Using DIR/Floortime to Improve Instructional Strategies at Every Level

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Introductions

- A bit about me....
- And you?
  - SLP’s?
  - Psychologists?
  - MD’s?
  - OT’s?
  - Educators?
  - Administrators?
  - Parents?
  - Secondary?
  - Early Intervention?
DIR/Floortime

Founded by Drs. Stanley Greenspan and Serena Weider

D = Developmental
I = Individual Differences
R = Relationship-Based

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D = Developmental

- Focus on strong developmental foundations rather than focus on symptoms
- Neurodevelopmental disorder makes sense!
  - Under connectivity
  - Whole-archical vs. hierarchical

- Basic capacities that all humans gradually master
- 9 core Functional Emotional Developmental Levels
- Goal: Help build healthy foundations for relating, communicating, and thinking
Developmental ‘Ladder’

Developmental Levels: 1-6

1. Shared Attention/Regulation and interest in the world
2. Engagement/Forming relationships
3. Two-way, purposeful interactions with gestures/Intentional two-way communication
4. Two-way, purposeful problem-solving interactions/Development of complex sense of self
5. Elaborating Ideas/Representational capacity and elaboration of symbolic thinking
6. Building bridges between ideas/Emotional thinking

Level 1: Shared attention/Regulation and interest in the world
Level 2: Engagement and forming relationships
Level 3: Two-way, purposeful interactions/Intentional two-way communication
Level 4: Two-way, purposeful problem-solving interactions/Development of complex sense of self
Level 5: Elaborating ideas/Representational capacity and elaboration of symbolic thinking
Level 6: Building bridges between ideas/Emotional thinking
Level 7: Multi-Causal, comparative, and biangular thinking
Level 8: Emotionally differentiated, gray-Aqua thinking
Level 9: Intermittent reflective thinking, a stable sense of self and internal standards
How do you know the ‘D’?

- This can be the toughest part!
- Critical to treatment plan
- Begin where they are!
  - Example...
- Observe a variety of “back and forth’s”
- Subtle cues/clues
  - Raincoat
  - Cookie Jar!
- Motor skills?
  - Toy car
- Exposure to age appropriate materials
- High Expectations

Hallway
Developmental Levels: 1-6

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Watch the range!
Developmental Levels: 1-6

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Development

- “The children with ASD and other special needs that make the most developmental progress are those who are engaged during most of their waking hours in healthy learning interactions”

“You have got to keep autistic children engaged with the world. You cannot let them tune out.”

Temple Grandin
Ex- Lets talk about PLAY!

- Complex phenomenon
- Occurs naturally for *most* children
- Children with ASD – difficult to achieve!
- Many of our kids WANT to play, but can’t
  - Q: Which developmental levels must be mastered for this?
- That is why we are here!!
- Take their interests and expand, expand, expand!
- Necessary for problem solving, creative, and higher order thinking skills!

Dr. Sorvino
Ex- Let’s talk about Problem Solving!

We can ALWAYS target problem solving!

• Needed to help grow developmentally
• Telling a child what to do constantly they stop trying to think by themselves!
  • A whole new language!
  • Where does that go?
  • What should you be doing next?

• Sneak Peek: Executive Functions for Problem Solving and Independence!

D= Developmental

I = Individual Differences

• How we take in and process information
• How we interpret the world around us
  • We ALL have them!
• Was there ever a concept you couldn’t understand?
  • How did someone teach you?
I = Individual Differences

- How does each child take in and process information?
- Looks at:
  - Sensory system
  - Motor system
  - Visual-spatial processing
  - Language and auditory systems
  - Personality
  - Passions
  - Learning styles

“If you’ve met one child on the autism spectrum, you’ve met one child on the autism spectrum.”
New Brain Imaging Studies!

- Scientists analyzed fMRI scans from autistic adults and controls (5 data sets)
- Superimposed scans one on top of the other...
- Controls: scans all looked pretty much the same
- ASD: scans showed individualized, idiosyncratic connectivity patterns
  - Each autistic brain differed from the norm, but each in it’s own way

*Nature Neuroscience, 2014*

What does this mean?

- Importance of individualization!

