Becoming responsible for the equitable access to learning and the development of the greatest potential in every student

Principal II

Principal's basis

This principle is understood from the verification that human learning is socioculturally built. From Vygostky (2009) we know that all social interactions -be it with others (parents, teachers, peers) or with sociocultural constructions (language, culture, books)- turn out to be key to incentivize students' learning. From this framework, it is possible to understand that learning and, therefore, the students' development constitute a responsibility for all of us who form part of the community in which they are inserted, having the teacher a predominant role.

Being responsible or taking on a certain responsibility means, in the first place, accepting the consequences of both intentional and unintentional actions (cf. Isaacs, 2000). This entails being accountable for such actions, both for their intentional dimension and for the unforeseen or undesired effects generated as a result of said action[1]. "We are responsible for all our actions, especially when they represent an act of will, but also when they are the result of a lack of foresight" (Isaacs, 2000, p.143). In this sense, a central component of responsibility is the ability to foresee or anticipate the actions' possible consequences, both the immediate consequences and those which could come in the long term. Hence, being an educator or a teacher means to consciously and thoroughly assume the professional role and task of having to answer for who I am (cf. Isaacs, 2000) and what I do or stop doing.

That said, being responsible for the equitable access to learning and the development of the greatest potential in every student means to commit in essence to the value of justice. Equity constitutes a way of understanding justice. "Equity implies, more than an abstract justice, an individualized justice (Ruiz-Gallardón, 2017, p.188). Equity recognizes differences among individuals and, as such, it assumes and recognizes that interactions and interventions should be differentiated, in accordance to the characteristics and needs of

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[1] The concept of responsibility is addressed in more depth in the document relating to principle 4 "Showing rigorous and responsible work".

each. Accordingly, under the concept of equity, there can be "just inequalities" (cf. Bolívar, 2005). To Bolívar (2012):

"If from the paradigm of equality all individuals must always receive the same treatment; from the framework of equity individuals are different from each other and deserve, therefore, a different treatment which eliminates or reduces the initial inequalities. The contrast is manifested when, from the framework of equity, the unequal treatment is just, as long as it can benefit those individuals who are most disadvantaged" (p.12).

To educate in equity or from equity, therefore, means to be aware and to consider the differences that may affect the learning and development of individuals, providing the means and support that allow to reduce or eliminate said inequality. This involves, if it is necessary, setting up diversified measures or interventions with the purpose of helping whoever requires it the most. It is important to remember that not always who requires it the most is the one who presents the most difficulties, but eventually also the one who, by having especial or particular talents, requires adjustments that make the development and strengthening of these possible.

In this sense, equity -or guaranteeing the equitable access to learning and the development of the greatest potential in every student- not only involves watching over equality of opportunity in the access to education, but in the explicit recognition of the differences that hinder a real equality of opportunity in learning, in the achievement of knowledge, competencies and learning results and in the means to achieve them. These inequalities can be natural or social and require, from the teacher, the ability to trust and to keep high expectations for all his or her students, providing greater attention to those who so require it.

In turn, it is given that the principle highlights the need for developing the greatest potential in all students, that we require the teacher to not only identify difficulties and needs but, as we pointed out, to also recognize the students' talents and to potentiate those skills.

As such, the equitable access to learning points towards recognizing differences, talents and difficulties, be them individual or social and relative to marginalization or discrimination of certain groups of people with the aim of protecting equal opportunities with regards to securing the access to education.

That teachers become responsible for the equitable access to learning, involves highlighting the efforts of an inclusive education capable of embracing the diversity that converges in the classroom and opening to the possibility of curricular diversification with the purpose of making the objectives, contents and instruments of evaluation more flexible. In fact, what this is about is highlighting a new approach to teaching, learning, and evaluating that can respond to the students' individual differences so that we can provide them with better opportunities for their learning.

Relevance of this principle

Diverse documents linked to educational policies, both national as well as international, manifest the need for watching over the equitable access to learning for all the students. 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) highlight the need to "secure equitable opportunities for the learning of all children" (MBE EP, p.14) and the need of "counting with teachers who promote abilities through teaching that achieves, effectively and equitably, significant learning (EPD MBE, p.11).

