

Preschool Democracy for a Civil Society:

Teaching Young Children to Gain Five Democratic Life Skills

Dan's books provide references for sources of information in this PPT.

EDUCATION FOR A CIVIL SOCIETY: TEACHING YOUNG CHILDREN TO GAIN FIVE DEMOCRATIC LIFE SKILLS (2023 2E)

A GUIDANCE GUIDE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERS (2020)

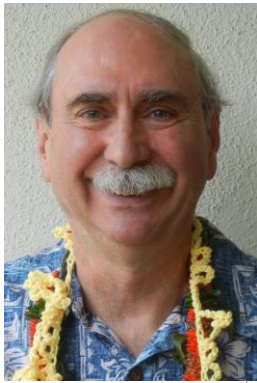
GUIDANCE FOR EVERY CHILD (2017)

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1

Dan Gartrell Ed.D.

- 6th Grade Teacher in Ohio school using corporal punishment (surprise!), to...
- Head Start teacher for Red Lake, Minnesota Ojibwe, where they really loved those kids, to...
- College field instructor & CDA trainer preparing non-degreed EC workers to be teachers, to...
- Director of Child Development Training Program, professor of ECE, and author at Bemidji State University (Mn) – Emeritus, retired but still active.



2

Boozhoo From Minnesota

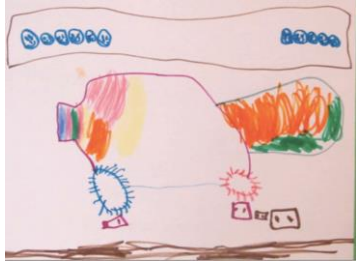
Photography is a hobby of mine along with writing, speaking, and yard work!

Belong to two families that include 5 kids, 15 grandkids, and 2 great-grandkids—families in Minnesota, NYC, and near Wiesbaden, Germany.



3

Beginning Notes. My PowerPoints are Wacky, Wordy, & Semi-Wise.
 • Several different slide designs keep things semi-lively.
 • For discussion, you can refer to slide numbers on bottom right.
 • We may skip some slides to save time. You have the PPT handout.
 • Young child's picture means a change in topic.



4

4

Topic One.
Two Big Questions:

#1. Democracy in Preschool?

Say What?

We are not talking about political democracy—preschoolers voting (!)—but democracy in social sense: <u>Every member is welcomed, listened to, and encouraged.</u>	This democratic learning setting for young children can be called an <i>encouraging early learning community</i> that models inclusiveness and equity.
To model democracy, all staff are members of a <u>teaching team</u> . Together they can guide children more effectively than any one can alone.	The teaching team builds <u>secure relationships</u> with every community member. All 5 DLS depend on these trust-based relationships.
The TT provides <u>developmentally appropriate</u> opportunities for individual choice, engagement, cooperation and gains in personal meaning.	TTs model and teach the 5 DLS, through developmental and intervention guidance, including group meetings and partnerships with families.

5

5

#2. Replenishing Civil, Democratic Society through Early Childhood Care and Education?

Say What?

Young children are building their brains through experiences like at no other time in their lives.	The neuroarchitectures that young children build impacts thinking, feeling, and social responsiveness for the rest of their lives.
Families are the primary teachers of young children, but teachers can be a great help. Like family members, TTs are "significant others" to children.	Secure (trust-based) relationships of a member of the TT with every child contributes to healthy brain development and gaining of the 5 DLS.
In further schooling, the brain benefits of secure relationships flourish best in developmentally appropriate settings that encourage child engagement and cooperation.	If a child has secure relationships in years to come, the foundations of the DLS will survive despite semi-supportive life experiences—so sustaining civil democracy.

6

6



7

Topic Two. Foundations of the Five Democratic Life Skills

The five democratic life skills (DLS) are (for me) the goals of education for a civil society. The five DLS address two separate fundamental human motivations, to be safe and to learn and grow.

Safety-Needs Skills

Skill One: Find acceptance as a member of the group and as a worthy individual

Skill Two: Express strong emotions in non-hurting ways.

