

Normal Was Never Enough. COVID Offers the Opportunity to Improve the Status Quo

“Educators need to learn about their students’ home cultures and environments, and to listen rather than to give in to the urge to imagine how they themselves would react in a given situation.”



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In this article, the author re-evaluates what “normal” means in the classroom and if what was considered normal was ever truly enough to create equity for all students. The author gives examples of students who are English Language Learners being treated as though the language barrier is a deficiency and the high rates at which students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are suspended or expelled. Resources are often times nonexistent or minimal for these students as well. The pandemic brought about the realization that we need to re-evaluate what is considered normal in our schools and make sure that we are embracing diversity and providing opportunities for all students. Four strategies were given by a report from the National Academy of Education in order to focus on equity in addition to excellence in the classroom.

The use of the term “normal” in the title of this article is what first grabbed my attention. My first seven years of teaching were spent as an ELA teacher in a small town in West Virginia. Every year, we read the novel *Stargirl* and would discuss why we should work on removing the word “normal” from our vocabulary. Stargirl’s character was effervescent and unique; what she considered “normal” was not the status quo. She taught the other characters in the book to embrace what made them different and use that knowledge to learn from each other. That unit was in my mind while reading this article. As educators, we have to leave the concept of normalcy out of our classrooms and curriculum.

My first experience in an online classroom was with ninth grade ELA. I quickly realized that I had students from all different cultural backgrounds in each of my classes. I found that when I encouraged all students to share their backgrounds and experiences, everyone, myself included, learned from each other and gained knowledge of just how diverse and wonderful our world is. We became better problem solvers and were able to dive even deeper into any text that we read. Everyone had a different perspective when reading a novel and felt comfortable when sharing that perspective. There was no “normal” because we embraced that we were all different. This article brought to light even more strategies to continue to embrace what makes each of our students unique and encourage them to learn from each other instead of viewing those differences as a barrier.

The first strategy in the article was to “take a problem centered approach to teaching and learning”. I will work to bring real world issues and topics into my curriculum and discussions. Another strategy given that I will strive to use is to involve families, not just students, in the educational process. Understanding family backgrounds will help me to understand my students and create a positive relationship with not only them but the families. When I gain knowledge of my students’ cultural differences, it will help me focus on how to best reach everyone and create a safe and positive learning environment.

