Cultivating Individuality and Equality in Education: Ideas on Respecting Dimensions of Diversity within the Classroom

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Abstract—This systematic literature review sought to explore the dimensions of diversity that can affect classroom learning. This review is significant as it can aid educators in reaching more of their diverse student population and creating supportive classrooms for teachers and students. For this study, peer-reviewed articles were found and compiled using Google Scholar. Key terms used in the search include student individuality, classroom equality, student development, teacher development, and teacher individuality. Relevant educational standards such as Common Core and Partnership for the 21st Century were also included as part of this review. Student and teacher individuality and equality is discussed as well as methods to grow both within educational settings. Embracing student and teacher individuality was found to be key as it may affect how each person interacts with given information. One method to grow individuality and equality in educational settings included drafting and employing revised teaching standards which include various Common Core and US State standards. Another was to use educational theories such as constructivism, cognitive learning, and Experiential Learning Theory. However, barriers to growing individuality, such as not acknowledging differences in a population's dimensions of diversity, still exist. Studies found preserving the dimensions of diversity owned by both teachers and students yielded more positive and beneficial classroom experiences.

Keywords—Classroom equality, student development, student individuality, teacher development, teacher individuality.

I. INTRODUCTION

THROUGHOUT the 21st century, various educators have touted the benefits of preserving and cultivating individualism within educational settings. This paper seeks to answer the question: "Can equality and individuality be cultivated and practiced together in the classroom?" This systematic literature review asserts that they can as long as individuality is grown within teachers and students and all parties are treated equally. A systematic review method was chosen to review this topic as this literature review method allows for an exhaustive search while providing the researcher with the ability to include or exclude information found based on a quality assessment [1].

To address the stated research question, various areas tied to individuality need to be discussed. First, arguments for and against supporting individuality within student and teacher education are presented. Second, learning theories that support individuality in education are presented. Next, dimensions of diversity such as gender, race, culture, language, and teacher self and emotion are explored to have an encompassing view of the various parts of individuality. Additionally, diversity perspectives that include school practices, policy changes, and the learning environment that have a role in preserving or diminishing individuality within education are reviewed.

This review then offers a few answers to the research question. First, ways to foster teacher individuality will be presented. Various methods include allowing teachers to create their own sense of identity through emotions and language, employing revised teaching strategies within schools, and introducing pedagogical models that embrace individuality within teacher training. Methods to cultivate student individuality and equality are then examined. These include using various pedagogical strategies and employing educational theories such as constructivism and cognitive learning. Changes to the learning environment are then discussed which include best practices within education. Lastly, adopting a caring environment within classrooms is highlighted.

II. DIVERSITY PERSPECTIVE

A. Compare

The need to emphasize individuality in education has been voiced and placed in practice by educators around the world. Dewey was documented as criticizing traditional forms of conveying knowledge to students who were forced to forgo their own individuality to fit typical molds of what students should look like [2]. Teachers were merely transmitters of knowledge but did not seek to make it applicable or personal to their students. The outcome was that of students learning rote knowledge [2]. Traditional education is seen to limit the development of individuality by emphasizing the mere acquisition of information [2]. This mindset was adopted by teachers and students to avoid rejection by other educators and students [2]. Because Dewey saw knowledge as "an instrument for action, rather than a passive reflection of given or fixed essential phenomena," he believed teachers purpose was to create a learning environment that enables students to learn while growing their interest in learning [2]. Dewey, Vygotsky, and other past and present leaders of education, pressed for teachers to be mediators who shaped learning practices for each of their students, giving them the knowledge they needed to

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succeed in life while allowing them to retain their individuality.

More recently, Radovic-Markovic et al. asserted that education strategy should hone-in on active modes of learning and individual growth [3]. Interaction among teachers and students is a foundational element as is developing an educational style based on "individual needs and abilities that should provide a completely new dimension of gaining knowledge and making learning a more convenient process" [3]. Teachers are responsible for teaching both hard skills, such as math and science, and soft skills such as understanding, empathy, and communication skills [3]. To do this, Forte states that a classroom atmosphere that encourages thinking, questioning, and imagining is critical to the development of individual potentials [3]. In this regard, some teaching standards are shifting towards embracing the individuality of student. Various teaching standards promote diversity and respecting individuality as a vital part of teaching goals. For instance, Common Core Standard ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 advises teachers to "prepare [students] for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively" [4]. Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standard for career development 127.13.3.A states [The student is expected to] demonstrates respect for the rights of others [5]. To fully develop students, it is important for both teachers and students to develop their individuality. To do this, teachers must be taught to embrace and grow both their students' individuality and their own. Teacher education must be concerned with teachers' capacities for freedom of expression [6]. As Phelan writes, teacher education needs to address teacher subjectivities [6]. Kirkpatrick characterizes subjectivity as an ongoing "event rather than a project of completion" [6]. This includes a teachers' thought, action, and freedom of expression [6]. Subjectivity, Phelan further writes, "is only possible in a world of plurality and difference" [6]. This means effective teachers can only be grown in an environment that embraces differences and individuality. Teacher instructors, much like student instructors, must be mediators for their students, providing tools for growth and effectiveness but never prescribing one "right" way to educate. Teacher education curriculums that can nurture creativity, originality, and the capacity for dissent can then teach students to do the same [6].

B. Contrast

Not all theorists and practitioners believe individuality within education is positive. Advocates for standardization within education include Schmoker and Marzano [7]. They believe that enacting prescribed teaching methods and policies "provide teachers with greater certainty about what and how to teach" [7]. Enforcing the same universal policies and procedures is thought to promote equity across educational settings while raising student achievement and quality of instruction [7]. Standardization of teaching is especially meant to aid underqualified and/or inexperienced teachers in underprivileged socio-economic status school districts and in districts with high teacher turnover [7].

Educational practices may also be standardized due to outside influences. Apple claims that changes in educational practices are political [8]. Moving in an individualized direction can shift the power balance from government or larger entities to the grassroots of an organization or school. It can also strain the relationship between multiple actors such as parents and more experienced educators. One example of this is the narrative published by Michael Jones, political editor of The Sunday Times. He writes,

"My children spent their primary years in a show place school where they were allowed to wander around at will, develop their real individuality and dodge the 3Rs. It was all for the best, we were assured. But it was not" [8].

