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Challenges in 21ˢᵗ Century Classrooms

Solutions with

Developmental Therapy- Developmental Teaching

Apart from chronic underfunding of education around the world, there are five issues that currently dominate conversation about education in the U.S. These topics are: ***Disruptive Behavior, Disproportionate Representation of Minorities, Inclusion, Program Effectiveness,*** and ***Teacher Performance.***
Are these relevant issues in the EU? … and for you in your professional efforts?

The complexities surrounding each topic could engage us for weeks. Not having weeks together, let's set the stage for continuing the dialogue among yourselves as you prepare for a new school year. I propose to touch briefly on key points for each of these issues and explore how Developmental Therapy-Developmental Teaching (DTT) addresses each.

1. Disruptive Behavior

There has been a surge in maladaptive behavior and misconduct by students of every age, everywhere. Warning signs often come from students who are disengaged, restless, anxious, or

withdrawn. A recent estimate is that there are 1.9 million students in the U.S with "clinically disabling anxiety."[1] On the other extreme we see overt disrespect, bullying, and violence toward other students and teachers. This has long-term impact on each student's life as it impedes the learning process for themselves and others. As we have seen, the outcome also impacts communities beyond schoolrooms. The recent shooting in Munich is an extreme example of tragedy incurred from behavior gone wrong, raising questions of, *"Why?"* The answer eludes us.

One middle school teacher recently brought a legal suit against her school district for failing to provide sufficient support to teachers with severely disruptive students. In the suit she describes, "… Constant fighting between students… and bullying plagues the school." She also reported, "consistently being the subject of profane taunts, routinely suffering incidents of battery from students by being slapped on the back of the head and by being struck by objects thrown by students…" Her legal suit goes on to say, "School administrators appear to be hesitant to enforce disciplinary actions particularly among African American students in order to avoid having to report these to the state."[2]

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[1] J. Bubrick, Fear Not, Child, *Scientific American Mind.* 25:*77-83.*

[2] J. Thompson, Teacher pushing for probe of how district handles misconduct, *Athens Banner Herald,* March 12, 2016, pp. 1, 5.

This teacher's experiences are not unusual. It highlights an urgent need for teachers to gain the competencies necessary to respond with skill to disruptive behavior. It also raises issues about responsibilities of local school administrators for crisis management and staff support. Kristin Sayeski, editor of the journal *Teaching Exceptional Children*, writes to these concerns and re-defines the task for both teachers and administrators:

> In these situations, teachers must move beyond the need to "manage" behavior and … **transform the maladaptive behavior into something appropriate and effective for students.**[3]

DTT goes deeper into this challenge to "transform maladaptive behavior." What is really involved? What do teachers and administrators need to know? To transform maladaptive behavior, DTT teachers suggest four essential practices,

(1) Recognize **surface behavior** and **re-direct it** into willing participation. The options might be **A, B, or C:**

   "A" strategies are those that **AFFIRM** a student's efforts, "**B**" strategies provide **BRIDGES** back to

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[3] K. L. Sayeski & M. R. Brown, Developing a classroom management plan using a tiered approach, Teaching Exceptional Children, Nov-Dec, 2014, p. 119.

participation, and **"C"** strategies **CONTROL** a student's unacceptable actions.

(2) Plan instruction around students' **developmental stages** and **chronological age characteristics**. Both age and stage define a student's current availability to learn. When accurately applied to classroom expectations, students have confidence that they can be successful when they try.

(3) Identify **social roles** and **social power** used by students in their interactions with others. Then, modify the group structure as needed to establish a satisfactory role for each individual in the group.

(4) **Decode behavior** to understand a student's motivation and feelings. (**Motivation and feelings are the inner drives that engage an individual to act or to avoid.**) It is not enough to merely recognize the defense mechanisms fueling behavior. Seek the source. To be effective, channel that emotional and developmental information into creative lessons. Use engaging developmentally-based motivators; respond with respectful understanding.

Motivation may come from values inherent in a student's culture and past experiences; or may be a force generated by

external events that cause a student to respond in a very personal way. There are **typical motivators associated with each age and stage of development as they shape behavior.** As a student matures from stage to stage, new motivators emerge, re-shaping their behavior and replacing old motivators with new ones.

Chart 1 (attached) outlines these universal motivators in more detail and can be used by teachers as a guide for *Individualized Educational Programs* (IEPs) and lesson planning in every country and culture. One easy way to remember these typical motivators is to **decode the central developmental message** in students' behavior in each age group.

