

THE BENEFITS OF ATTENDING A REMEDIAL SCHOOL

“Childhood is not a race to see how quickly a child can read, write and count. Childhood is a small window of time to learn and develop at the pace which is right for each individual child.” – Magda Gerber

There is absolutely no reason to attach a stigma to the word remedial. The word just incorporates the idea that a remedy is going to be sought in order to address the child's learning difficulties. Nobody would refuse medical assistance for their child, as that would be perceived as cruelty. Neither should a child be left to struggle on endlessly, experiencing constant failure and emotional trauma in the school system not designed to cater for their specific needs.

Remedial schools fulfil a crucial function in our education system. Remedial schools have a specific vision and that is to enable learners, who, if left without intervention, would not have much of a future. Many learners drop out of school because all they ever experience is academic failure. In remedial schools we cover the same curriculum as they do in mainstream schools, but we employ a remedial focus in all our teaching. We thus cater for the needs of individual learners.

I taught in the mainstream school system for 23 years, but only really learnt HOW to teach when I started teaching in a remedial school. I soon learnt not to be consumed with rushing through the curriculum, but instead to focus on the needs of the individual learners. Because of small class sizes, this is possible in the remedial school setup. Education takes place at a slower pace and learners do not work on their frustration level, but on their functional and instruction level. We are thus able to go back, in order to move forward.

The biggest frustration that remedial schools face is that many learner's parents were constantly encouraged to investigate the remedial route and to have their children assessed by educational psychologists in order to find the correct placement for them. Yet, years go by, without parents doing anything about the problem, and only when the child fails Grade 6 or 7, will they enrol the child in a remedial school, which is years too late. We then have to work with learners who are many years behind their peers in their

development and we are then expected to do the impossible. It is therefore evident that intervention happens far too late.

Many learners display learning problems at an early age, but parent denial and a perceived stigma attached to the word 'remedial' prevents learners in desperate need, from receiving crucial intervention at an early stage of their school careers. Early identification and intervention is the only route to learner success. The best time to send a child to a remedial school, would be in the Foundation Phase years (Grade R – 3), when basic skills are taught. The later a child begins with therapy, the bigger the gaps in knowledge and skills and the more difficult it becomes to remediate their learning challenges.

Finland produces top academic results internationally and the secret of their success is early intervention. Finish educators believe that 90% of students can succeed in the regular classrooms if they receive the emotional, academic and medical help they need. Critical emphasis is placed on early intervention. A third of their young children receive remedial education in some form and most of their education budget is set aside for the early years. Intervention begins right away, as soon as the child enters the system.

In remedial schools we tend to become a close knit, supportive family where the education is entirely child focused. A learner with learning difficulties tends to get lost and overlooked when placed in a large class, where a remedial approach is not evident.

Many learners are successfully mainstreamed after having spent a few years in a remedial school, especially if they start in the Foundation Phase. We therefor strongly urge parents to embrace the wonderful service that remedial schools have to offer our children in need.

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