Dictionary wise, equality and equity is not much different, both were describe as a state of fairness and justice. But in essence, they are fundamentally dissimilar.

Imagine a situation in class where one student is treated with more care and the others saying how “unfair” it is no matter the circumstances behind the action. This mentality is not because of the ‘unfairness’ of the situation but because students have this standard of ‘fairness’ that everyone must be treated the same way.

It originates from the good old days, when children are though that ‘fair’ is synonymous to ‘equal’. The mentality of “If a get two cookies, you’ll get two cookies too” is deeply engrained to the children that they disregard reason and just stick to that version of ‘fairness’ they grew up in. But this concept of ‘fair’ is profoundly flawed. For one, not everyone is the same. We all have different situations, go through different obstacles, and have different ways of learning.

“What equal treatment does is not erase differences but promote privilege.” – Mind Out Conference

Equality aims to be impartial by giving all students the same treatment and attention. Equity however is giving students what they need in order to succeed. This concept is born from the fact that not everyone is the same. Some students need more attention than others, some less. A student with development disorder needs a lot more care and attention as compared to normal children. This may seem unfair, but it all aims the same result, for the students to learn and succeed. Equality only works if everyone
starts at the same baseline, with the same background, ability and capacity, and we all know how unlikely that is.

For example, there are two students, Sam and John, Sam is a kinesthetic learner while John is a visual learner. If ‘equality’ will be implored, the teacher can just use visual aids to and be done with it. But ‘equity’ means also using strategies that uses interaction and hands-on activities, thus making sure that Sam and John both have the same probability of succeeding. Not the same process is applied, not the same effort is given, in the simplistic definition of ‘fairness’ it will seem ‘unfair’, but is it really?

Like any other aspect of life, fairness and unfairness are not black and white. There are a ton of grey areas that needs to be addressed. Equality promotes a very simplistic definition of what is fair. There is this cartoon photo circulating online that best explains the difference of equity and equality. In the photo there are three people, one tall, one average, and one short, they were all trying to watch a ball game through a wooden fence. The tall man can perfectly see above the fence, while the average and short man can not. In Equality, every single person will have a wooden crate they can step on. By doing this the taller man becomes even taller, the average man can no see above the fence, while the short man still is unable to see. In equity, the tall man will not get a crate, because he is already fine as it is, the average man gets one, while the sort man gets two. It is not the same and it may seem ‘unfair’ that the sort man has two crates while the others only have one and even none. But is you consider the individual circumstances, it is only ‘fair’ because he needs the crates the most.

It is the same in class, sometimes teachers would have to give extra attention to students because those students need that extra attention and effort to make sure that they learn and succeed.

“Fairness” is subjective complex; it can differ with every situation. Equal does not necessarily mean fair.
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