Growing-Needs Skills

Skill Three: Solve problems creatively--independently and in cooperation with others







Skill Four: Accept unique human qualities in others.

Skill Five: Think intelligently and ethically.

8

8

Contributors to the Democratic Life Skills

-  Centuries of European progressive educators including J. Comenius, F. Froebel, J. Pestalozzi, and M. Montessori.
-  American John Dewey's vision of school (including preschool) as being a microcosm of civil, democratic society.
-  Mid to late 20th Century psychologists--Maslow, Adler, Erikson, Purkey, Katz, Bowlby and Ainsworth, and Gardner. Especially Maslow for his two sources of motivation.
-  The neuroscience of human relationships and healthy development--two key ideas:
-  1) Intelligence(s) are not fixed but develop or are thwarted, through human relationships
-  2) Secure relationships lead to healthy development and prosocial behaviors; Insecure/difficult relationships lead to unmanageable stress & mistaken survival behaviors.

9

9

Maslow's Two Sources of Human Motivation Substantiated by Brain Research.

Slide 1. Motivation #1, Mediated by Amygdala/Hypothalamus Function

Motivation #1: Safety Needs

The amygdala/hypothalamus function is a component of the limbic system in the lower region of the brain that manages emotions and some memory.

- 1) The A/H function senses and reacts to threat, generating stress hormones that lead to survival behaviors: fleeing, freezing, and aggression.
- 2) A/H function is formed very early in life—illustrated by when uncomfortable infants cry, innocent aggression.
- 3) Because the young are relatively helpless and vulnerable, their A/H function causes them to sense threat easily and often.
- 4) In the face of perceived adverse experiences due to threat and harm, A/H reactions cause young children to feel high—unmanageable—stress and even childhood PTSD.
- 5) Unless a child is buffered, early adverse experiences can cause a long-term high stress response. Stress-conflict- punishment syndrome.

10

10

Maslow's Two Sources of Human Motivation Substantiated by Brain Research:

Slide 2. Motivation #2, Mediated by Executive Function

Motivation #2: Growing Needs

The executive function, located in the frontal lobe of the brain, manages problem solving and learning activities: collecting relevant information, focusing attention, staying on task, and seeing things through.

- 1) Executive function has begun to develop by aged three but doesn't operate maturely until individuals reach adulthood in their twenties.
- 2) With adverse experiences in early childhood, the A/H function overwhelms nascent executive function, undermining its healthy development.
- 3) In the classroom children suffering from high (unmanageable) stress react with the survival behaviors of fleeing (at least psychologically); seeking to be invisible in the group; and/or showing verbal or physical aggression.
- 4) Children need secure (trust-based) relationships with providers, guidance rather than discipline, and solid teacher-family relations for them to manage stress, be able to gain safety needs skills, and progress with growing needs skills: Make progress with healthy development of executive function.

11

11

Skills, Not Just Needs:

With a Teaching Team's Guidance, the 5 DLS Reflect the Child's Developing Abilities-

First, to Gain Safety-Needs Skills

- 1. Find acceptance as a member of the group and as a worthy individual
- 2. Express strong emotions in non-hurting ways

Then, to Gain Growing-Needs Skills

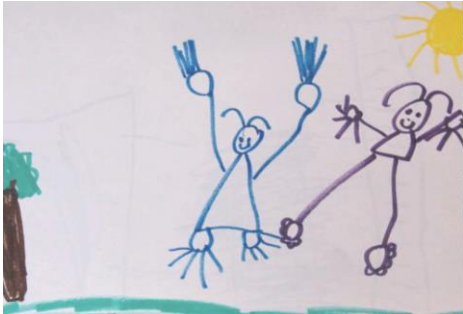
- 3. Solve problems creatively—independently and in cooperation with others
- 4. Accept unique human qualities in others.
- 5. Think intelligently and ethically.

For each DLS, via an encouraging early learning community, the TT's role is to support and nudge every child via established secure relationships.

