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# Asynchronous Pacing and Readiness for Independence in Young Adult Diversion

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# Abstract

Diversion programs often assess progress through employment, housing, education, substance-use outcomes, and compliance. These achievements may not fully indicate whether participants can sustain them as supervision decreases. This conceptual article proposes asynchronous pacing as a hypothesis about the relative timing of functional achievement and psychosocial development among justice-involved young adults. Drawing on developmental and life-course criminology, desistance scholarship, and retrospective practice-based observations from a residential diversion program, the framework distinguishes habilitation pacing, or change in observable functional milestones, from developmental pacing, or change in psychosocial capacities and their consistent application. Habilitation-led asynchrony describes functional achievements advancing ahead of relevant capacities; development-led asynchrony describes the reverse pattern. Readiness is treated separately as the fit among current capacities, environmental demands, and available supports. Two illustrative participant accounts motivate the framework but do not establish rates of change, causal relationships, or predictive validity. Six propositions and a prospective research agenda specify how repeated domain-specific measures could test whether trajectory information improves prediction and transition decisions beyond current functioning, stress, and supports. The framework connects program transitions with broader questions about developmental timing, agency, and social opportunity. Its practical value remains contingent on validation; meanwhile, it directs attention toward individualized support and graduated autonomy without treating compliance as a sufficient measure of development.


# 1. Introduction

Diversion programs frequently evaluate participant progress through employment, educational attainment, housing stability, substance-use outcomes, compliance with supervision, and completion of treatment activities. These indicators represent meaningful accomplishments, but they raise a further question: do observable achievements indicate that participants can sustain them as external support decreases? For justice-involved young adults, this question connects program evaluation with developmental and life-course concerns about the timing of change, transitions in social roles, and the relationship between individual agency and opportunity.

In this article, habilitative diversion refers to a justice-system alternative that combines treatment and practical support with intentional development or strengthening of psychosocial capacities needed for sustained prosocial functioning. The term emphasizes capacity-building within the broader field of rehabilitation rather than treating rehabilitation and habilitation as mutually exclusive approaches.

Habilitation pacing refers to the rate at which an individual achieves observable milestones associated with functional stability and successful community participation. These may include obtaining employment, maintaining sobriety, securing housing, developing financial stability, acquiring transportation, and completing program requirements. Although these accomplishments may involve

learning new skills and adopting new behaviors, habilitation pacing concerns the observable achievement of functional objectives.

Developmental pacing refers to the rate at which an individual develops, strengthens, and internalizes psychosocial capacities necessary for responsible and increasingly independent functioning. These include emotional self-regulation, impulse control, delayed gratification, honesty, accountability, perspective-taking, and the ability to make decisions consistent with long-term goals. Unlike external milestones, developmental progress is reflected in the increasingly consistent application of these capacities across situations, particularly under conditions of stress, uncertainty, interpersonal conflict, or reduced external supervision.

Asynchronous pacing refers to a divergence between the rate of external habilitative achievement and the rate of internal developmental change. Two broad patterns are proposed. In habilitation-led asynchrony, observable accomplishments advance more rapidly than the developmental capacities necessary to sustain them. In development-led asynchrony, developmental capacities advance more rapidly than observable habilitative milestones. A third pattern, synchronized pacing, describes a comparatively aligned progression of the two dimensions. Importantly, synchronization does not necessarily indicate adequate progress or readiness; both dimensions may advance slowly, or remain at insufficient levels.

The distinction emerged from practice-based observations within a residential habilitative diversion program serving justice-involved young adult men in the United States. The program integrates residential support, behavioral health services, employment assistance, life-skills development, mentoring, and opportunities for increasing independence. Staff observed external accomplishments coexisting with difficulties in capacities relevant to independent functioning, as well as instances of prosocial behavior alongside continuing economic instability. These observations motivated the framework; without comparable repeated measures, they cannot establish relative rates of change.

This article advances a testable hypothesis: within habilitative diversion, the timing and relative trajectories of functional accomplishments and demonstrated psychosocial capacities may contribute information about subsequent transitions beyond their current levels. It distinguishes pacing from readiness and accumulated stress, identifies six propositions, and proposes prospective tests of incremental predictive and practical value. It does not claim that uneven change is a new discovery or that pacing is already a validated predictor.

