

Equity and Responsibility in Action

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Part One: Reflection & Connection

In human society, regardless of its polity and ideology, the problem associated with oppression, diversity, and equity is a never-ending phenomenon. In China, the action of the government and institutions toward the pandemic over the past three years has raised the discussion of these questions to a brand-new level. In fact, it's fascinating how we can see the shadow of these questions in people's reactions to national or local policy. Even though debate around oppression, diversity, and equity can be identified, changing the current situation will not be an easy move.

People often use the word “freedom” to express their dissatisfaction with the government, which is an act of precipitation and a lack of deeper thinking, after years of being restricted on special level, they have a sort of instinct that the government always goes against people's will, causing them normally not to, or even refuse to think further of why the government propose legislations like that. There is an old saying in China that goes: “there is a Long March for each generation” obviously for our generation, the enemy is the COVID. In recent months due to years of torture by the pandemic, the word “freedom” is being mentioned more frequently than ever. Here comes the first topic I will discuss, which is, the right to know the truth. In “Standing Up Against Hate” by Mica Pollock, she mentions that it is the teachers' responsibility to engage students with the facts and protect their right to learn. Throughout her chapter, she mainly focuses on preventing hatred on campus, but I want to add on that to say we should engage the fact and protect the right to learn of all people. Sadly, the situation in China still has space to improve. As one of the

biggest republican countries in the world, the idea of what's good and what's bad, or who are our enemies and who are our friends, is deeply rooted in our mind, and even to some degree, becomes a chain to our mindset. Information control is undisputedly an effective way for the government to better maintain the stabilization of society, but once people, especially those who believe in the government, start to realize that the government has been unfaithful to us, that sense of truth will collapse. People yell about "freedom" to show how they disagree with policies like quarantines or taking regular NAT, but what they fail to see is the counter-outcomes, how many people will die because of COVID, how will other countries think of us if information spreads out, and even how will those who want freedom will say if the government really give them the "freedom" they want? All of these issues that are not being considered thoroughly are because of the inequity in learning, meaning that problems of not-being-taught-from-multiple-aspects happens in most of the educational institutions. "We stand up for one another when we get more informed about fellow human beings and the world." (Pollock, 2019). Just like what she says, if people have a more complex understanding and are able to generate a unique opinion about the pandemic or the policies against it instead of blindly following what the media or other people talk about, at least we don't have to worry about internal conflict and just focusing on our one and only enemy. Therefore, I propose that people should have the right to learn and think independently.

Not only did schools choose not to have discussions about the pandemic, but they even avoid them on purpose. As teachers and educators, it is our duty to encourage

students to have healthy conversations. The pandemic is merely a small example; for more general circumstances, teachers should also follow the rule of “warm demanders” (Delpit, 2012). Delpit suggests that it’s almost impossible for a single person to improve the whole educational system, but one can focus on their own students. She believes that the key element of successful and effective teaching is the teachers’ attitude toward their students, to what degree they are willing to promote insightful conversations, how deeply they feel that teaching is not only a job they get paid for but also their responsibility, and whether can they make the students feel their passion. To become a “warm demander” (Delpit, 2012), one must make students comfortable to show their vulnerabilities, accept their failures, and provide students with all the support they need at the same time. I’m not suggesting that teachers should encourage students to make irresponsible claims about the pandemic, which we all agree is an extremely sensitive topic in China, without gathering enough evidence. In fact, they should be even more careful when guiding students to form their own opinion. Unfortunately, almost none of the schools in China are having these conversations, mainly because they don’t “dare” to talk about it, which is another non-negligible problem in our society. For teenagers who are in a stage of life that have the ambition to make the world a better place, we lack support from our parents, and teachers, who happen to be the people who are supposed to be on our side, with the eagerness to criticize and the lack of guidance, it’s easy to form unhealthy mindset and become disappointed about the society we live in. We need teachers who care about us as people with all their hearts, and not only teach us solid

knowledge from textbooks but also help us form our own values and ways of seeing things. Hence, I conclude that we need more teachers who are willing to take their responsibilities for helping students.

Current regulations and policies around pandemics are inequitable in multiple aspects. The primary issue is that the government often comes up with decisions that lack the consideration of marginalized groups. In order to monitor the health status of China citizens, the government invented Jiankang Bao, a program that is meant to report each person's NAT result. One problem about it is that to have proof of tested-negative, one must have a smartphone to use Jiankang Bao. "... oppression is the experiences one is subject to as a result of belonging to a group that is of lower status within social structures." (Suyemoto, 2022). As people who live in relatively modern areas, smartphones have become an indispensable item in our daily life; however, many people, especially elders, who live in less developed rural areas, never use smartphones, and have no idea how to use one. This difference causes privilege because compared to rural areas where the average GDP is almost negligible, the government will prioritize the condition of "the upper class" when generating national policies. The pressure of implementing "NAT for everyone" does not match the support the government provides for older groups of people. Therefore, a form of oppression happens. The fact that people have less attention to this oppression is another great example of how we and the environment in which we live can react to each other. In "Understanding Privilege Through Ableism" by Sensory, Ozlem, and Robin DiAngelo, they describe whether being privileged or oppressed in a society is

like whether a fish is moving along or against the water. The difference between being privileged or oppressed is that people who are being oppressed can feel much more pressure from society while people who are being privileged take everything for granted like it is how things are supposed to be: how most Mouse are designed for right-handed users, how LGBTQ people are labeled, and of course, how most people think having a smartphone is normal. Life for these marginalized groups is inequitable and hard, and this issue has been amplified because of the pandemic. So, I suggest that there are still plenty of regulations that can be modified and improved.