12

12

Topic Three. The Five DLS in the Early Learning Community/ Supporting and Nudging at Work



13

13

SAFETY-NEEDS SKILLS 1 AND 2

Preventing The Stress-Conflict-Punishment Syndrome

- a. Sources of unmanageable (high) stress are neurological, environmental, & sometimes both.
- b. Children who feel high stress show the mistaken survival behaviors of psychological fleeing, freezing, &/or acting-out by aggression.
- c. The mistaken behavior of aggression, whether reactive or instrumental, too often causes children to be punished & feel continued stress.
- d. For too many kids this pattern of Stress-Conflict-Punishment becomes a long-term syndrome that can continue into adulthood.
- e. Teachers who use guidance work actively to prevent children from falling into the Stress-Conflict-Punishment Syndrome.
- f. Children gain DLS One and Two as they learn to manage amygdala/hypothalamus-driven stress through secure relationships.

14

14

Skill One. Finds acceptance as a member of the group and as a worthy individual.

Teaching teams work hard to build secure relationships with children outside of conflict situations. From day one, the TT works together to get to know the family, in order to better understand the child

They use **developmental guidance** to provide the child with an encouraging environment in order to help prevent conflicts.

They use **intervention guidance** to problem-solve and sustain relationships during conflicts.

This video-clip illustrates Deb's work with Wyatt and Atrou to build DLS one.



15

15

Skill Two.
Expresses strong emotions in non-hurting ways.

In the encouraging early learning community, TTs rely on the practices of *intervention guidance* to support and nudge kids to gain DLS 2.

Calming all always comes first. The goal is to keep the trust-relationship with each child while guiding for resolution and learning.

In this anecdote a guy preschool teacher uses *conflict mediation* to teach for DLS 2. Thanks to read.

Kayla likes to shoot hoops with a favorite ball, but today Shoggie has it. Kayla approaches Shoggie with another ball, but the smaller boy won't trade. Frustrated, Kayla knocks the "ball for big kids" out of Shoggie's hands. She grabs it and starts to shoot hoops. Shoggie sits and yowls. Teacher Kiko calms Shoggie and looks at Kayla, who comes over holding the ball and says, "Shoggie wouldn't trade."

"I think we have a problem here," Kiko says. "Let's sit down, get cool, and work this out." Kayla and Shoggie both know Kiko is going to mediate. They sit down. Shoggie follows Kiko's lead and takes breaths. Kayla watches & waits.

"Let's hear from Shoggie first," Kiko says. As Shoggie shares, Kiko guides Kayla not to interrupt. Then Kiko gives Kayla a turn to share. Kiko repeats each child's account, and the children nod that Kiko has it right. Kiko then says, "How can we fix this problem?" Realizing that she is not going to be punished, Kayla becomes less defensive. "Maybe Shoggie could have a short turn, and then it is my turn." Shoggie agrees and soon gives the ball to Kayla. Kiko has an individual guidance talk with Kayla and asks the child to think of and share a better response for "next time."

16

GROWING-NEEDS SKILLS 3, 4, AND 5.

Slide 1.
The TT actively mediates between the child and the curriculum.

The Child is more important than the curriculum.

The child has gained some resilience and is mostly managing stress. Executive Function is coordinating expression of the intrinsic need to learn and develop. In the emotional-social-physical-cognitive-linguistic process of learning, children feel more willing and able.

- a. TTs build and sustain encouraging communities where children experience, create, problem solve, and gain—even from imperfect attempts at so doing.
- b. TTs encourage children into and through creative endeavors with materials, alone and with peers. *The TT uses acknowledge, pause, listen, and flexibly nudge.*
- c. In scaffolding, the TT provides enough guidance, but only enough guidance, for children to do the rest and see themselves as able learners.
- d. Rather than having high expectations about achieving predetermined, fixed products and standards, the TT has high expectations that children will learn and grow in their own ways to the best of their abilities
- e. The TT mediates between the curriculum, which is logical, and the child, who is psychological, so that every child finds personal meaning in learning.

17

Growing Needs Skills Slide 2.

