

Foreword

Countries around the world are implementing educational standards they hope will guide their schools to produce the high performers needed to guarantee their vision of their ability to globally compete for the highest levels of productivity. Many school systems have shown that creation of programs to address the standards have resulted in increasing academic achievement scores for many; however, not only does a gap continue to exist between students labeled as achievers and those labeled “low achievers,” but data from new assessments that focus on higher levels of thinking illustrate that the number of students on the lower end of the bell curve is increasing (Hernandez and Gebeloff, 2013).

The most unfortunate collateral damage of the increasing pool of students labeled “low achievers” on these assessments is the interpretation of these results as indicative of these students’ incapacity for high levels of thinking. The underestimated (or totally ignored) reality proven by the eminent psychologist Reuven Feuerstein (and substantiated by neuroscience) is that these students are *not* incapable of high levels of thinking and performance. Instead, it is the mental processes and “habits of mind” requisite for high levels of thinking and intellectual performances that are underdeveloped.

So what is a critical root cause of this problem and what is needed to ensure the development of thinking so the vast capacity of all students can be elicited, nurtured and guided for high performance?

I have dedicated my practice to these questions and proffer one significant recognition: The focus of education on academic scores and/or global competition has steered us away from the original purpose of education upon which the word is derived: that is, to draw out and encourage high levels of thinking for activating the vast potential of an individual. This purpose of education is the catalyst for a new vision for schools, a vision that transcends the narrow focus of instruction on high test scores indicative of school achievement (where a large portion of students continue to underperform), to a vision of stimulating high levels of students’ thinking, enabling all students to recognize and act on the vast capacity of their abilities for self-actualization and personal contribution to the world.

Thinking Schools presents us with explorations into schools where such a vision is a reality. In these schools, instruction becomes instead mediation of learning designed to address the intention that every student be a deliberate, reflective, critical, and creative thinker for personal achievement. With this as the intention, explicit attention is on developing thinking to critically analyze, engage in comparative behaviors, reflect, question, critique, evaluate, forecast, and innovate. This laser focus is delivered through cognitive tools that create the neural patterns that make learning more efficient and effective and practices that cultivate habits of mind that animate the self-determination needed for

self-directed learning and high intellectual performance. The empirical, cognitive and neuroscience that substantiate these cognitive tools and practices are described along with guidance and insights from these Thinking Schools' educators so this vision can be facilitated in every school for all students.

Paolo Friere once said the question we have to address is this: When we emancipate all students to be deliberate, reflective thinkers who question, critique, and want to take action, will educators, systems, and governments be ready for the power that will be unleashed? The answer to that question is clear: We are at a seminal point in the evolution of a global community. The paradigm of a global community negates competition among countries. In a global community, countries recognize reciprocal interests and the need and benefit of interdependence. Therefore, this new paradigm of a global community calls for Thinking Schools internationally, schools where students will be equipped to think dialectically, reflecting on the ramifications and possibilities of interdependence; schools where students will be cultivated to transform themselves to be self-actualized and make contributions to transform the world so this millennium is the one in which we achieve the global success of cooperation, high productivity globally, and innovation of efficient and effective use of our most promising and productive resource: our mind and the thinking it generates.

Yvette Jackson, Ed.D.

Author of the Pedagogy of Confidence

Chief Executive Officer of the National Urban Alliance

REFERENCE ■

Hernandez and Gebeloff. (2013, August 7). Test scores sink as New York adopts tougher benchmarks. *New York Times*.