Building Play Partnerships:

Embracing the Greenspan Floortime Model

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Introduction

I developed this handout as an aid to parents and prospective Play Partners - who clearly needed an overview of the Greenspan model as they tackled the 438 pages plus appendices of The Child with Special Needs as well as its supporting body of literature and training materials. There is no substitute for the book itself - it is the authoritative reference in the authors' own words. Appendix A, photocopied with the permission of the authors, has been attached as a quick guide to Floor time techniques. However, the book does not contain a comparable handy conceptual reference to the developmental model that underlies "Floor time". Once again, these notes, with liberal excerpts, both quoted and paraphrased, are not a substitute for the primary texts, and the reader is encouraged to avail themselves of the originals, to attend workshops, and to view videotapes.

Most of the following references are from [The Child with Special Needs](); however, a few references are from other sources and are specified as such. Outside references are used to clarify concepts in The Child with Special Needs. The Child with Special Needs is divided into three parts: Part One: Discovering Each Child's Unique Strengths, Developmental Capacities, and Challenges; Part Two: Encouraging Emotional and Intellectual Growth; and Part Three: Family, Therapy, and School.

Part One: Discovering Each Child's Unique Strengths, Developmental Capacities, and Challenges

"During the past 20 years, [the authors] have created a developmental approach that engages a child at his current level of functioning, works with the unique features of his nervous system, and utilizes intensive interactive experiences to enable her to master new capacities." (p.1)

The Six Emotional Milestones

Greenspan describes six emotional milestones or stages of development that form a developmental ladder. "Children achieve these milestones at different ages - there is wide variation even among children without challenges. What is important is not so much the age at which a child master each skill, but that each one is mastered, for each skill forms a foundation for the next" (p.89).

"Once a child has mastered all six milestones, he has critical basic tools for communication, thinking, and emotional coping. He has a positive sense of self. He is capable of warm and loving relationships. He is able to relate logically to the outside world. He can express in words a wide range of emotions (including love, happiness, anger, frustration, fear, anxiety, jealousy, and others) and is able to recover from strong emotions without losing control. He can use his imagination to create new ideas. He is flexible in his dealings with people and situations, able to tolerate changes and even some disappointments and bounce back. Obviously not all children do all these things equally well, but a child who has mastered the milestones will have important foundations for loving and learning" (pp.89-90).

Milestone 1: Self-regulation and Interest in the World

"The dual ability to take an interest in the sights, sounds, and sensations of the world and to calm oneself down" (p.3)

"The dual ability… to take in [the] sensory panorama…of light and sound, movement and touch, taste and smell…while regulating his response and remaining calm. All of this information is exciting and stimulating, but at the same time he has to learn not to be overwhelmed. This ability to self-regulate enables us to take in and respond to the world around us" (pp.3,72).

Some children fail to master this skill because sensory stimulation is overwhelming so they either become irritable or shutdown. Other children [seem] "to take little interest in the world…his muscles are a little on the loose side or his attention wanders" (Essential Partnership, p.8).

Milestone 2: Intimacy

"The ability to engage in relationships with other people" (p.3)

"Along with interest in the world comes a special love for the world of human relationships ... [Mastery of this milestone indicates that the child knows] warmth and love are possible [and] that relationships with people can be joyful ... This ability to be intimate allows us to form warm and trusting relationships with people that grow throughout our lives" (pp.3, 74).

"[Some children fail to master this skill because] processing difficulties have made ... contact ... confusing, scary, or painful" (p.75). Children who have difficulty sometimes are more mutually engaged with adults who adjust their communication according to the cues the child gives. Peer relationships are often more difficult because other children are less successful in reading affect cues and adjusting their social register.

Milestone 3: Two-way Communication

"The ability to engage in two-way communication" (p.3)

As a child enjoys intimacy in a safe and calm manner, an "interesting thing happens. He realizes he can have an impact on [others]... The [child] expresses a feeling or intention, and his [partner] responds. This is the beginning of communication; the [child] and his [partners] are having a dialogue. [In these early efforts], we learn to communicate with our gestures and understand the intentions and communications of others" (pp. 3, 76)

Greenspan calls these dialogues "opening and closing circles of communication". "When a child reaches out -- with a look, for example -- he opens the circle. When his partner responds -- by looking back -- he builds on the child's action. When the child in turn responds to the parent - by smiling, vocalizing, reaching, or even turning away - he is closing the circle" (p.76-77).

Children who do not master these skills may seem hard to engage. They may seem to be oblivious to others or they may stand by as an onlooker as if they would like to be involved. They need help facilitating interaction and taking initiative. Once again, difficulty with sensory processing may result in difficulty

reading the cues of others or misinterpreting them making two-way communication difficult.

Milestone 4: Complex Communication

"the ability to create complex gestures, to string together a series of actions into an elaborate and deliberate problem-solving sequence"(p.3).

"Once a child has mastered the basics of two-way communication, the number or circles she can open and close grows rapidly. And with their number, so grows their complexity…For the first time the child has a vocabulary for expressing her wishes" (p.78).

