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The Council's Professional Development Focus of the Year for 2008–09 is “Equity: All Means ALL.”

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Reference

Reeves, Douglas B. *The Learning Leader: How to Focus School Improvement for Better Results*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2006.

EQUITY: ALL MEANS ALL!

This year, NCTM is making equity in mathematics education a special focus. The Council's Professional Development Focus of the Year for 2008–09 is “Equity: All Means ALL.” Equity will be a theme at all NCTM meetings and highlighted in journal articles, research, Web site resources (www.nctm.org/equity.aspx), the *NCTM News Bulletin* (see page 5), and other NCTM forums. This emphasis on equity builds on the Council's Equity Principle, enunciated in *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics*.

In January 2008, NCTM released a position statement, “Equity in Mathematics Education,” calling for the creation of a culture of equity in the teaching and learning of mathematics. Fostering a “culture of equity” in the mathematics classroom and beyond is essential, and we perhaps initiate the process most effectively when we examine our own biases. How do issues of gender, race, class, special needs, and language affect our own teaching and our students' learning of mathematics in our classrooms? Recognizing and grappling with our own biases—and acknowledging their influence on our instructional practices—help us view our students through the lens of equity.

Where do the barriers begin? Take a look at your own lifelong acquisition of beliefs and behaviors. I know that I acquired beliefs, and subsequently developed behaviors, that kept me from achieving my goal of providing an equitable mathematics education to my students. Through the help and guidance of colleagues, friends, and students and their families, I became aware of actions that were resulting in my failure to challenge a student productively in mathematics. I worked on changing behaviors and attitudes that I now recognized could undercut students' engagement, success, and confidence in learning mathematics. Challenges for me included

scrutinizing and overcoming my preconceptions and acceptance of stereotypes. When tracking and grouping students, did I let personal and societal beliefs shape my expectations about the mathematics that particular students could learn? In classroom discourse, did I change my questioning and response interactions depending on my expectations of a student? Did I use assessment to challenge and support students in learning significant mathematics, or did I use irrational preconceptions to rationalize poor results?

Examine your expectations for each of your students. Does your perception of how successful a student will be depend on who the students is, as determined by race, gender, class, language, or special needs? Are you more likely to expect lower achievement in mathematics from a student in one group than another? Do you regularly offer as much challenge to students who are gifted in mathematics as to those who struggle in the subject? Each of us should answer these questions as we strive for equity in our classrooms.

A growing body of research underscores the fact that poverty and ethnicity are not the primary causal variables related to student achievement—leadership, teaching, and adult actions matter more (Reeves 2006, p. xxiii). I challenge you to seek—and find—your students' untapped potential. Every child comes with strengths as well as experiences of inequities. Can you identify a strength of each student in your class? Are you aware of inequities that he or she has experienced and may continue to experience? Make sure that you build on every student's potential instead of letting the inequities become barriers. For all students to succeed at the highest level possible, they must know that their teacher believes that they can do well. With support, collaboration, and effort, students and teachers together can reach their goals.

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