The developmental and life-course contribution concerns the temporal relationship between change in social circumstances and change in capacities during young adulthood. Program transitions offer a bounded setting in which to examine that relationship. They are not equivalent to life-course turning points, and successful program completion is not equivalent to sustained desistance. Whether trajectory information improves decisions about support, autonomy, and transition timing remains an empirical question.

# 2. Theoretical Foundations of Asynchronous Pacing

## 2.1 External Achievement and Internal Transformation in Desistance Theory

Research on criminal desistance recognizes that sustained behavioral change cannot be explained solely through improvements in external circumstances. Although employment, stable housing, supportive relationships, and reduced exposure to criminogenic environments may facilitate desistance, their effects depend partly on how individuals interpret and respond to these opportunities (Giordano et al., 2002; Sampson & Laub, 1993).

Giordano et al. (2002) proposed a theory of cognitive transformation emphasizing the interaction between opportunities for change and the individual's evolving capacity to recognize, embrace, and act upon those opportunities. Their concept of hooks for change suggests that external circumstances may create opportunities for behavioral transformation without necessarily producing that transformation independently. Changes in identity, attitudes, and interpretations of one's circumstances are also important components of the desistance process.

Maruna (2000) similarly emphasized the importance of identity reconstruction and the development of coherent narratives through which individuals understand themselves as capable of living differently. From this perspective, desistance involves more than the cessation of criminal behavior; it may also involve changes in how individuals understand their past, interpret their present circumstances, and envision their future.

Subsequent desistance scholarship further complicates any simple sequence from changed behavior to changed identity or social integration. Nugent and Schinkel (2016) distinguish among dimensions of desistance and describe the difficulties that may accompany progress in one domain without corresponding change in others. Anderson and McNeill (2019) revisit cognitive transformations within the broader desistance literature, while Giordano (2022) emphasizes the continuing interplay of subjective change, social circumstances, and processes unfolding over time. These contributions establish that uneven or nonsequential change is not itself a novel observation.

The proposed contribution is therefore narrower than the observation that external and internal changes unfold unevenly, a point already recognized in desistance scholarship. It is the hypothesis that their relative longitudinal timing, considered within a structured habilitative program, may carry additional information about the risks and supports associated with a particular transition. Two participants with similar current achievements, developmental functioning, and environmental supports might have followed different trajectories; whether those trajectories meaningfully distinguish subsequent outcomes is an empirical question. The framework does not assume that unlike constructs can be placed on a common scale or that a divergence score is inherently meaningful. Its value depends on demonstrating

incremental predictive or decision-making utility beyond current levels of functioning, environmental demands, and available supports.

## 2.2 Psychosocial Maturation and Developmental Readiness

Steinberg and Cauffman (1996) identified psychosocial factors that contribute to maturity of judgment, including responsibility, temperance, and perspective. Their work suggests that effective decision-making involves more than intellectual knowledge of consequences. It also requires the ability to regulate emotional responses, resist immediate pressures, consider alternatives, and act consistently with longer-term objectives.

Maturation and program learning should not be conflated. Age-related developmental change, learning through relationships, recovery, and adaptation to changing circumstances may all affect observed conduct. A short period of improved behavior cannot identify which process produced it, and findings about adolescent judgment should not be generalized without qualification to all young adults.

Life-course criminology also distinguishes trajectories from transitions and turning points. Moffitt's (1993) taxonomy addresses different developmental patterns of antisocial behavior; it does not authorize assigning diversion participants to developmental types from limited program observations. Sampson and Laub (1993) place social bonds and changing life circumstances at the center of pathways through adulthood. The present framework addresses a narrower question about change during supported transitions and does not replace these explanations of offending and desistance.

## 2.3 Developmental Histories and Learning Processes

Developmental processes may differ according to participants' histories and opportunities for learning. Childhood adversity, inconsistent caregiving, and instability may constrain opportunities to practice self-regulation, trust, conflict resolution, and future-oriented decision-making. These experiences do not determine an individual's capacities or later outcomes. Resilience research instead emphasizes adaptation through interactions between developmental experience and changing environments (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2014). Habilitative intervention may therefore involve opportunities to acquire or strengthen capacities that have not been consistently developed or expressed. We describe this proposed process as developmental acquisition.