For example, <u>infants and toddlers</u> are in DTT Stage One (*"Meet my needs")* and are motivated by physiological and psychological safety needs. These needs are met through care, nurturing, and bonding

<u>During the years to age six, children</u> are in DTT Stage Two and need to "***Please adults***." Psychological *individuation* is happening with behavior striving for autonomy and egocentric experiences—an emerging sense of self as separate from others, but needing to be authenticated by adults.

<u>Typically, students in elementary school to age 9-10</u> are in DTT Stage Three, and motivated by the need to feel that they are

being treated fairly (**"*Be fair … to me").*** A psychological shift is happening as students begin to internalize values and judge themselves and others. (This is the *existential crisis* phase.)

Students in middle school to about age 12, in DTT Stage Four want to **"*Fit in, and be responsible.*"** These students are searching for meaning; affirming their own self esteem through competence and conformity (to something they value). Rewards change from tangible results to vicarious satisfaction through relationships. For students with unmet emotional needs from previous stages, participation will be difficult. While they may be middle or high school age, they are still struggling with unresolved developmental challenges of previous stages. This may explain the surge in disciplinary referrals among students in this age group.

Finally, students in the teen years, to age 17, are in Stage Five and want to "**Do what's right, and care for others.**" New behaviors are built on experiences teens had during previous stages of development. If all has gone well through each stage, they are motivated by a search for self-actualization—a personal identity. They find it in various ways: conforming to individuals and groups they admire (including gangs), embracing cultural characteristics and symbols, and forming an ideal self to guide

their actions. They are also developmentally vulnerable to recruitment into causes that offer them high ideals.

2. Disproportionate Representation of Minorities

The view that behavior may be influenced by race, culture, or gender brings us to major questions for Issue #2: *What explains the disproportionate number of minority students referred for disciplinary action or for special education? Are teachers racists in their referrals? Realistically, should we expect* proportionate *representation?* These are rhetorical questions, lacking answers from research. However, to the question of whether past experience, culture, and environment contribute to students' behavior, my answer is, **YES**, based on four decades of experience.

Consider this example: There is a large number of African American students in our Georgia Network of Educational and Therapeutic Supports (GNETS). This is a program for students with severe emotional and behavioral disabilities. **In GNETS, 41% of the students are White, while 54% are African American, 4% Hispanic, and 1% Mixed.**

We do not know what these numbers really indicate. Perhaps the referring teachers are racists about the behavior of African American students. Perhaps Hispanic students are underserved. However, the numbers **do reflect a need for**

services to all of these students. To focus on an individual as a minority group member does little to advance understanding of the uniqueness of that person's pattern of developing competencies, or which educational practices should be used.

DTT addresses race, culture, and gender in a precisely individual way, recognizing that every individual—everywhere—needs universally recognized competencies, which are milestones for social, emotional, and behavioral development. Each individual follows the same general pathway toward maturity, but in a very personal way and time. DTT uses such milestones to guide instruction.

Here are simple examples of these universal skills: C*omplete Individual Tasks Independently, Describe Experiences, Share Materials, Wait For A Turn, Read For Information,* and *Solve Practical Measurement Problems,* to mention only a few. Students in U.S., Germany, Turkey, or elsewhere, all need these milestone skills at some point in their development. Regardless of racial and cultural differences, DTT is effective for ALL children. **The focus must be about the unique way each individual is progressing on this universal developmental pathway toward social-emotional maturity and responsible behavior.**

3. Inclusion

This brings us to the challenges presented by **Inclusion,** especially when our DTT focus is on **individualizing**. Inclusion can be right for students with special needs <u>**only**</u> if each individual's daily lessons result in successful outcomes for that student.

With about 5.8 million U.S. students in special education, some educators say that while services in special settings are the most effective approach, costs may be driving policies toward full inclusion—a cheaper approach for special education. Others say that inclusion, if carefully planned, offers students with special needs the same educational opportunities afforded typically developing students.

Two suggested solutions embrace both views: (1) the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS, from the old "pyramid" design) and (2) "Wrap-around services" (specialized supports to include emotional health and family services). The MTSS paradigm can offer the best possible placement for a student, including full inclusion, but only if the initial intake, assessment, and program planning are on target to meet that individual's current needs. Wrap-around services bring essential therapeutic supports for families and teachers working together. DTT fits nicely into both designs because the universal nature of developmental competencies can be addressed wherever a student is located.

