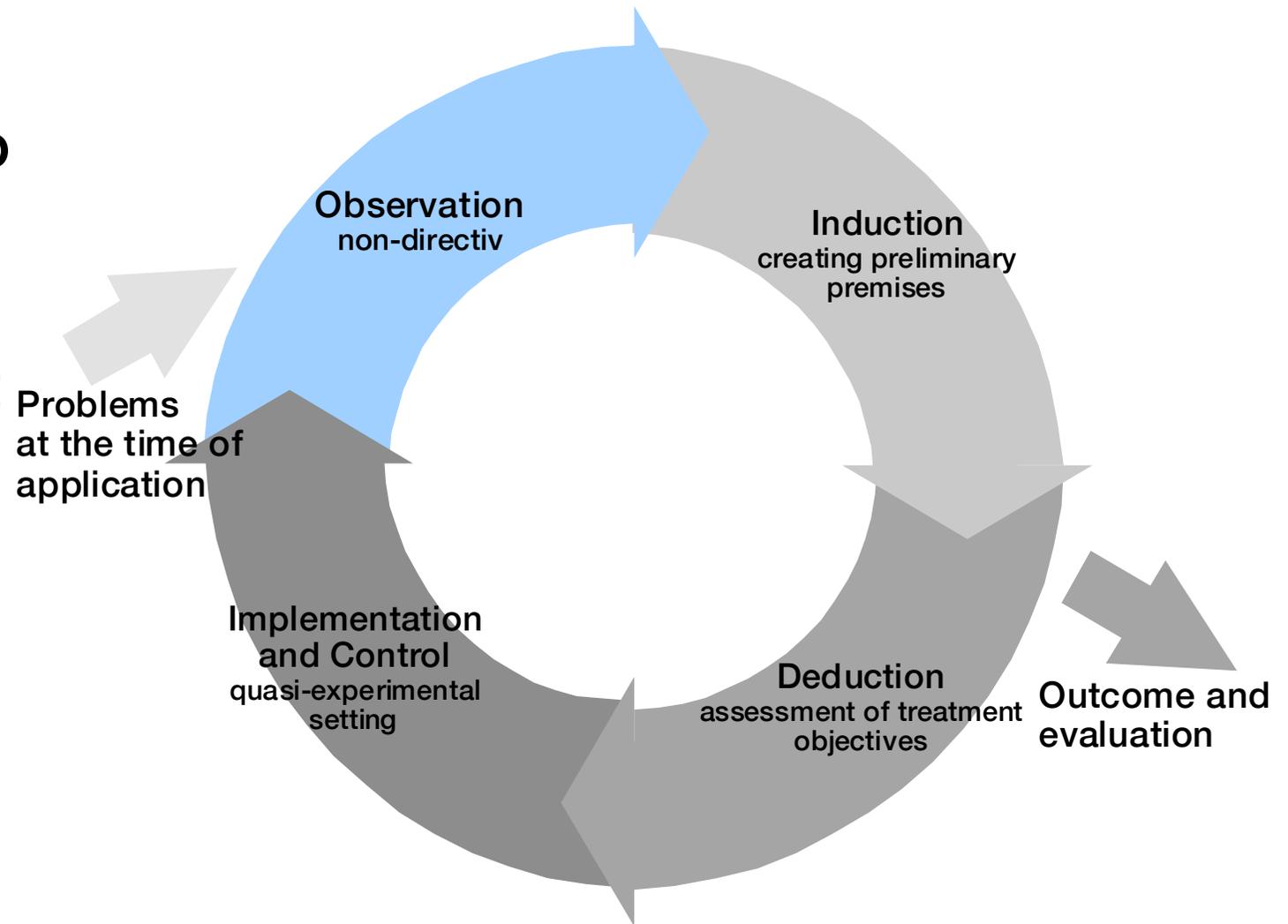
# Empirical Regulative Cycles



# Empirical Regulative Cycles

## 1st phase: Observation

