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Johnny W. Lott

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A Preface to “Gutstein Generalized—A Philosophical Debate”

Johnny W. Lott

The University of Montana

Past President, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) has taken a very firm stand on the issue of equity in mathematics education. Not only is equity incorporated in the *Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics* (1989) and *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics* (2000), equity is the first plank of NCTM’s legislative platform. That plank is listed below:

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics—

- *Supports the right of every child to be taught by a highly qualified teacher of mathematics, one who is knowledgeable in content, who understands how students learn, and who uses appropriate instructional methods.*
- *Expects every child to have the opportunity to receive a strong mathematics education required for an economically secure future.*
- *Believes that no single test should limit future opportunities of students to learn mathematics.*
- *Expects every school to be a safe and supportive learning environment for students to learn mathematics (NCTMc, 2004).*

The plank is prefaced by “One who is mathematically literate can analyze data, reason, and solve problems by applying mathematical concepts and skills.”

Because of the plank and its importance to the Council, two task forces were named, the Equity and Diversity Integration Task Force and the Achievement Gap Task Force, since 2004. With different goals, the first of how to incorporate equity and diversity more fully within the Council, and the second to make recommendations about how an organization of approximately 100,000 members can approach the achievement gap, NCTM continues to work toward a more equitable mathematics education for all students.

One of the recommended actions by the Achievement Gap Task Force is to identify a research agenda that includes a “focus on research that promotes improvement of curricular and instructional conditions that will close the achievement gap” (NCTMc, 2005). In particular was a recommendation for research that explores “characteristics of school curricula that empower students from underrepresented groups to learn,” and “cultural factors that influence mathematics teaching and learning, including analyses of the function to teachers’ *worldview* in the process of teaching and learning” (NCTMc 2005).

With the plank and task force reports mentioned, the Council has cast a wide net to incorporate differing views of mathematics and how it should be taught while continuing

to address equity issues. Certainly, mathematics taught from a social justice viewpoint is not opposed to the plank; nor is mathematics taught from a functional literacy viewpoint. The real goal is preparing students for their mathematical needs of the future. In both “Teaching and Learning Mathematics for Social Justice in an Urban, Latino School” (Gutstein 2003) and in “Gutstein Generalized—A Philosophical Debate” (Braver, et al., 2005), one sees both an approach and a debate based on the approach that have the real goal as an objective.

References

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