All in all, I think the biggest benefit I gained from this course is the ability to “take a step back,” meaning to let down my self-opinion and biases and look at the facts as well as different points of view from different groups of people on the same event. Especially regarding the pandemic that is happening right now, I’m able to identify the problem around it in both the citizens who lack multi-angle thinking and the government that oppresses marginalized groups and privileges the upper-class community. The journey of eliminating inequity and oppression in human society carries on generation after generation, we’ve made some progress, but new problems always show up, and people, especially educators like us, must never stop fighting for the right that we are born with, and believe that this “protest” will continue even after we are gone.

Part Two: Long-term Action Plan

As I mentioned before, it’s almost impossible for an individual to make any

impact on the system, but still, I'm going to come up with a long-term action plan which I hope is as realistic and doable as possible by only discussing the pandemic-related rules and restrictions around my neighborhood. To respond to Part One, I will explain my plan from three distinct angles, which are working with the educational institutions nearby, the community, and the local government.

First, the educational institution is one of the most important spaces where people get educated; that's why if we want to make some changes, working with educational institutions such as schools, the Ministry of Education, or tutorial classes, is our primary goal. Of course, It will not be realistic to ask the Ministry of Education to tell local schools to teach students about the pandemic because it will conflict with current curriculums, and not to mention a school could be punished by teaching this topic due to its sensitivity. So, what I recommend us to do is to go to the Ministry of Education and tell our intention to related personnel and propose a pilot project. We could make contact with schools (high school would be best) or tutorial classes that are not too popular in the area through help from the Ministry of Education and add an optional course about the pandemic, which can provide extra credit for students' GPA if taken. However, for this optional course, the knowledge about the pandemic must not to put in a straightforward way. Instead, teachers must know the consequences of teaching irresponsibly and find their own way to provide students with the facts they need to know but be careful when dealing with students from different age groups because their values will be easily affected by the fact if they haven't formed their own mature and solid ones. The purpose of this step is to make

the students get to know about how the society or the government is reacting to the pandemic, especially when it's something that is very close to their daily lives, and doing this, provides us with the foundation of the whole action plan.

After a semester or a full academic year of teaching and learning about the optional course, we can move to the second step of the plan: engage with the local community. Since the schools or tutorial classes we choose to implement the pilot project are the less popular ones, their students will possibly come from communities not too far away. The effect we are looking forward to seeing is that the students will actively talk about the knowledge of the pandemic they learn from the optional course with their parents. Two possible outcomes of this children-parent communication will be either the parents also agree with us and become powerful evidence for us to carry on with the plan, or the parents are afraid that our program could affect their children's mindset and values in a bad way. Both outcomes are completely reasonable. Therefore, we can also take action to respond to their reactions. For the relatively cooperative parents, we will contact them and talk about how their children is attracted by this topic and how learning this course not only improve their GPA but their motivation to learn other courses as well. However, the purpose of reaching out to them is that we don't want them to spread out words in the communities. There will always be people who don't appreciate what we do and don't understand why we are teaching students sensitive topics, so we don't want to cause unnecessary trouble. And for the group of parents who oppose us, we will invite them to our school and teach them a lesson about the pandemic, to make them experience what their children are

learning in school. The most important thing to be clear is to let them know that this whole thing is voluntary: if they feel uncomfortable with their kids to learn these lessons, they can just drop the class and use other school activities to make up that extra credit. However, we hope that through the experience of learning the lesson themselves, we can change their opinion about us and our actions and join the group of parents who support us. The estimated time for this process is two years, during which the parents can come to us at any time to talk about their suggestions or complaints or whatever they want to say; we will modify the course content based on the feedback.

Finally, based on the achievement we make in step two, if things happen the way we plan, we will now be able to hand in the proposal and talk to the local government. Till this point, we will have persuasive evidence that teaching the course can help students to improve their learning skills and parents who support our program. The decision to contact the government is the most important move in the whole plan, so we must wait patiently. Only after we have enough parents, who are classified as working class in society, to support us, will we have the power to make the local government listen to what we want to say. Also, we can't ask the government to give us permission to teach classes about the pandemic in all the schools in the area. Instead, we should ask permission to teach in different schools step by step, one at a time. With each school, we will do what we planned in step 2, but the overall process shouldn't be too long because as the action plan proceeds, the effectiveness of the plan on each school should grow exponentially because we have a richer experience

of how to teach the course and our “street reputation” will spread out, perhaps schools will even start to contact us to teach the course. Even though the pandemic has already become a powerful topic, if we can use it properly and carefully, its sensitivity can help us to make people engage with facts, protect their right to learn and even possibly change the system, which is also the initial reasons why we started this program, and it is important that we must never forget it. After we make sure we have all the evidence and support we need, the final negotiation with the local government requires strong psychological quality, and we must show all the benefits our program brings to students, parents, and local communities. Meanwhile, we must also point out the possible troubles we may encounter when cooperating with relatively high-quality schools. The goal is to persuade the local government to grant us the permission to make this course about the pandemic a required class instead of an optional one.

In conclusion, this action plan is merely just a frame, there are so many details to discuss and so many problems that could happen on the way, but difficulty cannot stop people from fighting for their own community. I believe that as long as people are working together, one day, we will see success in this battle because, as educators, it is our duty to think for the people, speak for the people, and act for the people.

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