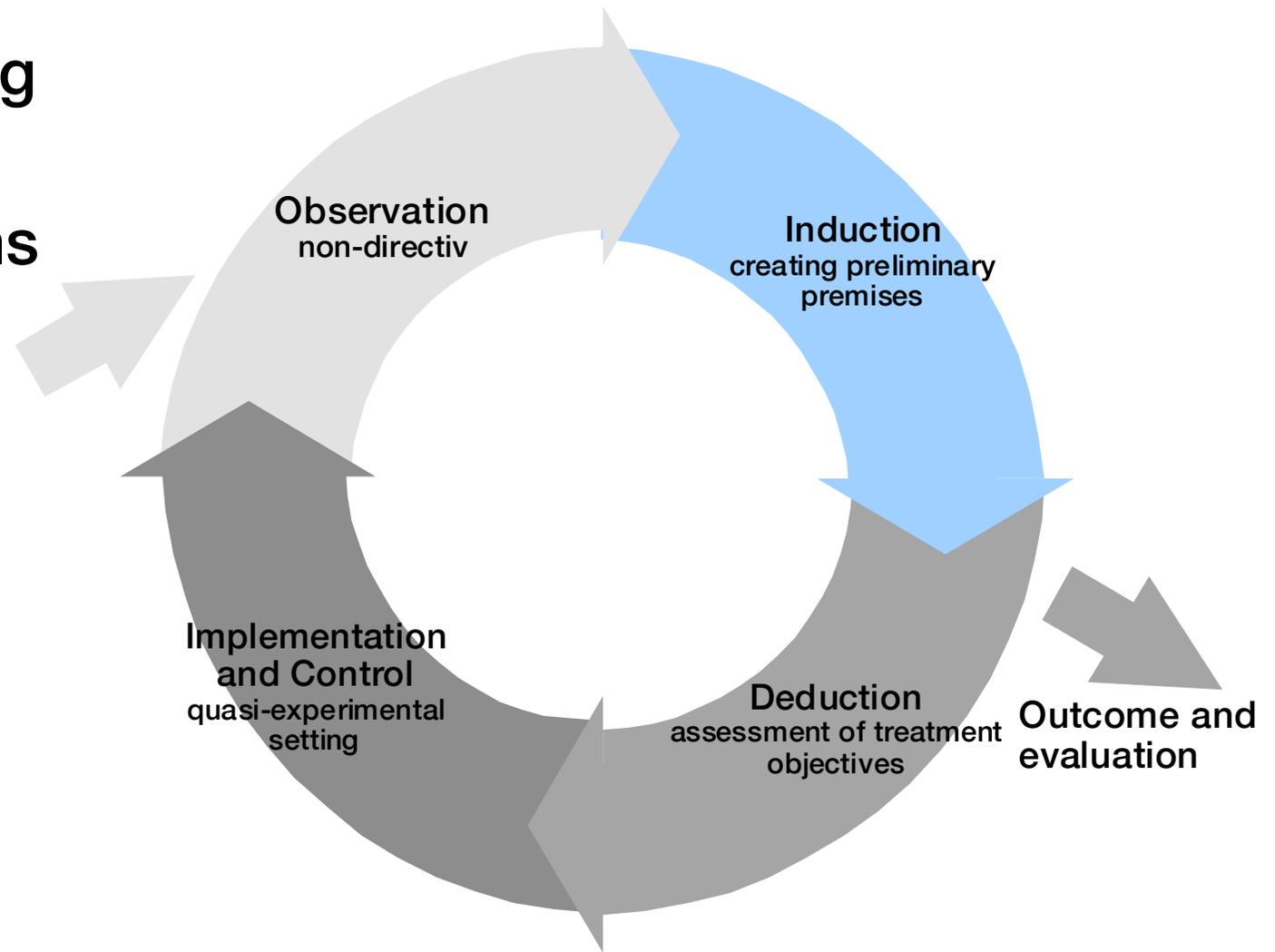
- assessment of capacity to satisfy basic needs
- temperament and disorder
- non-directive
- phenomenological



