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Due: March 25, 2011

Winnie the Witch Reflection

Each student is an individual and therefore different. Students have different personalities, strengths, weaknesses, and interests. What we do with these differences is what shapes the environment in our classrooms across the United States. Do we accept students’ differences and shape the environment around them, or attempt to change students so that they fit with the environment? This is the question examined in the story *Winnie the Witch.* Through an extended metaphor, Paul and Thomas emphasize that a child-centered curriculum is necessary for successful learning. Through a series of events the witch, a metaphor for a teacher, uncovers that there is a dilemma with her cat, a student, fitting into his environment. It is by the reactions of the witch to the cat not fitting into the environment originally provided that creates the basis for the argument that changing the child to fit the environment and not the other way around is a slippery slope to lack of willingness to learn.

The witch, like many teachers, begins the story by uncovering a dilemma. The witch’s dilemma is that her black cat blends into the all black environment she provided. Teachers on the other hand may face the dilemma of differing academic levels, different learning styles, students who have physical or mental disabilities, differing personalities, different lifestyles or any number of differences. Uncovering these difference may not be as evident as the witch who as surprised by a trip in the hall or an angry cat on the chair. Instead it may take more careful observation to discover that an uninterested student is feeling unchallenged or a student that hardly completes their work actually has a learning disability. Upon discovering these differences there is another dilemma that is presented: deciding what to do to accommodate for the differences.

The story begins by showing the harmful effects of attempting to change the child, or in this case the cat, to fit the environment that you have set up. There are two attempts to change the cat. The first, while initially “successful” proves to have a flaw greater than the original problem. The cat is able to be suitable for the environment indoors, in the case of a student suitable for the classroom. However, when placed in the outdoors, the cat blends in at all times instead of just sometimes like he had before indoors. This experience provides a metaphor for a student who like the black cat would have originally been fine in the environment outside of the house or in a student’s case school, but since they were forced to change to be suitable for the environment provided they no longer are suitable for the other. The second attempt to change the cat leaves him suitable for both the house environment and the outdoor environment. So in this case, the student would adjust to fit the classroom environment and then make further changes to re-fit into the environment outside of school. The result of these changes is the withdrawal of the cat. In the case of a student, they may stop paying attention in class or regress academically or socially.

After seeing the negative results of trying to change the cat to fit the environment, the witch discovers that it is the environment that needs to adjust to the cat and not the other way around. This too is the case in a classroom. The environment needs to be shaped around the strengths, weaknesses, interests, and unique aspects of each student. Students already fit into an environment outside of the school community. Changing them to fit their new environment in the classroom may lead to them no longer fitting their primary home or neighborhood environment. This means they will have to make further changes to readjust to the expectations of their environment outside of school. As shown by the cat, all of these changes take away from the student’s happiness and as a result they do not progress as intended by the change but instead regress and withdraw. However, on the other side, when a child-centered environment is used, the student will thrive since they will fit well with not only their classroom environment but also the environment outside of school. This is demonstrated when the witch looks at changing the environment and not the cat. The witch is happy because the cat functions well within the adjusted environment, and the cat is happy because he is allowed to be himself without suffering the fate of being tripped over and sat upon.

When a child is forced to change to fit their school environment there are effects felt well beyond the classroom. Students are undeniably tied to several environments and therefore asking them to adjust to fit yours specifically is not healthy for the child. By working with a child-centered curriculum, a fostering environment is provided that accepts and teaches students to accept the difference in others. When this child-centered curriculum is applied, an ending , like the happily ever after one in *Winnie and the Witch,* is more in reach for both students and teacher.