For the Faculty of Education UDD, this principle gains especial relevance given that it aligns itself with what was established in its vision: "To be a leading Faculty of Education in the training of professionals, capable of providing effective and fair educational opportunities to the future generations […]". Justice, in this sense and as we have previously pointed out, aims to knock down the barriers that could hamper or make the access to learning for all students difficult, and, in turn, to potentiate the development of all of them, explicitly considering their talents and abilities. Now, what does it mean in concrete terms to be responsible for the equitable access to learning and the development of the greatest potential in every student?

How to become responsible for the equitable access to learning and the development of the greatest potential in every student:

- **Diversifying the classroom:** this idea, proposed by Caron Ann Tomlinson (2008), breaks with the traditional classroom paradigm. Whereas the traditional classroom is characterized by the fact that differences are masked in case of being problematic, because a narrow concept of intelligence and a unique definition of success prevails, among other things, the diversified classroom recognizes and values diversity. In it, differences are taken as a basis from which to program the education, it is sensitive to diverse forms of intelligence and success is defined, in great measure, by the personal growth from a given starting point. Moreover, students are stimulated to make choices on the basis of their interests, learning options are provided on the basis of their personal characteristics, time is used flexibly on the basis of the students' needs, varying materials are provided, diverse perspectives of events and ideas are studied, problems are solved with everyone's participation, students are evaluated in various ways, among others. Thus, the diversified classroom constitutes a way of taking responsibility over a series of elements that come to play in the teaching-learning process with the aim to safeguard the learning and development of the students.

- **Establishing expectations:** independent of the personal characteristics a student may have, the teacher shall establish ambitious goals that orient themselves towards the achievement of learning and its development. These goals represent the teacher's high expectations and must be structured according to the needs of each student, creating a challenging learning culture. This principle goes across other principles, such as principle 1 and 4.

- **Focusing on the abilities (potential) and working on overcoming weaknesses (difficulties):** all the students have the ability to learn. Recognizing that ability and visualizing all the potential that students have and that can become updated and developed if the right environment, instances and conditions for it are generated, allows the teacher to plan not only on the basis of immediate benefits, but on the basis of future developments. Explicitly expressing confidence in these abilities and potentialities instills enthusiasm and confidence in students, reducing the fear of making mistakes. Recognizing students with greater talent and providing opportunities to enhance that skill constitutes a first step toward developing the potential of each of them. Moreover, it's important for the teacher to work on removing barriers or obstacles that might hinder students' learning opportunities.

- **Offering real participation opportunities** given that all students are different, the ways of connecting and interacting in class, with the teacher and among themselves, also vary. More shy or withdrawn students might not feel comfortable with instances of participation that involve a greater level of exposure. More extroverted students could assume a prominence that diminishes the instances of participation of those who are shyer. Students with some motor, visual, hearing or learning difficulties will see their participation limited if access to opportunities or resources to participate involve efforts that escape their abilities or possibilities. For that reason, it is about creating a respectful classroom environment, non-threatening, which explicitly considers these different ways of being and which offers different forms of participation, creating spaces which give way to diversity.

- **Providing scaffolding and support resources:** recognizing the necessary support for students to learn and develop constitutes the teacher's essential job. Assuming there is such thing as the "average" student and that, therefore, they all learn the same and require equal conditions is a mistake that prevents diversity from being recognized and appreciated. For that reason, it is relevant that the teacher can structure and diversify the classroom's resources (diversifying the material resources, activities, ways of presenting the information, ways of demonstrating knowledge, etc.), considering that classrooms are heterogeneous and that students have different ways of learning. In the case of students with physical or motor problems or difficulties, it is relevant to facilitate access to the spaces, to safeguard good acoustic and lighting conditions in such a way that it is not these factors that make their learning or development difficult. This duty goes across other principles such as, for example, principle 4.

