

ME'AH FOUNDATION

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Integrated Dynamic Learning

Integrated Dynamic Learning (IDL) is based on the *Progressive Mindfulness Protocol (PMP)*, which was designed from neuropsychological research and with clinical data obtained over twenty-seven years. The *PMP* has three measurable domains: **Perception, Attunement and Mindfulness**.

In 2007, a sixth-grade teacher in a public middle school was having difficulties concentrating while trying to finish her Master's Degree. I gave her Mindfulness techniques from Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings to reduce her anxiety and improve her concentration. She successfully completed her studies and wished that the techniques could be implemented in a classroom.

Since there is already a clinical model being used in my private practice, and I am a certified school psychologist, I suggested that I could re-format the model to compliment the State approved curriculum standards. I suggested that teachers did not need to modify the curriculum, but only needed to learn a teaching method that would potentially reduce anxiety, anger, competition and frustration in the classroom. I further suggested that a positive classroom climate could potentially eliminate bullying.

Integrated Dynamic Learning Rubric

An **IDL Rubric** was designed. The **IDL** provides teachers with a compassionate understanding of each student's perceptual reasoning level, mindfulness and ability to relate to authorities and peers. The purpose of the **IDL** is to help teachers view their students through the eyes of the developmental psychoeducational model and to provide tools for teaching those students who function at nonverbal and pre-concrete levels. With the assistance of the **IDL**, teachers not only can bring the students, who function at nonverbal level to a pre-concrete level, and to a concrete level, but also can take students from a concrete to a pre-abstract reasoning level. In addition, the **IDL** addresses social and moral behavior; both areas are necessary for a student's development.

Sixteen observable perceptual reasoning styles, seventeen observable items of attunement or relatedness, and eleven items of mindfulness were identified on the **IDL Rubric**.

Pilot Project 2007-08

One week before school convened, the two sixth grade teachers from the same middle school reviewed their lesson plans with me. Using the **IDL** model, we redesigned the lesson plans from a compare-contrast model, to a more inclusive model. We learned that sixth graders tend to cluster around four developmental levels within the three domains. The lessons were re-designed to include all four developmental, **Perceptual, Attunement and Mindfulness** levels (see Appendix A).

Supervision

The teachers met with me monthly to review each student who was having difficulties. We revised the student's **IDL Rubric Index** and re-adjusted the curriculum to match the student's academic functioning level.

Parent-teacher-student Conferences

Within the first week of school, the teachers had a parent-teacher-student meeting. During that meeting, the teachers listened carefully to how the parent(s) described his/her child and his/her abilities. They wrote down the comments of the parent(s) and when appropriate, they reiterated the same statements during class. The rationale was since students hear their parents' comments at home, the positive were reinforced and the negative statements were reframed. For example, a parent would say, "You are so stupid." Thus, the teacher would say to the student,

"You may think you are stupid, but what is really happening is that I have not been able to say it in a meaningful way. Can you help me? Can you tell me what you heard me say? Then I will say it in a different way."

During the initial parent-teacher-student meeting, the teachers presented the **Learning Goals** (see Appendix B).

Tribal Pods

The teachers gathered the students into **IDL Pods**. Each **Tribal Pod** has approximately four students at various **IDL Index** levels. For example, a **Tribal Pod** named the "Cougars" had a girl who had an **IDL Index** of Four in all three domains. Another girl had an **IDL Index** of two. One boy had an **IDL Index** of Two in **Perceptual Reasoning and Attunement**, and an index of One in **Mindfulness**. The fourth student, a boy, had an **IDL Index** of Three. The students in each **Pod** named their **Pod**, made a shield to represent their tribe and situated their desks in a circle or square format.

Smiley Face and Daily Check-up Card

As the students enter the classroom, they touch a **Smiley Face** taped on the door frame. As they touch the **Smiley Face** they repeat,

"As I smile at this moment,
it will bring a smile the next moment."

They then choose to pickup a **Daily Check-up** card. On the 3 x 5 card is an outline of a body. The student marks the spot on the body where he/she is hurting and places the card on his/her desk. As the teacher walks around the room to check on each student's class work, she glances at the card and sees the mark on the body. Bending down to the student's level, she says, "I am saddened to know about your hurt." She then smiles reflectively to the student and moves on to the next student. If the student is functioning at a **Bubble Dweller** level (*Level 1*) at that moment, the teacher skillfully looks beyond his gaze in order not to "poke" his bubble.