Once a child has mastered the basic skills of remaining calm and organized, enjoying intimacy, and two-way communication, it would seem this milestone would be a natural. But to learn "to convey [one's] wishes and intentions, [one] must first organize behavior into logical sequences and [also] must learn to read the sequenced behavior of others" (p.79). However, for children with sensory processing difficulty, motor-planning and logical thought, as well as reading the behavior of others, may not come naturally. Auditory processing difficulties may make it hard to interpret sounds and words may be lost on the child. As the complexity of two-way communication increases, it may become overwhelming and a confusing intrusion. The child may feel defensive and be irritable or retreat (p.80).

Milestone 5: Emotional Ideas

"the ability to create ideas" (p.4).

"The child's ability to form ideas develops first in play. The child uses toys to weave stories, and through these stories he experiments with the range of intentions and wishes that he feels. Baby dolls are fed by Mommy dolls. People inside a house are threatened by giant bears. Cars crash into other cars.

"Along with this idea-laden play comes expanded use of words…He adds dialogues to his play. Later, with help from his parents, he puts names to his range of intentions, wishes, and feelings…["I want juice!"].

"Through idea-laden play and expanding use of words the child is learning that symbols stand for things…Each symbol is an idea, an abstraction of the concrete thing, activity, or emotion with which the child is concerned. As he experiments more and more with pretend play and words, he becomes increasingly fluent in the world of ideas…With this new ability to manipulate a world of symbols, he has made the leap to a much higher level of communication and awareness" (pp.82-83)

A child who is still fragile in mastery of previous milestones, may fail to achieve this milestone without help. He may need more time to respond before adults supply the answer. He may need more room to initiate play with peers. Engagement, interest, and state of arousal/organization may need to be ideal in order for the child to begin directing the play and offering ideas. They adult may need to optimize the environment so exchanges remain warm, intimate, and pleasurable for the child. Ironically, it is through opening up to the world of emotional ideas, that skills at intimacy and communication are strengthened.

Milestone 6: Emotional Thinking

"The ability to build bridges between ideas to make them reality-based and logical" (p.4).

"In the previous stage, the child's expressions of emotion are like little unconnected islands. Play moves from a happy, nurturing tea party to an angry crashing of cars to a monster threatening to tear down a house all within a few minutes, as the child uses whatever caught her eye to play out emotional themes. In this sixth stage, the child builds bridges between those islands. Ideas are linked together into logical sequences and play, and imagination is also more logically connected. Whereas in stage 5 a child might dress up a doll, then, seeing a crayon, scribble, then, seeing a drum, pretend to be a drummer, a child

at the stage of emotional thinking connects the pieces together. For example, she might have the drummer play for the dressed-up little girl and use the crayon to make invitations for the performance; or, the doll might have a tea party, call friends to invite them, prepare refreshments, set the table, and determine the seating pattern.

"At this stage the child is able to express a wide range of emotions in her play, and through experimentation she begins to recognize more and more what makes "me." She can even predict some of her feelings, and she begins to see that her feelings and behavior have an impact on others. She strings ideas into logical, original thoughts: ' am mad because you took my toy."

"She also begins to understand emerging concepts of space and time in a personal, emotional way ... The ability to conceptualize space and time and to link actions and feelings enables the child to develop a sense of self that has logical bridges between different perceptions, ideas, and emotions. She is also able to connect ideas in terms of spatial and verbal problem solving; instead of seeing separate block towers as isolated structures, she can link them together to make a big house. She can answer what, when, and why questions, enjoy debates, logically articulate an opinion, and begin the long journey to higher and higher levels of abstract thinking. Both verbal and spatial problem-solving abilities rest on emotional problem-solving skills. As with the earlier stages, emotional interactions create the thinking strategies that are then applied to the more impersonal world.

"During this stage the child becomes more fully verbal. She still resorts to gestures to express her feelings -- especially negative feelings such as anger and aggression - but she is now comfortable in the realm of words and understands that ideas and feelings can be communicated verbally.

At first we see children master islands of emotional thinking. Over time these islands coalesce into continents and the child's view becomes more cohesive, integrating more experiences into a sense of self and problem-solving ability. Higher levels of thinking build on this foundation" (pp.86-87).

"Three aspects of the child's world come together to influence how well he masters these functional emotional milestones. The first is the child's biology, the neurological potential or challenges that enhance or impede his functioning. The second is the child's own interaction patterns with his parents, teachers, grandparents, and others. The third is the patterns of the family, the culture, and the larger environment" (p.4).

In Greenspan's model, the therapy program strengthens all three areas.

Biological Challenges

"Children with special needs have a variety of biological challenges that impede their ability to function in the world. Although there are many ways to describe these biological challenges, for the purpose of considering how they influence development it is useful to divide them into three types.

1. **Difficulty with sensory reactivity.** The child may have difficulty with modulating information received from the world through his senses of vision, hearing, touch, smell, taste, and body awareness (i.e., the child may be under- or overreactive).
2. **Processing difficulty.** The child may have difficulty making sense of the sensory data she receives.
3. **Difficulty creating and sequencing or planning responses.** The child may have trouble making his body move the way he wants.

Each type of challenge makes it difficult for the child to relate to and communicate with his parents, caregivers, teachers, and peers and thus impedes his ability to learn, to respond, and to grow. Therefore, to help a child progress, we must understand how he functions in each of these areas. Once we have pinpointed his specific challenges, we can begin to design treatment programs to ameliorate them. Even more important, we can help parents, teachers, and professionals learn how to work around these challenges to help the child learn, relate, and grow" (pp.4-5).

