

Why Feuerstein Today?

It is no secret that there are many substantial reasons to be concerned about the educational achievement of many of the students in the schools of North America. It is also a well accepted fact that the complexity of life in the 21st Century will demand more and more knowledge and expertise in order to experience success and a high standard of living. It is paramount that professional educators do everything possible to improve the lives of the students in the schools of North America.

We believe that the insights and programs of Reuven Feuerstein are especially powerful in addressing the problems that so many students experience in their days of formal schooling.

We begin by addressing the fundamental question of why so many youth of today have so many problems with schooling. Feuerstein gives us a look at the root causes of academic difficulties that are evident in the classrooms of our schools. In his theory of structural cognitive modifiability, he identifies a set of cognitive functions that are the basis of all thinking and learning. It is because of the presence deficient cognitive functions that students are unable to do well in the school situation. This etiology of learning difficulties is different from other explanations that concentrate on environmental hardships and/or socio-economic reasons. Feuerstein assigns causality most directly to cognitive deficiency and therefore identifies the mind as the agent of change in the life of students. And so while schools can do little to make a radical change in the environmental conditions under which alternative students live, they can do a considerable amount in the development of the mental capacity of those students through the use of the assessment (LPAD) and intervention (FIE) programs of Reuven Feuerstein.

Another important issue flowing from the identification of cognitive deficiency as the cause of learning difficulties is the understanding that radical change can happen at any time during a person's physical life. People are not locked once and for all into a determined level of cognitive functioning. Educators need not embrace any tenet that claims that some students are a lost cause.

In his theory of the mediated learning experience, Feuerstein assigns the proximate causality of adequate cognitive functioning to be a qualitative interaction between an adult, (parent, teacher, caregiver), and a child that is not directly and/or exclusively dependent on environmental conditions. Feuerstein states that is because of the presence of the mediated learning experience that a structural cognitive development takes place in the minds of individuals. This in turn makes the individual capable of benefiting from the wide range of experiences that life offers and able to be modified in a constructive way by those experiences. In contrast, an individual without sufficient mediated learning experiences is not capable of using the happenings of life in a constructively modifiable way and instead is prey to the singleness and temporality of one episode after another. In school terms this means the difference between a child who is able to integrate and benefit from all of the new information

and learning activities that a school offers and a child who, while perhaps intensely involved in a lesson of the moment, is not able to take what the school offers and integrate it into a useful mental construct.

Feuerstein uses the term structural cognitive modifiability to indicate that, with sufficient mediated learning experiences, a patterned condition develops within the mind that enables it to assimilate new information and experiences in an intelligent and beneficial way. The use of Feuerstein's assessment (LPAD) and intervention (FIE) programs in a school setting enhances the development of this structural cognitive modifiability. Thus a student is able to become a much better thinker and learner.

Because of the dynamic nature of the mediated learning experience as an interaction between humans that possesses specific qualitative characteristics, it is able to be present at any time in the person's life and under any environmental and material circumstances. It is not dependent on a certain stage of physical development. Although in most instances of human development, the early years bring about much of this structural cognitive growth, still it is able to take place at any time in a person's life. Thus it is never too late to bring about a radical change in a person's mental functioning and ability to reason and think effectively. The use of Feuerstein's assessment (LPAD) and intervention (FIE) programs equips teachers to provide mediated learning experiences for their students and subsequently improve the cognitive abilities significantly.

The materials developed over many years by Feuerstein and his colleagues that form the basis of LPAD and FIE have a minimal reliance on previous cultural experiences and knowledge of content. Both sets of materials allow students direct contact with cognitive operations without going through pre-conditional modes of previously learned "basic" skills. Thus, students who have fallen behind in traditional basic skill development, (reading, writing, mathematics), are still able to handle the materials that are used in Feuerstein's applications. Thus every student in the classroom is able to experience a direct benefit from the use of LPAD and FIE.

Because of the primacy of the mediated learning experience as the proximate cause of adequate cognitive functioning, the use of Feuerstein's programs demand that there be an intense personal involvement between teachers and students. A teacher is not able to simply give the materials to the student and then stay at a distance. The concept of mediation demands instead that the teacher step into the process and intentionally become the connecting link between the materials and the student. Thus a personalization of the whole process of schooling is enhanced. This, in turn, makes it more likely that students will be able to find success in the school experience.