Collateral Closet

In order to minimize the conflict between a teacher and student regarding proper classroom supplies, a **Collateral Closet** was designed. If a student forgets to bring a pencil, pen, paper or textbook, he goes to the closet where the supplies are kept. He marks a supply list of the items he picked and then places his shoe in a basket located at the bottom of the closet. At the end of class, the student goes to the **Collateral Closet**, returns the supplies, checks the box by his name marked "return" and picks up his shoe.

Rumbling Technique

After the students have gathered according to **Tribal Pods**, put their supplies on the desk, and picked up the class outline (see Appendix C), the teacher engages them in the **Rumbling Technique**. They cross their hands and tap their legs, alternating the hand gestures from left to right. This technique comes from the work of Francine Shapiro, Ph.D., who introduced EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), (1987). By tapping the hands left and right, the brain is stimulated to fire neurons from the left and right hemisphere. This process generates emotions which are often felt as body sensations. The students can identify where they feel stressed or anxious. By focusing on their feelings, students can shift from negative emotions and ill-being, to positive emotions. While tapping, students become keenly aware of their breath. They rapidly move from an unfocused shallow breathing, to a more conscious deep breathing. Finding their core of well-being, students can find themselves giggling at the end of the **Rumbling** session.

Completion Table

If a student comes to class with incomplete homework, she does not have to feel shame or anxiety. She simply goes to the **Completion Table** which is setup next to the teacher's desk. On the **Completion Table**, are the homework and textbook necessary to complete the assignment. As the teacher explains the homework, those students at the **Completion Table** follow along and complete their work.

The teacher has no ill-feelings or anger toward the student who did not have her homework. Nor does she elicit an explanation from the student for not having the homework. This eliminates the struggle between student and teacher over missing homework.

The **Completion Table** is used to emphasize the positive aspect of the homework, rather than the negative response of an "incompletion." The teacher calmly collects and reviews the homework, marking those answers that are correct and not giving bonus points. The student then returns to her **Tribal Pod**.

Grading

The grading system was changed from losing points for wrong answers or incomplete work, to gaining points for right answers and completion of the assignment. If the assignment was completed at the **Completion Table** and not at home, the student would not acquire the points on the **Self-Direct Learner Scale**. Students who have their assignment ready on the due date will receive points on the **Self-Directed Learner Scale** (See Appendix D).

In order to avoid a grading nightmare on the larger projects, teachers negotiate with students who fail to bring in the project on the due date. These students go to the **Completion Table**, and write the summary for the project. They are required to bring in the project the next day in order to receive a grade. They only do not receive+-- their **Self-Directed Learner** points.

If the student states that he completed the homework and just “forgot” to bring it to class, the teacher smiles and states, “She was glad that he had completed the homework and therefore it will be easier to answer the questions and/or write the paper again at the **Completion Table.**” If a student forgot a book to read during free reading, she is instructed to go to the **Collateral Closet** and select a book.

IDL and Curriculum Development

The teacher presents the daily lesson plan based on the four levels of **Perceptual Reasoning Learning**. When academic materials are presented at a level too complex for students to grasp, we noticed that they become **Stressful Learners (Level 2)** (e.g. irritable, anxious, agitated, distracted and/or withdrawn). As **Stressful Learners**, they have very little mental capacity to focus on the lesson plan and often cannot remember the lesson or the homework assignment.

The following is an example of how to present history using the **IDL Rubric Model**:

US History – Constitution

The teacher reads the story of how the Constitution was written. Then, she asks the students to **label** (Mindful speech), with one-word, concepts, the ideas of the Constitution. Then from the label list, the students **create** a new descriptions of how the Constitution was developed (Mindful Action). With the descriptions, they **negotiate** (Mindful thoughts) and **discuss** which concepts should remain in the Constitution.

The following is an example of how to divide reading groups in Language Arts:

The teacher divides the reading groups into units of four to six students. The groups are selected on a heterogeneous basis rather than on a homogeneous basis. Although it is understood that the **Bubble Dwellers** in each group will more than likely stay in their “bubbles”, it is important for the Level 1 students to imitate the pre-concrete (Level 2), concrete and pre-abstract readers. The teachers are instructed not to ask **Bubble Dwellers** to read or answer questions. The Level 2 (pre-concrete) thinkers are asked to read simpler paragraphs with the teacher presenting a two-choice question. For the concrete (Level 3) and pre-abstract (Level 4) readers, she presents a concrete and abstract, open-ended question.