# Empirical Regulative Cycles

## 2nd phase: Induction

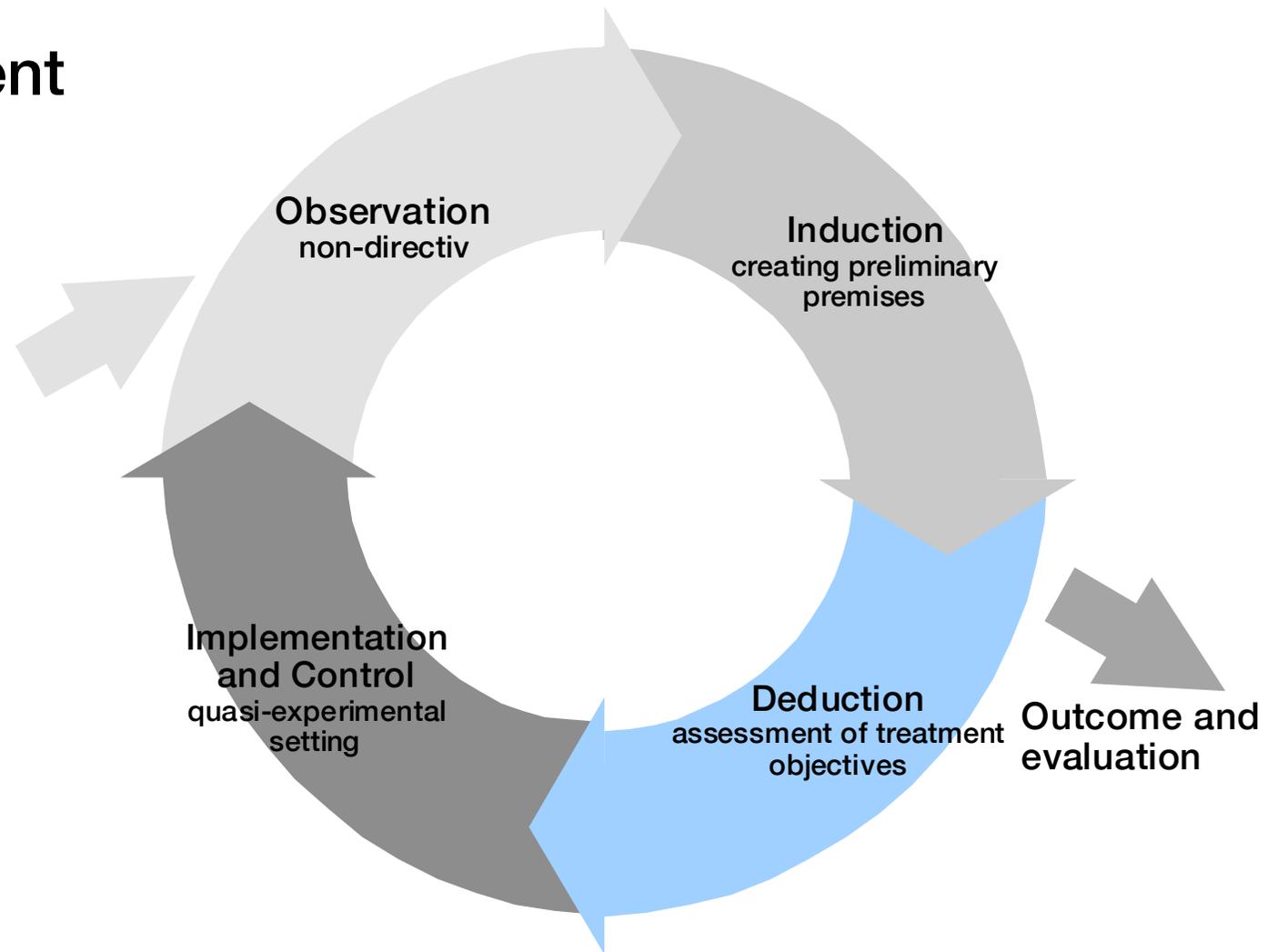
- co-experiencing
- find possible Gestalt-patterns
- bottom-up procedure
- assessment of developmental stagnation



