



Episode 34: From Sensory Surplus to Praxis: A Developmental Approach

Hosts: Tracy Stackhouse · Michelle Maunder · Cory Dundon

LISTENER NAME

DATE LISTENED

TOTAL LISTENING + REFLECTION TIME (MINS)

CPD HOURS CLAIMED

Episode Summary

In this episode, the team explores sensory integration as a developmental theory, tracing how praxis unfolds across a child's changing developmental competence. Tracy unpacks the spiralling continuum of development, the role of affect as the glue of the system, and the critical relationship between sensory discrimination and the emergence of executive functions. Through a rich clinical story of a boy with Fragile X syndrome, the episode illuminates how meeting a child precisely where they are, in their motivational bias and perceptual world, can unlock genuine developmental progress. The concept of sensory surplus is introduced to reframe how we understand neurodivergent children who need much more time in perceptual exploration before moving into representational play.

Resources & Mentions

- **Wired to Feel: Autism as a Condition of Sensory Surplus**, Sarah Bergenfield, Martha Sweezy and Beth Ann Malow (New Harbinger, 2026)
- **DIR / Floortime**, Stanley Greenspan, on affect and development
- **DFX Learning Journeys**, build your clinical reasoning skills

Reflection Prompts

Take a few quiet minutes to consider each prompt and write freely.

- 1 Think about a child you're working with who seems stuck in a repetitive pattern. Instead of reading it as a deficit, how might you see it as a form of sensory surplus, or a search for predictability? How does that shift your approach?

- 2 Reflect on the idea of affect as the glue. Can you think of a recent session where emotional connection, or the lack of it, seemed to be the deciding factor in whether a new skill emerged?

- 3 The episode questions teaching skills too early, like shoe tying with a toddler. Where in your caseload might you be pushing for a cognitive outcome before the sensory or embodied foundation is ready?

- 4 Consider the million repetitions problem. When do you feel the urge to push for repetition, and what might happen if you paused instead to find the affect inside the child's category of interest?

- 5 How could you use the SPIRIT model to map the path from a child's raw sensory experience to the emergence of a complex praxis task, like playing basketball or building a block tower?