Children show they have mostly gained safety-needs skills when they engage in activities and interact with others with enthusiasm. The hallmark of progress with the growing-needs skills is the creativity that preschoolers universally show. Put away the forms to color in, the projects to copy, and the pictures on construction kit boxes that young ones are not ready to make.

Blank paper (and story-picture paper) with markers, and open-ended hands-on materials are what young kids need. And lots of big-body activity. Enjoy these slides of kids working on DLS 3, 4, and 5 and displaying healthy Executive Function development.



18

Growing Needs Skills Slide 3. Maybe 80% of pictures that young children see are telling stories in books and on screens. So, naturally children create pictures that tell stories. To enrich development in both art and writing (literacy), I recommend story pictures--paper blank on top and with lines on the bottom. Staple them together and you have picture story books and class books. Here's a make-believe story picture.

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BY Kati

19

19

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Skill Three. Solves problems creatively-independently and in cooperation with others

TTs build an encouraging learning community through sustaining trust-relationships and using DAP with every child. DAP with Young children means that programs are active, interactive, and open-ended.

This observation illustrates great teaching for DLS 3. Thanks to reader.

Just before going to the active playroom with her group, Cynthia gets all five puzzles off the puzzle rack, mixes up the pieces, and puts them together simultaneously. An assistant teacher starts to tell her not to get the puzzles out just before cleanup and to do them "the right way," but teacher Sage intervenes. Sage tells Cynthia, "You like doing puzzles, Cynthia. *(Pauses for a response.)* You can finish doing these 'easy ones' as soon as we get back to the classroom." Cynthia does.

The next day Sage brings in a 30-piece puzzle. She does the puzzle with Cynthia, then asks if Cynthia would be willing to put the puzzle together with other children. (Cynthia does a lot of things on her own, and Sage sees this as an opportunity for her to build social problem-solving skills.)

For the next week, Cynthia starts the puzzle and invites other children to join her. Some do and stay for a short time; others stay until the whole puzzle is done. Cynthia is patient with the little ones and enjoys the social experience of the puzzle work with her classmates.

20

20

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Skill Four. Accepts unique human qualities in others.

Teaching teams design programs, hold group meetings, and through daily situations model and teach the acceptance of unique human qualities. Modeling cooperation with other adults is vital.

This observation illustrates how a student teacher models and teaches acceptance and inclusiveness. Thanks to the reader.

When student teacher Ali offers Brian a seat at the lunch table next to Cheyenne, Brian mutters, "I'm not eating by him. He's got dirty skin." Ali stops getting the table ready and kneels next to Brian. Softly, she says, "Brian, Cheyenne doesn't have dirty skin. His skin is just a darker color than yours. We have lots of different skin colors in our group, and that is just fine. It looks like Cheyenne is all set to pass you a milk (carton). Better sit down so you get one." Ali helps Brian to the seat next to Cheyenne, and with a hand on Cheyenne's shoulder asks if he can pass Brian a milk. He does, and Ali says, "Thank you, Cheyenne."

Later, Ali and the cooperating teacher, Marsha, smile when they see the two boys playing together. That evening, when Brian's dad comes to pick him up, Ali initiates a brief conversation with him. She tells Dad what happened and mentions he might want to reinforce the message that people have lots of different skin colors, and it's fine. We all can get along. Dad flushes a bit, but the next day Brian is back as though nothing had happened. Teacher Marsha thinks about these events. She decides that as a member of the teaching team, Ali has done not one, but two courageous things. The next day before the children arrive, Marsha tells Ali she is proud of her.

21

21

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Skill Five
Think Intelligently and Ethically

Teaching teams prepare children to show DLS 5 by diligently guiding them to gain Skills 1-4. Most children show generous behaviors on occasion. Children show Skill Five when they share smart, empathetic responses on a regular basis.

These two observations document that even preschool children can show the behaviors that we wish each other would show. Thanks to reader.

