Self-Evaluation of Alumni-Teachers' Proficiency in Addressing Learner Diversity, Spiritual Maturity, and Christian Witness

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Abstract

This study evaluates the competence of the teacher alumni in two key areas: Diversity of Learners and Spiritual Maturity and Christian Witness - in both of which the graduates were found to be prepared as early childhood educators. In this regard, the alumni scored "Very Good" in the Diversity of Learners with 4.01, with the following strength in differentiated instructions to learners' gender, needs, strengths, and interests. Lower scores on the other hand were found if it should be on culturally responsive strategies as applied to indigenous learners. Interviews revealed the use of adaptive teaching methods, collaboration with parents, and adherence to Bruner's scaffolding theory, emphasizing the value of personalized approaches to meet diverse needs. In the Spiritual Maturity and Christian Witness category, alumni were according their highest overall rating (4.46), indicative of a very strong belief in the teaching of discipline through faith. They believe that living their lives in accordance with God's Word and referencing biblical tales in their lessons are in agreement with the framework of Palmer, Stonehouse, and Horne. Coded responses indicate the modes of nurturing spiritual consciousness and promoting godly communion but there are still areas for improvement, such as inclusivity and personal growth in spirituality. The alumni possess a very high level of proficiency in handling the various learner needs while exemplifying also in Christian values. There is also the urgent need for continued professional development in culturally inclusive teaching and spiritual mentorship.

Keywords: teacher-proficiency, learner-diversity, spiritual maturity, Christian witness

Introduction

Teaching profession plays a pivotal role in shaping the mind and values of future generations. Teachers are qualified not only to deliver knowledge but also to become role models to embody principles and values that bring holistic development for the learner. Teacher's role becomes even more profound in educational settings where diversity, spirituality, and ethical grounding are central. This study aims to explore the perception of proficiency levels of alumni-teachers toward addressing diversity among learners, demonstrating both their spiritual maturity and Christian

witness. The results and insights obtained through the evaluation of their self-assessed competencies are meant to applied into teacher preparation programs with actual classroom demands and mission-based education.

Educational institutions have two issues to deal with: the first is to reach out to the students to show them ways and means to have a better life based on how they can learn the configuration of world-point study and secondly to impart education together with strong Christian values. Such teachers would be rooted in reality and be quite effective in their teaching-learning institutions in imparting spirituality and holistic approach to life to their students. This concern is seen in terms of the responses of alumni-teachers who have gone from teacher education programs into the multifaceted realities of classroom practice. Here, reflections as well as self-evaluations can be telling signposts to indicate the effectiveness of and preparedness for meeting the complex responsibilities in training, and these findings together with the impact on classroom setting can provide recommendations for improvement.

The proficiency of a teacher is a multi-dimensional construct, involving subject knowledge, pedagogical skills, and personal traits such as empathy and ethical behavior. From the previous studies, such kind of knowledge has a concrete place in addressing learner diversity, including recognizing individual differences in cultural background, socioeconomic background, learning styles, and abilities. Differentiated instruction is described as critical in meeting diverse needs in classrooms and therefore it requires that teacher training programs should feature appropriate strategies that enable inclusivity and equity in the process of training.

Spiritual development, as a dimension of teacher proficiency, is gaining a good deal of attention especially in faith-based education. Smith and Lytle (2016) mention that spiritual maturity in educators systematically vitalizes moral and ethical decision making within learners. Furthermore, Christian witness - the practical demonstration of the tenets of a faith - forms part of the mission of the Christian education process. Thus, according to Noddings (2013), teachers demonstrating ethical and spiritual example inspire such learners and essentially contribute to holistic student development.

While there has been much scholarship on such single aspects, little is looked into regarding the holistic nature of the self-assessment of alumni-teachers in terms of addressing learner diversity, spiritual maturity, and Christian witness. This study, therefore, aims at filling this gap by synthesizing these dimensions and looking at their intersection through the lens of self-evaluation.

There is an extensive amount of literature pertaining to the individual dimensions of teacher proficiency - strategies in managing learner diversity and spirituality in education; however, such literature has scarcely been integrated into a coherent framework. Most of the studies also relate to either pre-service teachers or in-service teachers in a secular context, neglecting the experience of alumni-teachers working in faith-based educational systems.

