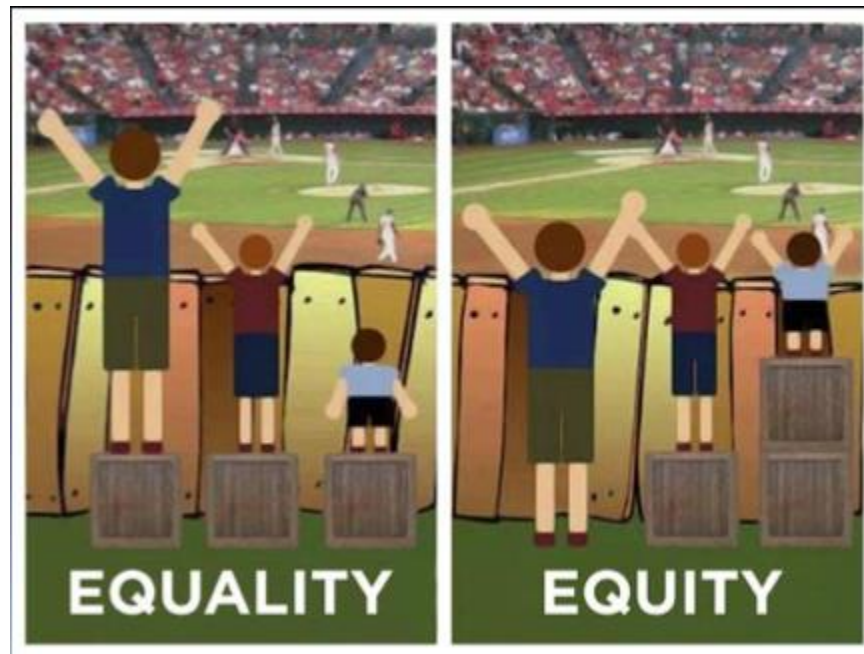


Why I hate the EQUALITY vs. EQUITY Graphic

11/5/2014

6 Comments



I am often bothered by this picture - the one of the kids looking over the fence, (the one titled “equality vs. equity”), because I believe this is the wrong message for teachers who truly believe in either equality or equity to stand by in education.

The kids are all trying to look over the fence... one is short, one medium-height, and one tall enough to see over the fence but just barely. In the next frame the kids all have crates to stand on that are different sizes so they all can see over the fence. The idea is that all kids should be given services that get them to see over the fence. The problem is the crates are all shorter and shorter the taller the child is.

If you take this literally it implies that every child who is already doing grade level work, (hence, “seeing over the fence”), only needs a little bit of support or teaching during the school year, while other children should get more support and teaching. In other words it is saying that students with higher abilities should get less time or help or teaching than the other kids.

This is a real problem in education, not merely a problem in a cartoon picture. High level kids are often left to their own devices and teachers sometime assume these kids are ok with getting support, which often means less learning in a school year than other students. Kids who are asked to do remedial work to keep busy while other kids practice tasks they struggle with, or kids who are asked to help the other students after they are done learning the task themselves are often spinning their wheels and wasting hours of the school days when they could be learning new things and pushing their own minds instead. But yet teachers often seem to think it’s okay as long as they don’t create problems in the classroom... as long as they pass their standardized testing... as long as they don’t have parents who complain.

There are many kids with parents who trust the system and do not ask many questions or who just can't participate as much as they would like in their children's educational experience. They may be the ones who don't come to parent conferences because they are working, or the ones who don't realize their child is capable of much more and celebrate all the high scores he/she brings home each year. The ones who believe the teacher when the teacher says the child is not listening well in class, or the child is not doing well because of behavior issues, rather than challenging the teacher to find out why their child is doing grade-level work and acting out. Those parents look to us to help their children achieve at the highest level they are capable of achieving. We are not meeting that challenge by only giving those kids just a small "boost" or no boost at all like the cartoon implies those children should receive. Every child deserves our efforts as teachers and we should work just as hard to help them push their own limits as we push the kids who struggle more.

There are many gifted kids who will sit back and skate through life without complaining. But with a boost from a teacher who cares about them they could reach heights they never thought they could achieve before.

It is so important that in this day and age of common core standards that we advocate hard for those kids who have the ability to soar but are held back by the education system- the ones who meet the standards easily but then are forced to sit in class and wait for everyone else to meet them. Or the kids who are capable of meeting the standards but already are giving up on playing the school game because they are bored or they are uncomfortable with the teacher or their peers in the class or they are lacking skills but assumed to be the "smart kids" so they are afraid to ask questions or participate or just plain don't want to even engage. We cannot let the lists of standards limit how far our gifted kids (or any kids) can go. The standards are not checklists that should be checked off and then "completed." Learning should happen as a cycle- although skills may be learned and practice achieved, there is always a higher level you can take a discussion to, or a new way to explore concepts to see how they interact in new ways. Find extra books and bring in interesting articles and question the kids with things that make the teachers think hard about life and about the universe. And continue to push and provide opportunities that tie the world to the classroom and the kids to the community and things outside of the classroom doors. Keep stretching them, keep questioning, keep growing as teachers and the kids will keep up with you if they are taught to care and how to think, rather than how to achieve on a few classroom tasks because a standards list said they needed to accomplish something, or a test is going to only focus on the few things you did that week in some book.

