

Learning Readiness

Pre-requisites for Learning: Goodness of Fit with Professor Reuven Feuerstein's Cognitive Enrichment Programs *By Dr. Martha M. Wood (2007)*

Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment (IE) and Learning Readiness Learning Readiness can be acquired in a variety of ways. Ideally, it develops naturally as children mature under the guidance and mediation of caring adults. When this is not the case, students may acquire Learning Readiness under the guidance and mediation of caring teachers. However, inevitably, there will be students who miss the mediation that is necessary to develop Learning Readiness. The need for a structured curriculum to guide teachers and parents is obvious, and fortunately such a curriculum exists in a Cognitive Enrichment Program developed by Professor Reuven Feuerstein (with the use of Instrumental Enrichment).

Why then has this curriculum not been more widely implemented? Primarily because it is not a "quick fix" and is therefore not attractive to administrators who are looking for immediate results. Note the following characteristics of IE, reflecting its thoroughness and complexity.

- Teachers must be trained in Feuerstein's theories of Mediated Learning and Structural Cognitive Modifiability as well as the specific techniques for teaching the "Instruments".
- IE is a two- to three-year program and teaching each level requires a minimum of 40 hours of study with a Certified Trainer.
- Only certified teachers and trainers may purchase IE materials.
- Then, the classroom or Learning Center schedule must be arranged to include at least two, 45 minute IE sessions each week.
- Since IE is not limited to any one content area, scheduling and assigning teachers can be problematic.
- Finally, materials must be provided for the students. IE materials are consumable and therefore must be purchased each year for each student.

The greatest detriment to implementation, however, is lack of familiarity. Since IE is not linked to a specific content area or age level, it is not an obvious topic for professional journals – particularly in the United States. IE materials have been translated into 19 languages, and IE has been implemented more widely in other countries than in the United States. There are now nine Authorized Training Centers (ATC's) in the United States, so hopefully, familiarity with Feuerstein's methods is increasing. There is now an International Web Site: www.icelp.org and several ATC Web Sites – one of which is our SCCEL site: www.scel.org.

For this practitioner, the theory of Learning Readiness has evolved through the study of Feuerstein's methods. This formal statement of the theory comes at the conclusion of a professional career devoted to the search for an answer to the question, "Why do so many students have such a hard time learning?" The theory of Learning Readiness presented

here has been tested to my satisfaction for "goodness of fit" with Feuerstein's programs as well as with the literature of educational pedagogy, and more importantly, with my 40 years of experience. Hopefully, in the future, those who share my fascination with the "whys" and the "hows" of learning will test this model more thoroughly. Could it be as simple as: Students have a hard time learning when they are not "ready" to learn?

The article below is a description of a proposed theory of Learning Readiness. Statements in italics are additions to the original article to point out the "goodness of fit" with Professor Feuerstein's views on how people learn.

Learning Readiness

There are four characteristics that a student should possess in order to learn effectively from classroom instruction:

1. The Disposition For Learning
2. Adequate Cognitive Functioning
3. Adequate Knowledge Base For The Content Being Presented
4. Adequate Study Skills And Strategies

Even when these four characteristics are accessible, however, learning is not likely to take place unless circumstances in which the individual finds himself/herself make it possible for the individual to apply them. (These "circumstances" could be personal situations, geographic location, curriculum offerings, quality of instruction, etc.)

The **DISPOSITION FOR LEARNING** is a characteristic that the student must possess before entering an academic setting if he/she is to gain the maximum benefit from his/her time and effort. It includes such constructs as:

- A desire to learn
- A positive attitude toward the learning situation
- A willingness to make the investment of time and effort that is necessary for learning
- The ability to persevere
- An understanding of the importance and value of learning

These characteristics are emphasized in Feuerstein's Parameters of Mediated Learning and become a part of the curriculum when Feuerstein's methods are followed.

ADEQUATE COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING refers to the possession of the cognitive (mental) skills that are necessary for learning. These skills should be acquired, in the normal process of maturing, from caring parents, or parent substitutes, and from teachers. They include such constructs as the ability to process information efficiently, the ability to make comparisons, the ability to organize information, the ability to handle more than one piece of information at the time, the ability to adequately communicate answers, etc. Although formal instruction in these skills is usually not a part of the school curriculum,

these skills can be learned and/or improved through good study strategies and/or through focused instruction in cognitive functions.

Feuerstein has identified specific Cognitive Functions that are pre-requisites to learning, and his programs are designed to assess and teach these functions. The assessment instrument is the Learning Propensity Assessment Device (LPAD) and the intervention program is Instrumental Enrichment (IE), which is appropriate for age 3 through 3rd grade (IE-Basic) and 4th grade through adulthood (IE-Standard and Fast Track).

ADEQUATE KNOWLEDGE BASE for a class is sometimes referred to as having "pre-requisite skills". In any academic setting, the instructor assumes a certain knowledge base-even if it may only be the ability to read. For example, in mathematics the knowledge base is particularly important. For a given lesson, certain mathematical skills are assumed and students who do not possess those prerequisite skills are at a decided disadvantage in learning "new material".

Students often assume they don't have the cognitive skills for learning a subject when the real problem is that they have continuously tried to take in new concepts without an adequate knowledge base. If this essential component for learning is lacking it must be remedied if effective learning is to take place. This aspect of learning readiness is addressed through "remedial courses" at any level. However, experience has shown that instruction in content alone will not insure success.

ADEQUATE STUDY SKILLS, like cognitive functions can, and should, be acquired as a result of maturing academically. However, if this is not the case, it may be necessary to provide focused instruction in study skills. (Such instruction should include mediation of many of the affective skills that make up a disposition for learning.) Fortunately, there are many good courses and abundant reading materials that address this need.

If maximum learning is to take place, careful attention must be given to these aspects of Learning Readiness. The implications for program design, choice of curriculum, and classroom presentation are profound.

Wood, 1996 (revised 2000)
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