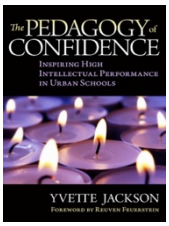
Excerpt from

The Pedagogy of Confidence®

Yvette Jackson, Ed.D., Teachers College Press, 2011



Mediation: Accelerating Intellectual Development and Learning (pp. 59-61)

For Feuerstein, intelligence (or adaptability) depends on three different phases of cognitive behavior: (a) taking in information (input phase), (b) reasoning about or thoughtfully operating on information that has been taken in (elaboration phase), and (c) effectively communicating the results of this reasoning (output phase) (Narrol & Giblon, 1984/2001, p. 10). The environment affects the strength of the behaviors in these phases, which is why students who lack certain guided interactions with enriching resources or encounters needed for learning specific types of information develop what Feuerstein identifies as cognitive dysfunctions. While assessing his students, Feuerstein observed that modifying cognitive dysfunctions to optimize intellectual development and learning required assistance in developing the processes that ameliorate the structure of the cognitive functions.

Feuerstein found that the most salient catalyst for assisting restructuring of cognitive functions and the development of intelligence was the interaction between the teacher or parent (or mediator) and the student. He used this recognition to codify the type of pedagogical interaction or process that would heighten intellectual capacities to maximize learning. He called this process "mediation" to highlight the notion of interaction between a learner and his or her environment. This interaction is mediated, or transformed, by a mediator who intentionally and specifically aims to make the interaction of the learner with learning experiences more effective. The goal of the mediation process is to elicit from the learner a personal motivation for learning and to provide the strategies needed for efficient and effective learning. The mediator—guided by intention, culture, and emotional investment in his or her learner—organizes and exposes learning experiences to provide the learner with opportunities to deeply investigate information by posing authentic questions strategically framed in the cultural context of the learner.

This guided investigation includes probing for elaborations and searching for personal connections, enabling learners to critically analyze tasks and focus on what is relevant to the learning required. The mediator amplifies learning by providing additional examples of concepts being taught and explicit feedback to facilitate acquisition of relevant relationships, expand language development relative to the focus, and fortify both the cognitive skills necessary to master the task at hand as well as those cognitive functions needed throughout life (e.g., focusing on problems or issues, inferring connections, organizing information, sorting relevant from irrelevant information, and classifying information) (Feuerstein, 1980; Feuerstein, Falik, & Feuerstein, 1998; Feuerstein et al., 2010). This dynamic interaction between the mediator and the

student is the most important aspect of the mediation process because it allows assessment of understanding and learning to be part of the instructional process (Jackson et al., 1998). These types of quality interactions have been involved in the cultural transmissions parental figures have provided that have accompanied human development and have shaped human experience (developmental and cultural) throughout history. Mediation is not necessarily verbal or language dependent, but it is always intentional; that is, the mediator wants the learner to grasp what is being taught and will do whatever it takes to help the learner do that (Feuerstein et al., 2010, p. 38). The practices that are used in the mediation process are called Mediated Learning Experiences (MLE).

Mediation and cultural transmission in the learning process have often been ignored. However, they are critical factors in accelerating intellectual development and reversing underachievement for school-dependent students. The latest explanation given for stagnant or declining achievement scores in major urban areas around the country makes this alarmingly clear. This argument highlights worsening economic conditions for poor families as a key factor in the reversal of achievement. It is true that poverty inhibits access to enriching resources, but what makes enrichment influential in intellectual development and learning is not simply a resource itself. The direct experience of walking through a museum or seeing a scientist at work does not expand thinking. What expands thinking is the access plus the intentional mediation with probing questions and guided discussion that includes purposeful exploration of connections to personal references. These connections then create the mental anchoring that strengthens hypothesizing or theorizing or even philosophizing. Considering that lack of resources or "fatherlessness" is often cited as a possible reason for the reversal of achievement, it is even more critical that schools do what they can to bridge the gap. Thus, access to enrichment accompanied by teachers trained in mediational methods and school staff committed to creating a Mediative Learning Community is now more important than ever. Closing schools and replacing leadership or teaching staff while maintaining instructional methods that lack the mediation more advantaged students receive as pro forma support outside and inside of school typically results only in repetition of unsuccessful results. It is the lack of mediative practices that keeps students dysfunctioning, not the capacity of their brains.

Neuroscience has validated the power of the authentic questioning involved in Feuerstein's mediation process. The research has shown that when a learner makes a decision on the basis of an authentic question, the process engages the executive functions of the prefrontal cortex (Goldberg, 2001). "The executive functions engage a set of skills and capacities that include problem solving, planning, decision making, time management, persistence, risk assessment, judgment, and impulse control" (Miller & Cummings, as cited in Caine & Caine, 2006, pp. 50–52). Mediation enhances a student's ability to adapt to new stimuli so learning can be optimized.

Jackson, Yvette. The Pedagogy of Confidence: Inspiring High Intellectual Performance in Urban Schools (pp. 75-76). Teachers College Press. Kindle Edition.