



Katutubo Excel School, Inc.

# Teachers' Seminar Notes

School Year 18/19

*“A teacher’s advantages may have been limited, so that he does not possess as high literary qualifications as he might desire; yet if he has true insight into human nature, if he has an appreciation of the magnitude of his work, and a genuine love for it; if he has a willingness to labor earnestly and humbly and perseveringly, he will comprehend the needs of his pupils, and by his sympathetic spirit will win their hearts and leads them onward and upward. His efforts will be so well directed that the school will become a living, growing power for good, full of the spirit of real advancement.”*

Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, p.70

# THE EIGHT NEURODEVELOPMENTAL SYSTEMS

The book “All Kinds of Minds”, by Mel Levine, uses a neurodevelopmental framework that serves as an organizing structure to help educators understand learning and learners. If we describe a framework as a set of file folders, the “All Kinds of Minds” neurodevelopmental, or learning, framework is composed of eight file folders called "systems." These systems – and the framework as a whole – are based on a synthesis of research from neuroscience, cognitive psychology, child and adolescent development, and related fields about how the brain functions and how these functions affect student learning and performance at any point in a student's development.

## Social Thinking System

- Knowing what to talk about, when, with whom, and for how long;
- Working and playing with others in a cooperative manner;
- Nurturing positive relationships with influential people.

**Proposed activities/ interventions:** give your student constant feedback, in a private way about his/her behavior, tone of voice and use of words. Do it in a gentle and loving way.

## Motor System

- Using large muscles in a coordinated manner;
- Controlling finger and hand movements;
- Coordinating muscles needed for handwriting.

**Proposed activities/ interventions:** show compassion for the challenges of the student; shelter him/her from being embarrassed in front of other students (this is important for all of the systems); provide alternatives to long written reports (this also helps with the language system) so that every student has a chance to show how their minds work and think in a way that they are comfortable (oral reports, short written reports, drama, etc).

## Memory System

- Briefly recording new information;
- Mentally juggling information while using it to complete a task;
- Storing and then recalling information at a later time.

**Proposed activities/ interventions:** as much as possible, try to enlighten your students about how the memory system works and what kind of memory is being required for a particular activity; encourage your students to diversify the format of the information they should remember through visual information (timeline, mind maps, diagrams, pictures) and textual (describing a picture or a scene).

## Language System

- Understanding incoming oral and written information;
- Communicating ideas orally and in writing.

**Proposed activities/ interventions:** provide alternative too long written reports (see Motor System); provide your students with the experience of reading something they are interested, so that they will persevere in understanding the text; have reading moments with your student, to assess comprehension, reading habits, and provide better tools.

## **Spatial Ordering System (Visual Thinking)**

- Understanding information that is presented visually;
- Generating products that are visual;
- Organizing materials and spaces.

**Proposed activities/ interventions:** Mind map; story telling, providing an opportunity for the students to imagine places and characters; promote oral description of environments.

## **Sequential Ordering System (Keeping Track of Time/Order)**

- Understanding the order of steps, events, or other sequences;
- Generating products arranged in a meaningful order;
- Organizing time and schedules.

**Proposed activities/ interventions:** have your students keep a monthly schedule and plan the activities that need to be done before a particular due date (also helps with problem solving strategies).

## **Attention Control System**

- Maintaining mental energy for learning and work;
- Absorbing and filtering incoming information;
- Overseeing the quality of academic output and behavior.

**Proposed activities/ interventions:** as much as possible, provide the student with knowledge about his own challenges, ending the cycle of victimization of the student and sense of failure; give instant feedback, whenever possible, about distracted behaviors of the student; form a team with the student to better understand his challenges, possible reasons and tools to minimize or bypass the effects.

## **Higher Thinking System**

- Comprehending concepts;
- Generating original ideas;
- Using logical approaches to address complex problems.

**Proposed activities/ interventions:** mind map and concept map (thinking with concepts); have your students tell you the specific steps they will take to solve a problem such as study for a test, write an article or solve a math problem (problem solving); stimulate the students with open-ended questions, give their opinion on a story or book (thinking critically); promote time for a “free-style” art project (divergent thinking, risk taking).

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## **Most important**

1. Give your student opportunities to use his creativity without so many rules; let him/her engage in activities that give him/her pleasure and a sense of accomplishment; allow them to feel successful.
2. An engaged, motivated, and happy student will most likely find his/her own way into facing the academic challenges that lie ahead, as well as any other challenge that they will encounter in life.

# OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Tests should include as many open-ended questions as possible in order to assess student knowledge effectively. But for students to perform well ins such types of questions, they must be exposed to this critical-thinking process as often as possible.

Here are some examples of how to build questions that will truly foster critical-thinking as well as a more engaging learning environment:

## **Comprehension**

- How would you classify the type of...?
- How would you compare...? Contrast...?
- Will you state or interpret in your own words...?
- How would you rephrase the meaning...?
- What facts or ideas show...?
- What is the main idea of...?
- Which statements support...?
- Can you explain what is happening...? What is meant...?
- What can you say about...?
- Which is the best answer...? Why?
- How would you summarize...?