Integrated Mindfulness Instruction of a Level One and Level Two Learner

Dean Miller was described as an impulsive and descriptive learner who blamed everyone, including inanimate objects, for his misbehavior. He never showed remorse for his inappropriate language or behavior. When Dean was overwhelmed or confused in class, he retreated to his “bubble”. While dwelling in his bubble, Dean enjoyed doodling in the margins of his class work. Whenever a teacher “poked his bubble” by demanding participation, he would rage, kicking the desk, wall and hitting his head on the desk (Level 1). When he “unzipped his bubble”, he “clowned around” or requested a restroom or nurse pass (Level 2). He was often disoriented, agitated, frustrated and unable to describe what his teacher was presenting. Dean often came to class with broken glasses or no glasses, and often explained present and past events, interchangeably, without any meaningful connection. Dean lacked the understanding of what actions directly caused the outcome.

Since Dean was oscillating between a Level One and Level Two learner, Ms. Brown, the Language Arts teacher, requested a parent-student meeting within the first week of school.

Dean's mother wore a tight, black leather skirt with a low-cut, sleeveless blouse. She had a tattoo above her left breast of a heart with a name printed over it, as well as other tattoos on her arms, legs and ankles. Mrs. Miller told Ms. Brown that her eldest son had died in Iraq. During her senior year in high school, she was gang raped and became pregnant. She did not know who was the father. She did, however, graduate from high school. After the death of her son, Robert, she had his name tattooed and she pointed to the heart. Mrs. Miller told Ms. Brown that Dean's father was in jail for drug trafficking, and he rarely paid child support. Mrs. Miller had just divorced her second husband, who worked for the post office and garnisheed his salary for maintenance and child support for her third son. Mrs. Miller was unemployed and on Workmen's Compensation as a result of a ladder falling on her in a warehouse.

Mrs. Miller described Dean as stupid, impulsive and always in trouble at home. She punished Dean for "bad behavior" by sending him to his bedroom without dinner, cell phone and computer time. Ms. Brown sympathized with Dean's mother over losing a son and having to raise two other boys on a limited income. She kept notes on how Dean's mother described him, and tried to find something they had in common. Using the common thread of both of them having graduated high school, Ms. Brown suggested they could work together to help Dean experience success and graduation. Ms. Brown asked Mrs. Miller to go to a discount store, buy four colorful, small binders, and label them with the four main subjects. In the front of the binder, Ms. Brown would list the homework which was divided into four parts, each of fifteen segments. Dean's mother had him do his homework at the kitchen table without distraction.

Since Dean benefitted from a predictable routine, he came home, had a protein snack and sat down at the kitchen table. After opening his backpack, Dean's mother would only open the first binder, read the instructions for the L.A. homework and listen to Dean paraphrase the instructions. Setting an egg-timer, Dean would read a sentence of the paragraph and then his mother would read the next sentence. After completing the reading, Dean wrote a conclusion to the essay before writing a topic sentence or outline. When the timer buzzed, Dean's mother initialed the homework calendar and he placed the first folder in his backpack. He then took a five-minute break, during which he walked around the block, jumped rope, **Rumbled** or jumped on the exercise trampoline.

After the five-minute break, Dean and his mother looked at the second folder and worked side-by-side on the Math homework. They also followed the same sequence described above for the Science and Social Studies folders. If at any time Dean became overwhelmed, both his mother and he would do deep breathing. If Dean still felt anxious, he would do **dot-to-dot line** exercises or listen to **Biolateral** tapes. Knowing that he had only fifteen minutes on each folder and with the help of the calming techniques, Dean often pushed through his anxiety and stayed focused on the homework.

Dean experienced greater success by following a predictable sequence in each class. The sequence was written down and Dean added his personal illustrations. He entered class, sat at his desk, opened his backpack, and removed the appropriate subject folder and textbook. While Dean waited for the teacher to start reviewing, he either would do **dot-to-dot line** or **Rumbling** exercises.

Dean had a history of wandering the halls, instead of getting to class on time. In order to help Dean be at his desk on time, he would receive one restroom pass for not being tardy. On the restroom pass, was a time at which he could leave for five minutes. He also had an egg-timer on his desk. He would set the timer every fifteen minutes. When the timer rang, Dean would do deep breathing, **Rumbling** or, if appropriate, use the restroom pass.

