



QUDWA 2017

Teacher Talk in collaboration with OECD

“Making Schools More Equitable: Teaching Disadvantaged Students”

Saturday October 7th, 2017

- **Jacque Kahura**, Teacher, Founder, Executive Director, LIBA, Kenya
- **Manil Maharjan**, Alumni 2017 (Fellow 2015), Teach for Nepal, Nepal
- **Dr Taoufik Boulhrir**, English Medium Teacher, English Head of Department Abdulqader Aljazaeri School, UAE

Moderated by Tarek Mostafa, Analyst, Early Childhood and Schools, Directorate for Education and Skills, OECD

What challenges do teachers face when teaching students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households? Education can help reduce broader social inequalities only if all students are equipped with equivalent opportunities to realise their full potential.

This is an interesting question for a school in the UAE, but it takes on entirely new meaning for administrators in more disadvantaged countries such as Kenya or Nepal, where students can't access basic materials, much less computers or the internet.

According to OECD surveys in 2015 and 2016, students from disadvantaged groups tended to perform lower on standardized tests than non-disadvantaged students.





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Teachers need to ensure that socioeconomically disadvantaged students have equal opportunities to learn, said Mostafa. And there are many strategies that can help, including expanding early childhood education programs, increasing professional development using technology as a tool for learning, especially for non-native English speakers, and re-examining policies that sort students by ability.

In a poll taken during the session, almost 70% of teachers had students whose language is different from language of instruction; more than 40% had students with special needs and more than 30% from a socioeconomically disadvantaged homes.

“On a micro level, teachers can make use of resources, social workers, psychologists, special needs teachers, or specialists and parents,” said Bouhrir. “They need to motivate their students and open their eyes to the possibilities they have in front of them. A lot of difficulties come from parents having low expectations for their children and this lays a domino effect for the situation.”

In many cases, teachers themselves need to serve as role models, said Maharjan, who worked in poor rural areas of Nepal.

“Their view of that their life is quite narrow, they can’t think beyond their abilities,” he said. “One of my first strategies was to present myself as their role model. I just instilled a belief inside them if a visually impaired student from Nepal can do what I do, they should be able to derive motivation from that.”

It’s also important to get the children’s eyes trained on the future. “If they can’t see any ray of hope for their future then they don’t want to concentrate on their present,” he said. “My next strategy at my school was giving them that hope for the future.”

Jacque, operating in a very poor school in Kenya, where only half of her 10 teachers have education training and she possesses the only computer and internet access, has had to accept that her role goes far beyond that of educator. Children who have walked to school for five kilometers, barefoot, whose parents may be drunk on palm wine, or abuse them, needs other adults willing to understand where they are coming from. “We as teachers play multiple roles,” said Jacque. “We act as administrators, we can act as caregivers, and we can act as healers. When these students come to school, there is someone to listen to them, because they don’t have that at home, they would have a greater understanding, to go beyond the call of duty, to take time to have more understanding of who these students are.”





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For Jacque, going above and beyond has also meant adding extra learning programs on the weekend and school holidays.

Teachers also need to be vigilant, watching to make sure students who may have language challenges are absorbing all they are being taught. Boulhrir recalled teaching in the US and getting two students straight from the Dominican Republic. Although they pretended they were understanding his lessons, by the end of the first week, when questioned, they admitted that they weren't. The situation then required computer support, basic English instruction, consultation with the school principal and social workers, and gathering information about basic literacy in Spanish.

Main Takeaway: One effective way to level the playing field between those with more resources and those with less is to pursue partnerships with businesses and organizations in the community.