The experience he longed for his children to have was one that mimicked his own; years of sitting in fixed wooden desks without movement nor teacher collaboration [8]. Jones saw any change in his educational experience as a decline in standards [8]. US figures such as William Bennett, E.D. Hirsch Jr. and Diane Ravitch all agree the more progressive nature of education has destroyed a once great and beneficial past [8]. Each cry for a restoration of past educational models, viewed as a more controlled education system, to make the once-fabled educational system great again [8].

While not all standardized educational systems are driven by political reasons, they can be driven by necessity. One example of this is the National Education Policy seen in Japan [9]. Initially stemming from Meiji government political need, a universal mass education system was seen as a necessary part of creating an armed force "with a certain standard of intelligence for modern military tactics" [9]. A standardized educational system, complete with standardized instructional methods throughout each school, was deemed a required precursor to instituting Western or more modern methods of war [8]. Catering to the wealthier parts of the Japanese population, the standardized school system allowed them to relate to Western countries but alienated the poorer factions of their own country [8]. Regardless, the Meiji government continued to press for a government-run school system which can been seen in Japan today [8]. As opposed to the very regimented educational systems began by the Meiji government, modern government has seen the value in restoring individuality to students but still seeks to ensure all students are exposed to the same educational foundation [8].

III. EDUCATIONAL THEORIES

A. Cognitive Learning Theory

Cognitive learning theory is defined as the "theoretical perspective that focuses on the mental processes underlying learning and behavior" [10]. Cognitive processes, or a specific way of thinking about or responding to an event or information presented, is based on two principles [10]. The first principle is that people are able to easily learn new information when they can relate it to items or information they already know [10]. The second principle is related to the first: students can learn new information easier when the new information can be connected to parts of an overall organizational structure [10]. Because of

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the sheer amount of information thrown at each person a day, individuals are selective about what they process and learn [10]. This leads to an individual interpretation of any given situation [10]. Differences in prior knowledge can also be due to the neighborhoods and cultural backgrounds of the learner [11]. Individual interpretations of any given situation then play into Principle 1; individuals have different prior knowledge [10].

Cognitive learning theory also points to another cause of individuality in education. Learning differences can also come from the way each person engages with their own learning [11]. Each learner remembers, stores, retrieves, encodes information in a way that makes sense to them [10]. Part of this is dependent on the stimuli that attracts a learner to pay attention [10]. Learners, in general, do not all pay attention to the same stimuli [10]. Additionally, learners all interpret the four types of knowledge, declarative, procedural, explicit, and implicit, differently [10]. Each of these variances in learning become part of information processing theory, a theoretical perspective that hones-in on the specific ways learners process new information or events [10]. Teachers must understand that each student will understand the information presented in different ways and may choose to hold on to lessons they can easily assimilate into their prior knowledge.

B. Constructivist Theory

Another educational theory that supports the development of individualism in education is constructivist theory. Developed by Piaget, this theory asserts children develop a view of how the world works through experiences they pull together [12]. The understandings and beliefs generated are then organized into groups of similar actions, called schemes, the child then uses in response to the environment [12]. As a child matures and his/her complex mental capacity grows, the schemes shift from behavioral to abstract [10]. However, for a child to develop more schemes, the child must be given opportunities to actively experiment with the world around the child [12]. The nature of the interactions then leads to different schemes being developed and used by each child [12]. This is another way differences in prior knowledge arise. Children also crave social interaction; through these interactions children learn that each person sees a given situation differently [13]. Children then come to realize that their own view of the world may not be completely logical or accurate [12]. Teachers can help each student overcome the disconnect in his/her schema by giving each student the opportunity to discover the world around him/her.

A second way constructivist theory leans toward individuality of students is by pointing to science. Children physically develop at different rates. Part of this development is maturation changes in the brain [10]. The varying stages of maturation cause children to think in qualitatively different ways at any given point in time [10]. These neurological changes lead to varied meanings being constructed by the learner instead of through interactions with the environment [10].

C. Activity Theory

Activity theory is a third educational theory that promotes the development of individuality within education. While not a textbook educational theory, activity theory is a useful framework or tool for educators [14]. According to activity theory, people are socio-cultural actors within a system that include multiple actors [14]. The system also takes into account the environment, culture, role of the artifact (or given item), motivations, complexity of real-life action, and the history of the person [14]. People, then, take part in activities comprised of goal-directed, conscious actions [14]. Because people and their actions are not fixed, the activities can dynamically change to fit the surroundings [14].

Activity theory is built on four principles: object-orientedness, internalization/externalization, mediation, and development [14]. Object-orientedness is based on the notion reality is, in a broad sense, objective according to both natural science and socially and culturally-defined properties [14]. Internalization/externalization is merely making the distinction between external and internal activities [14]. While both internal and external activities transform into each other, they cannot be understood if analyzed separately [14]. The benefit of performing internal activities is actors that are allowed to try interactions in reality without manipulating real objects [14]. Externalization is beneficial when collaboration between or among multiple actors is necessary [14]. The third principle is mediation, or the theory human activity uses tools to intervene [14]. These tools take new form through their use; the tools then become part of the social knowledge of an individual and a society [14]. Lastly, development is derived from the "formative experiment which combines active participation with monitoring of the developmental changes of the study participants" [14]. These four principles hone in on the actions the individual takes and his/her effect on the environment.

Tolman writes that "activity theory insists on the society nature of the human individual [15]. The sense of individual actions does not lie in the action itself but in the relation of the action to other members of the group" [15]. These individual actions must have a shared meaning that is knowingly reflected by the actor [15]. One example of this is the division of labor in society [15]. Ultimately, Tolman argues that human individuality is only achievable in society [15]. Individuals learn through heredity and life experience [15]. Just as outlined in previous theories, because each person's life experiences are different, their interactions with others will then be different. People learn in different ways then can teach others through their unique viewpoint, a thought process in line with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development [15].