Hypothesis:
- Neural connections are shaped by the routine behaviors and experiences we have every day
- SO, when we keep using the same pathways, new pathways are not created
  - Repetitive behaviors
  - Rigid routines

Solution:
- Expose and encourage NEW interactions, environments, and experiences!
- This will expand neural connections and enhance development!
We have to attempt to understand the child’s experience before we can help. A bag of tricks, without understanding the child’s experience is like putting on a Band-Aid and will not ultimately be successful.
Importance of Talents’ Passions

- Individuals may be ‘fixated’ on a single thing
- Use the strong motivation of the fixation to encourage activities
- A good teacher takes the fixation and broadens it out
- Social interaction will develop through shared interests
- If a child likes trains, use trains in:
  - math problems
  - Train books for literacy
  - Invent a game involving trains that can be played with other children
- Many scientists pursued a childhood interest
- Temple word of advice: Develop talents that can be turned into job skills or hobbies

R= Relationship Based

- Warm, nurturing, affectively connected relationships enable any individual to grow
- When we are interacting, we are learning
- Changes brain structure
  - York University Study
- We want our students to want to stay connected with us!
- Compliance vs. Relationship
- Think about it: Who do YOU learn the most from?
  - Answer: family, friends, significant others, favorite teachers
Critical features of interactions that support development:

• Emotionally meaningful
  • Secure
  • Regulating
  • Engaged
  • Pleasurable
  • Warm
  • Reciprocal

• Relationships support the child’s ability to regulate, engage, communicate, and think

• Relationships are critical for learning to be meaningful

Insights from Recent Research

Related to our views of the students’:

• Competency
• Intelligence
• Respect
• Expectations

A students behavior, engagement, sense of self, social abilities, etc. are all impacted by our beliefs and our expectations

Many of our kids are very smart – even gifted!

Our goal: Help discover that ability, support it, and help them to be successful!
Affect and Emotions

- Emotions
  - “Lead the mental team”
  - Emotional engagement precedes everything: do I like it or not?
    - Executive Functions Importance
  - If we are emotionally shut down...
  - **What do you remember most from this past weekend?**

- Affect
  - “Ties it all together”

- Research shows that both learning and brain development are heavily based on experienced based interactions

- When you EXPERIENCE it and have an emotional connection, you will remember it!

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Affect

- Codes an experience to tell us what things mean

- Emotional signaling that alerts us
  - Engage
  - Conveys feelings
  - Prompt and re-direct

- Connecting affect to activate, organize, and sequence actions makes them purposeful and competent

- Connecting words to underlying affects give them purpose and meaning

- Central to all learning... and it’s free!
Good teaching is 1/4 preparation & 3/4 theater.

- Gail Godwin

Affect in the Classroom Part 1..
How do I target development in intervention?

How does it all tie together?

• Begin where they are
• R+I= Developmental progress
• Q: How do we work on this??
  • A: Floortime!
What is Floortime??

- Therapeutic process tailored to each child’s ‘D’ and ‘I’ using the ‘R’!
- **PLAY WITH A PURPOSE!**
- 2 primary components:
  1. Follow the child’s lead
  2. Joining the child’s world
- **LEADS TO GREATER MASTERY OF SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND INTELLECTUAL CAPACITIES.**

Follow the Child’s Lead

- Creating ‘A Great date!’
- Being in the company of someone who is:
  - Attentive
  - Available
  - Fun
  - Emotionally affirming
- Helps US to find out what is enjoyable for the child
- Helps the CHILD to stay regulated for longer and move forward developmentally

(Hess)
Joining the Child’s World and Expand!

- Join the child in their interests and passions
- ‘WOO’ into a shared world
- Create “Circles” of interaction
- Use interruption and drama to up the ante
- Build outward to a broader range of activities, words, and topics
- Climb up the developmental ladder!

Next: Watch videos and think about developmental levels and how gains were made...

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Raul

Eric and Abby
WHY should I think about development vs. isolated skills and behaviors?

