Facets Are Assets
A Reflection for Teachers

Any given classroom will have a range of learners. There could be a student who excels at math sitting right next to someone who can finish a chunky book over a weekend. Some will come from single-parent households, while others will live in a joint family with up to four generations under one roof. What is critical to the success of our students is that they are not made to feel ashamed or pitied for their unique experiences. In fact, their facets are assets! Check out the scenarios below to see how Linda brings students' life experiences into the classroom.[1]

Scenario 1

Amanda is a 14-year-old 8th-grade student. She has been held back twice because of poor grades and perpetual absences from school. Her teacher, Linda, notices a cycle with Amanda. She misses a couple of days of instruction in a row and then comes back and is well behind the rest of her peers. Add in the fact that she is two years older than most of the other students, and Amanda often resorts to acting out. She is known to have outbursts, walk out of class, and get into physical and verbal altercations with her peers. In an attempt to give Amanda one-on-one instruction to help her catch up, Linda learns that Amanda misses school because she has to take her father for dialysis a couple of times a week. Her mother is not present in her life, so Amanda is the only source of support for her father.

Fast forward to a couple of weeks later: The class is learning about organ systems. Linda asks Amanda if she would like to teach the class about the excretory system, considering she must have extensive knowledge about it, given her father's medical condition. Amanda is initially hesitant but ultimately gives in because she knows it's a way to bring her grades up.

Amanda not only presents eloquently on how the bodily organs interact to ensure that toxins exit the body, but also pushes her presentation over the top. She talks about the lack of access to healthy food choices in her neighborhood, the association between poverty and pathology, the psychological impact of kidney failure on her entire family, and the financial burden of her father's needing invasive treatment for nearly 12 hours a week. The moment was truly a turning point for Amanda.

[1] Disclaimer: Student names have been altered to protect their confidentiality.

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Scenario 2

Tina is a 12th-grader in Linda's AP Psychology class. She often chooses to sit in the back of class and sleep. Other times, Tina can be found in the hallways or running into different classrooms to see her friends. She has made it clear that she does not want to be in Linda's class because she finds it boring. Linda notices that Tina often sings and dances in the halls, kind of like she's in a Broadway musical.

As students are learning about neurons and neurotransmitters, Linda notices that the class is visibly struggling. Linda asks if a volunteer would like to join her in demonstrating how neurons communicate. Crickets in the room. "Okay, how about if someone acts it out?" Deep down, Linda was hoping Tina would volunteer. Tina, however, was uninterested. Then, a student shouted, "Tina, you do it; you're always singing in the hallways." More students joined in until Tina complied. And boy, did Tina put on a show!

Tina bounced around the room, singing about neurotransmitters and synapses. Although she struggled with the content, and the lesson needed to be retaught with more student autonomy and choice, this was quite a moment. After that, Tina would make up little songs and gestures to remember psychological theories and vocabulary. The class knew she was the go-to person before an assessment because she would have a toolkit they could learn from.

Reflection Questions:

As you think about the many facets of your learners, consider:

- What are some assets in your learning environment that you may not have tapped into yet?
- How can we help students recognize their own experiences as assets to the learning environment?

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