Dean often came to class without his binders or glasses. Instead of the teacher confronting him, Dean automatically walked to the **collateral closet** for classroom supplies and reading glasses, then walked to his **Tribal Pod**. The two students who were functioning at Level 3 and 4 in his Pod, assisted him with class work. Along with Ms. Brown, the students in Dean's Pod learned how to approach him when he dwelled in his "bubble". The instructions for a **Bubble Dweller** were not to poke his "bubble," but to allow him the control to "unzip his bubble." Kneeling down and looking at the **Daily Check-up Card** (if available), Ms. Brown would say,

"I see you are hurting and I am sorry you are in such pain. When you feel comfortable and secure to come out of your bubble, please raise your hand."

The students in his **Tribal Pod** were instructed to wait until he showed them his drawings or list of words. Then, the students helped him match a word or words to his drawings. Ms. Brown also encouraged him to write a sentence for each of his words (see Appendix E).

As the class progressed, so did Dean. At one point, Dean borrowed three colored pencils in the collateral closet and returned them sharpened. Ms. Brown nodded with an approving smile and Dean began leaving his secure "bubble" more and more. Ms. Brown frequently walked over to his desk, knelt down, snorted, or made other guttural sounds and responded positively to his class work. Giggling, Dean often imitated Ms. Brown's noises. After winter break, Dean returned to his "bubble," but quickly emerged and spent more time outside of it. He started to maintain eye contact with Ms. Brown, and decreased the urgency to use the restroom pass.

As an **Imitational Learner** (Level 2), Dean often appeared stressed and anxious. He was embarrassed about his class work, feared he would make a mistake and echoed his mother's frustrating remarks. In order to diminish feelings of inadequacies, Ms. Brown echoed his mother's comments with a positive statement. "I bet you feel stupid; however, I have not given you the right instruction." Saying he was a very good student, she redirected him to the **Completion Table**. Ms. Brown continued to cue Dean by saying, "The Rule is..." This statement was an anchor for Dean, and gave him time to become alert to the forthcoming direction. Rather than questioning him, Ms. Brown learned to make positive directional comments. For example, instead of asking, "What are you saying?" She would say, "I need help to understand." She would also ask Dean to fill in the blank of the comment, "The boy was going to..."

Dean slowly required less immediate prompting for each sequence. He was able to handle spelling and word usage corrections. He switched from writing the conclusion first, to writing the topic sentence and opening scene first. He was able to freeze the picture and describe the frame with appropriate nouns, adjectives and adverbs. He understood cause and effect. He was able to complete his assignments on time with some understanding of sentence structure, and always used a wrap-up sentence.

At the beginning of class, Dean did "warming-up" exercises and **dot-to-dot lines**. He wrote words on flash cards, drew pictures for each word, sequenced the words into a meaningful story, told the story to a Pod member and wrote sentences using the word list. At the end of the class, Dean would approach Ms. Brown's desk and pick up the homework.

Dean's mother frequently sent email messages to Ms. Brown asking for direction and advice. Mrs. Miller slowly transitioned from cueing Dean with each task, to a more verbal, supportive role. The students in his **Tribal Pod** and Language Arts class became aware of his academic limitations, and they imitated Ms. Brown's empathy and support. They reminded Dean to have his folders with him and walked with him in the halls. If Dean was being teased or bullied, a **Tribal Pod** member would defend with him.

At the end of the school year, Ms. Brown was the bridge between Dean and his mother. His mother learned to be more patient and compassionate. She developed a consistent routine at home. When upset or overwhelmed, she nonverbally redirected him to look on the daily chart for the next direction. Dean's reading skills improved, as did his concentration and retention.

Language Arts Teacher's Reflections

The year after the pilot project and after the teacher had finished a semester with the new sixth graders, I interviewed Ms. Brown. Although she could not use the techniques designed in the pilot project because of copyright, Ms. Brown's perceptions have changed. She better understands the behaviors of the students. She asks herself what factors may be causing the present behavior? She has a more positive point of view about her students. She is keenly aware of needing to pair visual with verbal instructions, and she shows more manipulatives (i.e., charts and pictures). She uses less words in her instructions and more gestures to explain content.

Ms. Brown no longer has battles in her class. If any of the students forget their homework, she views them from a developmental perspective by seeing them as unable to bring supplies to school. She watches the body language of the students and adjusts her expectations and presentations to better meet the needs of the student. She is aware of the **Bubble Dwellers**, and now drops her gaze and decreases her demands with them. She uses more affirmative nods. She is now conscious of matching hand and head movements with her speech and thoughts. She tries to mirror her students' feelings and she feels they now have a better relationship. She learned to reduce the stress among her students by being patient and compassionate. She is calmer and her students are calmer.