The present study therefore addresses the above gaps by looking into the self-evaluation practices of alumni-teachers with regard to their proficiency in addressing diverse learners, spiritual maturity, and Christian witness. It also attends to the unique context of faith-based education in which the spiritual and ethical dimensions form a part of the teaching mission. On top of this, the

study comprehensively looks at relating preparations in teacher education programs to such practical outcomes to chart the way toward improving these programs to meet today's challenges in education.

Thus, these gaps are covered by the present research and it is meant to advance theoretical understanding and practical approaches to improve teacher education and professional practice, thus contributing to the wider educational landscape.

Statement of the Problem

How do the selected alumni-teachers evaluate their own proficiency level in terms of the following:
a. diversity of learners
b. spiritual maturity and Christian witness?

Theoretical Framework

A trifocal theoretical and scientific framework is used as the foundation for this study namely, the social constructivist theory of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) of DepEd, and Harold Burgess's Model for Analyzing Religious Education Curriculum. The social constructivist theory of Vygotsky explains the essence of the research theme: teacher proficiency. It elaborates why highly proficient teachers are essential in the educational venture of children thus providing the unique characteristic and primary aim of this investigation which is to determine the proficiency level of selected teacher-education graduates of HMC. The PPST and Burgess's model for analyzing religious education curriculum, on the other hand, will serve as the bases of the domains to be used in discovering the proficiency level of the research subjects in terms of learning environment, diversity of learners, and spiritual maturity and Christian witness.

Research Methods

This investigation adopted an exploratory survey design with methodological triangulation converging both quantitative and qualitative approaches concurrently. This was due to strict availability of the objectives of the study concerning its scope, and other specific aspects justifying the adoption of a descriptive-survey method. It includes such description approaches which systematically collect and analyze data from the key informants towards the current condition and the general characteristics of a population under research at a point in time.

Additionally, qualitative insights from interviews with selected respondents were further supplemented and strengthened with the quantitative data for probing deeper into the graduates' proficiency status. It provides empirical data through statistical analysis of the research problem understanding, but with a complementary interpretation from rich narrative data actualized by presenting a complete picture of the findings. The mixed-method approach serves to provide a complete understanding of the research problem.

Results and Findings

1. Alumni Evaluation on the Domain of Diversity of Learners

The alumni respondents evaluated themselves in the domain of diversity of learners. Table 1 below exposes the weighted mean, qualitative rating, and rank of items based on the alumni's self-evaluation.

Table 1: *Alumni's Evaluation of their Proficiency in the Domain of Diversity of Learners*

Domain: Diversity of Learners	Weighted Mean	Qualitative Rating	Rank
a) Demonstrating knowledge and understanding of differentiated teaching to suit the learners' gender, needs, strengths, interests and experiences	4.23	Very Good	1
b) Implementing teaching strategies that are responsive to the learners' linguistic, cultural, socio-economic and religious backgrounds	4.07	Very Good	3
c) Using strategies responsive to learners with disabilities, giftedness and talents	4.13	Very Good	2
d) Demonstrating understanding of the special education needs of learners in difficult circumstances, including: geographic isolation; chronic illness; displacement due to armed conflict; urban resettlement or disasters; child abuse and child labor practices	3.83	Very Good	4
e) Demonstrating knowledge of teaching strategies that are inclusive of learners from indigenous groups	3.80	Very Good	5
OVERALL MEAN	4.01	Very Good	
Overall Mean Score Interpretation: Proficiency level is high, and alumni are adequately equipped to serve as early childhood educators.			

Table 1 as given above shows that the domain "Diversity of Learners" got an overall weighted mean of 4.01. The overall rating falls on the qualitative rating, "Very Good" with the interpretation, "Proficiency level is high, and alumni are adequately equipped to serve as early childhood educators."