When working in inclusive settings (Tier 1 in the MTSS paradigm), DTT recommends forming flexible mini-groups for instruction. There, students can work on achieving needed competencies, although it may be at a slower rate than their age peers. Students needing pullout services (Tier 2) for periods during the day also benefit from DTT mini-groups, as do students in the more intensive intervention programs (Tier 3). Mini groups can vary in size, time, space, and place depending upon the specific learning experience needed by members of that group working on similar learning objectives. Chart 2 (attached) contains suggestions for DTT mini-groups with academic content.

Keep in mind that students working alone achieve few, if any, competencies associated with social-emotional growth and responsible behavior. The important point is to **teach in small, flexible groups so that students can acquire the skills needed to interact successfully with others. This is true for each developmental stage—wherever students are located and whatever they are studying**.

4. Program Effectiveness

All educators want to believe that their teaching leads to student progress. The challenge is in how to show success when there are so few ways to do it, especially for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. It is a challenge because this disability

is hard to define and even more difficult in Individual Education Plans (IEPs). To add to the problem, current U.S. legislation requires metrics, not yet specified, to report student progress.

Documenting student progress has not been a problem for DTT because developmental assessment and re-assessment are central to planning, instruction, and behavior management. Repeated assessments also allow for timely program adjustments during a school year.

The *Developmental Teaching Objectives and Rating Forms-Revised (DTORF-R*) is the assessment system developed to document students' developmental progress. Their DTORF-R scores are reported for individuals and groups—the gains (or losses) during the year. DTORF-R scores also provide metrics about (a) changes in the score during the year, (b) competencies gained in each developmental stage and domain for *Behavior, Communication, Socialization,* and *Cognition,* and (c) comparison to typically developing age peers. Individual scores also can be aggregated for statistical analysis by age, race, gender, location, or other significant variables.

Here is an example with 2,082 students in 23 GNETS programs during the previous school year. Developmental assessments were repeated at scheduled times during the year, and the results were used to adjust individual student's programs

when needed. These assessment results were submitted electronically to the state at the end of the year, using an assigned code without identifying individuals, teachers, or locations by name. No student characteristic data except birthdates was collected.

The system-wide analysis asked these questions, seeking metrics to support the outcomes:

1.) Did students in GNETS make progress during the school year? In each age group? In center based locations? In school based locations?

2) How did progress of GNETS students compare with the progress of their age peers?

Group summaries and statistical t-tests were used to compare progress from autumn to spring. Results indicated that the mean scores significantly increased for all age groups and in both center based and school based locations. When comparing GNETS student progress to their age peer equivalent scores, the mean DTORF-R scores for pre-k/elementary and high school age students were approaching the scores of their age peer equivalents, while the mean score for the middle school group remained essentially unchanged in relation to age peers.

Maintaining accuracy in this assessment system is essential for reliability of results. The Developmental Therapy Institute

maintains an online introductory course for new staff, and provides ongoing professional development at local program locations, plus technical assistance to new program administrators and coordinators each year to maintain a valid database. What lies ahead? In the future, we see **requirements in the U.S. for even more statistical evidence of program effectiveness.**

5. Teacher Performance

This brings us, finally, to the topic of teacher performance. For U.S. teachers, measuring their classroom practices is inevitable. DTT is already there with a <u>self-assessment inventory</u> of recommended teaching practices—the *Developmental Therapy Inventory of Teaching Skills* (DTRITS). It is a checklist for teachers and paraprofessionals to match their own teaching practices with those recommended by DTT. There are separate DTRITS inventory forms with practices to match students' stage of development. In each stage there are sections about *Instructional Activities, Content and Materials, Behavior Management,* and *Ignoring.* For experienced teachers and beginners alike, the DTRITS is a helpful reference for keeping their classrooms developmentally based.

The DTRITS can also be used to <u>evaluate </u>teachers' classroom performance. It provides real time information about

the extent to which a teacher's practices are matched to the students' stages of development. When scored, it provides an overall effectiveness score and five levels of performance standards ranging from *Highly Effective* to *Poor* in comparison to DTT demonstration level teachers.

In closing, let's go back to a fundamental force teachers face each day as they teach: This is ***emotional memory*** and the powerful role it plays in students' attitudes and behavior. One expert describes emotional memory as, "A stored template of past experience."[4]

> Here lies the repository for all moments of triumph and failure, hope and fear, indignation and frustration … it uses these stored memories in its role as a sentinel… scanning all incoming information … to assess it for threats and opportunities, by matching what's happening now to the stored template of past experience.

