



Understanding Equity through Seeds

*Developed by Courtney Bentley, University of Montevallo
Dean/Professor College of Education and Human Development*

What does an analysis of seeds and their diverse needs to thrive tell us about students' opportunities to learn? This activity uses flower seeds as an analogy for understanding human diversity. Specifically, this activity disrupts the narrative of equality, as it relates to growth and development, and deepens an essential understanding of equity.

NAME Learn Learner Learning Outcome(s)

Developing Social Justice Consciousness

Level

Introductory

Goals

- Participants will understand basic dimensions for diversity
- Participants will differentiate common needs through equity analysis.
- Participants will identify how systemic oppressive structures limit development opportunities.

Assessment or deliverables

- Participants understand diversity as a basic need for survival;
- Participants are able to distinguish between "equality" and "equity; and why such a distinction is important; and
- Participants can accurately identify systemic oppressive structures.

Materials

- Seed packet information guides can be found through the following URL:
https://www.burpee.com/flowers/?cid=PPC&gclid=Cj0KCQjwtsv7BRCmARIsANu-CQfwcyb0_gtjB_CgOagNzgDWYjSPmyKxoFD8i1K9lmxk0Q0QG00_foUaAkK4EALw_wcB
- Seed packets can be purchased at a local hardware store (Include multiple varieties and have 1 packet for every 4 participants)

- Poster paper OR
- Markers
- Six Index Cards; Each card should list one of the following six climatic zones:
 1. Polar Chill
 2. Temperate Regions
 3. Arid Zones
 4. Damp Tropical Regions
 5. The Mild Mediterranean
 6. The Cold Tundra

Note: You may need to duplicate cards if there are more than 6 discussion groups such that each group receives a climate card.

- Projector, if necessary

Research & Theory

View the “What is Equity” NAME Learn FAQ through the following URL:

https://www.nameorg.org/learn/what_is_equity.php

Process

Introduction (10 minutes)

Whole Group Question: What do flowers need to grow?

Write down responses on whiteboard. Scaffold the discussion such that participants identify the basic elements flowers need to grow (i.e., sun, soil, air, space, and water). Transfer these three broad categories to poster paper (one per page). Affix to the wall at the front of the room. View the following video to see if they’re “right.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nGrDI5_zrc

Application (30 minutes)

- Divide participants into groups of 3-4. Give each group a flower seed packet as well as seed information guide (linked above). You can purchase seeds from a local nursery or home improvement store. Make sure that the seeds minimally have different light requirements (e.g., part sun, full shade, full sun) and are indigenous to continental climate zones. Ask groups to identify their seed requirements according to the five basic categories identified. (15 minutes)
- Ask each group to report back, transferring their responses to the appropriate sheet. You will find that they will note information not connected to the 5 categories. Add an “Other” sheet for this information. (10 minutes)
- Ask the whole group to reflect on the information presented using the following guiding questions:
 - Do all the flowers need the same amount of each basic element?

- If we give them more or less than required, will they survive? If they survive, will they thrive?
- Once complete, share with the group that the optimal conditions all require the plants to be sewn in a temperate climate zone. Distribute the six climate zone cards (i.e., Polar Chill, Temperate Regions, Arid Zones, Damp, Tropical Regions, Mild Mediterranean, and Cold Tundra). Remember that you may need more than 6 climate cards if you have more than 6 groups. The most important element is that all climate zones are included.

Ask them if their flowers will survive, even under the conditions outlined on the packets/handouts if they were sewn in the climate given. Ask them to consider as a small group what they can do to ensure growth in an inhospitable climate (5 minutes). Return to whole group and lead a discussion. Participants will typically recommend a greenhouse or other structure used to mitigate the climate.

Wrap Up: (15 minutes)

Ask the following question: What does our analysis of seeds and their diverse needs to thrive tell us about students' opportunities to learn?

Facilitate the discussion to ensure participants better understand how students' needs differ. Scaffold the discussion to include how systemic oppressive structures are analogous to climate zones for seeds.

Unpack ways teachers can work to dismantle these systemic structures in the same way they worked to identify solutions for their seeds. For example, if a teacher adheres to all the guidelines indicated on the flower packet (i.e., engages culturally relevant teaching), but the teacher's classroom is located in a non-temperate climate (i.e., an oppressive institutional context), building the greenhouse relates to positively impacting policies and practices in the classroom to counter school policies and practices that perpetuate and sustain institutional and structural racism as well as other forms of oppression at the building-level. The teacher's greenhouse serves to insulate the classroom and protect students in an otherwise oppressive climate, although valuable, is insufficient.

It is not enough to ensure culturally relevant teaching occurs in the classroom. Here culturally relevant teaching is responsive to each individual's needs in equitable ways and works to dismantle personally mediated or interpersonal marginalization, but does work to dismantle those larger structures.