Other participants may have demonstrated capacities earlier in life but have difficulty exercising them following disruption, substance-use problems, or prolonged instability. We use developmental reconstruction to describe the proposed process of reestablishing and adapting previously demonstrated capacities. Acquisition and reconstruction are heuristic descriptions, not mutually exclusive participant types or validated clinical classifications. Both require evidence about developmental history; neither can be inferred from a current setback.

## 2.4 Substance Use and the Role of Structured Habilitative Environments

Substance use disorders introduce additional complexity into developmental pacing because problematic substance use may interact with emotional regulation, impulse control, reward sensitivity, interpersonal functioning, and long-term decision-making. These relationships are not necessarily unidirectional. Developmental vulnerabilities may contribute to susceptibility to problematic substance use, while persistent substance use and associated environmental instability may interfere with the development or reliable expression of psychosocial capacities. These possible reciprocal relationships require investigation and should not be inferred solely from general developmental theories.

Structured residential diversion programs may provide more than access to services and external resources. They may also create environments in which participants repeatedly practice adaptive decision-making, develop interpersonal trust, receive corrective feedback, and experience the consequences of increasingly independent choices. Within such environments, relationships with staff, peers, and mentors may function as opportunities for developmental learning. Consistent expectations, positive reinforcement, predictable boundaries, and graduated responsibility may support the acquisition and strengthening of psychosocial capacities. Risk–need–responsivity research provides a broader rationale for matching interventions to individual needs (Andrews et al., 2011), although it does not directly validate the milieu mechanism proposed here.

A prosocial residential milieu may offer repeated opportunities to practice accountability, self-regulation, and decision-making beyond formal counseling. This is a proposed learning mechanism, not evidence that residential structure itself produces psychosocial development. The opportunity to exercise autonomy, the quality of relationships, and the transfer of learning beyond the program require separate examination.

# 3. The Asynchronous Pacing Framework

## 3.1 The Multidimensional Nature of Developmental Progress

Relevant developmental capacities include emotional regulation, impulse control, accountability, interpersonal functioning, future orientation, and independent decision-making. Their relative importance may vary according to the responsibilities and environmental demands associated with a particular transition. For example, independent housing may require reliable fiscal management, interpersonal boundaries, and the ability to respond adaptively to unexpected problems. Reduced residential supervision may place greater demands on self-regulation, decision-making, and the management of high-risk situations.

An aggregate developmental score may conceal meaningful limitations in particular capacities. Assessment should therefore consider both overall developmental progression and the specific capacities required for the next level of independence. Furthermore, developmental capacities may be expressed differently across environments. A participant who demonstrates effective self-regulation within a predictable residential setting may struggle to apply that capacity under conditions of interpersonal conflict, uncertainty, or reduced supervision. The consistency with which developing capacities are exercised across circumstances may therefore be as important as their initial acquisition.

## 3.2 Pacing, Readiness, and Environmental Demands

Although pacing and readiness are related, they represent different constructs. Pacing concerns the rate of change over time. Readiness concerns whether a participant's demonstrated capacities are sufficient for the responsibilities and environmental demands associated with a particular transition. A participant may exhibit rapid developmental progress while remaining insufficiently prepared for independent living. Conversely, a participant may progress slowly but already possess capacities adequate for a particular increase in responsibility.

Readiness therefore cannot be inferred solely from developmental pacing. The framework conceptualizes readiness as a relationship among three elements: demonstrated developmental capacities, anticipated environmental demands, and available supports. This relational understanding avoids treating readiness as a fixed personal characteristic. A participant may be prepared to assume greater responsibility when moderate supports remain available but not when those supports are removed abruptly. Similarly, an individual who initially struggles with independent decision-making may succeed when opportunities for autonomy are introduced gradually, accompanied by mentoring, feedback, and appropriate assistance.

## 3.3 Transition Vulnerability

Transitions toward greater independence provide a particularly important context for examining asynchronous pacing. Structured residential programs provide external supports that facilitate successful functioning, including predictable routines, supervision, transportation assistance, counseling, mentoring, and peer accountability. These supports may also compensate for developmental capacities that remain incompletely established or inconsistently exercised.

This creates what the framework identifies as transition vulnerability: a heightened susceptibility to maladaptive responses when the demands of an increasingly independent environment exceed the participant's demonstrated developmental capacities and available support.

