The PEDAGOGY *of* CONFIDENCE

Inspiring High Intellectual Performance in Urban Schools

YVETTE JACKSON

Foreword by
Reuven Feuerstein

Hawker Brownlow
EDUCATION

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Introduction

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK is to rekindle educators' belief in the vast capacity of their urban students and to restore their confidence in their own ability to inspire high intellectual performance by these students.

I have worked with many school districts across America where underachievement has become the norm. These districts are predominantly in cities, where "urban" is a euphemism used to refer to low-performing students of color and their teachers, who are assumed to need their instruction scripted in order to increase student performance. In these districts, administrators frantically search for that magic program that will save them from the penalties imposed as a result of the low performance on standardized tests of many of their students of color, a situation branded with the pernicious label "achievement gap." This label has exacerbated the cultural myth that the only way to close the gap is by focusing on weaknesses. As a result, we have been obsessively misdirected to turn our backs on the vast intellectual capacity of these students and to regard minimum proficiency as the ceiling, dismissing two inherent truths about learning as if they do not pertain to these individuals:

- All people have an intrinsic desire to learn and to be self-actualized. Maslow (1943) has shown that this desire is the human imperative.
- All brains are the same color. In other words, the way the brain makes learning happen does not differ from one culture to another. All brains require the enrichment opportunities to demonstrate and build strengths, supports to address weaknesses, strategies for developing critical thinking, and experiences that build the dispositions needed to be focused, engaged, tenacious, self-confident, and self-actualized. What is different among cultures is the information one is exposed to and the types of thinking processes that might be engaged in more often (Feuerstein, 1978; Feuerstein, Feuerstein, Falik, & Rand, 2006; Hilliard, 1977; Sternberg, 1998).

of 90 minutes each would have continued to eliminate opportunities for my students to deeply explore and learn social studies or science, leaving them "undereducated" and with a restricted frame of reference.

THE IMPETUS FOR SETTING WEAKNESSES AS THE FOCUS OF INSTRUCTION FOR SCHOOL-DEPENDENT STUDENTS

Control Versus Direction

It was at this point in my teaching career that I had an epiphany about the battle that was being waged in urban schools between policies that provided direction for growth versus policies that imposed control (a distinction that sounds familiar today as well, no doubt). What I gleaned from observing my students in the open classroom environment was that learning resulted from directed actions that reflected belief in student potential and promoted growth of that potential. My students' self-directed learning patterns were a result of the enriching instructional resources I had been furnishing them. Such direction—based on belief in potential—was positive and constructive. It amplified, maximized, and optimized the intellectual ability of the students. What I realized about the prescriptive practices that were spawned by policies that mandated control was that they were driven by a *lack* of belief either in students or in teachers, or most often both. These controls arrested or inhibited actions that could generate learning. Such control was negative in the way in which it deconstructed or destroyed inspiring, engaging instruction, causing disengagement, arrested growth, or even growth that atrophied, leaving students perpetually disenfranchised. I knew that I was correct in my perception about the impact of policies (and their concomitant programs) that mandated control. The proof was everywhere—in the artifacts of students' low achievement that littered the educational landscape we were witnessing. The potent impact of the control policies became so anchored in that landscape that it prevails to this day.

Control Through Classification

The prejudging practice of sorting students based on standardized criteria evolved from the government's need to expedite and facilitate classifying students without the expense of training teachers to assess the learning potential of the students. Education became the only field in which requirements or mandates were not followed by explicit training based on research

illustrative of their frame of reference as adolescents and their vast experiences of both types of relationships was their deep insight about what makes a relationship positive or negative. These discussions and the identification of attributes of positive and negative relationships provided the context needed for creating the similes, opening up a plethora of possibilities. These are examples of the similes the students authored:

- Relationships are like fences. They can keep you together.
- Relationships are like fences. They can pen you in.
- Relationships are like school. You can learn from them.
- Relationships are like the stars, when they are out in the open.
- Relationships are like the seasons. They change.
- Relationships are like the subway, when you have to go underground.
- Relationships can be like the ground. You can get walked on.
- A relationship can be like the trash, when you just throw it away.
- A relationship is like a light switch. You can turn it off and on.
- Relationships can be like glass. You can see right through some.