## **Analysis**

- What are the parts or features of...?
- How is \_\_\_\_\_ related to...?
- Why do you think...?
- What is the theme...?
- Can you list the parts...?
- What inference can you make...?
- What conclusions can you draw...?
- How would you classify...?
- How would you categorize...?
- Can you identify the different parts...?
- Can you predict the outcome if...?
- How would you estimate the results for...?
- What facts can you compile...?
- Can you construct a model that would change...?
- Can you think of an original way for the...?

## **Application**

- How would you use...?
- What examples can you find to...?
- How would you solve \_\_\_\_\_ using what you have learned...?
- How would you organize \_\_\_\_\_ to show...?
- How would you show your understanding of...?
- What approach would you use to...?
- How would you apply what you have learned to develop...?
- What other way would you plan to...?
- What would result if...?
- Can you make use of the facts to...?
- What elements would you choose to change...?
- What facts would you select to show...?
- What questions would you ask in an interview with...?

**Knowledge**

- What is...? How is...?
- Where is...? When did \_\_\_\_\_ happen?
- How did \_\_\_\_\_ happen? How would you explain?
- Why did...? How would you describe...?
- When did...? Can you recall...?
- How would you show...? Can you select...?
- Who were the main...? Can you list three...?
- Which one...? Who was....?

**Evaluation**

- Do you agree with the actions...? Outcomes...?
- What is your opinion of...?
- How would you prove...? Disprove...?
- Can you assess the value or importance of...?
- Would it be better if...?
- Why did they (the character) choose...?
- What would you recommend...?
- How would you rate...?
- What would you cite to defend the actions...?
- How would you evaluate...?
- How could you determine...?
- What choice would you have made...?
- What would you select...?
- How would you prioritize...?
- What evidence can you find...?
- What is the relationship between...?
- Can you make a distinction between...?
- What is the function of...?
- What ideas justify...?

**Synthesis**

- What changes would you make to solve...?
- How would you improve...?
- What would happen if...?
- Can you elaborate on the reason...?
- Can you propose an alternative...?
- Can you invent...?
- How would you adapt \_\_\_\_\_ to create a different...?
- How would you change (modify) the plot (plan)...?
- What could be done to minimize (maximize)...?
- What way would you design...?
- What could be combined to improve (change)...?
- Suppose you could \_\_\_\_\_ what would you do...?
- How would you test...?
- Can you formulate a theory for...?
- What judgment would you make about...?
- Based on what you know, how would you explain...?
- What information would you use to support the view...?
- How would you justify...?
- What data was used to make the conclusion...?
- How would you prioritize the facts...?
- How would you compare the ideas...? People...?

# MORNING CIRCLE ACTIVITIES

Morning Circles are a great way to start the day well and have quality time with your students. In order to accomplish that it is very important to focus on activities that generate discussion and will allow you to know better your students. You may use the time for games every now and then, but be careful not to use too many games that will not create any conversation or sharing of experiences.

Here are some examples of activities that can be used in the classroom:

- **Trip to Jerusalem with balls:** students sit in a circle and pass balls to the person next to them while a song is being played (ideally one ball per student). When the music stops, students with the biggest amount of balls will have to recite a Bible gem (even amount) and thanksgiving (odd amount).
- **Power of treating well other people:** create tags with good and bad adjectives, tape them on the back of the students and ask students to react to the words. Ask them how they felt.
- **Divergent thinking and creativity:** get a random object and challenge de students to give it a new meaning. Example: this is not a pencil, it is a hand massager (and demonstrate the new use).
- **Snakes and ladders:** prepare a board with squares and write surprises at the back of each square (memory gem, thanksgiving, action song). The students use a dice to know how many steps they have to take and then they do the activities on the back of the square.
- **Cross the line/step on the line:** a line is traced in the middle of the classroom and each person has to go to the other side of the line if they can relate to the question of the leader.
- **Quiet time:** talk about books students want to read in the future (you can do it in the library so they have a chance to scan the books around them).
- **Storytelling:** engage students in a story (teacher tells the story and students act it).
- **Guessing game:** the class is divided into two groups (when possible). One group thinks of a word and the other group asks questions in order to guess the word.
- **Introductions:** each student introduces himself by saying his name and an adjective that better describes himself. The next person has to repeat the names and adjectives mentioned before him and then add his own at the end. You may make variations of it by asking for other kinds of information besides a characteristic.
- **Crossword puzzle:** choose a topic and ask students to write their answers on the board as a crossword puzzle.
- **Word domino:** write a word on the board and the next person has to write a word that starts with the last letter of the previous word.
- **Guess who:** ask all students to write on a piece of paper something about themselves that not many people know. Mix all the papers and ask each student to get one, read it aloud and try to guess who is the person.
- **Spot the lie:** each person says three facts about herself (2 are true and one is a lie) and the others have to find out which one isn't true.
- **What I like about you:** each person says to the one on her right what she likes about him or her.
- **Like & Dislike:** students share their likes or dislikes. You may use two objects of different colors to decide if the student will share a like or dislike.
- **Animal guess:** each student describes his favorite animal and others have to guess what animal is it.
- **Ball toss:** a student asks a question and then toss a ball to another person who will answer it and ask his own question to another person.
- **Complete the sentence:** one student starts a sentence and the next finishes it.