For participants experiencing habilitation-led asynchrony, these transitions may reveal developmental limitations that were less apparent within the preceding environment. The framework therefore proposes that transition vulnerability may arise from a mismatch among developmental capacities, environmental demands, and available supports rather than simply from inadequate achievement or motivation. This proposition does not imply that independence should be withheld until participants demonstrate

complete developmental maturity. Opportunities for autonomy may promote developmental growth. Instead, the framework supports graduated transitions in which increasing responsibility is accompanied by opportunities to practice developing capacities, receive feedback, and access appropriate support.

## 3.4 Theoretical Propositions and Measurement Considerations

**Proposition 1**

Differential pacing. Within-person trajectories of functional achievement and psychosocial capacities may differ in timing and pattern. This proposition requires repeated observations of both dimensions; a cross-sectional discrepancy is insufficient.

**Proposition 2**

Habilitation-led vulnerability. After accounting for current functioning and transition conditions, histories in which functional achievements precede relevant developmental change may predict greater difficulty when demands increase or supports decrease.

**Proposition 3**

Development-led underrecognition. Milestone-based assessments may underestimate capacity for particular responsibilities when psychosocial development precedes functional achievements. Resource constraints may nevertheless limit the feasibility of independent living.

**Proposition 4**

Domain-specific readiness. Capacities relevant to a particular transition may be more informative about subsequent functioning than an aggregate developmental score. This proposition concerns readiness and serves as a comparison for testing whether pacing adds information.

**Proposition 5**

Environmental moderation. Any association between pacing and transition outcomes may depend on the availability, consistency, and responsiveness of supports and on the demands of the receiving environment.

**Proposition 6**

Developmental history. Trajectory patterns may differ with documented opportunities for acquiring capacities and with disruption of previously demonstrated capacities. Developmental acquisition and reconstruction remain hypotheses to be operationalized rather than assigned retrospectively from outcomes.

Operationalizing these propositions presents an important methodological challenge. Conventional habilitation milestones and developmental capacities are not naturally measured on equivalent scales. Employment attainment, housing stability, and sustained sobriety represent different forms of achievement from changes in emotional regulation, impulse control, or accountability. Consequently, asynchronous pacing cannot be measured reliably by simply subtracting an unstandardized developmental score from a count of habilitative milestones.

## 4. Practice-Based Observations: Two Contrasting Patterns of Asynchronous Pacing

Two retrospective participant accounts illustrate configurations that motivated the framework. They are not systematically selected cases, longitudinal measurements, or tests of the propositions. Details not necessary to the conceptual comparison are omitted. The accounts concern observed behavior and staff interpretations, not direct access to participants' internal states.

# 4.1 Functional achievement alongside developmental vulnerabilities

The first participant pursued education and vocational preparation, participated in recovery activities, and assumed responsibilities within the residential community. Staff described him as cooperative and engaged. These accomplishments indicated progress in several functional domains.

During the same period, staff also observed recurrent substance use, violations of program expectations, and concealment of conduct. These events complicated an assessment based solely on his accomplishments.

The account illustrates coexisting achievements and difficulties with the consistent application of self-regulation and accountability. It does not establish that functional progress occurred faster than developmental change. Nor does rule violation alone distinguish a limitation in capacity from other explanations, including stress, disagreement with expectations, or the circumstances in which behavior occurred.

# 4.2 Prosocial behavior alongside economic instability

The second participant displayed behavior that staff interpreted as increasing accountability, emotional awareness, and self-efficacy. He nevertheless experienced continuing difficulty achieving economic stability.

Although he completed vocational preparation and pursued employment, he struggled to secure income sufficient to meet his obligations. Staff observed persistence in seeking work and attempting to honor financial commitments despite limited resources.

On one occasion involving potential personal benefit, he sought staff guidance and chose a course of action consistent with honesty and responsibility. This observation suggested that economically constrained circumstances could coexist with prosocial discretionary behavior.

These observations were consistent with meaningful developmental progress despite limited economic stability, but they did not establish the extent to which prosocial values had become reliably internalized across circumstances. Nor, without repeated comparable measures, did they establish a faster rate of developmental change.

Financial difficulties coincided with reported interpersonal pressures, and the participant eventually left the program. These observations cannot establish why he departed. His departure does not erase earlier prosocial conduct, and that conduct does not establish readiness across all circumstances. The account illustrates how observed capacities, material resources, and changing demands may diverge without demonstrating their relative rates of change.