# Empirical Regulative Cycles

## 3rd phase: Deduction

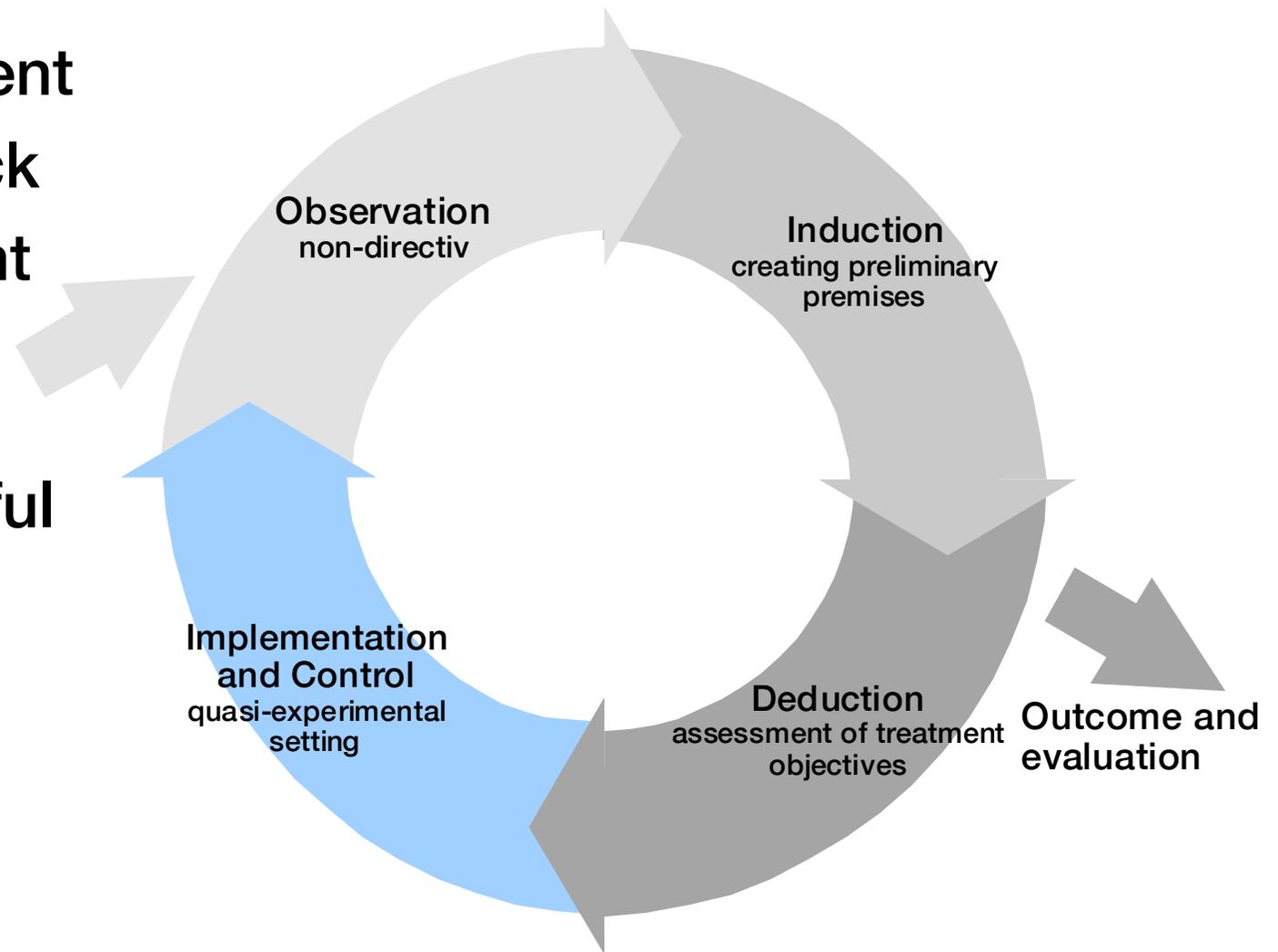
- assess treatment objectives
- attitude in the therapeutic relationship
- directive



