**Beyond F.A.T. City: A Look Back, a Look Ahead—A Conversation about Special Education**

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**1.** Fairness, at first glance, tends to mean equality or sameness. It would seem fair to provide everyone with the exact same opportunity or the same materialistic item or even the same emotional and psychological help. However, when we look at it from a more refined perspective, we understand that fairness is not defined by access to exactly same resources. Richard Lavoie, in his video about F.A.T. City and special education, asserts that fairness in a classroom is not defined by handing out the same means and treatment to all the students. Fairness cannot be quantified into an entity that equates what every student receives in a class. Rather, Lavoie explains that fairness is providing the recipients with what they need. This calls for individual care. Richard Lavoie goes on to explain how every child is special in their own way and must therefore need tailor-made care that is meant only for them. A certain item or piece of advice or even a method of guidance might bring unmatched difference in one student’s education but can have little to no effect on countless others. Some students have more trouble reading than others. Some might have trouble focusing. Others can show a tendency to find expression difficult. It is crucial that a teacher or an instructor is capable of finding a fairness in their classroom by catering to the needs that might be exclusive to certain students. Although tricky to navigate, this road is the only one that promises an equally remarkable education for all the students in the classroom.

**2.** The crux of the advice that Richard Lavoie offers in this video is the idea that perfect fairness is an impossible feat and quite literally, a fantasy. With children at home or in a classroom, being completely fair in giving them exactly the attention and the resources that they need is not achievable. Lavoie gives parents this consolation that they should not overwhelm themselves in an attempt at being perfectly fair. Parents should, however, keep in mind the basic criteria of fairness. All the children in a family are not the same. Even though kids, in their attempts at receiving a similar treatment from their parents, might convince them that fairness does indeed mean equality, parents should remember that that is not the case. Richard Lavoie is therefore officially permitting parents to treat their children differently. Catering to the special needs of every child is the only fair way to go about parenting and being equal to a fault does not achieve that. Moreover, the video also offers advice on the sensitive issue of children complaining that their teachers or their parents cannot understand what they are going through. Although Lavoie openly agrees to this suggestion, he also admits that the authority of making a judgement call still rests with the teachers and the parents. His advice still prevails in the idea that it is up to the parents to interpret the needs of their children and then be ‘fair’ about meeting those.

**3.** When discussing the dynamics between a teacher and their students at length, it is important to mention that teachers can sometimes entertain certain assumptions about their students. These can be understood with reference to teachers assuming that certain students might not be able to complete a specific assignment. When Richard Lavoie discusses fairness in the classroom, he understands that in an attempt to teach ‘fairly’ and to understand the special needs of some students, teachers can be guilty of making assumptions. Some of these assumptions can work in the classroom and provide the teacher with the material they need to work efficiently with a student. However, some assumptions made at the expense of a student can also bring harm to the student and to the quality of their education. Teachers can mistake one mistake with a consistent inability. This leads to the teacher trying to be fair to the student by providing extra care that the child might not even need. On the other hand, teachers can also be unfair by assuming that students will respond similarly to their teaching methodologies and the teaching aids they use in the classroom. It is therefore equally likely for a teacher to underestimate or overestimate their student’s capabilities of keeping up with their assignments and projects. Lavoie talks about these assumptions because teachers need to understand that they cannot fully comprehend what their students with learning disorders might be going through. Hence assumptions are understandable but there needs to be solid reasoning behind each observation and a motivation to uphold fairness in the classroom.

**4.** The most striking topic in the video for me was completely letting go of the idea that a teacher might be capable of understanding or even grasping the idea of what a learning disability must feel like to a child. Teachers can sometimes believe that they can empathize with their students to the level that they understand their difficulty with language. However, this video so remarkably asserts that it is totally unacceptable for a teacher to assume that.

The second key concept from the video that will stay with me is understanding the root of aggressive or unruly behavior from a learning-disabled student. Richard Lavoie clearly stated and later explained that a child will easily choose being bad over being dumb. A child will choose to bear the consequences of breaking rules before they choose to expose themselves to the consequence of their inability to learn. It is therefore upon the teacher or the coach to correctly diagnose the issue and react accordingly.

Finally, the third significant topic from the video is an introduction to the idea of true fairness in the classroom. When dealing with learning-disabled children, it is vital to fully understand that all those children have different needs and need to be catered to in a specific individual manner. A fair classroom only exists when each child is given exactly what they need. This goes against the general idea that equality is fairness and hence it is a very important takeaway from the video.

**5.** All three of these topics that were discussed so thoroughly in the video will have special impacts on my own teaching practice. I have learned to delete all thoughts or ideas in my head that might convince me that I can relate with the struggles of learning-disabled children. This can be generalized even further to include children without a learning disability. It is simply outrageous to comprehend what any of my student might be going through at a given time. It is therefore important that I create an alternative source for my teaching methods other than relating to the students’ struggles. The idea that a child will choose to break rules if it prevents them from looking stupid will also influence the way I choose to teach children. I will be more likely to look for patterns and alternate sources for an unwarranted display of aggression. If I can correctly identify the cause of the chaos, I will be better equipped to deal with it. Moreover, I will employ all these concepts and helpful ideas in trying to establish fairness in the classroom that I administer.