The facility with which these students were able to create similes illustrates their nimble intellectual capacity. In a 50-minute class period the students were able to disprove not only the negative prejudging about their ability but, equally important, the misrepresentation about their desire to be engaged. I was a total stranger to these students, yet after 30 minutes of priming, the door to their potential and creativity was opened to me.

Fear of Violence

The other reality for these students that must be recognized and revisited when judging them is the impact on their learning of fear arising from violence. Recently a study was done on the impact of violence on test scores in reading, writing, and thinking ability of students living in the very same area of Chicago. It was found that the constant experience of violence actually distorts the brain, causing test scores to deflate dramatically. The reality theorized by this study for students from such areas is haunting: The violent atmosphere created by the monthly homicides that occurred in the area caused students to function at impaired cognitive levels for 1 week out of each month, equaling impaired thinking for 3 months out of the year (Smith, 2010). Given this reality, the fact that the students I had the pleasure to teach for the demonstration lesson could so quickly learn the nature of similes and create similes at such a pace while living in an environment

Output phase. Cognitive function deficiencies that relate to factors that lead to an inadequate communication of final solutions include:

- Egocentricity
- Blocking
- Lack of or impaired verbal tools for communicating adequately elaborated responses
- Deficiency in visual transport (e.g., completing a given figure on the left side of a page by finding the missing part on the right side and transporting it visually)
- Lack of or impaired need for precision and accuracy in responding
- Trial-and-error responses
- Impulsive acting-out behavior

THE THREE SEPARATE LEVELS were conceived as a means of bringing some order to the array of deficient cognitive functions seen in socioculturally deprived school-dependent students. Interaction does occur among the levels, and Feuerstein felt that awareness of this interaction was of vital significance in understanding the extent and pervasiveness of the factors that impair cognition. Recognition of levels of deficiencies also substantiated the need for a dynamic form of assessment that could identify the root of cognitive deficiencies so that effective mediation strategies could be determined. That is the purpose of the Learning Propensity Assessment Device (Feuerstein, 1979b).

The Learning Propensity Assessment Device: Addressing the Complexities of Assessing Intellectual Development and Learning

Feuerstein's hypothesis that intelligence is a dynamic, constantly changing process led him to the realization that the only way to sufficiently and accurately assess students' thinking and learning potential was through a dynamic process that involved *teaching* them during the assessment process and then analyzing the way in which they applied cognitive functions for *learning*. This became the premise of "dynamic testing"—testing the student in the process of learning (Feuerstein et al., 2010; Narrol & Giblon, 1984, p. 13). This dynamic process (the antithesis of traditional forms of standardized assessment) consists of three distinguishing components: (a) assessment of the fluid processes of thought, perception, learning, and problem solving rather than assessment of the static or unchanging products of prior learning; (b) carefully structured teaching of cognitive principles and processes;