What does this say to teachers? They are the major source for successfully connecting new experiences to what is stored in each student's past. Teachers are constantly creating opportunities for students to build memories with satisfying results from their efforts. As students use their cognitive resources to mediate between emotional memories and life experiences, **the**

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[4] D. Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 1999, New York, Bantom Books.

result is emotional competence and responsible behavior at any age or stage.

The intent with DTT is to make this happen in dynamic learning environments, where new learning experiences resolve overwhelming anxieties and re-build groups that were disintegrating in conflict. When there are safe opportunities for students to speak from the heart, each individual feels authenticated and is a willing participant, satisfied with the outcome.

Finally, as we close, we must remind ourselves: **Participating students are NOT behavior problems; and lessons are only successful IF VALUED BY EACH INDIVIDUAL student.**

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Chart 1. Motivational Forces That Shape Students' Behavior and Social-Emotional Development

When a teacher knows a student's stage of development and then builds the instructional program on **characteristic motivators** for that stage students will participate, gain competencies, and mature. Authorities are referenced in parentheses.

**Stage One
(to age 2)**

"Meet my needs"

*Sensory-motor equilibrium (*Piaget*)*
*Physiological & safety needs (*Maslow*)*
*Attachment (*Bowlby*)*
*Model warmth, nurturing, bonding, loss, prosocial imitation (*Mahler, Maccoby, Rutter*)*
*Temperament (*Thomas & Chess, Kagan*)*

**Stage Two
(to age 6)**

"Please adults"

Individuation (Mahler, Pine & Bergman)
*Autonomy (*Erikson*)*
*Egocentricity (*Piaget*)*
*Avoidance of anxiety (*Sullivan*)*
*Reality demands (*S. Freud*)*
*Tension reductions (*Rapaport*)*
*Belongingness and love needs (*Maslow*)*

**Stage Three
(to age 10)**

"Be fair … to me"

*Esteem needs (*Maslow*)*
*Self protection (*Loevinger*)*
*Initiative, fears, guilt (*Erikson*)*
Internalization through identification (A. Freud*)*
*Observational modeling (*Bandura*)*

**Stage Four
(to age 12)**

"Fit in, and be responsible"

*Competence (*White*)*
*Industry & self esteem (*Erikson*)*
*Conformity (*Loevinger*)*
*Law & justice (*Kohlberg*)*
*Vicarious rewards, empathy (*Aronfreed, Bandura*)*
*Search for meaning (*Fingarette, Ausubel*)*

**Stage Five
(to age 17)**

"Do what's right, and care for others"

*Interpersonal conformity (*Kohlberg*)*
*Identity through society's rituals (*Erikson*)*
*Self actualization (*Maslow*)*
*Conscientious conformity (*Loevinger*)*
*Ideal self as pacer (*Loewald*)*

Chart 2. Mini-Group Solutions for Individualizing Instruction in Inclusive Settings with DTORF-R Objectives

Reading
Encourage small group teams to read responsively.
Select partners to read different sections or character parts.
Guide the group to create a chart and review it orally together.
Pair readers to share reading assignments.
Use unison oral reading for word recall.
Sing along with pre-selected vocabulary.
Design reading lines and vocabulary for a group planned "TV show."

Writing
Create a group story on poster paper with sentences from everyone.
Write and print a weekly class newspaper with ideas from everyone.
Form a mini-group to write a script for a dramatic story.
Form a second group to act the story for the entire group.
Present current news questions and write responses from each group member.

Math
Assign mini-groups to work on different math assignments.
Encourage math partners to work together on projects.
Assist the group in plans for community service project, estimating   supplies,
        costs, & time, where all contribute.

Science
Structure mini-group research teams using mathematical processes planning, experimenting, recording, analyzing and reporting.
Support group experiments with reports to class.
Guide small "Science Teams" for research projects.

Computer Science
 Assist 3-person groups (researcher, writer, presenter) research topics on Internet for class presentations.]

Social Skills Programs
There are several Social Skills curricula that are currently used in Special Education. This is the easiest content for planning supportive mini-groups to coordinate with needed DTORF-R competencies. Use a blank DTORF-R rating form as guide and review your specific social skills curriculum to identify corresponding skills and competencies a student needs to be successful with those lessons. You will also see needed DTORF-R competencies that can be worked on during a social skills lesson.

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