



DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES, OES, AND PERFECTIONISM

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A QUOTE...

“When I consider the brief span of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and behind it, the small space that I fill, or even see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces which I know not, and which know not me, I am afraid, and wonder to see myself here rather than there; for there is no reason why I should be here rather than there, nor rather now than then” (Blaise Pascal, 1623-1662).

WHY STUDY THEORIES?

- Gifted children often have greater developmental potential- *but not always*- and this can lead to internal conflict.
- Webb on existential depression: As the saying goes, “Once you ring a bell, you cannot unring it.”
- Becoming more self-aware and aware of the world around you, is not necessarily a bad thing. It gives meaning to one’s life and helps us to help others find meaning in their lives.
- Existential depression does not always lead to negative outcomes and when channeled appropriately, can lead to empowerment.

OVEREXCITABILITIES

- A Polish psychiatrist and psychologist, Kazimierz Dabrowski wrote about his ideas from 1929 until his death in 1980. He was and remains very unknown.
- Dabrowski noted that persons with greater “developmental potential” have a higher level of reactivity of the central nervous system called overexcitability.
- The prefix “over” means “the reactions of excitation are over and above average in intensity, duration and frequency” (Mika, 2002).
- He knew of the term “gifted,” but wouldn’t necessarily argue that those identified experience this greater potential.

OES CONTINUED

- You know there are five: Intellectual, Emotional, Sensual, Imaginational, and Psychomotor
- Several forms can be experienced, but one tends to be dominant.
- Heightened intellectual OE and emotional OE are the most significant predictors of potential for advanced development.

JUST TO HIGHLIGHT A FEW...

Emotional- More sensitive/intense reactions to issues they are personally struggling with and those connected to the world around them, especially involving morality and justice.

Intellectual- More likely to ponder and question their lives and the world around them.

Imaginational- More apt to envision how things ought to be versus how they currently are.

A NOTE OF CAUTION

See my posted lecture in the second learning session for elaboration on the second bullet...

- Kids are not labels
- Misdiagnosis does happen

THEORY OF POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION

Dabrowski was interested in understanding the development of potential, especially in eminent people.

There is a developmental process that underlies our conception of “What is” and “What ought to be.”

Only through breaking down of current ways of thinking, can we self-actualize.

Internal and external forces create a disintegration of current psychic structures that leads to a higher order reintegration.

- Dabrowski postulated five different levels of human development.

OES AND TPD

“OE on the one side accelerates individual development, and on the other, is the initial phase of neuroses and psychoneuroses. Although the latter increase the developmental dynamics, they also bring dangers of tensions too great to absorb and negative disintegration as a result”
(Dabrowski, 1964).

OES AND TPD

“Oversensitivity (OE) without inner psychic transformation brings many unnecessary conflicts with others – magnifies the differences, and lessens and obscures the most important things”
(Dabrowski, 1972).

WHAT IS TPD?

Dabrowski believed...

- Individuals who “fall apart” must find some way to “put themselves back together again,” either by reintegrating at their previous state or demonstrating growth by reintegrating at a new and higher level of functioning.
- Disintegration, the inner turmoil of awareness of “what could be” versus “what is,” is necessary to reintegrate at a high level of acceptance and understanding (Mika, 2002).
- No growth can take place without disintegration.
- Progression and regression are unique to each individual’s pattern of development.
- What we see as negative or pathological symptoms can actually be signs of positive development.

LEVEL I: PRIMARY INTEGRATION

- Egocentrism prevails.
- A person lacks empathy and self-awareness.

“Primary integration characterizes individuals who are largely under the influence of the first factor (biology) and the second factor (environment). These individuals experience the human life cycle and may become very successful in societal terms, but they are not fully developed human beings.” (Mendaglio, 2008b, p. 36).

LEVEL II: UNILEVEL DISINTEGRATION

- No clear-cut internal values.
- Influenced by society and mainstream values (e.g., the “second factor”)
- Inner conflict is horizontal, a competition between two equal, competing values.