Among all five items the lowest mean in this domain was on "Demonstrating knowledge of teaching strategies that are inclusive of learners from indigenous groups," which got an average mean rating of 3.80 while the highest mean of 4.23 was on "Demonstrating knowledge and understanding of differentiated teaching to suit the learners' gender, needs, strengths, interests and experiences." The HMC graduates' teaching methods that suit the learners' gender, needs, strengths, interests and experiences are further elaborated in their interview accounts. Figure 1 presents a MAXQDA map of the interview responses from the alumni respondents dealing with diverse learners.
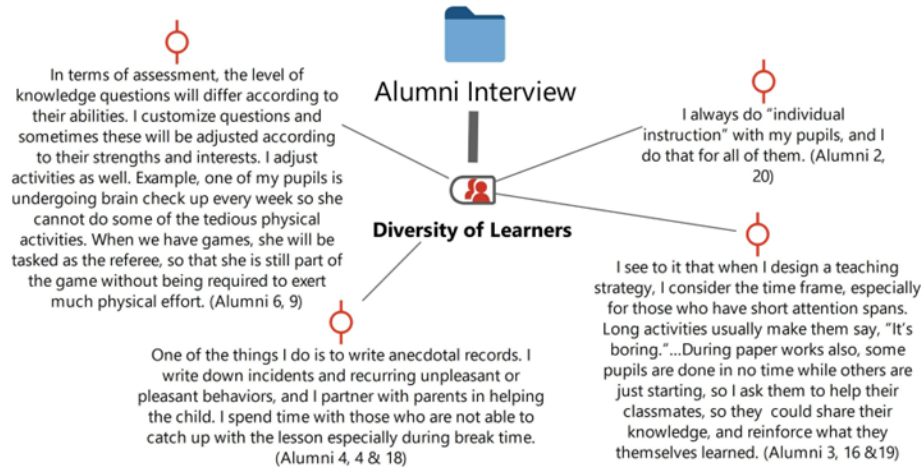
Figure 1: *Generated Interview Responses of Alumni on Diversity of Learners*

Describing the HMC graduates' teaching methods that suit the learners' gender, needs, strengths, interests and experiences, Alumni Respondent 3 elaborated thus:

> *In terms of assessment, the level of knowledge questions will differ according to their abilities. I customize questions and sometimes these will be adjusted according to their strengths and interests. I adjust activities as well. For example, one of my pupils is undergoing a brain checkup every week. So, she cannot do some of the tedious physical activities. When we have games, she will be tasked as the referee, so that she is still part of the game without being required to exert much physical effort.*

The alumni's differentiated approach in teaching by addressing the varied situations and needs of the learners may find affinity to Jerome Seymour Bruner's theory of "scaffolding" which points out that, more than imparting knowledge, teachers are there to facilitate the child's thinking and learning which can be transferred to an array of situations based on the needs and abilities of the learner. By using suitable approaches, the teacher enables him/her to solve "a task or achieve a goal that would be beyond his/her unassisted efforts." Alumni Respondent 3 further shared her own story on how she applies differentiated teaching to suit the needs and abilities of the pupils. She said:

> *I see to it that when I design a teaching strategy, I consider the time frame, especially for those who have short attention spans. Long activities usually make them say, "It's so boring!" . . . During paper works also, some pupils are done in no time while others are just starting. So, I ask them to help their classmates so that they could share their knowledge, and reinforce what they themselves learned.*

As shown in Figure 1, individual instruction (Alumni Respondent 2), and partnering with parents to help the child (Alumni Respondent 4) are some of the other methods which the HMC graduates use to handle diverse learners.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution and Percentage Count of Alumni's Coded Interview Responses in Diversity of Learners

Domain: Diversity of Learners		
Codes	Frequency Distribution	Percentage Count
1) Provisions Addressing Extra Skills, Needs, and Interests	5	71.43
2) Partnering with Parents and School to Better Address Diversity	5	71.43
3) Special Care for Learners with Special Needs	5	71.43
4) Differentiated Instruction for Diverse Abilities	4	57.14
5) Knowing Learner's Individual Profile and Background	3	42.86
6) Individualized Instruction for Each Learner	2	28.57
ANALYZED DOCUMENTS	7	100.00
PERCENTAGE VALID	-	100.00

As evident from Table 2 above, the HMC alumni revealed their proficiency as regards learner diversity through "Provisions Addressing Extra Skills, Needs, and Interests," "Partnering with Parents and School to Better Address Diversity" and "Special Care for Learners with Special Needs" (each of these three codes received the identical 5 over 7 in frequency distribution or 71.43% of the total responses). "Differentiated Instruction for Diverse Abilities" code received 4 over 7 in frequency distribution or 57.14% and "Knowing Learner's Individual Profile and Background" code received 3 over 7 in frequency distribution or 42.86%, and "Individualized Instruction for Each Learner" code received 2 over 7 in frequency distribution or 28.57 %. All seven documents were fully valid according to MAXQDA.