At parent-student-teacher conferences, Ms. Brown listens intently to the parent's descriptions and concerns of her child. Ms. Brown has more empathy towards the students and their parents. She changes her language from expectations to positive statements. She has acquired a better relationship with the parents. She listens for the hidden messages and gives more credit to the parents, because they do want to help their children. When some parents are toxic, Ms. Brown steps back, without judgment, and gives the parents the opportunity to express their feelings. When a parent requests to come to school immediately, Ms. Brown agrees and is aware of the parent's need for attention. She also recognizes that parents may be functioning at a Level 1, 2, or 3, so she tries to match the rhythm of the parent.

Ms. Brown learned that the **Self-Directed Learners** retained more information, because they repeated what they have learned with other students who need additional help. Thus, she and her students have a higher tolerance for differences.

Ms. Brown had never understood the students who had difficulties with expressive language or the nonverbal learners. She is amazed at and keenly aware of the different perceptual reasoning levels of the students. She is now conscious to the fact that there are many ways to teach students at various perceptual/attunement/mindfulness levels.

Although she is not using the **Completion Table**, Ms. Brown is allowing more time, sometimes up to a week, for students to complete assignments and projects. She allows the students to use the computer lab more often, and sometimes grants three extra days, in which they can do web searches and power outlines. She has also made herself more available during lunch, before and after school.

She feels the **Daily Check-up** is really important, because some students need additional attention and she is sensitive to the fact that she is another nurturing adult. She feels the **Rumbling Technique** is very effective and it teaches everyone how to self-sooth. She feels the **Collateral Closet** reduces tension between herself and her students. Regarding students being ready to learn with the proper supplies, she realizes it is not a battle to win.

Ms. Brown feels the **IDL** methods increases concentration and completion of work. It reduces aggression and increases teaching time. There is less time spent on trying to manage her classroom and more time on teaching concepts. She often steps back and reflects: "Perhaps the request is too high or perhaps I need to use more nonverbal tools." She implements water breaks and allows standing up during class. She also continues to schedule time for restroom breaks.

Ms. Brown feels the inclusive classroom is more effective, and learning is more accessible. She has changed her perception from what is wrong with the student to what is wrong with her teaching method. When she feels agitated, she is now aware of the tension she creates in the classroom and uses deep breathing to become calmer. She feels, in order to help students learn, she needs to be more patient and understanding. She is more compassionate, and has learned to calm and control her classroom through positive perception. She feels that teachers need training on the **IDL** method. She also feels that there should be ongoing, satellite coaching programs. Ms. Brown feels she is...

"an artist with a palate of various colors. She is putting more color into the students' writings through adjectives and adverbs. There is many brush strokes in writing and expressive language can be very colorful and playful."

Observations

The teacher modeled acceptance of all students regardless of their academic level. In so doing, she created a community in which the students started valuing and caring for each other. The students started protecting all members in their Tribal Pod outside of the mindfulness classroom, i.e., on the playground, in the lunchroom, auditorium or in other classrooms.

With this inclusive, nonjudgmental approach to teaching, the students feel an overall decreased level of anxiety. They became attached to the teacher and wanted to do well on all exams. They not only learned the curriculum, but they also performed better on the required State Proficiency Exam.

The **IDL** is designed to support teachers in integrating cognition, regulation and moral reasoning into their curriculum materials. **IDL** is an inclusive classroom model, which emphasizes the ability of a teacher to recognize the various developmental levels of all students, and seamlessly apply such awareness into a required curriculum. The goal of **IDL** is to facilitate compassion with positive perceptions, rather than on negative statements, and to integrate instruction with mindfulness. In so doing, the attunement between teacher and student, or student and student, promotes an empathic, inclusive learning community.

IDL Summary

The foundation of the **Integrative Dynamic Learning (IDL)** is to support educators in integrating cognition, affection and moral reasoning into their curriculum. Using the **IDL Rubric**, teachers can develop lesson plans which fall three levels below the grade equivalency.

Students who are partially proficient in any particular curriculum module can benefit from lessons being presented at different fundamental levels (pre-concrete to concrete to abstract). Using the **IDL** method, students, who are academically functioning below curriculum levels, can acquire a more proficient foundation for further learning, which results in a motivation to address additional, challenging subjects.

The **IDL** is one method that can create a safe, caring, respectful, disciplined and compassionate learning environment. It can help all students to feel success and become contributing members in our communities.