D. 21st Century Learning Theory

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization states that 21st Century Learning Theory "has emerged from the concern about transforming the goals and daily practice of learning to meet the new demands of the 21st century, which is characterized as knowledge- and technology-driven" [16]. The most prominent program in the US that embodies this goal is the Partnership for 21st Century Skills

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(P21) [17]. This educational framework was developed with input from educational experts, business leaders, and teachers with the goal of successfully defining and illustrating the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in school and life [17]. These different groups of professionals also closely outlined the support systems needed by students to achieve 21st century learning goals [17]. P21 has four main outcomes: life and career skills, learning and innovation skills, information, media, and technology skills, and key subjects [17]. To achieve these outcomes, P21 developers defined four main support systems: standards and assessment, curriculum and professional development, professional development, and learning environment [17]. Educators seek to cultivate individuality in each student through each of these outcomes; they realize that students need to be individuals in order to succeed in everyday life [17]. Students must reflect on past experiences to shape their future progress while responding open-mindedly to diverse values and ideas.

E. Experiential Learning Theory

The last educational theory to examine that actively develops individuality in education is Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). The term "experiential" is used to separate ELT from behavioral learning theories and cognitive learning theories by drawing attention to the basis of the theory – learning from experience [18]. ELT also emphasizes the "experiential" through its origins in the theories of Lewin, Dewey, and Piaget [18]. ELT defines learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" [18]. In this theory, there are four main phases in the process of learning from experience: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation [19]. Much like personality tests like Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, students' learning types are opposites with the student needing to choose the learning ability he/she will use in a given situation. The four main learning types are diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating [18]. Individual learning styles are then defined by one's tendency to lean on one or more of the learning modes [19].

Through these four phases, students fall into one of two dialectically related modes of grasping experience (concrete experience or abstract conceptualization) and two dialectically related modes of transforming experience (reflective observation or active experimentation) [18]. ELT asserts that individual learning styles are shaped through positive attitudes toward specific learning skills [18]. The end goal of these four phases of learning is to teach students skills [19]. These skills are then turned into routines by combining knowledge with ability [19]. This combination becomes individualized through personal experiences and intentional personal development [19]. Teachers can then turn these skills into individual routines that combine knowledge with ability [19]. The personal experiences and intentional individual development shared by each student makes them equal in terms of the effort exuded onto them by the educator [19].

IV. DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY

A. Gender

As studied by Lykes, "differences between men's and women's notions of the self are grounded in their different experiences of power" [20]. These differences in past experiences, as stated in earlier educational theories, need to be accounted for in a teaching environment in order to effectively reach each gender. In a study of 84 white men and women, Lykes found that women define themselves more through social experiences and the perceived interrelation of self and others [20]. In his study, Lykes reports that women were found more likely to perceive social dimensions of human interaction also had a tendency to perceive integrated wholes (versus small details) and resolve moral dilemmas using methods that echoed themes of social responsibility [20]. On the other hand, men did not have a steady pattern of correlation [20]. While men shared women's pattern of relations in social responsibility, cognitive perceptual styles, and social apperception, men in the study exhibited a more complex relational set [20]. This means that teachers need to appeal to each gender's relational set in order for each student to make meaning of the "soft skills" being taught in a classroom.

Taking into account each gender's educational needs enables future success both in and out of the classroom and broadened horizons for both genders. One example of this is entrepreneurial programs geared specifically towards women [3]. Traditional entrepreneurial programs were male-dominated, as men felt they were better-suited to be entrepreneurs when compared to their female contemporaries [3]. However, men being more capable was not the reason more women were not enrolled; entrepreneurial programs employed teaching techniques not compatible with most women's desired teaching styles [3]. Shifting the educational/teaching methods of entrepreneurial programs has led to female entrepreneurship becoming a driving factor in the development of many countries [3]. Another example of taking gender into account in educational practices can be seen in modern-day Japan. The growth of female populations with socio-economic or material power help educational systems materialize the concept of individuality [8]. Women have grown to understand that individuality equates to fair social status; they are no longer subordinate to their male counterparts [8]. The new emphasis on community within Japanese education has paved the way for women to make light of their struggles for fair status in the community while giving Japanese educators the motivation to account for gender differences in the classroom [8].

B. Race

Race is another difference that needs to be addressed in the quest for individuality. Casden lists three main reasons to take race into account when formulating teaching practices [21]. The first is it allows educators to adapt instruction more successfully to the needs of the individual learners [21]. The second is educators can then recognize collective and individual identities [21]. The third is teachers and administrators are then able to support future citizens' positive intercultural attitudes and skills

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[21]. One main method of teaching acceptance and understanding of different races in the classroom is through respect. As Gutman states:

"Full public recognition as equal citizens may require two forms of respect: respect for the unique identities of each individual regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity, and…respect for those activities practices, and ways of viewing the world that are particularly valued by, or associated with, members of disadvantaged groups" [21].

This respect can be cultivated through discussions and collaborative efforts within educators and students in the classroom. Another method to account for different race needs in the classroom is to simply address all the different races in a given classroom [21]. This can be done through showing all types of ethnicities in texts to allow each student to see themselves in a reading [21]. As second way to highlight race is through specialized programs. The Reading Recovery Program, enacted first in New Zealand but adopted into Australia, the US, Canada, and Britain, and Puente, used mainly in locations with Native American and Mexican students, lead to sharing of similar experiences while maintaining individuality within a multi-race community [21]. This intertwining of races and individuals creates a uniqueness in education while allowing each student to maintain, grow, and share their individuality.

C. Culture

Cope & Kalantzis write that culture itself is hybrid; it is "dynamic, open, and forever undergoing transformation" [22]. As such, it is of vital importance for educators to take into account the various diverging and converging cultures represented in their classrooms. Teachers need to be cognizant of the ways each culture represents itself. Cope & Kalantzis explain: "The representational resources available to an individual are the stuff of culture" [22]. In this statement, we see that individuality impacts culture in two ways. First, each person's environment has different resources available to them, impacting the culture around them. Second, the different uses of the resources available to a person are used can then transform culture. Teachers are able to both preserve an overall culture and help it evolve simply by using traditional cultural artifacts in new ways and/or presenting individuals in various cultures with new tools they can bring back to benefit their culture.

