

EQUITY VERSUS EQUALITY: EDUCATION AMID STUDENT DIVERSITY

by:

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You have probably heard the saying, “Everyone is unique.” Although it is a common saying, we cannot ignore the truth in it. Also, in the field of education, this “uniqueness” is very common, especially among students. Every student is distinct in terms of beliefs, customs, and socioeconomic background and so, each student, as an individual, learns distinctively. As teachers, who are facilitators of learning, we must be aware of the aptitude background, and personality of our students to understand their “uniqueness.” An understanding of our students’ “uniqueness” will enable us to incorporate their abilities and skills in planning for effective classroom instruction.

Admittedly, teaching in classrooms with diverse students is very difficult. In the midst of student diversity, we, teachers, must fully understand the social and cultural distinctiveness of our students because these aspects reflect the way they learn. To fully understand the different perspectives of our students, we need to consider the sociological foundation of education. Considering the existence of sociological foundation of education will bring us, teachers, many opportunities of exploring our skills and abilities other than the strengths that we know. As curriculum developers, the sociological foundation and dimension of education help us to plan and construct lesson plans that can cater to the diverse needs of our students. Also, studying this foundation of education helps us to diversify our pedagogical approaches and assessment techniques to provide our students with hopes and aspirations toward learning, especially those in marginal societies.

For the sake of our students, as they communicate and interact with each other, as teachers, we must study and understand the sociological foundation of education to create a platform for sociological discussions among our students wherein they can share their personal backgrounds and experiences. From this, we can know and handle their successes and conflicts very well. As we already know our students, we can now be able to adapt to their differences by allowing them to choose and decide their own preferred way of learning. Also, we can now identify patterns and groups of universality (unity along with diversity) among them which can be beneficial to our students to transcend group differences and on our part as their facilitators. To enhance the self-awareness of our students towards learning diversity, we can purposely group our students with different learning styles and diverse backgrounds for certain activities in order to promote cooperation and collaboration which can help them to come up with a good and innovative result.

One of the aims of education is to provide and promote fairness among learners and to attain this, the ideas of equity and equality must be considered. Equity and equality are often used interchangeably, but the two terms have different meanings. These words are about fairness but as we diverge the concept of fairness, its meaning branches out into many aspects with various considerations and limitations. In education, equality simply means everyone is treated the same way, regardless of need or individual differences. Equity, on the other hand, means everyone is supplied with what they need to succeed. As facilitators of learning, we, teachers, need to show equality and respect for the individual differences of our students by considering them in our teaching approaches. Also, we need to view them as equal, with no tradition, belief, principle, or culture greater than the other. Lastly, as classroom managers of our students, we must promote understanding and appreciation of their differences and see these as a key opportunity for them to learn among themselves. In these ways, we can encourage and guide them to discover their own values.

Moreover, we, teachers, must strip away the concept of stereotyping among our students and treat our students as individuals with their own needs for learning. It is because there are times that teachers unevenly treat their students and so, for every discussion and assessment, they are not aware that some of their students are no longer able to follow the lessons they study. We, teachers, have to remember that every student is distinct in terms of beliefs, customs, and socioeconomic background and so, each student, as an individual, learns distinctively. As I have a rich seven years of teaching experience, I admit that teaching in classrooms with diverse students is really difficult. But there is a saying, "There is no battalion of warriors rushing on a bloody war without planning". Meaning to say, we, teachers, have to plan for this backbreaking and crucial "battle" to engulf their "uniqueness" and this must initially start with knowing them as persons, as individuals. In this process, you can hold forums where they can share their socioeconomic background and experiences. And from this initial process of knowing our students, we can know the ways in handling their successes and conflicts, their strengths and weaknesses. Aside from that, knowing our students can help us to diversify our pedagogical approaches and assessment techniques aligned to the depth and breadth of students' way of learning.

Knowing and understanding the diversity of our students enables us, teachers, to cope to their distinctiveness by letting them choose and decide in terms of what they will learn and how they will learn it. Tailoring our classroom instruction is a must to adapt to this diversity of learning styles to meet their educational needs. This differentiated instruction must be in accordance to our students' preferred way of learning, depth, and breadth of learning, and strengths and weaknesses. The implementation of differentiated instruction must be accompanied by the identification of patterns and groups of universality among our students. In this way, the essence of unity in the midst of student diversity is practiced which can be beneficial in transcending group differences among our students. To increase our students' self-awareness and appreciation of learning diversity, we can purposely group them with distinct learning styles and rich personal backgrounds. From

these diverse groupings, they can be exposed to a lot of brainstorming of ideas, especially for certain group activities, which can urge them to cooperate and collaborate with others to come up with a creative and excellent result.

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