Sensory Reactivity

"We rarely stop to think about how vitally important the five senses are in terms of giving us information about the world. Without the ability to see, hear, touch, smell, and taste we would live in total isolation, unable not only to sense, but also to think, for we would lack any experience with which to develop ideas. In addition to these five common senses, there are the body senses: the vestibular system, which is sensitive to gravity and movement and influences muscle tone, balance, and arousal; and the proprioceptive system, which provides awareness of movement and the position of the body in space and influences motor control and body schema. These systems govern our ability to feel sure of our own body in space, to sense where "I" stops and the world begins. These systems enable us to feel balanced and safe as we move, sit, and stand, to let other people get close, and to protect ourselves if we feel endangered. In addition, our affects or emotions also function as a way to sense what is going on around us ...

"Within each of these senses, people can be under- or overreactive depending on their sensory threshold (the point at which the combined sensory input activates the central nervous system and we see a response). People who are underreactive don't respond to small or even moderate amounts of stimulation in the area of their sensitivity; people who are overreactive find small or moderate amounts of stimulation overloading or irritating…Children will often compensate for their under- or overreactivity. A child who is overreactive to certain stimuli may try to avoid those sensations, whereas a child who is underreactive may seek them out" (pp.35-36).

Children whose senses function fully read and interpret billions of tiny sensory cues as they master the skills of human interaction. But children with sensory impairments may miss or misperceive these critical bits of information as they learn to interact with the world. Learning to pay attention, learning to engage with others, and learning to communicate may all be affected" (p.37).

Sensory Processing

"Our senses enable us to 'take in' information from the world, but it is our processing system that enables us to make sense of what we receive ... [Examples include]:

- ... bits of light are translated into colors, pictures, faces, and other understandable images;
- ... sounds waves are translated into words, music, sirens, and other meaningful sounds;
- ... stimulation of the nerve endings in our skin is translated into gentle caresses, bear hugs, and other meaningful types of contact;
- ... the compression of our joints, the feel of the floor beneath our feet, and the sensation of air against our skin translate into an awareness of where our body is in space ...

"*Sensory processing* is the earliest form of processing that takes place in the brain…A second kind of processing [is] cognitive processing -- the ability to see patterns and create connections between things ... As children grow, their cognitive-processing skills become much more elaborate. Ideas form, and by the age of four or five most children are able to manipulate abstract ideas, that is, they are able to think about things that are not right in front of them. They can remember the past and imagine the future; they can link two or more abstract ideas together; they can use language to put their ideas into words" (p.37-38). Some common processing problems include: auditory and visual processing problems. Greenspan describes "a child with a severe auditory-processing problem, [as hearing but not understanding] most of what is said to him…experience[ing the world as] a hostile place, filled with sounds that make demands on him but to which he can't respond. He may come to feel shut out from the world of people, or, worse, people may seem frightening, always yelling because he is so often angering and disappointing them. Gradually he may draw more and more into himself and into the world of silent, inanimate objects. Here at least he can feel safe and secure" (p.42).

Likewise, a child with **"visual processing problems"** experiences difficulty but "may exhibit a very different type of behavior. Because visual information helps us form mental images of things it is an important component of a child's ability to

organize behavior and see the big picture. Without this ability a child may be easily distracted or get lost in details. Her capacity for problem solving and abstract thinking may be affected. The ability to visualize may also help children calm themselves…As a result, this child may be excessively demanding, and later in life may become depressed when confronting strong feelings and conflict because she loses the inner image associated with being loved and can't easily reconstruct it" (p.42).

"It is also possible to have trouble processing at more cognitive levels. Children with **cognitive-processing impairments** may have difficulty in the realm of ideas. They may have trouble forming abstract ideas (visualizing things that are not right in front of them) or making connections between ideas (understanding when two or more abstract ideas are related). They may have difficulty learning language because language requires abstract thinking, using words to stand for things" (p.42).

"... A third, equally important, type of processing [is] **affective, or emotional, processing** ... [This} refers to our ability to interpret the emotional signals we receive from others -- the ability to know, when we see a smile, that a person is friendly or to determine, when we hear a loud cry, whether it is a cry of warning or of distress…(p.37-38). ... The child who has affective-processing difficulties faces challenges reading other people's emotional signals. He might cower in the classroom when the teacher talks loudly, believing that the teacher is angry and about to punish him. Or he might misread another child's helpful offer to push the swing as a hostile gesture…From hugs to back pats, smiles to frowns, laughs to cries, the child may feel besieged by sensations that he doesn't understand. And when he responds [it's] often in unexpected ways ... Trapped in this escalating dialogue, the child can easily feel out of control and may react with tantrums, inappropriate body movements, or flight" (p.43).

"... One reason children with disabilities have trouble with cognitive and emotional processing is that both types of processing rely on sensory input, and in children with disabilities the sensory input may be especially confusing. On the

way in, the sensory signal may go unheeded, may be overwhelming, or may be without form or a recognizable pattern" (pp.37-38).

