



Changing Minds and Brains: The Legacy of Reuven Feuerstein Higher Thinking and Cognition Through Mediated Learning

Feuerstein, Reuven; Falik, Louis H.; and Feuerstein, Refael S.
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Book Review

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Until his death at ninety-three in 2014, Reuven Feuerstein was a leader in the fields of cognitive development, cognitive assessment, and education. His theory of Structural Cognitive Modifiability through the application of mediated learning experience (MLE) is widely applied in the context of educational and personal remediation for children and adolescents (but also adults) with deep learning disabilities as well as those with cognitive and affective impairments. “Much of Feuerstein’s professional life was spent – working with children and youth who were culturally different or culturally deprived – in Feuerstein’s own terms. These clinical experiences led him to focus on the developmental consequences of sociocultural disadvantage and atypical development” (xiii).

The essays in this book were chosen to reveal the evolution of the theory of mediated learning as developed by Reuven Feuerstein. The objectives of the book, according to the editors, are to expose readers to the writings of Feuerstein, to show the organic nature of the theory he developed and its implications for humankind, and to highlight the influence of Judaic culture in the formation and development of the theory (xxiii).

MLE is defined as “the interposition out of initiated, intelligent, goal-oriented individuals who interpose themselves between the world of stimuli impinging on the [learner] and interpret what one is supposed to see; not only this, but the mediator must be interested in and concerned with certain elements that the [learner] has to learn” (5). The goal of mediated learning is change, primarily change in the ways in which individuals approach learning and problem-solving situations (xiii).

Feuerstein claims there are two main theories that explain the modalities by which individuals learn and develop; one is through direct exposure where no awareness and consciousness is needed, primarily emphasized by behaviorists, and the second, postulated by Piaget, conceives learning as a sole product of the maturational process which makes the interaction with stimuli possible, according to the age and the maturational level of the brain. Feuerstein did not think these two theoretical perspectives really explained the way human intelligence develops. He proposed a third way, which requires the function of the human mediator, hence, his theory of Mediated Learning Experiences (19).

The majority of the book reviews the theory and methodology of MLE in great detail and deep explication. Chapters 1 through 8 will be of interest to those desiring to understand the theory and practice of MLE and its application to situations of remediation and work with particular populations.

Chapter 1 reviews the development of the concept of modifiability and how MLE's foundational concept differs from Piaget's theory of cognitive development and its assumptions. Chapter 2 describes the universal parameters and relevance of MLE and addresses why many do not receive adequate mediation. An important treatment in this chapter is Feuerstein's differentiation between cultural differences and cultural deprivation in terms of the theory and its application.

Chapters 3 to 5 review MLE in greater depth, considering its application in education and other contexts, and review the concepts of the nature of change, behavior, and structural cognition related to mediated learning. Chapter 5 reviews more contemporary and emerging sources in behavioral and scientific fields that support and validate the theory and practice of MLE.

The later chapters of the book are of more specific relevance and interest to the readers of this journal. Chapter 6 describes Feuerstein's search, in his later years, for the genesis and the development of spirituality (morality, ethics, religious belief) in the material and structural aspects of role development and cognition. Chapter 9 provides a very helpful review of how three pedagogies of questioning – Socratic dialogue, collaborative learning, and Talmudic pedagogy – are applied to mediated learning. Chapter 10 brings MLE into the modern context of digital communication and rapidly available information through technology. It provides a very challenging and articulate treatment of the implications of the changing nature of epistemology and pedagogy in the digital age.

While MLE tends to be a pedagogy applied to remediation with particular populations, understanding its theoretical basis for understanding cognition is of great value to any

educator. In this volume, the later chapters reviewing cognition and spirituality and pedagogy related to the epistemology and cognition in the digital age are well worth reading.

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