2. Alumni Evaluation on the Domain of Spiritual Maturity and Christian Witness

Spiritual Maturity and Christian Witness was the focus of the second domain. Table 3 below exposes the results of the alumni group's self-evaluation under this domain.

Table 3: Alumni's Evaluation in Spiritual Maturity and Christian Witness
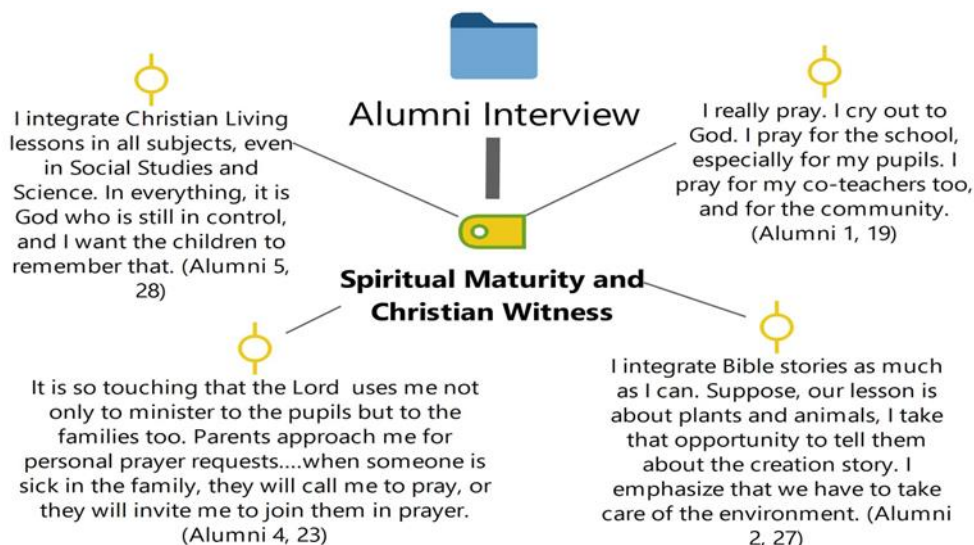
Domain:Spiritual Maturity and Christian Witness	Weighted Mean	Qualitative Rating	Rank
a) Demonstrating knowledge regarding the biblical foundations of the Christian faith	4.50	Excellent	2

b) Testifying to a life rooted in the Word of God both inside and outside the classroom	4.53	Excellent	1
c) Dynamically engaging in Christian activities in the church, in school, and in the wider community	4.43	Very Good	3
d) Earnestly promoting godly relationships with superiors, colleagues, students, and other co-workers	4.43	Very Good	3
e) Integrating Christian values in the daily teaching-learning activities	4.43	Very Good	3
f) Devoting oneself to the study of the Scriptures, personal prayer and meditation and daily seeking out to improve oneself for God's glory	4.40	Very Good	6
OVERALL MEAN	4.46	Very Good	
Overall Mean Score Interpretation: Proficiency level is high, and alumni are adequately equipped to serve as early childhood educators.			

Two items in Table 3 achieved a qualitative rating "Excellent." All other four items got "Very Good," even though mean ratings differ for individual items. The highest mean of 4.53 was on "Testifying to a life rooted in the Word of God both inside and outside the classroom." The lowest rating under this domain was on "Devoting oneself to the study of the Scriptures, personal prayer and meditation and daily seeking out to improve one's self for God's glory," which got an average mean rating of 4.40. The overall weighted mean for this domain is 4.46. The overall mean score interpretation states: "Proficiency level is high, and alumni are adequately equipped to serve as early childhood educators." Compared to the other domains, Spiritual Maturity and Christian Witness, got the higher overall rating based on the alumni's self-evaluation.

Testifying to a life rooted in the Word of God both inside and outside the classroom, the alumni's interview accounts through a MAXQDA map in Figure 2 below elaborates specific narratives as proof to their actions regarding the theme.