"Children who have difficulty processing sensory information can't manage the sensory teamwork that is required for higher-level cognition. They may misread signals, mistaking a smile for a grimace or a gentle pat for an aggressive swat. Or they may have difficulty combining the many signals they take in into a useful pattern ... Children with sensory-processing difficulties are unable to integrate incoming emotional data and interpret it from multiple points of view. Emotional processing can be greatly skewed by over- or underreactivity…Sensory reactivity or processing difficulties can cause a child to misinterpret emotional information from those around him, resulting in inappropriate -- sometimes extreme -- emotional reactions" (p.39-41).

The Motor System

"The sensory system enable us to take in information from the world; the processing aspect of that system enables us to interpret that information. The motor system is what enables us to respond" (p.40)

Our ability to formulate a motor response depends on a number of factors including: **muscle tone**, **motor planning** and **sequencing**.

"*Muscle tone* refers to the ability of our muscles to support our bodies without effort. Children with low tone, whose muscles are very loose, have to put great effort into holding their heads up and walking [or talking or eating]" (p.40).

"*Motor planning* refers to the ability of a person to plan and execute a series of movements ... A person will be able to figure out what action is needed and execute it ... Problems with motor planning can make even the simplest tasks difficult. Acknowledging Daddy when he leans over the crib means turning to face him, making eye contact, and responding with gestures or a smile -- sequencing numerous motions together ... Any activity that requires sequencing actions or behaviors presents similar challenges. Hence eating, exploring toys, playing games, and interacting socially are made more difficult for children with motor-

planning or sequencing challenges. Later in life, complex social sequences -- greeting new people, engaging in give-and-take behaviors such as two-way conversations, sports -- require skills in motor planning and sequencing. Even our ability to sequence ideas into a logical flow may be related in part to this ability" (p.40-41).

The Child's Interaction Pattern

"A child's biological challenges influence his interactions with others. A child who is underreactive to sound is unlikely to turn toward his mother's wooing voice. A child who is overreactive to touch may shrink, even shriek, when her father tries to hug her [or guide her]. If a child continually withdraws from the mother…the mother may feel confused and believe he prefers to be left alone ... The mother may decrease the degree to which she tries to woo the child into loving interaction ... It's easy to understand how these reactions can influence a child's development" (p.5).

Family and Social Patterns

"All parents [teachers, siblings, friends] bring certain tendencies with them to [interaction] ... Some of us are naturally demonstrative and "touchy"; others are more reserved. Some of us are born talkers; others are naturally quiet ... These tendencies…can make it easier or harder for our children to master the emotional milestones" (p.5).

Part Two: Encouraging Emotional and Intellectual Growth

"As we have worked with many different types of children, from the time they were babies until they were eight, nine, or ten years old, we have evolved a developmental model for working with children ...
"This approach focuses on helping each child climb the developmental ladder; specifically, it works to help each child master the six fundamental developmental

skills that underlie all our intelligence and interactions with the world. The achievement of each of these skills represents a new level, or milestone, of development" (p2-3).

"Children without special needs often master these skills relatively easily. Children with challenges often don't, not necessarily because they can't, but because their biological challenges make mastery more difficult" (p.3).

Typical Development

From First Feelings: Milestones in the Emotional Development of Your Baby and Child):

Requirements [to achieve milestones]:

0-3 Months
    Protection, comfort, and interesting sights and sounds to *feel regulated and interested in the world;*

3-7 Months
    Wooing and loving overtures to *fall in love;*

4-10 Months
    Sensitive, empathetic reading of cues to foster *purposeful communication;*

9-18 Months
    Admiring, organized, intentional interactions to foster *a complex sense of self;*

18-30 Months
    Pretend play and functional use of language to foster *emotional ideas;*

30-48 Months
    Effective limits and use of logic in pretend play and language to foster *emotional thinking.*

Children's Emotional Goals

From *The Essential Partnership* (p.4):

"Four-year-old children should be capable of:

1. Forming healthy, warm, and trusting relationships with others - peers as well as adults.
2. Experiencing self-esteem, feeling good about themselves and what they do.
3. Using good impulse and behavioral control.
4. Exhibiting a rich, emotional imagination and using words to express needs and feelings.
5. Separating make-believe from reality and beginning to adjust to reality's demands.

6. Beginning to deal with loss and beginning to show empathy and concern for others.
7. Concentrating, focusing, and planning as a basis for learning in both informal and formal educational settings."

The Floortime Approach

What is Floor Time?

"Floor time is a special play time that you set aside for the child. During this period, play is a spontaneous, unstructured activity when you get down on the floor with the child and try to follow his/her lead. Your initial goal is to tune in to whatever motivates or is of interest to the child ... This time allows you to reaffirm a rhythm and sense of connectedness and enables you to elaborate growing empathy and shared meanings" (Essential Partnership, p.19).

"Floor time [is] a systematic way of working with a child to help him climb the developmental ladder ... By working intensively with parents and therapists, the child can climb the ladder of milestones, one rung at a time, to begin to acquire the skills he is missing ... [During floor time, children at first learn] the pleasure of engaging with others and the satisfaction of taking initiative, making wishes and needs known, and getting responses. [Floor time then creates opportunities for children] to have long dialogues, first without words and later with them, and eventually to imagine and think" (p.121).

