



Principal's Post

About Teaching and Learning

December, 2016

FAIRNESS

"That's not fair!!!" "Try to be fair..." "It's only fair..." But what's fair isn't always the same. So what is FAIR? Being fair is an ideal that we value but what does that mean in the context of education?

Education is a cooperative endeavor, not a competitive one. In fact, research shows that competition within a class damages class culture. A competitive classroom climate where winning or being "number one" is the ultimate goal or the "ends" of learning harms students. A class climate that pits students against one another for grades saps motivation and gives students the impression that if you don't "win", or are not "first" then learning is not worth the effort. When in fact, learning is *all about EFFORT*. The purpose of education is for EACH CHILD TO LEARN. A primary goal of education is to cultivate in each student the desire to put forth effort, to strive, to continue to learn all throughout life. So it is essential for the entire school, and for each teacher, to create a classroom environment that fosters striving, acknowledges accomplishments, celebrates creativity, and promotes curiosity. The classroom must be the place where children feel comfortable trying and making mistakes.

That brings up the idea of fairness. What is fair? What does fairness mean in the context of education?

Rick LaVoie, an expert in the area of special education, and a pioneer in educating children with learning disabilities, writes extensively on fairness in the classroom. He says, "'fairness' is not equal, identical treatment; rather, "fairness" means that every student receives what he needs. Because each individual's needs are different, "fairness" dictates that [each child's] programs and expectations will be different. Children are capable of understanding this concept if it is explained clearly and if it is observed daily in the teacher's modeling behavior." (Source: <http://www.ricklavoie.com/philosophy.html>)

To achieve the goal that EACH CHILD LEARNS, teachers make accommodations that help students. Each teacher knows her students, and is an expert at setting conditions and making the appropriate accommodations to maximize each student's ability to learn. The classroom climate is carefully and deliberately crafted to enable each child to do his/her best work.

There are many kinds of accommodations: eye glasses, hearing aids, large print, audio textbooks, calculators, seating a student close to the teacher, specially designed chairs and desks, movement breaks, extra time for tests, tests responses given orally, specialized teachers who go into the class to team teach (“push in”); or students working with specialized teachers in a small group setting, (pull out). There are students who need to eat at regular intervals, or who need to eat foods that don’t contain gluten, or peanut oils.

Assistive Technologies have made accommodations easily accessible for individuals: math apps that allow students to line up numbers to see place value; reading apps that help student with dyslexia read words; dictation apps that allow students to dictate their compositions. Some students have a “one on one”, an aid that stays with them during the school day to assist with particular needs, and frees up the teacher to work with other students.

At St. Maximilian Kolbe School, our commitment is to teach *each child*. *Our goal, student centered learning*, entails making the reasonable and appropriate accommodations that *each* child needs. We recognize that the ultimate purpose of education is that EACH CHILD LEARNS, ergo, we acknowledge that to be FAIR we must make the accommodations that optimize each child’s learning.