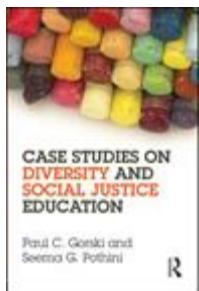


Case Study 8.2: Insufficient Accommodations



Written by Paul C. Gorski (gorski@edchange.org) and Seema Pothini (sg1515@hotmail.com) for their book, ***Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Education*** (Routledge, 2014). Check out the book for more than 30 additional school- and classroom based case studies on issues like race, class, (dis)ability, gender, sexual orientation, and religion.

Synopsis: A sixth grade teacher takes her class to a nature reserve for a science-based hike, believing the reserve has accommodations for her new student, who uses crutches due to cerebral palsy. When the class arrives they learn that the reserve's accommodations are underwhelming.

Points for Consideration

- This case points, among other things, to the tension between *equality* and *equity*. All students are invited on the same field trip, which would constitute a sort of equality. But once on the field trip not all students have the same access to learning opportunities, which is an obvious inequity. The best "accommodations" should provide equitable experiences rather than equal experiences. Consider how this tension manifests in other educational scenarios.
- Making choices for equity can be a difficult task. There often is a lot to consider, including what Sonia Nieto has called the "sociopolitical context of schooling." It might be tempting to look at this one event and think, "It's just one field trip so it's no big deal if Justin is separated from the class so everybody else can experience the hike." But if we step back and consider the situation more broadly, we begin to see that students like Justin often experience little slights, little fragments of inequity, that taken together could constitute a fairly exclusionary school experience. This is why it is important to consider these single events in their larger contexts.
- Ms. Thurston might feel compelled to address this issue with Justin and Ms. Parsons exclusively, but it is important to realize that it should be addressed with all of her students. By engaging them in a process of community building and problem solving, she would demonstrate that Justin is an integral part of the class community. Perhaps a future unit could encourage students to look at other ways inequity concerns come into play, perhaps by evaluating issues in their own communities.
- Although Ms. Thurston was mindful enough to call the park and inquire about accommodations, she took for granted that Justin would have a learning experience that roughly paralleled that of his classmates when Ms. Parsons told her that accommodations were available. This reflects a sort of privilege that both Ms. Thurston and Ms. Parsons (as well as other people without mobility challenges) experience, but may not understand. Had Ms. Thurston asked for clarification about the available accommodations, she would not have been surprised upon arriving at the park. More importantly, she would have had more of an opportunity to make alternate, more equitable, plans for her students.