"Floor time is like ordinary interaction and play in that it is spontaneous and fun. It is unlike ordinary play in that you have a developmental role. That role is to be your child's very active play partner. Your job is to *follow your child's lead and play at whatever captures her interest*, but to do it in a way that *encourages your child to interact with you* ... Your role is to be a constructive helper and, when necessary, provocateur by doing whatever it takes to turn her activity into a two-person interaction" (p.123-124).

"Floor time can be implemented, both as a procedure and as a philosophy, at home, in school, and as a part of a child's different therapies" (p.121).

The Nuts and Bolts of Floortime

"First we describe floor times as an intensive, one-on-one experience; then we discuss the overall therapeutic team and educational approach" (p.121-122).

"Floor time is ... a 20-30 minute period when you get down on the floor with your child and interact and play ... By interacting with your child in ways that capitalize on his emotions -- by following his interest and motivations -- you can help him climb the developmental ladder. You can help him want to learn how to attend to you; you can help him want to learn how to engage in a dialogue; you can inspire him to take initiative, to learn about causality and logic, to act to solve problems ... and move into the world of ideas ... In helping him link his emotions to his behavior and his words in a purposeful way, instead of learning by rote, you enable your child to relate to you and the world more meaningfully, spontaneously, flexibly, and warmly. He gains a firmer foundation for advanced cognitive skills" (p.122-123).

"Children with special needs require a tremendous amount of practice in linking their intent or emotions to their behavior and then to their words ... Floor time is your child's practice time. Each time you get down on the floor and interact -- spontaneously, joyfully, following your child's interests and motivations -- you help him build that link between emotion and behavior, and eventually words, and in doing so move forward on his journey up the developmental ladder" (p.123).

"Following a child's lead means building on the child's natural inclinations and interests. **It does not necessarily mean going along with what a child wants to do** [my emphasis]. Many parents and professionals frequently follow a child's lead passively, without generating a lot of opening and closing of circles. Active following of a child's lead means building on what the child does in a way that literally compels the child to want to open and close more circles of communication ... Initially this won't be easy ... You may have to be playfully obstructive -- literally get in your child's way -- to create an interaction ... Once that happens you can work on extending your interactions, prodding him through

play to close multiple circles of communication. As his joy in engaging, emotional expressions, and gestural communication grows, you can introduce the world of ideas. By putting a puppet on your hand or a doll in the car he is rolling, you can woo your child into complex imitation and pretend play; by being a character in his dramas, you can continue to foster interaction while introducing words. As his dramas become more complex and him language ability grows, you can help him begin to verbalize his feelings rather than act them out. You can encourage him to close verbal circles, just as he closed gestural ones. In this way, you may gradually entice him into the world of ideas and logical thinking" (p.124).

How Often?

"Children with special needs often need many sessions of floor time a day. Many family members, as well as friends, other caregivers, or students, can be a part of your floor-time team ... For many children, especially for those with sever challenges, in addition to a floor-time philosophy during all waking hours, six to ten 20-30 minute floor-time sessions a day is optimal. One to two sessions a day is often not enough" (p.129).

Four Goals (p. 125-126)

Goal 1:
>**Encouraging attention and intimacy.** Beginning with the ability to feel calm, focused, and intimate ... Maintaining mutual attention and engagement. Your goal is to help your child tune in to you and enjoy your presence. (This goal contributes to milestones 1 and 2.)

Goal 2:
>**Two-way communication.** Next you will help your child learn to open and close circles of communication, at first with subtle facial expressions and a gleam in the eye, a dialogue without words ... Your task is to encourage a dialogue, to help your child use his affects or emotions, hands, face, and body to communicate wishes, needs, and intentions. Over time, you try to help your child open and close many circles of communication in a complex, problem-solving dialogue. (This achievement correlates with milestones 3 and 4).

Goal 3:
>**Encouraging the expression and use of feelings and ideas** ... Your goal is to encourage dramas and make-believe, through which your child can express her needs, wishes, and feelings, and gradually to help her express these in words. (This goal corresponds with milestone 5.)

Goal 4:

Logical thought. Finally, you can help your child link his ideas and feelings to come to a logical understanding of the world. Your goal is to encourage him to connect his thoughts in logical ways. (This ability corresponds to milestone 6.)"

Chapters 9, 10, 11, and 12 are entitled:

Floor Time I: Attention, Engagement, and Intimacy. Helping a Child Become Interested in the World and Connect with People

Floor Time II: Two-Way Communication. Helping a Child Communicate with Gestures and Expressions

Floor Time III: Feelings and Ideas. Helping a Child Develop and Express Feelings and Ideas

Floor Time IV: Logical Thinking. Helping a Child Connect Ideas and Develop a Logical Understanding of the World

These chapters "show the developmental approach in action ... describ[ing] how floor time is used to create experiences for the child at each level of development that optimize his strengths and work around and improve his areas of challenge" (p.14). The "vivid case histories" that are included are inspiring.

Part Three: Family, Therapy, and School

"In Part 3 we describe how the individual-difference model can be used to organize the efforts of the child's intervention team, as well as of the child's school, and we discuss challenges to the family that commonly surface when a child has special needs" (p.14-15).