While the teacher helps preserve and innovate a student's culture, an influencer of a non-traditional definition of culture within teachers is just as vital to the fulfillment of educational goals. The school itself can be considered a great influencer of a teacher's emotional culture. One example of this is how a school's organizational structure as well as preconceptions of appropriate classroom settings can steer each teacher's perception of emotional propriety [23]. Another example is a teacher learning commonly-accepted practices through feedback in the form of expressions or silences [23]. The emotional rules learned can inhibit teacher individuality by forcing them to regulate their own emotions to comply with preset expectations for the teacher [23]. Teachers that do not

conform can be seen as outsiders and, consequently, shunned by their peers [23]. Those that do comply are at risk of losing their individual identity [23]. Some educational theorists have found that the repressive acts of repetition accomplished by some teachers can govern the emotions of teachers [23]. If the emotional rules forced on them by administration or by other teachers are repressive, teachers then can begin to see themselves as failures [23]. Conversely, teachers that are part of educational cultures that value or promote isolation and autonomy run this risk of experiencing teacher isolation [23].

D. Language

Students use language as a main representational resource of individuality. Students are using and altering language in creative ways that are not necessarily reflected in the majority of educational settings. Nevertheless, these new ways of conveying thoughts through evolving language practices are tertiary artifacts that shape current culture. As defined by Cole, a tertiary artifact is an imagined world that "can come to color the way we see the actual world acting as tools for changing current praxis [customary practice or conduct]" [24]. An example of this is Zawilinski's use of blogs to promote higher order thinking and alternate literacy practices. A second example is the internet in its entirety [25]. Zawilinski states "The Internet is this generation's defining technology for literacy" [25]

The widespread changing of language means that students need to be exposed to the varying ways language is used around the world. Teachers who subscribe to Gee's definition of semiotic principle give students the means to learn to understand and appreciate interrelations and changes in language all over the globe [26]. Semiotics, a process in which something functions as a sign to an organism, has a direct relationship with metalanguage [27]. Teachers need to be hyperaware of the ways they use images, symbols, graphs, diagrams, and other visual symbols and artifacts that either add to or detract from individual students learning both words and language used in a given content area [26]. These classroom symbols serve as mediated stimuli that help determine internal and external human reactions that can create a new set of rules and standards [28]. While it should not be the goal of the teacher to create a standard meaning for all metalanguage, it should be the goal to expose students to new language uses to allow them to assimilate it into their own knowledge base.

Language also has an impact on constructing emotion in the teacher self [23]. Language aids teachers in relating to a wider social life and helps define the "private" or "public" domains [23]. The language used in emotional talk defines inherent power relations within relationships while shaping the expression of emotions [23]. The language used can give some the power to feel emotions while blocking out others; this is done through social values and cultural norms [23]. Teachers can then use their emotions to build sites of social and political resistances [23]. Self-formation is then experienced by each person through the way he/she experiences language and applies it to their public and private emotional interactions [23].

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E. Teacher Self and Emotion

For teachers to satisfy children's need for individuality, first they must embrace their own. One method used to do this is developing teacher identity. According to Zembylas, "teacher self" includes three different concepts: identity, individuality, and fulfillment [23]. A teacher's identity, or identity growth, can be based on region or culture [23]. For instance, in North America and contemporary Western Europe, educators are meant to be "constantly moving between the need to connect with other colleagues and the need to maintain as sense of individuality" [23]. Ultimately, the teacher is the ultimate dichotomy - autonomous but believed to be bounded to his/her peers [23]. While their identity is thought to be consistent and a mere "repository" of classroom and school experiences, teacher identities are molded and changed through talk, social interaction, and self-presentation [23].

Through field research, Zembylas found that the teacher self demands constant construction, destruction, and repair of boundaries in order to stay effective as an educator [23]. Emotions are a vital part of the construction of the teacher self; however, these emotions are shaped through community and social interactions, family and religious practices, and legal norms [23]. Zembylas discussed various sociological studies have illustrated the relationship between teacher emotions and social interactions [23]. They found that the processing of surrounding social construction shows how social situations can shape the expression and experience of teachers' emotional states [23]. Because every teacher is exposed to different social and community interactions and influences, each teacher develops and individualized teacher self. This individual identity then is shifted through continued social, professional, and personal interactions. These emotions then play an integral part of each teacher's professional and personal development [23].

Ultimately, emotion is a vital part of forming and understanding individuality. The way a teacher identifies his/ her own experiences and emotions is dependent on the identity of the person owning the emotions and experiences [23]. Foundationally, both the psychological/philosophical and sociological/anthropological view of identity require the acknowledgement of emotion [23]. Identity of the teacher is then founded in multiple ways of knowing "with affective and direct experiential knowledge often being paramount" [23]. Each teacher can use his/her way of knowing to relate to other educators, parents, and students who share similar ways of knowing. Furthermore, the act of portraying emotion is the critical link between having emotion and identity formation [23]. Without a teacher revealing his/her emotions to others, he/ she will not fully form a definitive identity in the classroom. Because each classroom is different, each teacher then forms an individual identity. Teachers can then model the behaviors they would like to see from their students which then begins to form the identity of each student.

V. DIVERSITY PRACTICES

A. School Practices Impeding Progress

School practices need to change to support individuality in students and teachers. To support teachers, administrators need to address the issue of teacher isolation. As Gaikwad and Brantley write, "teacher isolation is a paradox" [29]. While the teacher is surrounded by students every day, he/she can feel lonely or isolated due to a lack of interaction with other adults. This isolation can manifest itself in several forms. One type is "egg-crate" isolation; this physical separateness can be seen in buildings with closed classrooms that require groups to meet in isolation [29]. It can also be seen when teachers are physically separated from their peers and other support personnel [29]. A second type is psychological isolation, which revolves around the perceptions a teacher has on his/her interactions with colleagues [29]. A third type is adaptive isolation. In this kind, "teachers are unable to meet the demands of adapting to new teaching strategies" [29]. Teachers can feel inadequately prepared to learn and enact new teaching strategies [29]. Teachers can be overwhelmed by the burden of creating authentic and beneficial experiences for children but powerless to determine what those experiences should be [29].

Flinders writes that teacher isolation is concerning for two reasons [30]. The first is research indicates isolation is a widespread characteristic of teacher life within schools [30]. The lack of opportunities to engage in professional discussions with peers, or psychological isolation, leads to an atrophy of individuality. As Flinders reports, "the workplace created inside the individual is recreated through the filtering and processing of information" [30]. Without peer feedback, the information processed is minimal and can lead the teacher to believe any failings in the classroom are solely their fault [30]. A negative self-image then bleeds over into teaching practices and student opinions and learning opportunities. Despite the benefits of talking to others, teachers can see isolation as a protective measure as it preserves teachers' time and energy [30]. Long term, this isolation degrades teachers' work quality due to the lack of feedback [30].