- **Giving out clear instructions and making sure the student understands the information:** we are social beings who share a language. However, that language is not always clear. The factors that take part in communication are multiple and, from there, the possibility of not understanding, or of misinterpreting the information, is high. In this sense, not only is it relevant that the teacher utilizes a language that is appropriate, adequate and understandable to his or her students, but also that he or she utilizes strategies that allow him or her to ensure that the information or the instructions given have been received and understood by all students.

- **Teaching different ways of learning:** given that all students are different and require differentiated support and scaffolding, it is important that the teacher dominates, utilizes and proposes teaching-learning methodologies that are diverse. Modeling these strategies and valuing that students utilize them according to their needs or preferences allows to make visible the fact that there are different ways of learning respecting the students' diversity.

- **Considering diversity in planning:** recognizing diversity relating to personal, social and/or cultural aspects is the first step towards guaranteeing equitable access to learning and development for all the students. As we were pointing out, equity relates to looking for ways to make up for or to compensate the inequalities of origin in a way such as to secure the learning or development and that involves, in itself, having that diversity on sight. Personal, social and cultural aspects, no matter how diverse, play a fundamental role in learning, as they constitute an essential part of the person. That requires a teacher who is attentive and committed to diversity from the planning of the class. This involves planning and designing learning experiences that explicitly consider diversity, safeguarding respect as an essential condition. To that end it is relevant: to formulate learning objectives contextualized to the characteristics of the students, to consider the prior knowledge and interests of the students, to select didactic strategies suitable to the needs of the group, to adopt a gender perspective in the selection of materials and activities, to organize the class responding appropriately to the rhythms, needs and characteristics of the students, among others (cf. MBE).

- **Considering diversity in the classroom:** considering diversity in the classroom involves implementing teaching strategies that attend to differences, difficulties and talents in all the students. For that, it is necessary that the teacher: understands and conducts activities in accordance to the age of the students, to the way in which they build knowledge and develop skills, attitudes and values. It is important that it can generate motivating activities, involving all the students starting from the identification of their educational needs. It is relevant that the teacher maintains high expectations for all of his or her students, and that he or she helps them approach the challenges as an opportunity, "implementing strategies to strengthening the academic self esteem and the self efficacy through the explicit recognition of achievements […] and the reaffirmation of their capability" (MBE, p.48). Finally, it is necessary that the teacher can adjust his or her pedagogical practice "on the basis of contextual situations, the

students' answers and the evidence that he or she compiles […]". (MBE, p.49).

- **Considering diversity when evaluating:** considering diversity when evaluating involves that all students can demonstrate what they have learned. This means considering diverse methods of evaluation, in accordance with the specific needs of the group. It is about "designing evaluations that allow to diversify and broaden the evidence […]"(MBE, p.31), in a way such that the evaluation instances give account of the students' progress, both on an individual level as in a group one. The evaluation must go in accordance with the strategies and procedures utilized, for that reason it is relevant for the consideration of diversity to be planned out, worked on and finally evaluated.

- **Generating a respectful culture and environment in which they all feel valued:** the teacher not only has to look out for what goes on inside his or her classroom. In his or her role as a trainer, he or she is responsible for promoting in the community the respect for diversity and the well-being of all the students. The students' learning and development also happens during the context of recess, during sports, during extracurricular activities, among others. For that reason, it is important that the respect and appraisal of diversity becomes part of the school culture and that it is not reduced to what happens inside the classroom or to what is merely academic. It is relevant that each individual has their space in the group, standing out with their talents and particular needs. It is about creating an environment within the school and classroom where everyone feels valued for what they are.

- **Using and promoting language respectful of diversity:** through language human beings not only express "what they literally say", but -in many occasions- they give account of their beliefs, values, prejudices and/or appreciations, sometimes without even realizing it. Our language is charged not only with words, but also with meaning and symbolism, and therefore what we say is susceptible of being well-interpreted or misunderstood. For that reason, respect for diversity requires especial attention to our language (including non-verbal language). Considering the other's differences, needs and talents respectfully requires that we can refer to them in a way such that the other feels valued, welcomed or at least, not discriminated against.

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