Chapter 19: School and Other Children

"Today there are more opportunities for inclusion of children with special needs in general-education classes ... An appropriate educational program will have the following features.

- A developmental and individual-difference approach or philosophy that encourages a developmental progression in each child, beginning with mutual attention, engagement, and interactive reciprocity ...
- An approach that incorporates the general principles of floor time ...

- Teachers who know how to facilitate relationships with children [between peers and] with children with significant delays ...
- Teachers who are sensitive to each child's individual [biological] differences and who respect each child's strategies for calming himself down ...
- Small groups led by adults ...
- An environment that provides or permits aides to work one-on-one with the children ...
- A policy that encourages parental involvement ...
- Openness to parents' suggestions ..
- An inclusion setting, mixing children with and without special needs…" (pp. 406-408).

Floortime in the Classroom

"The most critical point to emphasize ... is the importance of spontaneous rather than rote learning. At every step ... teachers should be interacting with your child, opening and closing circles of communication ... learning should be tied to real, interactive experiences -- real objects, real activities, pretend play -- not to pictures or flash cards ...(p.409)

"Mini-learning environments inherently promote hands-on, spontaneous learning. Each environment should include a range of toys and learning materials that children and teachers can explore together, at a variety of levels, to practice developmental, cognitive, social, language, and motor skills ... The classroom should be a miniworld that invites curiosity and exploration in small steps. Shelves should be open and full of materials to prompt exploration and initiative". (p.412)

Setting Up the Classroom

Suggested areas include:

the pretend corner
> dolls, dress-up clothes, hats, and props (p.412)

a math area
> big and little objects, fast- and slow-moving items, light and heavy objects and scales for comparing them, containers holding a lot and containers holding a little, and other materials that have to do with size, quantity, and sequence (p.413)

a spatial concept area
> objects to climb on, over, and under, places to hide inside, tall and short structures, balance beams of different sizes, boards with cut-out spaces to

navigate, and other materials to help children explore space with their bodies (p.413)

a listening and reading corner
> listen to sounds and match them to objects, sound and alphabet blocks (recognizing letters, then stringing them together to make words), small toys with names that are easy to spell (p.413)

sensory, music, and art area
> materials to smell, touch, listen to, and see; rough, smooth, hot, cold, sqooshy, firm, noisy, and quiet items; water, ice, and sand tables; large boxes of beans and corn with hidden objects, arts and crafts center with glue, paint, yarn, textured treasures; drums, keyboards, instruments to blow (p.413)

oral-motor area
> an area near the sink with musical instruments, party-favor blowers, bubbles, vibrating toys, and foods with different textures (p.413)

motor planning, gross motor, and vestibular (balance) functioning
> mini-obstacle courses; swings, mattresses, trampolines (p.413)

Helping Your Child Play with Another Child

1. *Use floor-time principles to follow the children's lead, looking for opportunities to encourage interaction, between the two.*

   Comment on what they are doing, joining in whenever you can. As soon as you see an opportunity, try to bring one child into the game of the other. For example, if your child is playing with toys cards, hand the other child one of the cars. If this doesn't get an interaction going, try to draw your child into the activity of the other child. Eventually they'll find a way to play together, even if only for two or three circles of communication. From these you can gradually build more.

2. *Use your voice to help each child pay attention to what the other child is doing.*

   Say things like, "Look! Did you see that? Wow!" The more drama you put into your voice, the easier it will be for both children to attend. And don't limit yourself to positive emotions; include negative emotions, too, such as anger, frustration, and jealousy.

3. *Get both children involved in problem solving.*

   Plead, play dumb, exaggerate, or do whatever is necessary to make your voice compelling enough to draw both children into the problem-solving activity. "Oh no! The car is missing a wheel! What should we do?" "Help! Help! The door to the house is stuck! The soldier is locked in! How can we help him?"

4. *Help both children become aware of each other's feelings.*

   Put a lot of drama into your voice and gestures, don't be afraid to shed pretend tears or make angry or jealous faces, and always use the name of the child you're describing. "Oh, poor Seth! He looks so sad!" Or, making an angry face and gesture, "Wow, Jason looks really mad right now!" Your child may be surprised at first, since he's not used to noticing other children's feelings. But if you do this regularly, he will become more comfortable and turned in to his friends' emotions.

5. *Help the children engage with each other.*

   The children may tend to do parallel play at first - playing side by side but not interacting. Try to draw them into interactive play by calling each one's attention to what the other is doing ...

6. *Try to hold each child's attention for as long as possible in order to delay her moving away.*

   If you sense one of the children is getting ready to leave, create some suspense or excitement to try to lure her to stay…If those efforts fail, try asking, "Why are you leaving - what's the hurry?" Or, "Is Maria yelling too much? Does it hurt your ears?" Or, "Was that a scary idea?" ...

7. *Help both children understand the other's behavior by translating that behavior into simple words.*

    Both children may become confused at times by the other's behavior. You can help them by explaining what the other child is doing. "Sarah screams when she hears someone cry; it hurts her ears." "David looks mad. He's throwing the tea set down so no one will have tea." "Uh-oh! Mary is stuck. She doesn't know what to do next."

