

WHY EQUITY AND DIVERSITY DESERVE CENTER STAGE FOR EVERYONE

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ABSTRACT

During a presentation, titled Addressing Equity and Excellence in Education: The Need for Aggressive Action, at the NCTM national conference of 2011, a case was made for the urgent consideration of the many factors that hinder the progress of minority students in the study of mathematics in our schools, and the strategies needed to address the situation were explored. This current presentation will highlight the factors previously identified as crucial barriers, explain why there is an urgent need for all mathematics educators to seriously consider them in the interest of *all* students, and present some practical ways in which educators at all levels might effectively address the situation for the benefit of students and teachers alike, as well as other constituent clients of the educational enterprise.

IDENTIFIED BARRIERS WITH AMPLIFYING STATEMENTS

- 1) Disconnect Between Students' Lives and the Mathematics Curriculum and Instruction that they will Typically Encounter: The socio-economic dimension of this concern is especially crucial among minority students but is important among *all* students. This presentation will explain this disconnect, and explore why we need to thoroughly understand and consider its implications in the interest of *everyone* involved.
- 2) Language of Mathematics vs. Students' Language and Daily Experiences: The abstract nature of the language of mathematics and the presentation of mathematical content without an intermediary transitional process is not only a barrier for minority students, but also results in negative consequences for *most*

students. Come to find out more about this topic and how to confront this situation.

- 3) Lack of Cultural Relevance in Curriculum and Instruction: The lack of meaningful relevance to the experiences of minority students in textbooks is compounded by the often shallow attempt to address this problem by some publishers. Culturally Responsive Teaching, as advocated by some authors, is beginning to be recognized as important for *all* students.
- 4) High Stakes Testing: This type of testing has been found to provide little useful information for practitioners, yet it often yields a negative impact for many students. While this result might prove more obvious for minority students a closer look reveals its negative consequences *overall*.
- 5) Neglect of Concerns Beyond the Classroom: Teachers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds must necessarily look to students' daily experiences beyond the classroom if they are to be successful. Identifying, and possibly strengthening, students' support system away from school is one important element in this process. This presentation will demonstrate why this concern (i.e. the social context) is a crucial consideration for *all* students.
- 6) Less than Adequate Teacher Preparation and/or Development: The literature is replete with calls for aspiring teachers to become better prepared to teach and work with ethnic minority students. Accordingly current teachers also need need exposure to the dynamics involved. This presentation will help attendees to gain an appreciation for this concern in the interest of *all* students, and expose them to real solutions that are relevant to it.
- 7) Tracking: The fallacy inherent in the tracking movement is highlighted by a finding that students who were mistakenly placed in the higher track had a significantly increased chance of being successful. Thus it seems that the curriculum, and correspondingly the instruction, for the lower track students was not appropriate for them. Consequently it seems only fitting that there is an urgent need to closely examine instructional practices for students *generally* .
- 8) Lack of Rapport between Students and Teachers: One study found that eighth grade minority males performed better in environments where a positive rapport had been established with their mathematics teachers. There is no reason to believe that this situation would not apply to *all* students. Therefore, finding ways to insure that all students are able realize this type of in- school support could prove quite productive.