

Learning

Knowing and understanding the different kinds of diversity at school

Diversity among your students is a big challenge for your school. If this issue is not addressed adequately, it may affect students' achievements and their social status in adult life. To provide every student with an equal chance for success in school means to understanding each student's learning needs and responding to them individually. Fairness in education does not mean giving everyone the same, but providing everyone with what they need.

But how can you, as a principal, deal with diversity in your school without specialized staff and no time to find out about it? One way is to deal with each case when it comes to your office. Another way is to prepare the educational staff to be sensitive to diversity.

When we speak about diversity at school, we usually mean cultural differences between students. It is widely assumed that diversity primarily affects schools with a multicultural background among students.

This assumption has been proved wrong. Research has shown that usually there are more differences between students that are labelled with the "same" cultural identities rather than "different" ones. School diversity is not mainly a matter of culture or ethnicity. Within each cultural or ethnic group of students, we will find high and low performers and students with different learning needs.

To deal with this kind of diversity at school, the staff needs to be aware of, and open-minded to the learners' diversity of characters, learning styles, gender, age groups, developmental needs etc.

Although it seems highly desirable to know every single student's specific learning profile, but it is not feasible. Schools have no specialized staff, and teachers and principals lack the time to find out. But the school culture must encourage openness to diversity, so that teachers may take diversity in their classes into consideration when planning and teaching their lessons and evaluating their students.