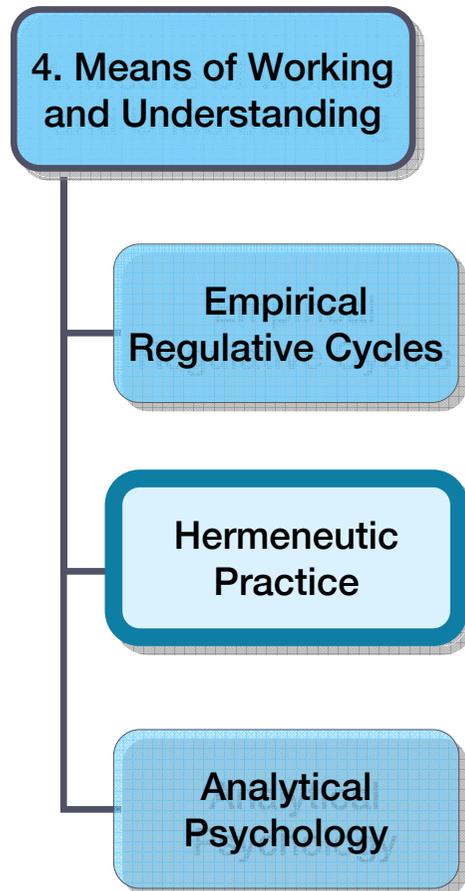
# Empirical Regulative Cycles

## 4th phase: Implementation and Control

- quasi-experiment
- gather feedback
- adapt treatment plan
- until premises allow meaningful description of play

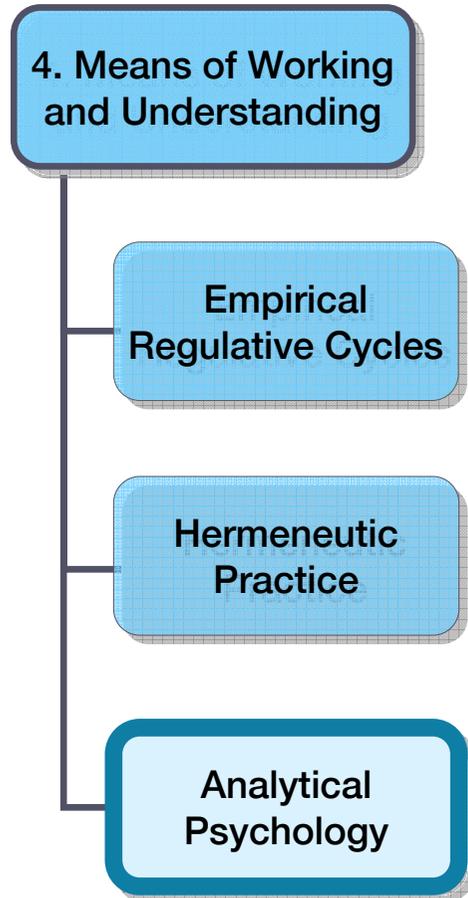


# Hermeneutic Practice



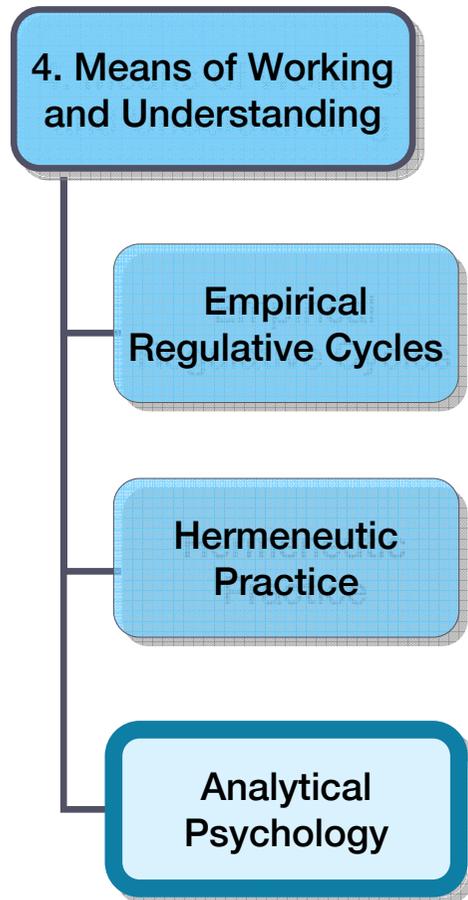
- Hermeneutics involves cultivating the ability to approach understanding from different points of view, involving therapist and patient.

# Interpretation of Symbolic Expression



- The characterization of the child's and adolescent's play is widely deciphered through the premise that all forms of spontaneous interaction constitute a specific Gestalt that can be playful.
- “Archetypes” (C.G. Jung)
  - genetic predisposition to experience, imagery and thought
  - that can be found in the expression of any individual.

