

Respecting the uniqueness of each student and, therefore, the diversity that is manifested among them

Principal I

Principal's basis

This principal arises from the need, every time more imperative, of recognizing and valuing the differences presented in all human beings. We all count with diverse characteristics, with different interests, with social, cultural, political stances that differentiate one another and that, from these diverse scopes, enrich the society in which we live. The observation of this diversity, nevertheless, makes it evident that it is not in the differences that the essence or nature of humanity is at stake, this is, that common factor by which we are all considered people. The person is not his or her characteristics, the person *underlies* his or her characteristics. This means that, despite the differences, we share a common 'constitutive relation', the biological belonging to humankind (cf. Spaemann, 2000). This biological belonging to humankind, inasmuch as a common root, requires or demands that we are all acknowledged and valued. This, "the recognition of the personal being is the recognition of an absolute demand" (Spaemann, 2000, p.235), that cannot depend on the observance of certain qualitative or empirical conditions. To condition being a person to these observances is to discriminate unjustly. To discriminate is to establish arbitrary parameters or conditions to determine who are part of a determined group. In the case of people, given this common biological root, there are no parameters or conditions that allow or make the exclusion of someone possible. Notwithstanding the above we cannot lose sight to the fact that as subjects we constitute ourselves socioculturally -even if our being a person is not at stake¹ in there- and this sociocultural construction, which allows us to go over biology, grants us with a common identity (we form part of a culture) which in turn allows us to differentiate ourselves (we form part of different cultures and build ourselves in different interactions).

¹ To delve deeper in this discussion, see Spaemann (2000).

The one who has to ensure, in the first place, the respect for the person -with the diversity that it constitutes- is the State, which “levels all men” regarding their rights (cf. Camps, 2000). This equality is “[...] the recognition of the same rights for everyone and the obligation for everyone and each one of us to respect one another[...]”(Camps, 2000, p.44). This way, it is given that we are equal -we belong to this humankind and build ourselves socioculturally- that we can be different. It is given that we are equal in dignity and rights, that we can demand to be acknowledged and respected in our differences (cf. Camps, 2000). Thus, the origin of respect lies in the recognition of a common root, which gives rise to what we know today as dignity².

We understand then by respect an attitude that involves consideration, deference³ and acknowledging one another. It springs from an affective-comprehensive process and it is enforceable regarding human rights and children's rights. For that reason, it cannot be the object of tolerance⁴.

In this way, respecting the uniqueness of each student and the diversity that among them is manifested, supposes in the first place, acknowledging the other as other. And it is given that it is an other, that it has all the right to be respected and valued in its qualities, characteristics or ways of being.

Thus, the respect for the uniqueness of each student obliges us, for example, to consider the presence of minorities whose culture keeps many times a distance from that promoted by education. That implies to overcome notions such as integration -which suggests adaptation or assimilation into the dominant culture- and to promote the one of inclusion, which recognizes the value of differences and considers them as part of a cultural enrichment. The latter involves considering the interests and particularities each student brings with him or her, which will allow to prepare them for a coexistence that respects the

² We understand by dignity the inherent and intrinsic value of all human beings. For a deeper view of this concept, see Cofré, J. (2004).

³ Real Academia Española (s.f.).Respeto. Retrieved on April 13, 2022.

⁴ By tolerance we understand the unconditional acceptance or no interference with the beliefs, actions or practices that are considered wrong or mistaken, but which are still “tolerable” or acceptable (cf. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (s.f.). Toleration). In that sense, tolerance has a negative connotation (all that which I disagree with, that which I disapprove, that which I consider incorrect, wrong or undesirable), but also a positive component (it requires the acceptance of that which I reject). These elements have been denominated objection components, and acceptance components (cf. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (s.f.). Toleration). In this context, neither human rights nor children's rights can be the object of tolerance, given that they are inalienable and enforceable rights, which are not subjected to voluntary individual acceptance or approval.

plurality from the observation that “[...] *differentiating* does not equate with *discriminating* and that *diversity* does not equate with *inequality*” (cf. García et al., 1997).

