

**Editorial: Building a Conducive Environment in Underachieving Schools: A Critical Pedagogy****Guest Editor: Mutendwahothe Walter Lumadi** 

Building a conducive environment in an underachieving school requires fostering a positive classroom climate and culture. Seen as part of the tradition, a school should be a safe haven for learners in which the role of the teacher becomes critical – that of primary contributor to the creation of a climate and culture of learning. Learning as social interaction takes place in formal and informal settings in which teachers and learners interact.

Learners' cognitive development is likely to be facilitated when they are exposed to a stimulating environment in which considerable attention is given to providing enriched cognitive experiences (Brandt, 1990). A climate and culture conducive to learning depends on classes free from interruptions in which supportive teachers present well-organised lessons that promote smooth learning progression. The learning activities should be relevant with challenging content that appeals to all learners, regardless of their backgrounds. Edmonds (1979) notes that the teacher as custodian of knowledge should guide learners to acquire and hone knowledge in such a way that it becomes effective academic knowledge created from raw data.

Learners know what they want to achieve but do not always know how they want to achieve it. The teacher should understand this to influence the nature of learners' studying, regulate their behaviour, and set high expectations (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). Assessment is critical in understanding learners' progression and performance. However, it should leave room for noticeable areas of improvement that need encouragement while paying attention to weakness. This means that assessment should focus on progress, standards and learners' growth expectations. Feedback must be prioritised and learners who fail hopelessly should be given remedial work as strategic intervention. Johnson and Johnson (2012) believe that a successful school should focus on improving learners' performance by getting them involved in the planning and evaluation process.

Programme development plans should be in place and linked to the school's goal to address the challenges of coordination (Chrispeels, 1992). Underachieving schools should undertake data-driven decisions and set SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely). For improvement to be realised, underachieving schools should ask pertinent questions: What is our vision?; What is our mission?; Who is our client?; Where do our clients come from?; How does the curriculum meet our clients' needs and interests? The school leadership should agree on a common purpose and work as a cooperating team (Ferguson, 2011) to reach their goals, promote higher learner achievement, and become successful. In achieving this, both school management and teachers must assume responsibility to turn learner achievement around.

When teachers get to know their learners and build positive relationships with them, they create classrooms that become enjoyable places to work and learn in which learners can excel academically and socially (Edmonds, 1979). Coupled with a caring attitude, the teacher can encourage learners to treat each other with the same caring attitude (Lezotte, 1991). Teachers that treat learners with respect and care, who care for the learning environment, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and society can promote and foster positive collaboration among learners.

**References**

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