8. *Help the children interact by using shared interests ...*

9. *Help the children stick with their play by helping them bypass tangential ideas.*

    Once the children have a play theme going (for example, taking a family of dolls to the park), take on a role yourself in order to help them keep it going. If another theme surfaces (an alligator comes by who has escaped from the zoo), either ignore it and return to the original theme ("When are we going to get to the park?") or incorporate the new theme into the original ("Let's take the alligator with us to the park!").

10. *Help each child notice the feelings and actions of the other by reiterating what each one said or did.*

    Children often miss the actions or reactions of other children because those actions may be quiet or subtle. To help them notice, point out what each child has done or said. You might even ask the child to repeat what he just said or did ("Evan, did you really say that?").

11. *Help the children share symbolic ideas.*

    Encourage playing around themes that you know both children can handle symbolically (perhaps you've already played pirate or doctor with each of

them). If you remind them of these experiences, then they can elaborate on them together ...

12. *Pick up on highly emotional themes (such as separation, fears, body damage, and aggression), and help the children play these issues out symbolically.*

    These highly emotional themes are shared by all children because they are part of a developmental progression. As children grapple with them, they define their sense of self and reality. Symbolic play that addresses these issues will be of great interest to the children. They may react actively or anxiously (by becoming overreactive, or passive and avoidant).

13. *Identify each child's coping strategies and solutions, and offer symbolic solutions to difficult situations.*

    Perhaps you notice that every time pirates approach looking for gold, one child falls asleep. You might say, "Jesse goes to sleep every time the pirates come. Jesse, if you go to sleep now you won't be scared. But maybe you'd also like to use a magic sword?"

14. *Help the children resolve conflicts together ...*

    ... Explain that it is important for each child to understand how the other one feels, then help them come to a solution to the problem.

15. *Create opportunities for the children to work together.*

    For example, if you are the bad doggy that is trying to mess up their house, they might need to build barriers together to keep you out. Or they might have to tickle you to see if they can make you laugh.

Hierarchy of [School] Goals

- Rapid, back-and-forth affect-gestural interactions;
- Complex, multiple circles of communication, social problem solving, initially involving simple motor or gestural sequences, but then advancing to two- and three- step motor and gestural problem solving;
- Spontaneous, self-generated, interactive pretend play and imagination, beginning with simple sequences such as kidding a doll or putting a doll in the car for a ride and moving to more complex pretend, such as good guys fighting bad guys; and
- Generating ideas from desire or emotion as opposed to repeating ideas (from simple ideas, such as asking for juice when …thirsty, to complex ideas, such as making up a word to get someone to laugh as he hams it up with big smiles at his first joke)

Ready for Floortime, What Do I Do?

From *The Essential Partnership*:

"Floor time is not always easy, [your] goal is to become a good and active play partner. If you watch parents, teachers, or even child psychiatrists try to become play partners, we all fall into the same pitfalls. Some of get too passive and just watch the child. Our thoughts drift as she gets involved in a theme that is not very compelling to us ... The child needs your emotional presence ...

"Others of us get overly controlling and bossy. We are all energized, wanting to make the most of the time taken out of our busy schedule. We start asking questions about the child's play and helping to direct the action, stepping up the pace whenever possible" (p.20)

1. Be a play *partner* ... not overly controlling or overly passive. Follow your child's lead and join in. Be careful not to ask too many questions or to direct the action. Also, do not step up the pace. (p.20)
2. You may want to *describe* what the child is communicating, especially *on an emotional level*. Curiosity, assertiveness, closeness, dependency, the human body, separation, rejection, learning about the world are themes that commonly characterize children's pretend play and verbal communications. (p.20-21)
3. Help your child *actively use his/her imagination*. Wonder out loud what the dog is going to do next or what you will find behind the tree. (p.21)
4. *Transform the one-way activity into a two-way one*. Pretty soon, she/he may be telling you stories, asking the questions, or arranging the blocks into cities. (p.21)
5. Just being there is worthwhile as dramatic play. Your gestures - pointing, smiling, frowning, and vocalizing ideas - all add an interactive component and complexity and depth to the play. When your child becomes repetitive, he needs more, not less, floor time and more, not less, patience. (p.21)

6. The children are the coaches; you are an active partner, always trying to *expand the activity further* than they would on their own but without taking charge. (p.21)

7. Express *empathy for emotional themes*. If the child is expressing a theme of anger and aggression, you don't interfere by saying "Why is he so mad? Why doesn't he behave nicely?" Instead you say, "Gee, he really wants to bomb those bad guys. He's going to destroy them in a hundred different ways. He must have a good reason for that." You acknowledge the range of anger and the fact that there must be a good reason. Your empathy will enable your child to feel you are on his side rather than a proponent of your own agenda. (Your acknowledgment does not imply approval. Recognizing a child's "pretend" agenda will strengthen your ability to set relevant limits on his aggressive behavior at a later point in time.) (p.21-22)

8. Foster your child's ability to *express a range of emotions, a balance of feelings*. Alongside your acknowledgment of "negative" feelings may come your child's introduction of the opposite theme. Dependency, love, and concern will spontaneously emerge alongside aggression. (p.22) Help your child explore the reasons for his/the teddy bear's feelings, e.g., "you must have good reasons for being so mad" (p. 23).

