

EDVOCATE

Not all that can be measured, should be; not all that should be measured, can be

Social Emotional Education

An article in the November 30th issue of *Education Week* revealed that emotional engagement at school is the noncognitive factor that most directly correlates with academic achievement.

In a 2009 Gallup study of 78,106 students in 80 schools across eight states, researchers found that a 1-percentage-point increase in a student's score on an engagement index was associated with a 6-point increase in reading achievement and an 8-point increase in math achievement scores. PSTA will address these findings with more in-depth analysis in later newsletters. In the meantime you can read the complete article from *Education Week* here: <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/04/09/28gallup.h33.html>



Embracing Equity: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love What I Do - by Erin Graham, H.S. Dir.

Earlier this year, my classroom flooded. I teach English at Palm Springs High School, and my classes were displaced for a week (even enjoyed a few days teaching in a locker room with better equipment and wifi than my classroom). While it was frustrating, disruptive, and infuriating at times...it was also kind of fun. There was no point in trying to maintain a seating chart when we moved every day, so meeting students in a “neutral” space and





Did You Know?

CVT will pay for you to join Weight Watchers. Go to <https://www.solera4me.com> to see if you qualify.

YES Opportunities

As Christmas approaches, so many of us can find a multitude of reasons to be grateful. It's also a wonderful time to remember and do something for those who have less. Join your PSTA brethren on Thursday, December 21 to distribute Christmas Food Baskets beginning at 3 p.m. at the Galilee Center located at 66101 Hammond Rd. In Mecca.

If you have your Christmas morning free, you can return to the Galilee Center to distribute toys to the needy children of the area beginning at 10 a.m. As always, you'll get a t-shirt for your participation in any YES project, but this time you'll get the additional gift of a child's excited smile.

You'll have another YES opportunity on February 1, 2018 if you volunteer to help with the district's Wellbeing Fair.

watching where they sat presented an opportunity for reflection I had been missing in my carefully managed classroom environment. There were different social groups and interactions, different students volunteering and leading, and more flexibility as students often had to share space to work. When I returned to my classroom, I realized that I hadn't rearranged the configuration of the furniture in the eight years I've been in that particular room. I like to imagine myself as an innovative teacher who responds to the needs of her students, but that was something of a wake-up call. How can I claim to be a proponent of equity in education if I couldn't even provide my students with a room that suited their needs, rather than my own? At that point, I decided to dedicate myself to restructuring "my" classroom as "our" classroom- inviting my students to own the space.

Now, I know what some of you are thinking: Look crazy lady, if I gave up a seating chart I would have students falling out of the ceiling. Some of you are scoffing that "Equity" is another buzzword, another educational fad that will fade in 5-10 years. Others have probably already written this off as another "strategy" that sounds great, but has no place in an actual, functioning classroom. You do have valid points (especially the seating chart one).



Establishing a certain environment is necessary for a successful class, and giving up control to allow for change to take place is scary, messy, and quite frankly, can make you look like a "bad" teacher from the outside, mostly in terms of classroom management. But in my experience, equity is what we've been fighting for since I started teaching. Every time we've pushed back against standardized testing, against mandatory pacing guides, against that one-size-fits-all approach, we've taken a stand for equity. Every time we've differentiated instruction for our students, we've taken a stand for equity. And every time we've argued for respect as professionals, as the experts in our classrooms, we've taken a stand for equity.

It probably makes some of us uncomfortable, because

equity is NOT equality. And we, as a nation, have been so focused on equality throughout our existence. It is easy to say “every student has the same opportunities in my classroom”, and to tout our objectivity. It is much more difficult to acknowledge that every student needs different support to even have access to those opportunities. According to CTA’s strategic plan, equity is: “a commitment to... fairness in treatment and access to opportunities and resources for everyone, recognizing that equality is not necessarily equitable” (CTA, 2014). Simply put, equity means something different for every classroom, every teacher, and every student. It can be mandated, such as giving a student extra time for an assignment due to an IEP. It can be student-driven, such as asking to sit in a different seat because s/he is having trouble seeing or hearing, or is struggling to concentrate. It can be district-driven, such as allocating different programs at different sites. But it also can, and should be, teacher-driven. We know our students, their needs, and their strengths best, and we need to advocate for them.

This is never easy. I am certainly speaking from a position of privilege; I’ve taught at the same site for 13 years, and have the resources and relationships that set a foundation for autonomy in my teaching. I have the luxury of standing up and speaking out. New teachers take note- you are not failing your students or yourselves by following directives or copying the lesson plans of others. In fact, you are building your own foundation for your future as an educator and your students’ futures as informed participants in society. Again, equity doesn’t mean that you have to be an innovator every day. It doesn’t mean your class is a free-for-all, where students just do what they want. It just means that you’re attuned to your students’ needs and that you’re committed to meeting them.

Ok, so what does all this have to do with furniture? As one of my first moves toward more equitable teaching, I implemented flexible seating. A crucial part of my understanding of equity involves choice, and picking where to sit each day is a good step toward that. Each day, I encourage students to sit in a different place. Some days they want to be a group. Some days they want to be left alone. It took some getting used to, and yes, there was a lot more talking and people off task at first. But after about a week, I noticed more students volunteering to answer questions and read out loud. They grew more engaged, mingling between different academic or research groups and teaching each other. I also found that students started choosing to sit next to others outside their social circle, without being mandated by a seating chart. To my delight, a higher percentage of students completed assignments in my sophomore class than before. I had more freedom to move about, and could gauge the emotional atmosphere of the room as well as their understanding of the material more easily than in the past.

Of course, these are things that can’t necessarily be measured. And I know there’s more than one administrator out there who would pass out if they saw students sitting on the floor in a classroom. The reality in these days of high-stakes testing and tracking our students’ every move is that data is king. If there isn’t data to back it up, we’re told it isn’t real or effective. Yes, data is important. But what’s more important are our day-to-day interactions with our students. We know that those can’t be measured, and we have to be able to say “That’s ok”. Not everything can be tested, and not every aspect of our job is objective. Even in the face of district and admin pressure, we have to be willing to say “I am doing what is right and equitable for my students”. Only then will our profession and our students thrive.

Is there a step-by-step plan for equity? Nope. Will you ever be perfectly meeting your students’ needs? Not by a long-shot. Do I envision myself as some paragon of equitable educating? Hahaha, good one. I do imagine myself representative of a PSTA member though- a dedicated, passionate teacher who consistently practices equity for our students, our schools, and ourselves.

