

Inclusive Ways of Rewarding Learners for Academic Achievement: What Are the Possibilities?

Dr. Shakira Akabor

University of South Africa (UNISA), South Africa

Abstract

Rewarding learners at school for excellence in academic achievement with badges, trophies, honour board listings and certificates is a fairly common practice in South African schools with over a century of tradition. Insights gleaned from previous mixed methods study on the impact of rewards on learners at two Gauteng high schools reveal that visibly rewarding learners provides the notion of excellence in education that is available to a small number of learners but excludes the majority of learners. This discrepancy in achievement goes against the foundations of inclusive education, wherein the participation and achievement of all learners is paramount. How then do schools confront this dilemma? This article reports on the current study in which 4 secondary schools in the Eastern Cape and KZN are invited to explore the possibility of changing the ways in which we traditionally reward learners for academic achievement. By incorporating Africanized ways of recognizing talent, schools offer insights into what can work and what the future of rewards might look like. Related concepts such as Ubuntu and collaborative environments are also explored. The article questions the ways in which schools can promote the recognition of academic talent by dismantling traditional practices and incorporating new methods that are more inclusive. In doing so, schools can focus on nurturing academic talent without shaming, blaming and minimizing the efforts of learners.

Keywords: Rewards, Academic Talent, Africanization, Inclusive Education