## 4.3 Comparative Interpretation

These accounts generate hypotheses rather than validate asynchronous pacing. Staff judgments may reflect selective attention, unequal opportunities to observe behavior, or knowledge of later outcomes. Participant perspectives were not systematically collected for this conceptual account. The cases therefore support neither prevalence estimates nor causal conclusions, and they do not justify classifying individual participants by pacing pattern.

# 5. Implications for Program Design, Assessment, and Intervention

## 5.1 Assessing Two Dimensions of Progress

Conventional measures of program progress frequently emphasize observable accomplishments. These indicators provide important evidence of functional improvement. However, they may offer an incomplete picture of the participant's readiness for increasingly independent functioning. Established risk–need–responsivity scholarship likewise emphasizes individualized assessment and matching intervention to criminogenic needs and responsivity factors (Andrews et al., 2011). Developmental assessment should examine capacities such as emotional regulation, impulse control, honesty, accountability, problem-solving, delayed gratification, interpersonal boundaries, and future-oriented decision-making. Importantly, these capacities should be evaluated through repeated observations of behavior rather than relying exclusively on self-report or isolated demonstrations of competence.

## 5.2 Using Pacing Hypotheses in Practice

When functional achievements coexist with difficulties applying relevant capacities, programs may offer supported practice in decision-making, accountability, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution under progressively less structured conditions. When psychosocial growth coexists with economic instability, employment assistance, transportation, and financial support may be more urgent. These are proposed

responses to assessed needs, not validated matching rules. They do not require assigning a pacing label.

Participants should help define meaningful goals and interpret setbacks. Staff compliance ratings are not equivalent to developmental maturity, and poverty, limited transport, exclusion from employment, or inaccessible housing should not be reclassified as individual immaturity. Any assessment should distinguish restrictions on opportunity from difficulty exercising a capacity. Proposed pacing categories should not be used to prolong justice supervision or deny housing, employment, or services.

## 5.3 Monitoring Accumulated Stress and Transition Vulnerability

The framework also suggests that programs should address the accumulation of environmental pressures. Financial instability, relationship difficulties, employment frustration, housing insecurity, and changing supervision requirements may interact in ways that challenge developing capacities. Individual stressors may appear manageable when considered separately. Their cumulative effects, however, may exceed a participant's available coping resources. The potential significance of resource loss and threatened resources is consistent with conservation-of-resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989).

Accumulated stress, transition vulnerability, and asynchronous pacing are related but distinct concepts. Pacing concerns differences between trajectories of external achievement and developmental change. Transition vulnerability concerns the fit among current capacities, environmental demands, and available supports. Accumulated stress refers to growing or interacting pressures that may strain coping resources, even when developmental capacities are well established. A setback under stress therefore cannot, by itself, be attributed to asynchronous pacing.

# 6. Research Agenda, Observational Foundations, and Limitations

## 6.1 Observational Foundations

The framework emerged from approximately ten years of program development, direct observation, and professional experience in a residential diversion setting. These observations informed the conceptual questions rather than constituting a systematically sampled or independently validated dataset. The article reports no estimates of program effectiveness or participant-level rates of change.

## 6.2 Operationalizing Habilitative and Developmental Pacing

Empirical investigation will require operational definitions that distinguish habilitative pacing from developmental pacing. Habilitative pacing may be examined through longitudinal changes in observable functional accomplishments, including employment, educational attainment, vocational certification, financial stability, housing, transportation, and completion of program requirements. These indicators

should be assessed in relation to the opportunities and supports available to participants rather than treated exclusively as measures of individual effort.

Developmental pacing presents a more complex measurement challenge. Relevant domains may include emotional regulation, accountability, honesty, impulse control, delayed gratification, interpersonal boundaries, problem-solving, and future-oriented decision-making. No single existing assessment necessarily captures all these capacities. A multidimensional approach incorporating validated instruments, structured behavioral observations, participant self-assessments, and staff evaluations may therefore be necessary.

For measurement purposes, researchers should distinguish acquisition or strengthening of a capacity, its reliable behavioral application, and its generalization across contexts and levels of supervision. Effective conduct in a structured setting does not establish independent application, while a lapse under acute stress does not establish that a capacity was never acquired. Repeated assessments should document the context and opportunity for behavior, incorporate participant accounts, and examine agreement among raters. Staff-rated honesty and accountability require explicit behavioral anchors to reduce moral judgment and cultural bias.