9. Contribute to a sense of *mutual pleasure*. Be animated, silly, involved, joyous, as well as explore aggression in an imaginative way. Share his smile or pout. Human relationships can be characterized by a quality of connectedness that allows for a great range of feeling and exploration. (p.22)

10. Help your child *elaborate on the theme of his play*. For example, your child may explain that "the bear is mad." In response, you might ask, "very mad?" ... ("Yes.") and then follow with "What does he want to do?" ("Put you in the ocean and make sure the pieces never come back together again.") then comment "Sounds like a big anger." ("It is.") (p.22)

11. Help your child *amplify each side of a theme that involves conflict*. Explore the ways both sides behave and feel. For example, if the play theme is "the cat hates the dog, but the dog insists on playing with the cat," it may relate to a child's insistence on playing with the one person in his class who is mean and rejecting. You can learn about the 100 ways the cat shows his hate for the dog, and discuss how the dog must play with anyone he wants to irrespective of the cat's feelings. (p.23)

12. You want to respond to your child's overall emotional tone. So, part of your role is to make *comments that help you understand the play more and help the child elaborate more*. You could say, "Oh! What will the pig do when the hurricane comes? How does he feel?" Or better yet, you could just comment on his drama, "Oh, the pig sees the hurricane coming." These are questions or comments that may help the child elaborate his feelings and add one more piece to his play. You are expanding his drama just a little, by summarizing the action and by empathizing with the child's interest. (p.28).

From [The Child with Special Needs](#)

- Join the Object/Games/Activity of the Child's Attention (p.141-143)

- Don't Entertain - Interact (p.144)
- Enjoy the Moment (p.144)
- Work from the Bottom Up. Return to the sensory profile and make interaction offer pleasure. (p.145)
- You Can't Force Closeness (p.146)
- Be Playfully Obstructive: playfully insert yourself in a way that makes it harder to ignore you, e.g., being a doggy and getting between her legs (p.147)
- Increase the Complexity of Behavior (p.168)
- Use Times of High Motivation (p.169)
- Be Animated! (p.172)
- Communicate the Whole Range of Emotions (p.178-179)
- [Use] gestures as the foundation for communication and speech (p.179) Build a gestural vocabulary (p. 188-189)
- Become a character in the drama (p.194)
- Ideas for Pretend are everywhere (p.195)
- Thicken the plot to keep the drama going (p.196)
- Introduce Conflict or Challenge (p.197)
- Increase the number of verbal circles (p.201)
- [Begin] Negotiating: questioning intent (p.202)
- Recognize your own feelings (p.220)
- Don't try to "fix" your child's feelings (p.221)
- Don't merely tolerate feelings; encourage them (p.221)
- Separate feelings from behavior (p.221)
- Remember the risk of communicating strong (and scary) feelings directly with words (p.221)
- Remember that feelings are transitory (p.221)
- Stick with the pretend play: "If your child touches on a sensitive spot during pretend play, remember that it's only play. Stay with the game and respond as your character would - supportively. If you treat her character's aggression or fears as real, you remove the safety of the play" (p.222).
- Don't slip into parallel play or running commentary; become a character in the drama (p.223).
- Don't feel embarrassed or stymied. [Many people] have a hard time with pretend play because they feel silly or unimaginative. (p.224) [As you practice, it will become easier.]
- Avoid repetition. [If your child tends to be repetitive] throw a curve ball to take the familiar routine in a new direction (p.224).
- Don't talk mechanically or too slowly (p.224).
- Don't encourage rote learning…displays of knowledge…avoid quizzing your child on academic skills…Acknowledge her accomplishment and then move into a more interactive conversation. (p.225).
- Stretch dialogues during day-to-day interactions (p.234)
- Ask open-ended questions (p.235).
- Combine actions and words…e.g., hold up things you know he doesn't like (p.235)
- Form bridges between ideas (p.242)

- Create multifaceted characters in play (p.242)
- Ask emotion-based questions: …Instead of asking "What did you do at school?" ask, "What was fun at school?" (p.248)
- Use emotion to categorize ideas, …e.g., "My sword's better than your sword." (p.248-249).
- Encourage "seeing the forest as well as the trees" (p.249-250)
- [Build] cause of effect into the process of though (p.251)
- Don't simply tell …what to do…give him plenty of time to argue his viewpoint (p.265)
- Explore feelings behind viewpoints (p.265)
- Don't stick to questions to which you know the answer (p.265)
- Don't solve problems for your child; let her solve them herself, with your help as a coach or brainstorming partner (p.265)
- Help your child learn about people, places, and ideas…Provide experiences suitable to your child's highest developmental level (p.265)
- Help your child grapple with your ideas (p.280).

Emotional Themes

(Themes that commonly underlie children's play)

From The Child with Special Needs (p. 206-208)

Theme 1: Nurturance and dependency.

Theme 2: Pleasure and excitement.

Theme 3: Curiosity.

Theme 4: Power and assertiveness.

Theme 5: Anger and aggression.

Theme 6: Limit setting (containing feelings - aggressive feelings, excited feelings, yearning feelings).

Theme 7: Fears and anxieties.

Theme 8: Love, empathy, and concern for others.

Theme 9: Control.