1) Janelle has a double major in ECE and PE. On a very cold day, the student teacher at this child development center blows a whistle and has the preschoolers run down an empty hall to the wall and back. She does not announce "winners," but does loudly encourage Annette, 46 months and a bit overweight, to run faster. Way behind the others, Annette exclaims, "I can't GO faster!" Darnell, 58 months, is already returning from the wall. He says, "I will run with you Netty." He turns around, trots next to Netty and says, "You can do it." The two reach the wall and return side-by-side.

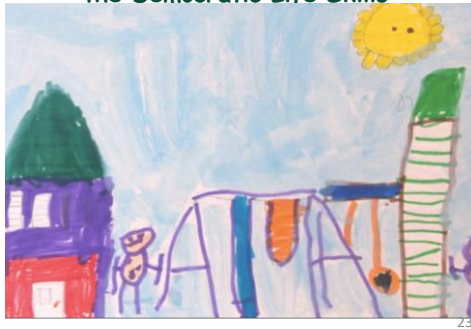
Aside from what Janelle learned from this experience—better to remove contest elements from preschool active play—Darnell was clearly showing DLS 5.

2) Sheryll came into Head Start with an unexpected blue buzz cut! (Mother away—sister in cosmetology school.) The staff was at a loss as to what to say. Sheryll went up to her friend, Ansha, and asked, "Do you like my haircut?" Ansha started to say something, but checked herself and said, "I'm still getting used to it." "Me too," said Sheryll, and the two went off to play. Ansha was showing DLS 5 too.

22

22

Topic Four. Guidance Leadership and the Democratic Life Skills



23

23

TTs Rely on Guidance to Teach Children to Gain the Democratic Life Skills

From Froebel, Montessori, Dewey, Vygotsky, Katz, Ainsworth....guidance is:

- 1) Relationship-building with all members of the community
- 2) Calming first, then teaching children to solve their problems, rather than punishing them for having problems
- 3) Liberating children from the perils of a long-term *Stress-Conflict-Punishment syndrome*
- 4) Teaching for healthy development in the emotional/social domains, interrelated with the cognitive, linguistic, and physical domains.
- 5) Teaching for the 5 DLS in order to replenish our democratic society.

Guidance leaders consider:

- 6) Children as months-old rather than years-old
- 7) Children who show challenging behaviors to be themselves challenged
- 8) A universal, intrinsic motivation for development to be sacred, needing support and guidance, not "training"
- 9) Classrooms need to be encouraging communities for all through: guidance, DAP, local social/cultural responsiveness, teaming among staff, and home-school partnerships.

24

24

Teaching Teams Use Developmental Guidance to BUILD Encouraging Early Learning Communities.

Encouraging Early Learning Communities are places where people want to be even if sick, as opposed to not wanting to be there when they are well. They include:

1. Working to create closeness as a teaching team and partnerships with parents.
2. Utilizing DAP for all—active as young children are active; and open-ended as this is a time for brain-building experience and discovery, not “preacademic achievement” in any formal sense. (Example: story pictures.)
4. Holding daily, interactive large group meetings (even with toddlers).
6. Using 8 defined communication techniques to build relationships:
 - 1) smile and nod; 2) acknowledge & pause, 3) contact talks, 4) friendly humor, 5) appropriate & friendly touch, 6) compliment sandwiches, 7) private encouragement to individuals/ public encouragement to the group, 8) Remembering names, contact talks, and promises.

We discuss 2) Acknowledge & Pause, 3) Contact Talks, and 7) Encouragement.

25

25

Acknowledge and Pause

Use acknowledge and pause (A&P) to start conversations. (Less obtrusive than saying “Tell me about...”) A handy starter stem is “You are really...” and compliment a detail in what you see:

- 1) “Using that chalk,”
- 2) “Riding that strider,”
- 3) “Looking sad,”

Then pause for the child’s reply and respond supportively, verbally and non-verbally.

26

26

Not Just Task Talks, Have Contact Talks

Contact talks are quality times that a TT member chooses to spend with children. Their purpose is to get to know the child better and vice-versa. (To build secure relationships.)