## 6.3 Measuring Trajectories and Testing Incremental Value

Comparison requires attention to differences in measurement. Employment status, housing stability, and emotional regulation do not share a natural scale. A prospective study could collect dated records of functional milestones alongside repeated domain-specific developmental assessments and information on demands and supports. Researchers could estimate each trajectory separately and test whether the timing or ordering of changes adds predictive information. Standardization alone does not make unlike constructs substantively equivalent. Analyses should retain domain-specific results and avoid interpreting an arbitrary difference score as a direct measure of asynchronous pacing.

The central empirical test is whether longitudinal information about the timing and relative trajectories of habilitative and developmental change improves prediction or transition decisions beyond current developmental functioning, functional stability, environmental demands, stress, and available supports. Prospective studies should compare models with and without pacing indicators, distinguish levels from rates of change, and evaluate calibration and out-of-sample performance where feasible. A useful comparison would examine participants with similar current functioning and supports but different histories of change, asking whether their subsequent transitions differ. If pacing does not add meaningful predictive or decision-making value, the framework may remain a useful descriptive perspective rather than an independently informative assessment construct.

## 6.4 Prospective Research and Outcome Evaluation

A prospective design could begin at admission, repeat assessments at prespecified intervals and before changes in support, and follow participants through transitions and after departure where feasible. Measurement intervals should reflect expected change and remain consistent enough to distinguish

time trends from variation in observation. Initial feasibility work should establish acceptable burden and measurement reliability before predictive modeling.

Repeated assessments could document habilitative accomplishments, developmental functioning, environmental stressors, and the supports available to each participant. Outcomes might include retention, successful transitions, sustained employment, housing stability, substance-use recurrence, supervision violations, and subsequent criminal justice involvement.

Analyses should account for baseline functioning and risk, age, developmental history, time in the program, treatment exposure, supports, and changes in external opportunities. Program staff may change support in response to perceived readiness, creating time-varying confounding. Attrition and program departure may also be informative rather than random. Studies should document missingness, distinguish supportive from punitive exits, and avoid interpreting a predictive association as an intervention effect. Small programs may need multisite collaboration and restrained model complexity; a small sample cannot support a heavily parameterized trajectory model.

## 6.5 Limitations

First, the framework originated from sustained professional observation within a single residential habilitative diversion program. Although these observations extend across a decade and numerous participants, they were not initially collected through a research design intended to test asynchronous pacing.

Second, the two illustrative cases were selected to clarify contrasting patterns rather than through a systematic sampling procedure. They cannot establish how frequently these patterns occur or whether they are representative of the broader participant population.

Third, the distinction between habilitative and developmental pacing remains conceptual. The proposed dimensions require further operationalization, and the reliability and validity of methods for comparing their rates of change have not been established.

Fourth, retrospective interpretation creates a risk of hindsight bias. Knowledge of a participant's eventual outcome may influence how earlier accomplishments, setbacks, and behavioral observations are understood. Prospective assessment and clearly defined measurement procedures will be necessary to reduce this risk.

Fifth, participant outcomes cannot be attributed solely to differences in pacing. Substance-use disorders, trauma histories, economic opportunities, interpersonal relationships, supervision conditions, program practices, and other factors may independently or jointly influence behavior and long-term functioning.

Finally, the framework was developed in the context of a program serving justice-involved young adult men. Its applicability to women, adolescents, other justice-involved populations, and different

intervention settings remains to be investigated.

## 7. Conclusion

Asynchronous pacing is a hypothesis about the timing and relative trajectories of functional achievement and psychosocial development in young adult diversion. Its proposed contribution to developmental and life-course criminology is to test whether histories of change explain transition outcomes beyond present functioning, environmental demands, stress, and supports. The practice-based observations presented here motivate this question but cannot answer it. Prospective, context-sensitive measurement is necessary to establish whether pacing offers useful information beyond existing assessments.

Preparing a participant to complete a program is different from supporting sustained functioning afterward. Graduated autonomy and practical support should respond to demonstrated needs and participant goals. Until the framework is validated, pacing should guide research questions rather than serve as a threshold for release, a reason to extend supervision, or an explanation that substitutes developmental deficits for structural disadvantage.

## Declarations

# Author Contribution

D.C.P. wrote the manuscript. F. D.D. contributed to the development of the theory of developmental habilitation. L.M. applied the theoretical concepts in practice and recorded and analyzed program data. All authors read and approved the manuscript.

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