The second concern of isolation is related to the first; isolation is a potential barrier to reform due to the restrictions on professional growth opportunities [30]. In a study conducted by Flinders, six teachers were followed and interviewed to track their interactions with other educational professionals [30]. He found that other teachers and supervisors did not play a large role in each teacher's life as each had little contact with other teachers [30]. Instead, each teacher used his/her classroom as a sanctuary and preferred to remain alone instead of in departmental offices [30]. Teachers blamed their need for solitude on the never-ending work of grading, revising lesson plans, and so on [30]. A byproduct of this isolation and the work load is the restriction of any potential collaborative or professional development opportunities among teachers. If teachers "don't have the time" to talk to each other, they do not actively seek growth opportunities involving those outside their classroom [30]. Sadly, some teachers completely gave up on interacting with others because they found it did nothing to help

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their own teaching practices [30].

Zembylas discusses the plight of one teacher who initially strove to express her individuality within her classroom practices [23]. Her fellow teachers, instead, wanted her to achieve "normality" [23]. One colleague even instructed her to "do what everyone is doing" and questioned her for attempting to teach science in any other way but theirs [23]. The shame instilled on her by her peers left her feeling powerless and inadequate [23]. More importantly, the individuality of this teacher was not cultivated [23]. This peer situation can be altered through the identification and development of the emotional knowledge of each teacher's pedagogies and of themselves [23]. Administrations can then begin to help teachers explore the construction of individual emotional discourses and how they affect teacher subjectivity [23]. By aiding teachers in exploring their own emotions and grow their own individuality, students then benefit from learning from different styles of teaching.

B. Policy Changes in Schools

Teacher isolation can also lead to other policies within schools. One issue encountered by teachers is a tendency for schools to blame the victim when educational objectives are not met. Unfortunately, this standpoint can also lead to a loss of individuality within the teaching corps as teachers are forced to conform to oppressive school policies [30]. Teachers who do not conform to school policy are then released and replaced while the school looks for a different teacher who will conform. Some school policies purposely isolate their teachers due to ease of finding other teachers. As Flinders found, some organizations find it easier to function after the loss of an experienced teacher if the body of teachers functions as independent units [30]. Both actions can lead the organization to assume the teacher is the entity that needs to change, not the school [30].

Other policy changes have been positive steps toward growing inclusive environments while sustaining student individuality. Twenty-first century schools are a cornucopia of diversity. Classrooms are filled with students that are Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, and many other ethnicities [31]. Teachers are faced with the challenge of teaching common skills to the masses while still acknowledging the individuality of each student [31], [32]. They are also plagued with finding cultural competence in curriculum that does reflect the diversity seen in classrooms [33], [34]. Teachers who have difficulties embracing or blatantly disregard diversity within their pedagogy run the risk of removing students' sense of self [32]. Despite the challenges presented to teachers, the world of education has taken positive steps in embracing diversity.

Revamped educational policies have led to the restructuring of classrooms and the purpose of education. Numerous court decisions such as Brown v. Board of Education and Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education paved the way for students of all races and ethnicities to learn side-by-side [35]. These desegregation laws forced schools and school districts to offer more choices for learning options for different groups/

ethnicities. They also brought about more wide-spread social change by addressing discrimination head-on [35]. A second way is the purpose of school was redefined. School and education are no longer used as way to "mentally maintain [the elite's] strongholds" [34]. Instead of education being used to maintain power and separation between the elite and the lower classes, education is now open to all. This inclusion of all students gives them the opportunity to achieve more later in life.

C. Impact of the Learning Environment

While policy changes have led to more diversity in schools, individual classrooms may not be as welcoming for individuals. Some classrooms still practice covert assimilation. As stated by Urrita Jr., "assimilation is promoting the culture, language, institutions, and traditions of the colonizer as 'superior'" [34]. American education does this by not including or celebrating the other cultures represented in classrooms. Two examples presented by Urrita Jr. are Native American boarding schools and the educational models to teach Mexican students [34]. Native American children were forced to adopt typical Anglo ways to include only speaking English, wearing Anglo clothing, and learning Caucasian culture [34]. Mexican students were, and are still, labeled with negative stereotypes such as "at risk" and "slow" [34]. Mexican families are viewed as not valuing education and are not involved in their children's education [34].

Dewey believed that schools and children were at a disadvantage when trying to balance societal impacts such as the "needs and forces of industry," home life, and advanced academic endeavors [36]. Students need to exchange their thoughts and ideas in order to grow and become a unified society. However, the basic construct of school in terms of social organization leaves students wanting more; more interaction with other students, more growth opportunities, more active participation in their own learning processes [36]. Students' expected interactions and behaviors while in a classroom do not lean toward two-way participation with either teachers or other students [36]. Additionally, the curriculum taught should change based on the emerging desires of the world outside school walls. "The modification going on in the method and curriculum of education is as much a product of the changed social situation, and as much an effort to meet the needs of the new society that is forming, as are changes in modes of industry and commerce" [36]. As such, educators should be in tune to those desires to properly equip and engage students within the classroom.

Varying educational motivations have caused the learning environment to both improve and deteriorate. One improvement is the use of advanced technology within the classroom. Dewey wrote,

"The change that comes first to mind, the one that overshadows and even controls all others, is the industrial one -- the application of science resulting in the great inventions that have utilized the forces of nature on a vast and inexpensive scale" [36].