FIGURE 5.1   Circle Map with a Frame of Reference
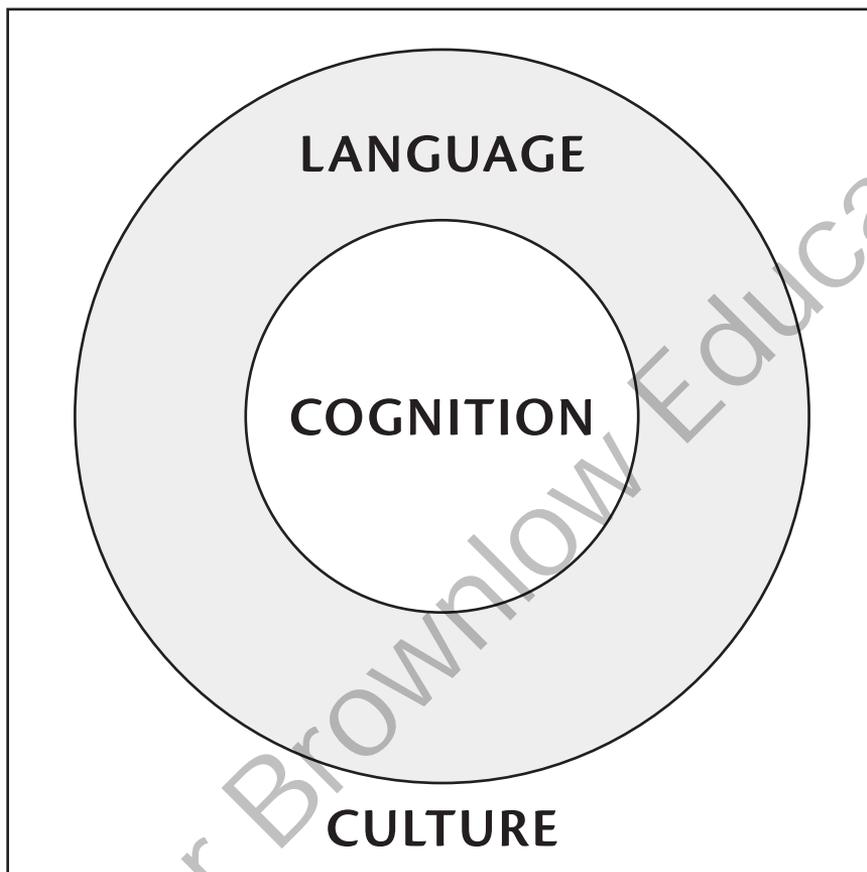
provide examples of the concept (or any information that puts the concept into context). The frame around the outside is used to generate discussion about the different experiences, perceptions, and points of view individuals have related to the concept. This discussion reveals the influence of background experience on an individual's thinking. Background experience, or cultural references, can be elicited by asking how one came to the knowledge displayed in the outer frame. But I have found that the most provocative question for developing the frame is to ask why or how the examples in the outside circle relate to or reflect the targeted concept in the central circle. This generates analytical thinking that assists in synthesizing ideas into definitions of or generalizations about the concept or theme of focus.

FIGURE 10.2 Pedagogical Flow Map for a Lesson on Measurement

Introduction

National Standards

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of science and technical texts, attending to the precise details of explanations or descriptions.

Follow precisely a complex multistep procedure when carrying out experiments, taking measurements, or performing technical tasks, attending to special cases or exceptions defined in the text.

Compare and contrast findings presented in a text to those from other sources (including their own experiments), noting when the findings support or contradict previous explanations or accounts.

Assessment

Hypothesize a sustainable plan for renewable energy within your community using specific textual evidence. Include other energy plans that have contradictory information with your research.

Concept Development

Concept: Measurement

Central Issue: Science and technology— The promise and paradoxes of innovation

Strategy: Circle Map

Energy Pre-test

Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary: Hydropower, sustainable, transmission, arbitrage, contiguous, anemometer, amperage, turbine, biomass, geothermal

Strategy: Frayer Model

Skill Development
(Explicit Skill and Strategy Instruction) (New Strategies/ Familiar Content)

Experiment/Lab

Imitation Writing

Four Square Science

Introduce the Text (Guided Practice)

Text: "Energy Answer: Blowing in the Wind" (Article)

Text: "Energy, Let's Save It": http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-g73ty9v04 (No words)

Experiment/Lab

Imitation Writing

Four Square Science

Mediate for Mastery

Flow Map: Experiment/Lab

Read Draw Talk Write

Key Word Notes: With video and written text

Teacher (Self) Reflection

Were my examples culturally responsive?

Did I provide multiple opportunities for students to make personal connections to the examples?

Release the Lesson (Independent Work)

Text: "Wind-to-Hydrogen Project" (NREL video)

Text: "The Clean Energy Economy" (Summary and data)

Experiment/Lab

Imitation Writing

Four Square Science

Review

Create crossword puzzles and word searches for younger students: http://www.eia.doe.gov/kids/energy.cfm?page=cwp_renewables

Use online energy calculator to show conversions: http://www.eia.doe.gov/kids/energy.cfm?page=about_energy_conversion_calculator-basics (Light bill, etc.)

Student Reflection (Confidence Check)

What skills am I having trouble with?

Create a taxonomy of terms related to measurement for various forms of energy sources.

Concept Confirmation

Concept: Measurement

Strategy: Circle Map

Assessment

Hypothesize a sustainable plan for renewable energy within your community using specific textual evidence. Include other energy plans that have contradictory information with your research.