- Contact talks often flow from Acknowledge & Pause.
- (1) Chalk drawing: “Dis is a bizzard and my Mom’s plowing, but you can’t see her.”
 - (2) Riding Strider: “Yeah, I ride with my sister. She rides fast”
 - (3) Dog tragedy: “My dog bumpers got hit by a Car. He died.”

You then supportively extend the conversation. Contact talks are not task-oriented. They are often brief, but—at a minimum— they need to happen with every child, every day. All TT members can start and have contact talks. (Keep a list?)

27

27

Giving Encouragement: Private with Individuals; Public with groups

Not praise, "good job," but *encouragement*: "You are really putting those blocks away." *Private encouragement* tells one or a few children you care enough to pay attention and are not resorting to the standard, old mental shortcuts.

Public encouragement addresses the entire group and does not single out individuals. Not: "Macie and Geraldo are cleaning up well;" but "You are all really cleaning up today!"

Public encouragement avoids the appearance of favoritism, embarrassment, and negative group dynamics. P.E. builds group spirit in all.

If Macie and Geraldo are cleaning up well, give them encouragement privately. If Chris and Zack are hiding and grinning, use intervention guidance with them also privately, perhaps while hiding a grin yourself.

28

28

Teaching Teams Use Intervention Guidance to SUSTAIN Encouraging Early Learning Communities

I suggest using a general strategy for social problem solving, the *five-finger formula*: 1) Calm all down, yourself too; 2) Guide children to define the problem as each child sees it; 3) Facilitate (if needed coach) children to come up with possible solutions; 4) Decide on a solution and try it; 5) Follow up with *guidance talks*.

During conflicts, TTs use the FFF with "the big 4" intervention strategies: **guidance talks, group meetings, comprehensive guidance** and **mediation**. Use the FFF less formally with the first three; more formally in **mediation**.

•**Guidance Talks.** Talk with—not at—the child about: how they saw the conflict, how others felt because of the conflict, what the child can do to resolve the problem (Not "Say your sorry"), and what the child can do differently next time.

•**Mediation.** Follow the five steps. Make sure to calm all fist, including yourself. Depending on the kids, use high level coaching, low level facilitation, or monitoring. Ensure each child feels involved. Actively support the more fragile child; remain non-judgmental with the more powerful child. Captain the team of you and the children working together. If no time then, calm all and set the scene for later. Follow-up.

29

29

Group Meetings

Group Meetings. Group meetings with primary and pre-school children are used in both developmental and intervention guidance. The TT provides leadership by using enough words, but only as many words as necessary, for the kids to take turns using their words and their listening ears in order to address the situation.

In *developmental guidance*, the group together sets guidelines both for the classroom—like "Please use friendly words"—and for the conduct of the meetings themselves—"We listen when someone else is talking." Developmental group meetings are distinct from traditional circle times and involve TTs and children talking and listening about previous and future events, people about to join the group, etc.

In *intervention guidance*, TTs use group meetings to resolve conflicts that have gone public, that many have experienced or witnessed. Mutual respect is built into these meetings, reinforced by guidelines like, "Anyone can talk." "We are careful about using names." A guiding principle is the meetings are to solve problems cooperatively.

Group meetings give young children direct experience in participating in democracy and build lasting communication and inter-personal skills like no other activity can.

30

30

**Group Meetings:
Essential for the DLS**

Group meetings teach children that the setting is an inclusive community and that they are worthy, contributing members—vital rehearsal for membership in society’s many groups to come. The meetings map the way forward and resolve problems of speedbumps, potholes, road construction, and dead ends. Group meetings help with each of the 5 DLS. In every classroom, every day. Thanks to the reader.

In their regular morning meeting preschool teachers Cloe and Dyson introduce a four-sided climber they put up in the active play area. They discuss with the children when it will be open, how many can be on it, and what being safe on the climber means. On the second day, one child has fingers stepped on while climbing the ladder. Another child gets jostled on the top platform. A third child going down the slide bumps into a fourth child climbing up the slide.