In 21st century schools, this "application of science" is that of computers and online resources. Teachers are able to tap into

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international resources to show students authentic applications information technology practices have in academia and business. Students can be given assignments that provide opportunities to practice computer programs and online uses that they may use later in life. As Dewey stated, students who learn the most skills from an academic environment are those who have instructors that bring authentic activities to the classroom [36]. Dewey wrote, "That we learn from experience, and from books or the sayings of others only as they are related to experience, are not mere phrases" [36]. Conversely, the learning environment has deteriorated because children are no longer owners of their processes and cannot see the relation of facts to the real world. In *The School and Society*, Dewey denoted that "the children, as they gained in strength and capacity, were gradually initiated into the mysteries of the several processes. It was a matter of immediate and personal concern, even to the point of actual participation" [36]. The increased emphasis on standardized testing may cause students to never know a process. They are sometimes taught rote facts in an attempt to show learning achievement as defined by social institutions. As Dewey stated, "No number of object-lessons, got up as object-lessons for the sake of giving information, can afford even the shadow of a substitute for acquaintance… acquired through actual living among them" [36]. Teaching the test, as some teachers do for standardized testing, takes away the "actual living" [36]. Students are not given the opportunity to tie facts to the world around them.

VI. TEACHER INDIVIDUALITY AND EQUALITY

Despite all the theories and educational efforts to cultivate individuality and equality within students, students celebrating their own individuality will never occur unless teachers are comfortable celebrating their own. Schools and districts can work to embrace teacher individuality through the use of language, removing teacher isolation, and enhancing teacher creativity. Teacher preparation programs can also work to cultivate teacher individuality before new instructors enter a classroom full time.

Language is key in creating and representing teacher individuality. As language changes, teachers need to ensure the changes are reflected in educational settings. These evolving language practices are considered tertiary artifacts and can shape current culture. Cole defines a tertiary artifact as an imagined world that "can come to color the way we see the actual world acting as tools for changing current praxis;" praxis is a customary practice or conduct [24]. Modern-day examples of this include blogs and the internet; these two examples have not only changed the way teachers present the world to students, but they have changed the language and metalanguage used in the classroom [25]. Metalanguage is "any language or symbolic system used to discuss, describe, or analyze another language or symbolic system" [37]. Gee's definition of semiotic principle gives teachers a warning on the effect metalanguage can have on their interactions with others while appreciating the changing languages and language practices across the globe [26]. The visual symbols such as diagrams, images, and graphs can add to or detract from the message being conveyed in a given content area [26]. Classroom symbols used can generate external and internal human reactions that lead to a new set of acceptable rules and standards [28]. Allowing teachers to create and use their own metalanguage supports their individuality and an individualized learning environment. Providing a safe environment for teachers to share their language with others creates equality in a school setting.

Language ties back to the construction of the "teacher self" [23]. Language aids teachers in relating to a wider social life and helps define the "private" or "public" domains [23]. Emotional talk uses language that defines inherent power relations within relationships while shaping the expression of emotions [23]. Language gives individuals power to feel emotions and the ability to block other emotions out; choosing which emotions are felt or blocked is done through cultural norms and social values [23]. Because each person's sense of self is formed through the way he/she experiences language and applies it to their private and public emotions and emotional interactions, interactions with language defines an individual [23].

Creativity was also identified as a much-needed skill within the teaching community [38]. This teaching skill, when grown in students, is at a juxtaposition to standardized, performance-based practices often valued within business [38]. Learning how to be creative is an art that requires sensitivity to different cultures and balancing creativity/innovation with consumer/ workforce needs [38]. Teaching creativity means teaching interaction as creativity can be nurtured through individual and community interactions [38]. Teachers' creativity also relies on their ability to develop their own ideas on their learning through self-reflection [38]. Teachers need to know how to develop creative activities in the classroom and can do so by harnessing their own creative efforts [38].

To cultivate the requisite social interactions among teachers that provide them with their sense of identity, schools need to work to remove teacher isolation. One idea is to adopt a team-teaching method within schools. Flinders reported one teacher within his study who team taught to prepare students for an Academic Decathlon [30]. This endeavor requires him to not only interact with his teaching partner but with other subject teachers that serve as consultants [30]. These collaborations, while constructed out of necessity, lead to professional discussions and potential learning opportunities for each teacher participating. A second solution is to integrate staff-development activities into school settings such as in-service days. These activities geared toward self-improvement can be seen as a threat to professional survival if not embraced as positive by school administrators [30]. A more invested policy change that can be made by schools is to adopt a "user-oriented" approach to self-improvement [30]. With this approach, schools make a commitment to supply teachers with the resources necessary to do their work while being keenly in tune with the ecology of classroom teaching [30]. If teachers are encouraged to practice their individuality and are supported through professional opportunities, teachers may actively choose to collaborate with others, leaving self-imposed teacher isolation by the wayside.

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Lastly, pre-service teaching programs can help grow teacher individuality. Korthagen urged teacher educators to use the onion model as a guide to help others become good teachers [39]. This model of change is comprised of five levels: central to this model is the mission of teachers and teacher educators [39]. The first layer right outside of mission is identity as how one defines him/herself has a direct effect on how he/she can meet the teaching mission [39]. Beliefs is the second layer; as research illustrates, beliefs can determine a teacher's competencies, which is the third layer [39]. The fourth layer and outer layer, respectively, are behavior and environment [39]. Student teachers tend to focus more on how to manage their classroom versus defining themselves as professional educators [39]. Effective teacher educators move student teachers past the superficial layers (environment and behavior) and aid in the reflection process [39]. The process of reflection, as opposed to being told what to reflect on, allows novice teachers the opportunity to determine the level they are having problems and how best to address them using other levels of the model [39]. Using this model can allow teachers to explore their beliefs to construct individualized environments that play to their own strengths while seeking to enhance self-identified areas for improvement.

VII. STUDENT INDIVIDUALITY AND EQUALITY

Just as it is important for teachers to be treated fairly and like individuals, students' individuality also needs to be part of educational equity. As highlighted by the earlier Common Core and TEKS teaching standards, students need to be taught to treat others equitably while been show equality in classroom practices. One way to measure student equity is through the Learning Skills Profile [19]. Grounded in Experiential Learning Theory, the assessment is based in the 3D model of human knowledge. The model itself leans on three levels of adaptation [19]. The foundation is performance: knowledge is discrete, content focused, and of limited time duration [19]. The middle level is learning: the application of knowledge is extended in time and space to include generically similar situations [19]. The last level is developmental: learning is organized in the longest time perspective and is concerns with the strategic control of adaptation [19]. The assessment is meant to provide information as to the organization of a person's knowledge at the level of learning and can clue teachers into the adaptiveness of a student's responses to different situations [19]. This information can then aid the teacher in showing equity to all students by playing into each students' initial skills and addressing each's zone of proximal development as defined by Engestrom [15].

