

## HEALTHY EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: NEW DIRECTIONS AND CHALLENGES

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The domain of “healthy educational environment” is an emerging area of study derived from a reinterpretation of traditional learning science and a re-examination of conceptions of health. The concept of educational environment is being reconceptualized through the lens of an ecological perspective by examining the basic assumptions psychological learning theories as well as the meaning of “being healthy.”

Exploring limitations of the conventional conception of learning will be helpful in identifying the obstacles that keep a learner from healthy learning activities and lead to the creation of unhealthy physical and social-emotional well-being.

Social-emotional health is composed of the following components:

1. awareness of one’s own and others’ behavior, appropriate emotional responses, and styles of communication;
2. ability to make decisions, manage the consequences of their decisions, cope with internal and external stress, and communicate with others;
3. ability to pursue one’s own individual development and manage the factors of self-perfection.

There are inherent links between academic success and social-emotional health. The feeling that one can accomplish a particular task in the classroom leads to the formation of identity, self-direction and self-efficacy, and a sense of purpose outside the classroom. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills in academic work develop ability of conflict resolution and decision-making skills outside the classroom couple with a sense of autonomy. A developing sense of appropriateness in its own turn can impact classroom conduct, including attentiveness and concentration. It will also influence self-esteem and social interactions with peers.

Eliminating barriers to healthy emotional-social development is to shift to the healthy paradigm of educational environment with its distinguishing features known as:

- a) Learning reflects the individual’s natural tendency to learn and individuals’ tendency to learn in different ways to attain relevant standards (e.g., objectives, outcomes). It also takes account of the individual’s personal context: ability, level of opportunity and advantage, situation and setting.
- b) A healthy learning environment emphasizes and constantly expands the capacity of each individual and the collective. Early learning and equitable access to achieving high standards and reasonable outcomes are part of a healthy learning environment.
- c) Learning is most effective in an environment where challenge is high, but threat is low. Contradiction can be an effective impetus for learning.
- d) An “inclusive learning environment” is ensured where all of the students and participants are actively involved in the learning process and can fully relate to the concepts being presented.

Recognizing, understanding, appreciating, and valuing personal differences in each individual student can eliminate such barrier to emotional well being as groupthink in the classroom. (Groupthink is a pattern of biased decision making that occurs in groups whose members strive for agreement, among themselves, at the expense of accurately assessing information relevant to a decision). Understanding and respecting such differences can create an “in-

clusive learning environment” where groupthink is avoided and synergistic results flow infinitely as learners think for themselves and stretch their abilities beyond their existing boundaries. Diverse teams can achieve synergistic results if they appreciate, understand and value their differences effectively.

The challenge of renewing educational environment within health-based approach brings into question teacher’s preparation process which is bound to reconsider its educational objectives, curricula and pedagogy. Professional teachers’ training aimed at turning out graduates for ‘healthy school education’ should undergo the following alterations in its objectives:

- to foster understanding of the links among social-emotional development, mental health, and learning, inform prospective teachers about social-emotional wellness and provide specific skill-based techniques for classroom use;
- to give overview of potential effects on learning and behavior, risk factors and protective factors for mental and emotional problems;
- to show teachers and staff how to develop an action plan to help pupils who need additional support;
- to teach them to formulate a plan to encourage the creation of sustained school-home-community partnerships to meet the educational and developmental needs of youth;
- to teach them ways to promote a healthy learning environment through instructional techniques that take into account individual styles of learning and the classroom climate;
- to instill the value of diversity in the class and its synergetic potential for individual development;
- to teach them strategies to promote a positive classroom climate which contributes to learning and mental health for all pupils.

To meet the outlined objectives of teacher education it is essential to involve new learning modules which give expended information on the rationale for healthy educational environment and the ways to put it into implementation: learning cycle, creativity theory, principles of healthy communication, the concept of positive feedback, adventure based education and cooperative learning, the sequential progression of teambuilding, strategies for disciplines breaches prevention, behavioral norming strategies, techniques designed to develop synergetic teambuilding, etc.