

THE THERAPEUTIC DIMENSION OF EDUCATIONAL THERAPY

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THE PROBLEM

- To understand the emotional impact of learning challenges on students' capacity to learn
- To understand the elements of the relationship that are critical to the establishment of a learning alliance
- To supplement remediation efforts with change agents that address the emotional barriers to learning

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THE STUDENT AS A COMPLEX ADAPTIVE SYSTEM

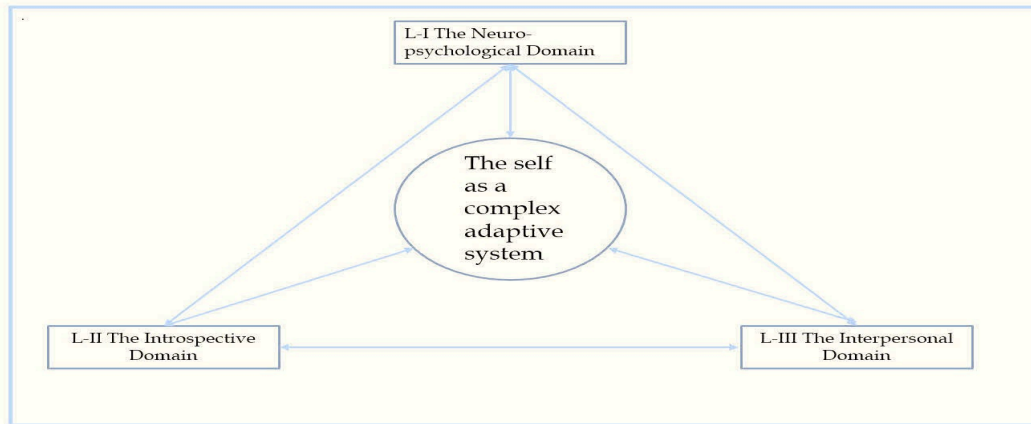


Figure 1. The Self as a Complex Adaptive System and the interaction among the three domains of experience, the Neuropsychological, the Introspective, and the Interpersonal.

MAJOR ASSUMPTIONS

- **A complexity view of the factors that affect students' learning**
 - L-I neuropsychological
 - L-II introspective (subjective)
 - L-III interpersonal

L-I: NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL SELF-DEFICITS

- **The variability of students' cognitive strengths and weaknesses in endowment**
- **Challenges with which they present:**
 - Cognitive: *sensory, motor, perceptual, memory, attention, executive functions, expressive/receptive language*
- **As educational therapists, you are experts in identifying these problem areas**

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L-II INTROSPECTIVE (SUBJECTIVE)

- **How students experience the challenges they face:**
 - *The stability or instability of the sense of self, self-esteem*
 - *Their responses to their challenges:*
 - Shame/humiliation
 - Trauma
 - Fight/flight responses
 - Defenses of disavowal or dissociation:
 - Attractors: habitual patterns of responding to stresses

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L-III: INTERPERSONAL

- **The effects of their learning challenges on students' capacity for reciprocal social interaction**
 - **On their sociability:** social connectedness, capacity to interpret social cues, social maturity, use of pragmatic language
 - **On their social functioning:** peer relationships, capacity for imaginative/symbolic play, adaptability to stressful situations, humor
 - **On their emotional functioning:** capacity for emotional communication, emotional sensitivity, capacity to deal with sensory overload
 - **On their feelings states:** tolerance for anxiety, management of anger, sadness, capacity for affect regulation

UNSUCCESSFUL ACCOMMODATIONS TO THEIR CONTEXT (PSYCHOPATHOLOGY)

- **One way to characterize students struggles is that**
 - *They are unsuccessful in accommodating to the environment they inhabit*
 - *There is a mismatch between their resources and the demands made by the tasks they are assigned*
- **They search for others to complement their areas of weakness**
 - When others supplements what they are missing, their functioning improves; when the demands exceed their capacities their functioning deteriorates.
 - A circular pattern: as others respond to them, they in turn respond, which leads others to respond.

THE LEARNING ALLIANCE: I

- **Dealing with the subjective component requires the establishment of a learning alliance.**

- **What the students bring:**

- *Their ability to change: are they open or closed to benefiting from interventions*
- *Their capacity to use the relationship as a change agent*
- *Their capacity to dialogue*
- *Their ability to utilize assistance to enhance their cognitive competencies and emotional functioning*
- *Their proactive engagement in dealing with their challenges*

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THE LEARNING ALLIANCE: II

- **What the educational therapists bring:**

- *Their capacity to maintain a dialogue*
- *Their understanding of the students' differences from others*
- *Their non-judgmental attitude to the students' nonconforming behaviors*
- *Their ability to explain to students the nature of their learning challenges*
- *Their ability to identify the triggers to the students' sense of shame about their learning challenges*

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THREE TYPES OF MOMENTS

The course taken by the learning process is nonlinear, its course cannot be predetermined. It is constituted of moments that occur episodically.

1. Concordant moments

Moments during which the focus is on enhancing and maintaining the learning alliance

2. Complementary moments

Moments during which the focus is on enhancing the students' understanding of their learning challenges

Moments during which the focus is on developing ways to cope with those challenges

3. Disjunctive moments

Moments during which the learning alliance is disrupted and in need of repair

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CONCORDANT MOMENTS

- **The creation of the learning alliance**

- **What the student bring to the process:**

- The student's "curative fantasy": the hope that relief from past patterns of failures is available

- **What the educational therapist brings to the process:**

- The "diatrophic attitude": a caring, nurturing, protective attitude
- Empathy for the pain that students have suffered because of their challenges

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COMPLEMENTARY MOMENTS

- **Educational therapists address past patterns of relating by**
 - Assisting student in dealing with past experiences of shame, humiliation, and fears of failure
 - Supporting them in working on the traumas that resulted from chronic criticism and bullying
- **Educational therapists provide psychological functions by:**
 - Enhancing the students' self-esteem through the affirmation of positive accomplishments
 - Providing a protective environment in which students can feel safe
 - Assuring that their differences do not lead to their exclusion from their community of peers
- **Educational therapists enhance the sense of agency by:**
 - Enhancing students' capacity for self-advocacy
 - Enhancing their capacity for proactive engagement in problem solving

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DISJUNCTIVE MOMENTS: THE RUPTURE & REPAIR SEQUENCE

- **In any relationship ruptures will occur**
 - Shame and its defenses
 - Fears of retraumatization
- **Repairs as essential to the process**
 - Restoring the learning alliance
 - Enhancing self-understanding:
 - Co-construction of a new narrative

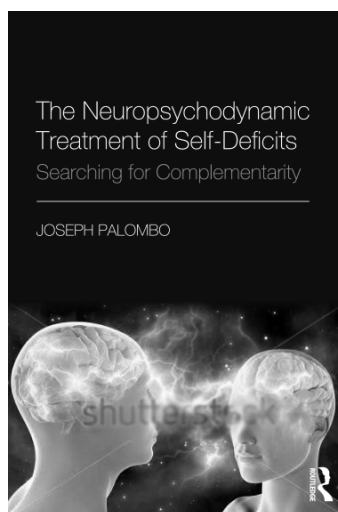
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OUTCOME:

- Greater openness to learning
- Strengthened sense of agency and capacity for self-initiative
- Greater ability to assert themselves as individuals that are distinguishable from others: taking pride in their differences.

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AVAILABLE JANUARY 17



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