I think that to achieve equity in a classroom, I think we first need think about, what does an equitable classroom look like? How would I know one when I see one, right? Realizing also that equity, classroom equity, can be seen or measured on a continuum so that some classrooms are more equitable then others. And we strive for more and more and more equity. So, one of the features of an equitable classroom is that all students have access to quality curriculum, intellectually challenging tasks, equal status interaction with their peers, with the teachers, and with the text of schools, and by texts of schools I mean the books, the manipulatives, you know, text at large.

A classroom where the students can see each other as competent, as contributing, as learning, as colleagues, and as peers while engaging in serious content is for me the ideal. They solve problems that are like real life problems; they address dilemmas; they have things to talk about, and they do that democratically and they do that equitably. That's the ultimate. Now I think that what people sometimes mistake it for is friendliness. Okay, so because, you know, group work is seen as the answer, we do see classrooms that are, classrooms that use group work are indeed friendlier, because kids know each other's names. They talk to one another a little bit more. But that still does not address the issue of the equal status interaction. And so, they can be friendly, but they don't necessarily see particular students as competent, as smart, and therefore can't see them as contributing to the — contributing to the group task.

The theoretical basis for complex instruction in particular, comes from a theory called expectations status theory, expectations status characteristics theory. Status characteristics are characteristics where society agrees that it is better to be in the high state than in the low state, right? So, society agrees, or society knows, that it is probably better to be rich than poor. In certain societies, more power and prestige is related to the high status characteristic — if you're white, than if you're a person of color. Gender is such a diffused status characteristic, right? So, more power and prestige in certain situations are given to males than — and there are many other, you now, age sometimes or — it's interesting. Then the theory talks about specific status characteristics that are specific for a particular situation. In classrooms, particularly the elementary classrooms, your perceived reading ability is such a status characteristic. What's so amazing was that — research done in, in I think the late 70s — Susan Rosen… — where kids, fourth graders, were asked to rank each other and themselves on their reading ability in classrooms. It's mind boggling, but the kids were able to rank themselves, and their ranking corresponded to the teachers' raking to an amazing degree.

And the theory also talks about something called status generalization so that when I come to the situation and all I know about is that you are good reader and the task that we have to has nothing to do with reading — we should built something, you know, a model airplane with Legos — I was so generalized from the fact that you are a good

reader to your competence to building for example. When teachers explain to the students that the task requires multiple intellectual abilities — so a particular task you need to make sure that you understand the text, you talk about the ideas, you summarize them in ways that make sense, you can explain it to them. You can synthesize, you can then make a visual representation of the poem that you read, you know, build it — paint a beautiful painting out of it. That particular task then requires so many different things to do, that number one, a single person will really have a hard time doing it by themselves in 25 and a half minutes. And so I need everybody, and I need everybody's expertise, okay? And that really, no one person is always successful at everything, which is a huge problem by the way for the kids who are always successful at everything in schools because the tasks are so narrow, which is why they are successful. But on this multi-dimensional, you know, broad rich tasks, I need many different ways of being smart, many different ways.

So we are, you know, Howard Gardner talks about multiple intelligences and it's great work, and sometimes I want to say that probably the single most important thing that he did was that he made intelligence plural. He made intelligences, you know so it's not only one, so it just adding an "S" to the end of the word was, like, perfect for me. So, that's number one, to just make the kids aware that different kinds of capabilities and strengths and talents that we can contribute, that come from school but also from our outside experiences. Kids come to school with such rich repertoires that we never take advantage of, we never mind, we never give them opportunities to show how smart they are, and they are incredibly smart.

So, that's one, making them aware. Then when the students are actually working on these tasks and they require the multiple ability tasks, multiple abilities to perform them, or you know, different ways of being smart I would like to say that, that way because it's so much more colloquial. Then as a teacher, I can go around and observe and give specific feedback to all students, particularly to the students who have never before been seen by their peers as contributors, or as smart. And so I'm changing expectations, because if I say more and more, "Hey, you know, wow, look at him, look at what he did." That's changing expectations. And so when I enter a new situation I won't automatically say, oh this person is going to be the one who is going to solve the problem and I can just sit back. And, you know, we all have to perform and do something to produce the task, to produce the product.

I think that the message that we are trying to give is counter normative for schools where everything is so narrow; it's counter normative for teachers, and its counter cultural in many ways. We are always wanting to find the best person in the, whatever stupid measure we have, for "the" right? And here it's more about, let's look at the richness. Now, the good thing about all of these is that in the end, actually the writing, the reading and the writing and all those test-taking skills that the kids have to perform on, are indeed there. You know, it's a false dichotomy to just say, well if I have a rich task and I teach them all these higher order thinking and, you know, deep conversations, they won't do well on the test. But that's not true; that's a false dichotomy; that really is a false dichotomy.

It started with saying what do equitable classrooms look like? Okay, and I said all kids work on academically rich curriculum. Both the teacher and all the kids understand that they will have opportunity to demonstrate their smarts in different ways, by different means and different occasions, okay. They understand that being smart can be learned, that it's incremental and multi-dimensional. And finally in an equitable classroom — and I know that that's where I get the most resistance, it's also probably lack of understanding — is that the achievement is clustered around a narrow, acceptable mean. And that there are very few kids who are just below, and some kids who are above, okay. So, it's not a normal curve. The achievement in an equitable classroom is not the normal curve, because in the normal curve only 60% of the classroom are around the acceptable mean. I talk about the achievement where I demonstrate what students know, what all students know, right? In this graph. Standardize tests actually, if an item does not discriminate, right? If you have some, an item that everybody know how to respond to, that is taken out of the standardized test, because it does not discriminate, right? Because we have to have a normal curve. The teachers that I work with in, you know, my step teachers who are these amazing people, they should go out and make a difference in that way and build equitable classrooms. That's, that's our job because, you know, if we don't do that, democracy won't be there.

SOURCE: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education
http://edpolicy.stanford.edu/