



Developmental Therapy Institute

Universally Recognized Content in Developmental Therapy-Teaching (DTT)

Developmental domains and behavioral milestones from research and theory provide the content foundation for DTT and the DTORF-R.

The essential question for teachers and parents is, ***what are students and teachers gaining from DTT?*** To answer this question, consider how DTT content was selected and organized into four universally recognized developmental domains with sequences of key milestones needed by all children as they mature.

How was DTT content selected?

To identify essential content for assessment of students' social-emotional and behavioral development, the Developmental Therapy Institute through the University of Georgia, the Georgia Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Education began an extensive review of existing research and theory. **The goal was to identify and operationalize a broad knowledge base about personality development to build sequentially ordered content for teaching social, emotional, and behavioral competence.** The assumption was that there are universal characteristics in child personality development that are benchmarks for emotional and behavioral maturation. Such milestones then guide programs for students of all age groups and grades in sequential steps toward increasingly mature competencies essential for success at school, home, and community between infancy and young adulthood.

The first step in defining such classroom-based content was to identify widely accepted constructs about personality development, behavior, and the ages when key indicators first emerge for typically developing children. This took us back to an extensive review of 164 theorists and researchers to identify widely recognized constructs of cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral development that shape social-emotional learning. (For those who seek an in depth study, we recommend the entire publication field of Developmental Psychology.)

In this limited space, here are a few of the first foundation contributors to what became the DTT content:

A. Bandura (*Social Learning Theory*)

J. Kagan & associates (*Mental Structures*)

R. Coles (*Moral Intelligence*)

L. Kohlberg (*Moral Development*)

E. Erikson (*Identity and the Life Cycle*)

M. Lewis (*Emotional Development*)

A. Freud (*Developmental Lines*)

T. Lickona (*Character Development*)

D. Hebb (*Organization of Behavior*)

J. Lovenger (*Foundations of Ego Development*)

M. Mahler & associates (*Attachment & Individuation*)

R. Selman (*Interpersonal Understanding*)

A. Maslow (*Hierarchy of Needs & Motivation*)

E. Turiel (*Social Knowledge*)

J. Piaget (*Development of Thought*)

Our findings from these experts centered around four broad categories: **(a) personality development, (b) cognitive and emotional learning, (c) moral and motivational development, and (d) the impact of social conditions on thinking and learning.**

As we completed our extensive review, four major developmental domains emerged: *Behavior* (DOING), *Communication* (SAYING), *Socialization* (RELATING), and *Cognition* (THINKING). Within these highly interdependent domains, a large pool of indicators of healthy personality development was formed. These descriptors were then organized into sequential developmental strands for specific ages and stages within each domain from birth through age 16. Competencies were defined further in observable (functional) behaviors of increasing complexity, each building on previous skills. Finally, to verify that every selected competency had content validity, each item was referenced directly to the original domain analyses.

What do these domains specifically include? Each domain contains life-processes in personality development that occur sequentially with increasing complexity from birth through 16 years. These domains are interdependent, each contributing essential elements to the total person. Within these domains, there also are key developmental milestones that can be observed in specific school-related behaviors.

The *Developmental Teaching Objectives and Rating Form (DTORF-R)* contains these specific milestones designed as an assessment tool for identifying the presence or absence of social-emotional competencies at each stage of development. The stages correspond to five stages of development from birth to about age 16. Each stage emerges sequentially while building on the other domains. Key milestone competencies are numbered as DTORF-R items used for assessment, IEP planning, instructional practices, and accountability. These milestone items have universal relevance because they reflect broad qualities all people acquire as they mature in any culture.

Summary. Seminal research and theories about personality development shape the way parents, teachers, researchers, and neuroscientists view children and teens today. From this foundation, DTT content and instructional practices emerged. Today, this knowledge guides day-to-day instruction for students' healthy social-emotional development, success in school, personal responsibility, and maturity at every stage of their development.

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