From the educational sphere, it is important to remember that in the year 1948 it is proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Under its article 26 it is mentioned that ‘everyone has a right to education’. Subsequently, in the year 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes under article 28 the right of the children to education. In this way, States have the obligation to respect, protect and observe the right of all students to education (cf. UNESCO, 2014). No kid, independent of the socioeconomic conditions in which it was raised and independent of its personal, social or family characteristics shall be left out of the school system. That means, in the first place, that the school shall embrace diversity precisely to take care of it. In this way, “it is not our educational systems the ones who have a right to a certain type of children. It is a country's schooling system what we have to adjust to satisfy the needs of all children”(see Lindquist en UNESCO, 2005, p.36). If education and the educational systems ignore the differences and needs of each child, the purpose or goal of education fails, because the learning of those children fails. Learning, we know, is mediated by multiple factors and those factors refer to those elements that make us different: political, social, cultural factors, family income, neighborhood or suburb where the kid is raised and the parents' educational level (cf. Treviño et al., 2016). It is undeniable that classrooms harbor academic heterogeneity, but also social, cultural diversity, diversity of gender, of interests and motivations, of capabilities, educational needs, of teaching styles, among others. Hence we understand “there is no average or model student [...] given that all students have individual educational needs” (UNESCO, 2005, p.38).

It is because of this that today it becomes indispensable to again look over at the formation of teachers with the goal of examining the pedagogical practices that are developed in the classroom and that could be loaded with prejudice or biases and to become aware that an inclusive education, which contemplates diversity, is only possible if we explicitly take charge of those prejudices through the modification of our practices. This involves, in the first place, establishing certain practices that aim at, in this case, respecting and valuing the uniqueness of each student and the diversity that is manifested among them.

Relevance of this Principal

Diverse documents linked to educational policies, both national and international, manifest the need of taking charge of this principal. The Sustainable Development Goals, developed by the UN in 2015 hold the purpose of achieving a quality education. This goal “exhorts countries to guarantee a quality, inclusive and equitable education and to promote learning opportunities for life for everybody” (UNESCO, 2017, p.12). On a national level, both the “Framework for the Good Teaching of Preschool Education” (2019) as the “Standards for the Teaching Profession. Framework for Good Teaching” (2021) reveal concepts such as inclusion, attention and respect for diversity. The relevance of these concepts is such that they appear across their 4 domains. Now, what does it mean in concrete terms to respect the uniqueness of each student and the diversity manifested among them?

How to respect the uniqueness of each student and the diversity that is manifested among them

- **Greeting:** to greet someone is the first approach to a person. Through greetings I acknowledge the other as other. In this sense, it is relevant -ideally- to greet the other by his or her name directing your gaze to him or her and putting yourself on the same level as the student, in case it is necessary.
- **Addressing and listening to each student attentively:** dialog is only possible to the extent that the other is and feels recognized as a valid speaker. Listening and paying attention to what the student says, avoiding judgment and attending to their emotions or worries, is a way of sheltering, taking care of and of trying to understand the other, respecting it in its individuality.
- **Being careful of language and of the way of referring to students:** through language (verbal or nonverbal) we manifest our preferences, beliefs and stances. An overly colloquial language or that reflects disdain over certain ways of being situates the student in an uncomfortable position given the authority role of the teacher. In this sense, it is relevant that the teacher can put him or herself on the level of the student, in case it is necessary, to look or direct his or her gaze to him or her and to listen attentively.
- **Knowing each student:** knowing their name, how they want to be called (nickname), how they want to be addressed as (gender). Knowing about their race, ethnicity, religion, beliefs, political stance, family and sociocultural context, their capabilities,

difficulties, educational and special needs, motivations, prior knowledge and interests. It is important to implement pedagogical practices that consider this knowledge, so that respect for differences is explicitly worked on in the classroom.