- We want to see the BIGGER picture
- Behaviors give us clues, but we want to provide developmental foundations for the whole individual to be successful, independent, and happy

Food for thought: Fortune 500 Companies

- Don’t care about test scores or isolated skills
- Want people who:
  - Work well with others
  - Think outside the box
  - Are creative
  - Are reliable
  - Can problem solve
Foundational Capacities for Development and Best Practice Guidelines

An Integrative Framework for Determining the Best Approach(es) at Each Stage of a Child’s Development

Best Practices

- IDENTIFY Child’s Individual Differences, Family System and Community Resources
- DETERMINE Child’s strengths, developmental needs and challenges at this stage
- MATCH Developmentally appropriate Treatment Approaches and life experiences to support progress and overcome challenges
- PLAN for the present, but always reflect on how today’s intervention supports success across an individual’s lifespan

DIR Instructional Strategies for Success

- Begin with a relationship
- Meet them at their developmental level
- Incorporate individual differences
  - Consider reactivity to sensations
  - Consider sensory needs
- Build on child’s natural interests
- Make it meaningful/ purposeful
- Use affect and emotions to make it come to life!
- Always know where a child is, and where you want to go next.
  - Be “Goal Minded”
- Focus on problem solving and independence- always
Ex- Problem Solving and Independence!

- Executive Functions!!!
- Direct and control perceptions, thoughts, actions, and to some degree emotions

Executive Function are a set of cognitive processes controlling learning and “production” of outputs

SOURCE: Dr. George McCance, Director of School Psychology Research in the Psychology Department of the Keene State College of Education and Health
Why is EF/Brain integration so important?

• Must integrate all new skills so we know:
  • When it would be helpful
  • How it would be most effective
  • Generalize!

• If we are not integrating all of these thought processes, we cannot help someone improve their brain so they are making decisions for themselves.

• Nothing can be in isolation

How to target EF in intervention?

Challenge them and make THEM figure it out— even if it takes a long time!

• Step back and ask: what do you think? What do you want to do? How would you do that? Why?
• If you don’t challenge the brain for growth, it won’t grow...
How to Target EF and INDEPENDENCE

- #1 way: Ask questions!
- If it’s not the individual’s idea, it is just not going to work.
- Everyone has an agenda - you need to work with it!
  - Ex: 5 year old, cleaning up
- Sometimes begin with external control to get it ‘cooking’
  - Provide parameters for success
  - Teach and explain how tasks go
    - Be SPECIFIC! Ex: find mistakes.
  - Scaffold and support as needed
  - If it goes IN an organized way, it will go out in an organized way and it can happen again.

How can I target individual differences?

Create an environment for success!

- Reminders for YOU
  - In lesson plans
  - Around the room
- Provide space to move and think
- Sensory supports available
  - Organization is key!
  - Schedule it in...
What I need to think about all day, every day...
Especially when planning lessons, we should think about:

- Multi-sensory experiences
- Meaningful?
- Interdisciplinary
- Intellectually challenging
- Promoting problem-solving
- Individual profiles
- Affect
- Building trusting relationships
- Incorporation of fine/gross motor

- Fun and engaging
- Cross-curricular
- Experience based
- Promotes independence
- Encourages peer interactions
- Promotes language
Math Lesson

Reading Class: Focus on Comprehension
Importance of a Multidisciplinary team

- Psychologists
- Pediatricians
- OT’s/PT
- SLP
- Educators
- Developmental optometrists
- Administrators
- Tutors
- All related therapists for a child
- Parents
Kaleidoscope

- If the program (kaleidoscope) is not shifting over time, then the program has become more autistic than the child.

- The program must be dynamic, flexible, grow with the child, and meet the needs of the child (and family) at any point in their trajectory from childhood to adulthood.

- Importance of:
  - Multidisciplinary team- we all bring our disciplines!
  - Having an up to date and working “tool box”
A final poem to leave with you:

Tell a child what to think, and he will know a fact;
Help a child learn to think, and he will be a problem solver.

Tell a child to listen and perform, and he will learn to comply.
Help a child to discover, and he will be a creator.

Tell a child words, and he will label the world;
Help a child express his feelings and he will share ideas.

Tell a child to obey, and he will follow authority;
Help a child learn to trust, and he will be a leader.

Tell a child to follow rules, and he will learn his limits;
Help a child to imagine, and he will be an achiever.

Thank you!
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