

Equity in the Classroom through CULTURALLY CONSCIOUS INSTRUCTION

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Everyone needs a pair of shoes, but each person needs a pair that fits them properly. Because of this, not all shoes are going to be the same. Equity in the classroom is just this. It isn't synonymous with fairness, but rather, according to Edwin Javius, CEO of EDEquity Inc., it consists of "applying additional or different resources (human, fiscal, and intellectual) to ensure all students receive what they need to exceed common core, or rigorous, standards."

To foster equity in the classroom, educators must be culturally conscious. To accomplish this, Javius explained in his Saturday session, "Equity and Culturally Conscious Teaching: Meeting Rigorous Standards," they must be purposeful, intentional, and deliberate with students. Understanding where students come from and focusing on building relationships with them is crucial to being able to give them what they need to succeed.

Growing up, Javius experienced very little cultural synchronization between school and home. He described himself as an ESL student because he didn't speak using academic language, but preferred to speak in the black dialect he was accustomed to. He wasn't taught to speak with a quiet voice, wait his turn to speak, or sit still for long periods of time. He was, however, able to hold meaningful conversations with adults at the mere age of four. Rather than recognizing this as one of many core attributes he possessed, his teacher only saw a student who couldn't sit still during circle time. The problem in many classrooms, Javius stated, is that teachers aren't always dissecting what students are bringing to the table.



Equity, he argued, is 75 percent mind-set and 25 percent strategies. Mind-set comprises not only our cultural awareness and attitude, but also our ability to analyze our own biases and to recognize how racial identification and development affect how students

learn. Some minority or low-income students are caught between trying to succeed in an AP class and still maintaining relationships with their friends who aren't excelling in school. Some of these students may also feel as if they can't answer incorrectly in class, or it will be attributed to the color of their skin. "To understand the impact of race and culture on student achievement, [teachers] need to be willing to abandon the belief that colorblindness is a possible solution," according to Javius, because equity itself is based on color consciousness.

In the last few minutes of his session, Javius left educators with three "culturally conscious instructional strategies" to support students in transferring their learning into the common core realm. The first was the use of structured oral language practice, which consists of strategically pairing students and having them discuss topics as the teacher models academic language use and assists them when needed. The second strategy involves transferring the use of academic language to what the students are expected to master cognitively. Finally, Javius recommended employing positive and descriptive feedback in the classroom. He emphasized the importance of commending students on their efforts, not on whether their answers are correct.

According to Javius, "there are no pedagogical barriers to teaching and learning when willing people are prepared and made available to children." The knowledge and skills needed to educate all children equitably already exist; it is the will to do it that is needed. ■



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