Figure 2: Generated Interview Responses of Alumni on Spiritual Maturity and Christian Witness

Relevant to testifying to a life rooted in the Word of God both inside and outside the classroom, Alumni Respondent 4 relates: *"It is so touching that the Lord uses me not only to minister to the pupils but to their families too. Parents approach me with personal prayer requests . . . When someone is sick in the family, they will call me to pray, or they will invite me to join them in prayer."* This delight in ministry which reflects the teacher's relationship to God, to others and to one's own inner self reverberates Parker Palmer's understanding of spirituality as "wholeness" involving one's relationship to the Holy, to others and to one's inner self. Palmer says that through this kind of involvement, "*We not only express what is in us and help to give shape to the world; we also receive what is outside us, and reshape our inner selves. When we act, the world acts back, and we and the world are co-created."* (Palmer, 1990, 17).

The interviews with the alumni respondents also tell much about how they integrate Christian values in their teaching. For instance, Alumni Respondent 5 specified*: "I integrate Christian Living lessons in all subjects, even in Social Studies and Science. In everything, it is God who is still in control, and I want the children to remember that."* In the same fashion, Alumni Respondent 2 narrates: "*I integrate Bible stories as much as I can. Suppose, our lesson is about plants and animals, I take that opportunity to tell them about the creation story. I emphasize that we have to take care of the environment."* Such focused intentionality of sharing Bible stories to children echoes Catherine Stonehouse's (2010) discussion of Harold Burgess's Model of Religious Education, which underlines the significance of children knowing and loving the stories about the people of God. She highlights that the teaching-learning experience should be directed to leading children "into Biblical events, to meet God there and to reflect on life … giving meaning to the words of the faith." (May et al., 2005, 196.)

All the seven codes generated from the interview accounts of the alumni respondents with specific frequency distribution and percentage count of responses are displayed in Table 4 below.

Table 4: *Frequency Distribution and Percentage Count of Alumni's Coded*

Interview Responses in Spiritual Maturity and Christian Witness

Domain: Spiritual Maturity and Christian Witness		
Codes	Frequency Distribution	Percentage Count
1) Integrating Christian Values in Teaching	7	100.00
2) Promoting Godly Relationship with Pupils, Colleagues, and Others	5	71.43
3) Demonstrating Biblical Knowledge of the Christian Faith	5	71.43

4) Ministering to People Inside and Outside the School	3	42.86
5) Upholding Church, School, and Community Concerns	3	42.86
6) Devoting Self to Study the Bible, to Prayer and Meditation	1	14.29
7) Respecting People of other Religious Affiliations	1	14.29
ANALYZED DOCUMENTS	7	100.00
PERCENTAGE VALID	-	100.00

These responses reveal that HMC alumni demonstrate their spiritual maturity and Christian witness through the following: "Integrating Christian Values in Teaching" (7 over 7 or 100% of the total responses), "Promoting Godly Relationship with Pupils, Colleagues, and Others," "Demonstrating Biblical Knowledge of the Christian Faith" (both these codes got 5 over 7 in frequency distribution or 71.43%); "Ministering to People Inside and Outside the School," "Upholding Church, School, and Community Concerns" (these two codes getting 3 over 7 or 42.86%). Each of the remaining two codes, "Devoting Self to Study the Bible, to Prayer and Meditation," and "Respecting People of Other Religious Affiliations," got 1 over seven in frequency distribution (or 14.29%).

Very relevant to the survey and interview findings of the alumni's self-evaluation on Spiritual Maturity and Christian Witness is Herman Harrell Horne's (1964) reflection on the exemplary role of Jesus the Master Teacher. He has pointed out that teachers teach more by what they are than by what they say and we learn by association with persons. Since learners only treasure and obey the truths of Scripture when these are taught by people whose opinions they value, teacher's role in spiritual mentoring and Christian witness to early childhood learners cannot be exaggerated. Early childhood teachers can look at Jesus Himself, who was teaching his disciples for long-term life orientation, in their function as spiritual mentors. Jesus' expectations of them went beyond imparting them correct knowledge. Gregory C. Carlson (2006) says that teachers should become more like the Lord and encourage the learners to do the same and this is very valid in this connection. Their Christian witness rooted in the Word of God should be manifested inside and outside the classroom.