Growing students as individuals is vital to their academic success. One specific way to cultivate individuality in the classroom is to allow students to individualize their learning. A method to do this is to incorporate game play as part of the curriculum. Games teach lessons that cannot be easily mimicked using a textbook alone [40]. The trial-and-error nature of video games supports constructivist learning by allowing students to use their prior knowledge [41]. Additionally, the lessons learned through the instantaneous feedback provided in the game can then be transferred to other areas in real life [41]. Students are also able to reflect on the outcomes of their actions through debriefs and formulate different ways to solve a given problem [41]. Teachers can use student performance in games to understand a student's preconceived understandings concerning a system and address any misconceptions held [42]. Using games to further student-centered learning objectives can also foster intrinsic student motivation [43], [44]. However, for game play to be effective the game must address open-ended questions of personal relevance to the student [45]. These types of questions allow students to learn the necessary material but provide the opportunity for students to craft their own opinion using the facts found in the game [45]. In addition, teachers and schools must create classroom opportunities to use games that enable students to learn varying topics at varying rates [45]. By providing equal opportunity for all students to study independently, both equality and individuality are kept intact [46].

Schrum et al. highlighted the need to incorporate both constructivist learning practices and technology into community classrooms [46]. This is often difficult due to the wide range of abilities and experiences held by community college students [46]. The need to prepare a diverse student population for future success within four-year universities or the workforce places great pressure upon educators to hone their skills through continued education [46]. Schrum et al.'s research found community college teachers desired "professional development activities that were integrated into their professional lives [and had] activities that offered some focus on building and sustaining collegiality between themselves and their peers" [46]. Schrum et al. also found that teachers wanted help in learning how to create supportive communities based on their students' interests, abilities, and needs while maintaining a clear understanding of expectations and requirements within online forums [46]. This was highlighted as more post-secondary classrooms are becoming virtual [46].

Teachers must be able to reach students in a language that makes sense to them. Pedagogically speaking, teachers need to shift their practices from psychological to social [47]. Much like curricula changes can force a greater emphasis on social interaction and individual exploration, uses of new technologies or literacies such as Facebook can also enable students to be themselves while interacting with the world around them [47]. The social experiences can then shape the development of individuals into higher-order, more effective beings [15]. Students must also be given the opportunity to discover their own knowledge and identity through social interactions. As illustrated by Gee's study, affinity groups who came together through a common endeavor gained a shared identity and explicit knowledge [26]. Each student was allowed to discover their own knowledge and identity while viewing themselves through the eyes of members of a different culture [26].

Shifting classroom practices also requires teachers to understand how to teach a variety of learners [48]. As stated by the National Academy of Education Committee, "To make

good decisions, teachers must be aware of the many ways in which student learning can unfold in the context of development, learning differences, language and cultural influences, and individual temperaments, interests, and approaches to learning" [48]. This can be done through teacher education programs that include knowledge for teaching diverse learners and various classroom management and assessment techniques [48]. Teacher education must also be able to help teachers understand learning practices that are quite different from the methods used to teach them [48]. Ultimately, as long as teachers "keep what is best for the child at the center of their decision making," they will try to appeal to the individual needs of each learner [48].

VIII. INDIVIDUALITY IN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Individuality in the learning environment can come from changes in curriculum and teacher training. Schools and educators can grow individuality by acknowledging other cultures and the value a diverse perspective can have in the classroom. As found through Kohl's first-hand experience, finding ways to teach needed skills while preserving a student's heritage makes him/her and his/her family more receptive to the lessons being taught [32]. Second, more opportunities to learn and participate in culturally-relevant pedagogy need to be readily available to teachers. As stated by Osborne, teachers who are concerned about their students "would do everything possible to maximize the learning of all their students" if given the right environment [33]. The right environment is one that aids in eliminating barriers to finding and using new teaching methods that embrace other cultures [33]. New teaching methods include classroom and assessment practices [33].

One main curriculum change that can be instituted in schools to grow individuality is including self-authorship. Self-authorship is defined as "the internal capacity to defines one's belief system, identity, and relationships" [49]. To tackle more complex learning outcomes, it is vital for students to develop an internal belief system created from the critical analysis of multiple perspectives [49]. These internal belief systems then become interwoven with an individual's values that then alter how he/she relates to others [49]. Unfortunately, many students entering college or advanced academic endeavors have not been challenged to understand their own belief systems, identities, or values much less seek exposure to perspectives different than their own [49]. Without encountering what Pizzolato calls "provocative experiences," students then make important life decisions relying on external authority never maturing their own individuality [49].

Three programs have become the benchmark for self-authorship curricula. The first is Miami University's School of Interdisciplinary Studies. The program walks students through three different phases; they include engagement with expressive models, critical awareness of/proficiency in disciplinary forms, and interdisciplinary scholarship [49]. Students are given the opportunity to increase their self-authorship skills each semester by introducing new and increasingly complex skills gradually [49]. Participants have greater gains in semester grade point averages (53% vs. 28% for nonparticipants), cumulative grade point averages (3% vs. 2% for nonparticipants), and less attrition than regular college students (16% vs. 34% for nonparticipants) [49].

A second example is a semester-long immersion program in El Salvador [49]. One of the primary goals of this program is the creation of global citizens "who act consistently with their own beliefs and values to become, each in their own way, collaborators in promoting global solidarity" [49]. The growth of their students in intercultural maturity is a carefully-planned end product of teaching students to cohabitate with diverse individuals without fear of disapproval [49]. The program coordinator for the semester-long program in El Salvador qualitatively reports participants think critically about poverty, international policy, and their roles in the world [49].

The last example is the Community Standards Model seen at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas [49]. This program differs slightly from the first two as it works to develop students and faculty [49]. Students are placed in shared living environments to participate in drafting living agreements that foster intellectual development [49]. Through this living arrangement, two-thirds of participating students reported a greater openness to others, increased comfort in making their own decisions without outside influence, and a deeper understanding of themselves as individuals [49]. Not only are faculty are encouraged to learn from the students participating in the curriculum, they take part in guided explorations of how they construct themselves and social relations [49]. Mutual knowledge construction occurs among veteran and novice faculty members who then dictate the pace of student development [49]. All three of the above programs create a vested interest in the development of the individual and then show participants how their individuality can benefit the world around them.