- **Knowing the student's development stages:** knowing the students' needs and characteristics in relation to the stages of their physical, cognitive, socioemotional and motor development. It is important to be able to understand, from this knowledge, the changes or states that could be affecting the student, so that we can provide the necessary help or support.
- **Consider the student's beliefs:** even if it is for didactic or educational purposes, students should not be required to do things that go against their customs, faith, religion and/or beliefs.
- **Favoring or fostering the affirmation and valuing of each student's identity:** consider activities in which students can choose, give their opinion, decide, question and show differences. Incite them to defend with arguments their position, without judging from the teacher's stand.
- **Promoting gender equality:** the gender perspective invites us to have the same expectations for men and women, to give the same amount of attention to men and women and to avoid using material or learning resources that promote gender stereotypes. In this way, it is recognized that both men and women are capable of carrying out the same roles and to stand out in the same areas.
- **Respecting sexual and gender freedom:** as teachers we should be careful to approach and avoid discriminatory situations that could threaten the dignity and rights of the students given their sexual orientation and their gender expression and identity. This discrimination can come from other students or the community as mockery, comments, use of language as well as from our own teaching practices, through our way of communicating, from the examples we utilize, from our attitudes, among others.
- **Having and showing high expectations regarding each student:** knowing that, as the opportunities, the scaffolding and the necessary support are given, each student is capable of progressing in his or her development and learning. Challenging each student is to show confidence in their abilities and capabilities. This performance goes across other principals, such as, principal 4 and principal 2.
- **Considering the time required by the students:** considering that different tasks demand different times according to the characteristics of each student. It is relevant to be capable of being flexible and of respecting the rhythms of each student, as long

as it is possible, especially in the face of emerging situations, needs or interests from the students.

- **Generating an environment where all the students feel included, heard, valued and respected, both by the teacher and their classmates:** the teacher is the one in charge of mediating in conflict resolution encouraging dialog, respect and the values of democratic life.
- **Generating contents and materials that are accessible for all students:** involves considering the needs or obstacles that certain students could have for reading, listening, writing, mobilize themselves, see, among others. It involves also to utilize language that is clear and in accordance to the characteristics and age of the students.
- **Favoring the election of activities and materials:** it is relevant that the students have moments or instances in which they can choose or select the activities that they want or are interested in and/or the materials they wish to utilize. The possibility for the student to choose gives account of the valuing and respect, by the teacher, of the students' interests or preferences.
- **Recognizing the benefits of diversity:** many of our prejudices are inherited or they stem from ignorance. To be able of sharing diversity, knowing the other in its singularity and recognizing him or her as other -with equal rights- opens life perspectives and world views that enrich the formation of a human being. To go deeper with diversity, from an educational viewpoint to the service of learning, see principal number 2.
- **Recognizing your own prejudices and society's stereotypes:** the first step towards breaking with discrimination is to become aware of our own biases and of the biases that are predominant in our society and/or culture. As teachers committed to the learning of all students, we must highlight the person's dignity, this is, to recognize the inherent value in each one of us, recognizing that each person is always an end in itself and never a means to or an instrument for... Whereas things can be traded and have a price, people have dignity and deserve respect. It is for that reason that when it comes to dignity, it is not possible to establish degrees.

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Suggestions for citing this document

Observatorio de Buenas Prácticas Pedagógicas, Facultad de Educación, Universidad del Desarrollo (2022). “Respecting the uniqueness of each student and, therefore, the diversity that is manifested among them”.

This document has been elaborated by Mariana Gerias, revised by Fernanda Nuñez and revised and approved by the Consejo de la Facultad de Educación, under the framework of the Observatorio de Buenas Prácticas Pedagógicas de la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad del Desarrollo, Santiago, Chile.

Last update October 2022.

Translated by Jerónimo Ohlsen, July 2023