- **Unforgettable memories:** ask students to share things that happened in the past and they will never forget.
- **Favorite things:** ask students to share their favorite things.
- **Train of thought:** one student starts with a word and what it reminds him of. The next does the same with the last word. Example: Bananas remind me of monkey. Monkey reminds me of tree. And so on...
- **Animal connection:** each student shares what animal best describes the classmate right beside him and explains why.
- **Bible race:** students have to find verses as fast as possible and then read it. At the end they have to find the common topic for all verses.
- **Tell something:** write 6 things numbered from 1 to 6 and after playing the dice students share the information requested. Example: 1) Tell us something you ate last week. 2) Tell us something you like to do when you are alone.
- **Writing a friendly letter:** students write a short friendly letter for a person assigned to them. Make sure all students will receive a letter in the end.
- **My experiences:** ask students to share experiences about their family or friends.
- **Dream gift:** ask students to share a small gift they dream of having.
- **My parents:** each student share a good thing about their parents and what can they learn from them.
- **Tourist plans:** ask students to share the places they would like to visit in the future and why.
- **Thank you/Sorry:** each student picks a name from a basket or bag and then say either thank you for something that person did or always do, or sorry for something he had done or said to that person.
- **Conditional sentences:** one student writes the first part of a conditional sentence, folds the paper and pass it to the person besides him. The person has to write a second part to it without looking and then read it aloud. Example: person 1 writes "If I had a lot of money", and person 2 writes: "I would get sick".
- **Learning a new language:** share something on our original language with the students and ask them to guess what is it. Teach it to them and share a little about cultural elements involved with that word.
- **Thank you note:** give students small pieces of paper with a name (a classmate or staff of the school) and ask them to write a thank you note.
- **Weird stories:** ask students to share weird or funny stories from their personal experience.
- **List of questions:** prepare a list of questions and then have each student pick one and answer it.
- **My weekend:** ask students to share what were their favorite or least favorite things about the weekend before.
- **Alone time:** ask students what are the things they like to do the most when they are alone, or their favorite places to be when they want to have time for themselves.
- **Home and school:** ask students to share what they like or dislike the most when they are home or in school.
- **Hypothetical questions:** ask students things such as "If you could be any animal/object in the world, what would you be?".

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## Most important

1. Sit in the circle with the students.
2. Show interest in your students' answers and interact with them.

# WHAT SHOULD BE THE FOCUS OF EDUCATION

- Developing **critical skills** (by asking more questions), **comprehension** (by reading and discussing what was read) and **logic** (analyzing information and playing games).
- Focus on learning for mastery (to be able to apply knowledge and not simply be able to reproduce or recite when asked). This cannot go along with simply trying to cover all the material and doing all the exercises on the book.
- Spotting students that are hiding behind what they feel comfortable doing, but that are not developing in the other areas of knowledge (a child that hides behind speed on mental math, but cannot apply it in practical everyday situations).
- Constantly assessing students.
- Addressing students that are behind.
- Being sensitive to student's needs, passions and interests.

## MOTIVATION

- Comes actually from the student himself. It can only be awakened by the teacher, but not caused by him.
- Motivation comes mainly from things you are good at, areas of your own interest and seeing that the task to be accomplished makes sense.
- In the classroom a powerful way to get students motivated to grow is as a response to a good relationship with the teacher which will cause students to respect and desire to please him.
- Class has to be enjoyable. Nobody, even adults, want to do or be part of something that is not engaging.
- When students say they don't like a certain subject or activity, the teacher must find the root of the dislike: is it because the student is struggling to accomplish the activity or maybe because he cannot see any meaning or sense in doing it.

## THE DANGER OF CRAMMING

Cramming information doesn't work, but still, that is what is most often done in the classroom. We wrongly believe that the more exercises a student does, the better. "It is practice", we say. But we can only practice what we understand. When a student doesn't understand a concept, plenty of exercises are just conditioning him to find the right answers, but later on he won't know how to apply the knowledge in other situations.

On top of that, we end up moving forward with the content when students still don't have a solid foundation, hoping that they will eventually catch up with the rest. We need to take time to build a strong foundation and to address the issues of those who are staying behind.

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### Most important

1. Teaching for mastery and not for covering the material.
2. Remediation for kids that are staying behind.