IX. CREATING A CARING ENVIRONMENT

According to Noddings, a caring relationship requires a two-way interaction [50]. In an educational environment, typically the teacher is the carer and the students are the cared-for [50]. Caring relationships exhibit certain characteristics. First, it is a connection between two people, the cared-for and the carer [50]. If either party does not contribute to this relationship, the relationship fails [50]. Second, the connection needs to be a willing connection [50]. The student can be an unwilling party in two different ways. If the student does not want to be cared for, he/she breaks down the caring relationship [50]. Additionally, if the student does not feel cared for, it does not matter how hard the teacher is trying to care [50]. The student's lack of acknowledgement of the efforts of the teacher can lead to the teacher being worn down by an absence of rewarding experiences [50]. This leads to the teacher, the carer, being less able and/or less willing to care for others [50]. The third trait of a caring relationship is a way for both the carer and the cared-for to dialog with each other [50]. Teachers need to model the behavior they would like to see; this includes cultivating open dialog in the classroom [50]. By doing this, the teacher can show the student to care [50].

Noddings, Freire, and McAllister and Irvine all describe the

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role culture and gender can have on a caring relationship [50]-[52]. Noddings discusses full receptivity which cannot be achieved unless each party responds in a way "he receives and recognizes" [50]. Background differences can make it so the caring relationship cannot happen due to verbal and non-verbal communication barriers. One example of this is interaction between English Language Learners (ELL) and mainstream, or "white, middle class" population in some US classrooms [53]. Some cultures teach children to value non-standard ways of telling stories which are at odds with typical discussions and standardized tests seen in US classrooms [53]. These students can be labeled by society as "at-risk," leaving them behind academically [53]. Without teachers attempting to relate to all their students and modifying the curriculum to do so, they will continue to alienate ELLs and break that caring relationship needed for learning to occur [53], [50]. To combat this, McAllister and Irvine urge teachers to have an empathic disposition [52]. Teachers possessing this are often able to "take on the perspective of another culture and respond to another individual from that person's perspective" [52]. Teachers can grow this perspective in a number of ways. Two connected methods are to participate in cross-cultural simulations and immerse himself or herself in communities that differ from a teacher's own [52]. These personal interactions allow teachers to "understand other cultural communities through the eyes of people within those communities" [52]. Another method is for teachers to examine their own cultural background [52]. All three methods result in teachers learning how to create more caring classroom environments [52]. McAllister and Irvine found three benefits of developing this empathic disposition [52]. The first is they are more able to motivate their students. As found, "Students of color who have caring relationships with their teachers are more motivated and perform better academically than students who do not" [52]. The second benefit is teachers open the door for better communication between the teacher and student and the teacher and parents [52]. The third is they are more able to change their pedagogy and classroom curriculum to fit the needs of their students [52]. These changes can include engaging in more positive interactions with students, creating student-centered classrooms, and building supportive classroom environments [52].

Freire warned teachers of the perils of relying on the banking concept of education in the classroom [51]. Culturally, the banking system can mimic the "oppressive society" minority students face every day [51]. Because students are not just receivers of information, using this concept diminishes the ability for the teacher and student to take part in two-way educational experiences [51]. Without two-way teaching, students' ability to develop critical thinking skills is stymied [51]. If the teacher deposits enough information into students, they learn to "adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them" [51]. In essence, the banking system enforces the domination of the oppressed, regardless of the reason (cultural, race, socio-economic status, etc.) [51]. This continued oppression can cause those affected to act out when "they find themselves unable to use their faculties" [51]. Freire compares this to the interactions between dominant elites and rebels in a society [51]. The elites (i.e., the teacher) sees his/her actions to be in the name of good order and discipline while the rebels (i.e., the students) want to act effectively in a way that makes sense to them [51]. Freire states teachers must adopt "a concept of women and men being conscious beings" able to engage in cognitive processes [51]. This means teachers need to allow students to express their cognitive processes in their own ways without their own thoughts on the students [51].

Development of Nodding's caring environment requires teachers to take into account individual considerations [50]. Teachers need to not rely on the banking concept of teaching and, instead, work to create classrooms supportive of cognitive development [51], [52]. When this happens, teachers and students will be able to be able to take part in mutually-beneficial two-way dialog that works to overcome any prejudices imparted on students by society [50], [51].

X. CONCLUSION

The National Academy of Education Committee gave sound advice to educators: "To make good decisions, teachers must be aware of the many ways in which student learning can unfold in the context of development, learning differences, language and cultural influences, and individual temperaments, interests, and approaches to learning" [48]. Teachers who do this acknowledge and cultivate the individuality each student possesses. The equal treatment and development of all students promote equality within the classroom. Changes in pedagogy that include constructivist and cognitive learning theory and revised learning standards such as those seen in Common Core and TEKS aid teachers in showing students individuality is vital in the learning process if individuality is paired with mutual respect. Employing various pedagogical techniques such as game play and authentic learning activities in the classroom is one way to develop student individuality while ensuring students are able to explore questions that interest them.

Teacher individuality and equality is fostered by allowing teachers to explore their individuality as a beneficial part of the education process. Schools can provide opportunities for teachers to become less isolated through team teaching and other staff-development activities. These social activities give teachers the ability to cultivate their own individuality through the development of "teacher self." The individualized "teacher self" can be fully developed through a teacher's chosen language, metalanguage, and emotions. Pre-service teacher education can also help foster the desire to grow individuality in the classroom. Also, teaching educators how to be creative can help adopt non-typical teaching methods that better reach their students and play to the teacher's own strengths.

All educational systems need to account for barriers to individuality and equality such as culture, race, gender, and restrictive school policies to better establish an environment safe for all teachers and students to be individuals. One way this can be done is by creative inclusive learning environments through cultural experiences. Another method to creating a more accepting educational environment is to establish a caring environment in which student-teacher interactions is seen as a

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safe space for expression. Dewey asserted that, "Only by being true to the full growth of all the individuals who make it up, can society by any chance be true to itself" [36]. Educators need to balance outside influences with the individual requirements of students and themselves. It is a difficult task, but one that is necessary to ensure engagement and growth of students across the country.

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