LEVEL III: SPONTANEOUS MULTILEVEL DISINTEGRATION

- Hierarchical sense of values; inner conflict is vertical, a struggle to bring one's behavior up to a higher standard.
- Dissatisfaction with what one is because of a competing sense of what one could and ought to be.
 - This internal struggle can lead to depression and feelings of dissatisfaction with the self.
- The autonomous factor begins to surface (not just heredity and environment), called the “third factor.”
 - A person must be able to assert self-awareness and self-discipline to triumph over obstacles created by heredity and environment.

LEVEL IV: ORGANIZED MULTILEVEL DISINTEGRATION

- On the road to self-actualization.
- The person has found a way to reach his/her own values and ideals.
- He/she demonstrates high levels of responsibility, reflective judgment, empathy for others, autonomy of thought and action, and self-awareness.

Some individuals may disintegrate and fail to reintegrate at a higher level, or they may stay at this level or regress.

LEVEL V: SECONDARY INTEGRATION

- Inner-conflicts regarding the self have been resolved through actualization of the personality ideal.
- Disintegration has been transcended.
- Life is lived according to the highest regard for the worth of a human individual.

“Persons characterized by secondary integration are influenced primarily by the third factor; they are inner directed and values driven. As fully human, they live life autonomously, authentically, and altruistically. Biological drives are sublimated into higher modes of expression. Conformity and nonconformity to societal norms are principled. Movement from primary to secondary integration arises from positive disintegration” (Mendaglio, 2008b, p. 36).

A SPECIAL NOTE

- Even with Level IV and Level V, reintegration at previous levels and disintegration can still be experienced as individuals face new obstacles in their lives.

TPD AND GIFTEDNESS

- Students identified for gifted programs may not be gifted in a “Dabrowskian” sense.
They may not demonstrate great developmental potential at a young age or ever. Others not formally identified may actually be “gifted” in this sense. We need to know our students.
- Some emotions are self-serving and do not represent inner-conflict.
- We cannot orchestrate crises for our students to facilitate positive reintegration. This is unethical and is not our job.
Rather, we need to point out opportunities for personal growth and provide students with positive coping strategies.

PERFECTIONISM & TPD

“The tendency toward perfectionism is a tool which can either produce growth or agony. When perfectionism is focused inward, it can lead to extraordinary achievement, but when it is focused on others it usually leads to unfair expectations, disappointment and resentment. If perfectionism translates into trying again and again, it leads to success, but when it results in paralysis, avoidance, anxiety attacks, and withdrawal, it guarantees failure” (Silverman, 1999, p. 221).

PERFECTIONISM

- Adaptive and maladaptive forms of perfectionism

“Perfectionists are capable of ecstatic heights, of being totally in Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) flow, unfettered by time constraints or the judgments of others, when the activity itself becomes the reward rather than a means to an end “(Silverman, 1999, p. 2).

PERFECTIONISM

Perfectionism is not always negative. Some separate perfectionism and the pursuit of excellence. Silverman says they are one in the same.

“The seedling does not know that it is a mighty oak in the making. If it obsesses over what it is not, it may not survive and grow to what it can become. As higher consciousness develops, the struggle for selfhood is gradually replaced with awareness of the unity of life and one’s unique role in promoting the good of the whole. Then perfectionism is in the service of joy, the service of truth, the service of beauty, the service of love, and it becomes a blessing instead of a curse” (Silverman, 1999, p. 5).

COPING STRATEGIES

(ADAPTED FROM WEBB, 2012)

- **Self-Awareness**- What makes me unique and special in this flawed world?
- **Connectedness**- Rather than isolating myself, what can I do, even on a very small scale, to support a cause that is meaningful to me?
- **Compartmentalizing worry and reframing**- Does worry and anxiety need to spill into all aspects of my life? What can I be grateful for? When I am emotionally ready to deal with that worry, what constructive steps can I take to do so? Positive self-talk encourages hope and resilience.

REMEMBER THIS?

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COPING STRATEGIES

(ADAPTED FROM WEBB, 2012)

- **Table the past and future; focus on the present-** What can I do today, now? The past and future lend themselves to disintegration. *Pascal's quote and existential depression.*
- **Webb's "Rippling Effect"-** How can I positively influence the actions of others through my actions? Rippling often happens unintentionally. We never fully realize the power we have to impact others' lives in a positive way.
- **Be aware of HALT (hungry, angry, lonely, tired)-** Are any of these four things clouding my thinking right now? If so, I need to take a break and address them.