According to Walter Wangerin Jr. (1986) relationship with God, "the beginning experience of God," is at least initiated in all human beings; it is a natural experience for every child. Even though this is "the common lot of all children," it is also in danger of being lost "in the vast massacre of neglect" and therefore every child is in need of support and sustenance of his/her in-born God-consciousness and God experience. (pp. 21-22) It is in this situation that spiritual nurture and Christian witness on the part of grown-up people, including the teachers, come to play their role. It is incumbent on teachers to provide children with an appropriate language, "the language

of faith," in the form of "words, stories, ritual, and doctrine" in order to make "space in the rational mind for the heart's conviction of God" so that their initial innate experience of God becomes also intellectually conceivable and acceptable. (p.47) HMC graduates' proficiency level in the nourishment of children's spiritual awareness and God-consciousness have been consistently appreciated by their peers and supervisors, as evident from the repeated references to the same in the survey responses and interview accounts.

Discussion

With an evaluation average of "very good" (4.01), alumni rated themselves in addressing learner diversity. The highest score was for applying differentiated teaching strategies suitable to different learner profiles (4.23), while a lower score on teaching strategies for indigenous groups was at 3.80, indicating lower achievement. Interviews with alumni showed effective personalized instruction, partnership with parents, and adaptive teaching: all resonate with Bruner's (1961) theory of scaffolding. However, the frequency analysis showed variation in the strategies being given importance, probably signaling a need to develop professional competence regarding culturally responsive practices.

The domain on spiritual maturity and Christian witness earned the maximum overall rating of 4.46, which emphasized that the alumni would integrate faith in teaching. Their proof of a life immersed within God's Word was rated quite high at 4.53, even though their devotion to private spiritual practices showed some area for growth at 4.40. Some alumni cited examples about embedding Bible stories into lessons and ministering to pupils and families, underlined by Palmer's (1993) notion on spirituality being relational wholeness. Coding analysis focused mainly on the integration of Christian values and encouraging godly relationships while indicating areas of improvement regarding inculcation and spiritual mentoring inclusivity. Practices of the alumni match the emphasis given by Horne (1964) on the character of the teacher and by Carlson (2006) in calling for Christlike teaching.

A management conversation about diversity in education reminds inclusion and equity among the learners. Differentiated instruction is one of the methods enunciated by Tomlinson (2001), referring to an adaption of teaching strategies geared to the various abilities of students, their specific interests, and cultural backgrounds. Jerome S. Bruner has a scaffolding theory which gives importance to teachers in knowing their students with individual needs and handing over the responsibility of learning gradually to students (1061). According to Banks (2004), the research entails on the contribution of culturally responsive teaching to educational equity for marginalized groups such as indigenous learners. Despite this, the frustration within the area of empowering teachers with skills for effective adaptation of multiculturalism to their current teaching practices continues to demand ongoing growth and change for profession development (Banks, 2016).

Faith-based education demonstrates the principles towards holism or development and spiritual maturation inherent in the Christian formation. Palmer's (1998) definition sees spirituality as wholeness, thus linking all relationships between the teacher with God, others, and self. The influence which students receive from their clear imitation of these values is what Bennett (2012) underlines when he stated that the teacher teaches more by character than by word. He advocates Birrion (2005) by using the Bible stories in lessons through which the spiritual experience and

relationship between children and God may develop. Such practices are in harmony with Carlson's (2006) call for Christlike teaching which inspires both moral and intellectual development in learners.

Conclusion

Findings from the evaluation of alumni regarding their competence for addressing learner diversity and demonstrating spiritual maturity and Christian witness revealed important facts about them as they prepared to be effective early childhood educators. For instance, although learner diversity received the lower average rating compared to the other evaluated domain, the alumni nevertheless showed a high degree of competence, evidenced by the "Very Good" qualitative status. Their very good rating reflects their competence in differentiating instruction, adapting strategies to meet individual learner needs, and incorporating inclusive practices into instruction that facilities equity in the learning environment. It also indicated areas for further growth, such as the inclusion strategies for learners from indigenous peoples.

Alumni demonstrated exceptional performance in the area of spiritual maturity and Christian witness, winning the higher cumulative rating for the domains evaluated. Their practice of integrating Christian values in teaching, active involvement in spiritual mentoring, and ministering to students and families indicate consistency with a faith-based educational mission. Moreover, qualitative data from interviews reiterate their quest for a spiritually enriching, ethically sound learning environment aligned with transformational education principles.

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