On this afternoon the teaching team calls an unscheduled group meeting. Cloe explains there have been some problems on the climber. She asks children to share. Without naming names, the four do. Loosely following the five-finger formula for conflict resolution, the TT asks the children how we can make sure the climber is safe for all. The children come up with ideas and Dyson interprets and records them on a big chart: “Watch out when kids are climbing up.” “No standing and give kids room for kids on top.” “We go down the slide except for Fridays.” Cloe and Dyson especially liked the last idea. It gave the group a chance for upper body exercise and was a functional calendar experience.

The group reviewed the guidelines at the next morning’s meeting and Cloe posted them by the climber. The guidelines worked. Dyson later commented that when he was in school, the teachers would have just taken the climber down—a traditional “group punishment” that would have undermined group spirit and the children’s faith (trust) in the teacher.

31

31

Comprehensive Guidance

- TTs use **comprehensive guidance** when children have frequent conflicts, showing strong unmet needs mistaken behavior. These kids are having difficulty gaining DLS 1 and/or DLS 2.
- The TT relies on the relationships they have been building since Day One with each other, the child, and the family, in order to work together to assist the child.
- One member of the TT takes the lead and organizes meetings of staff and with families to discuss the situation in ways supportive of the child.
- Informally or formally, the team develops an **Individual Guidance Plan**® charting a coordinated strategy that uses an intentional mix of developmental and intervention guidance strategies. To the best of their ability, the team implements the IGP. The TT lead provides coordination. The team reviews the plan and makes needed adjustments.
- *Removal of the child from the program happens as a last resort and only after: a) the IGP has been fully implemented; and b) the program has assisted the family to find another program having more resources to aid the child and the family.
- *Go to dangartrell.net; under “Presentation Handouts” scroll to **Individual Guidance Plan** for free download.

32

32

Topic Five. Bonus Question and Postscript



33

Bonus Question:

What is Liberation Teaching?

To leaders guiding for the DLS, liberation teaching means:

- Creating a secure relationship with every child, especially with those difficult to like or understand.
- Continuous mediation between the psychological child and the logical curriculum. The child is more important than the curriculum.
- In the face of conflicts, calming and teaching rather than punishing.
- Liberating stressed children from the peril of a long-term Stress-Conflict-Punishment syndrome.
- Supporting and nudging each child to gain DLS 1 & 2 and make progress in gaining 3, 4, and 5. Offering the gift of *resilience—the power of the child to make this transition.*
- Empowering each child's intrinsic motivation system for learning and growing via an encouraging early learning community.
- Never giving up on an any child.

34

34

Postscript:

Take Care of You!

Early childhood professionals need adequate financial and personal resources.

- Most EC professionals subsidize the cost of their programs by taking low salaries. They are subject to the social stressors of marginal livable wages.
- Early childhood programs need and deserve more government funding, along with agencies that support and ensure high quality programming.
- To be at their best, EC professionals need support systems both on the job and in their personal lives.
- Have good friends. Do enjoyable things with family. Take time to join fun groups, have hobbies.
- To reach out for personal support is a sign of strength—Professionals helpers can be good for you.
- Not technicians but professionals, EC professionals learn even as they teach.

35

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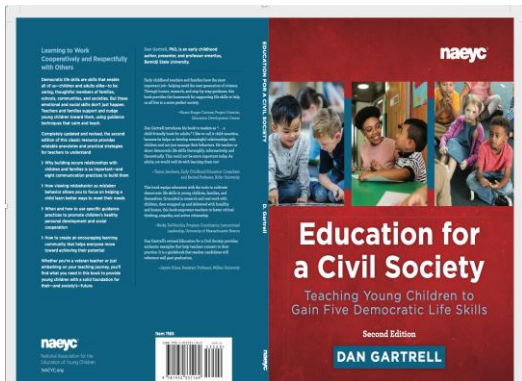


Like some other "neandrelthal septageraniums," I do not do commercial social media.

But, you can locate more information on these topics in my books, downloads of articles, session handouts, and power points at my website: dangartrell.net.

36

36



37

37