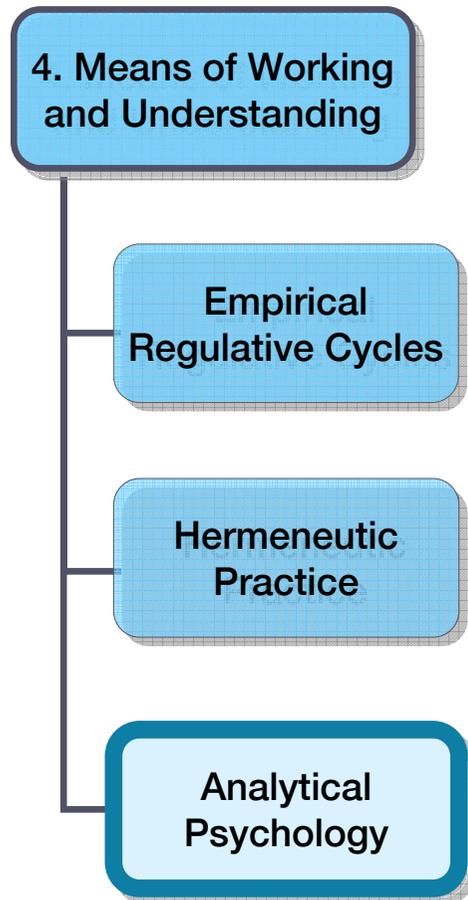
# Interpretation of Symbolic Expression



**“It is in creative fantasies that we find the unifying function we seek. All the functions that are active in the psyche converge in fantasy. Fantasy has, it is true, a poor reputation among psychologists [...] For Freud as for Adler it is nothing but a “symbolic” disguise for the basic drives and intentions presupposed by these investigators.”**

**(Jung, 1977, §490)**

# Interpretation of Symbolic Expression

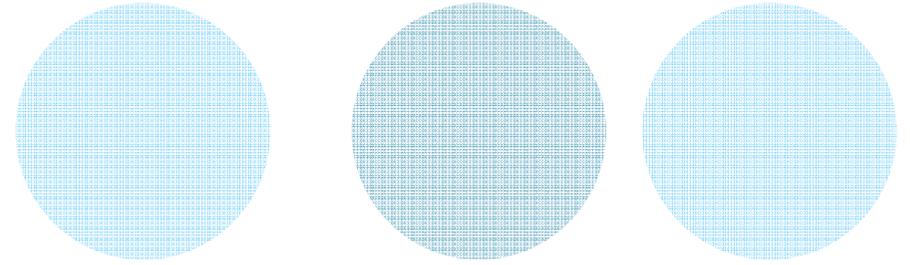
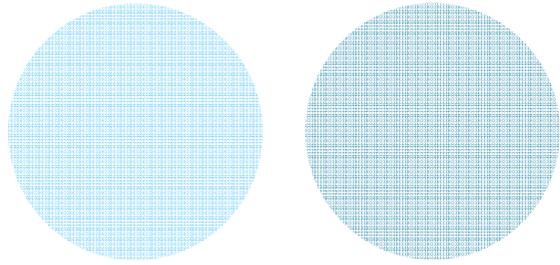


**“There is no science on earth by which these lines could be proved ‘right’; on the contrary, rationalism could very easily prove that they are wrong. Their validity is proved by their intense value for life. And that is what matters in practical treatment: that human beings should get a hold of their own lives, not that the principles by which they live should be proved rationally to the ‘right’.”**

**(Jung, 1977, §493)**

# Summary of Main Points

1. Case-study research encompasses clinical work.
2. Revise traditional views and acquire special clinical skills.
3. Impaired soma cannot be equalized to a broken self.
4. Development as self-organizing process.
5. Developmental paths instead of norms.
6. Perceiving Phenomena as Gestalt.
7. Treatment objectives in relation to personal needs.
8. Relationship quality instead of effective treatment.
9. Attitude of investigation and obstetrics.
10. Empirical regulative cycles.



**Thank you  
for your attention!**