There are students who are going to try to convince us they are too hard to reach, or too weak in some skills that they do not have high abilities. They will trick us and try us and sometimes make it easier to let them stand without that "boost." And that is when we need to know enough about gifted kids to see past those behaviors and find the ways to reach them regardless. We need to focus our efforts in the education communities to ensure adequate training for all teachers - so that those who see misbehavior as a sign of low intellect can learn to see when it is more likely a sign of boredom or a sign that the academic program is not working for the child. We need districts and teacher certification programs to prepare experienced teachers as well as brand new teachers to teach real world connections and higher order thinking and to infuse every lesson with social-emotional skill building practice and support so that every child is challenged and supported, and every lesson is meaningful and stretches every mind.

Every child is entitled to high level instruction and should learn something new every day. Give every child the highest boost because they all deserve the teacher's time and energy. Help every child see over the fence but don't stop once they do - some of them can fly.

6 Comments

Eirin 8/31/2015 22:51:32

Glad I Googled that cartoon before using it in a presentation against bullying! I had already thought of asking whether we could be sure this actually fulfilled the needs of the tall child, but I only got so far as to think he might belong in the game instead of passively watching. Now I will also problematize the fence itself: who put it up, why that height, what is it there for, etc.

Thank you for posting your very accurate musings online!

Reply

Tina 10/27/2015 00:24:57

I see this image - and have only seen this image in relation to needs based funding of schools.

Reply

Barry Thorpe 2/24/2016 11:08:26

The graphic uses 3 boxes to illustrate a solution to equitably distribute limited resources. Your point is well taken in a hypothetical world of unlimited boxes (resources of time, money, personnel, and instructional options). However, the point here is, in order to reach a goal (seeing over the fence) ... The best use of limited resources is to distribute the boxes in a way that first allows the goal to be realized by all. If you want to then introduce a new and/or loftier goal, that would require an input of more resources. I think the graphic is good for what it is trying to say. The greater need for more resources to develop the already gifted student is implied. On another note, I think this was meant to be more of an economic statement than an educational one.

Reply

Josh 2/25/2016 09:37:12

I also think--in an educational context--it's a narrow reading to say that equitable teaching is purely a function of time. There are plenty of equitable teaching practices that do not sacrifice time away from one set of students in lieu of additional time to another set. Part of this idea, I think, involves shifting the notion of differentiation away from teachers "working independently with different achievement-level groups of students" and toward teachers "providing engaging activities that students of all achievement-levels can enter into in whatever ways suit them." In particular, research has demonstrated, conclusively to my satisfaction, that tracking in mathematics classes (whether within or across classes) is counterproductive to learning. Making this transition requires a lot of professional development and curricular support for teachers, who often have a skill-minded rather than a problem-solving and critical-thinking oriented understanding of mathematics (and, quite likely, other domains as well).

Reply

Barry Thorpe 2/26/2016 09:28:34

"Making this transition requires a lot of professional development and curricular support for teachers". That is precisely the point I was trying to make. Teacher development requires time, money, and resources. Supporting teachers takes time, money and resources. I wasn't only referring to class time.

Reply

Susanne Cooper 3/1/2016 05:18:52

I think that this cartoon, as it applies to gifted students, could be instantly remedied if one assumes that the ballgame is representative of a year's worth of learning for a year's worth of schooling...something our tall poppies are routinely denied. The boxes would then be symbolic of acceleration, special programs, and the like.



Kathleen Casper

Kathleen is a board member of SENG (www.SENGGifted.org), and is the Legislative Chair for the Florida Association for the Gifted (FLAG), as well as the former vice president of the Washington Association for Educators of the Talented and Gifted (www.waetag.net).

She was the Highly Capable Program Facilitator for the Tacoma Public Schools and a teacher in both Florida and Washington State.

She is currently teaching civics education at a middle school for a school district in West Florida as well as doing consultant work and working as a part time attorney specializing in family and education law for clients in Washington State.

She and her husband Brad are parents of four gifted children, as well as foster parents and formerly were a host family for Shared Housing Services where they were mentors and provided housing for young adults in their home.

An avid traveler, Kathleen is a national writer, presenter and a consultant who works with school administrators, teachers, parents and students from all over the world.