

An Adventure in Academia. I

March 12th, 2009

Once upon a time, at the start of my career, the Monthly (of the MAA) turned down a paper of mine on the basis of two referees: one had said that it was highly controversial and the other that it was completely trivial. Obviously, I was very sore but I had been vaccinated: After that, I never “submitted” anything and just about everything else I published was “by invitation”.

And then, forty years later, I came across

A Call for Chapter Proposals for a Forthcoming Book on Quality and Equity Agendas in Mathematics Education. Editors: Bill Atweh, Mellony Graven, Walter Secada and Paola Valero.

Specifically,

Proposals for chapter authorship [are] requested from mathematics teachers, educators, researchers and policy makers for an edited collection dealing with two important agendas for mathematics education in societies around the world, namely quality and equity.

I will now quote in full:

Concerns about quality mathematics education are often posed in terms of the types of mathematics that are worthwhile and valuable for both the student and society in general, and about how to best support students so that they can develop this mathematics. Quality mathematics is sometimes measured from within the discipline of mathematics itself and is seen as a reflection of its rigor, formality and generalisability. Alternatively, the value of mathematics is often argued based on perceptions of its utilitarian importance such as individual mathematical literacy, the economic and technological well being of a society, the participation of an informed citizenry in the challenges of a democratic society, and/or for opening up future opportunities for students in terms of their career goals and access to higher education. Trends gleaned from international comparisons have ignited debates within many countries about the low level of achievement of their students internationally regardless whether

mathematics is valued for its academic rigor or utilitarian literacy. Less often do international comparisons result in local media and public discourse vis à vis equity issues that they might raise.

Concerns about equity are about who is excluded from the opportunity to develop quality mathematics within our current practices and systems, and about how to remove social barriers that systematically disadvantage those students. Equity concerns in mathematics education are no longer seen at the margins of mathematics education policy, research and practice. Issues relating to ability, gender, language, multiculturalism, ethnomathematics, the effects of ethnicity, indigeneity, and the significance of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of students on their participation and performance in mathematics are regularly discussed in the literature. This is not to say, however, that the problem of equity is exclusive of students who are positioned as disadvantaged due to their association to any of the categories above; nor that the growing focus on the issue has resolved it between countries and, indeed, within any society. Rather, insofar as access to quality mathematics is thought to confer benefits on individuals and the larger society, concerns for equity and access revolve around the impacts on an individual's life and social participation and on the larger society's continued well being when that access and its benefits are systematically restricted from and/or systematically provided to people on the basis of their or their parents' social placements.

This collection of chapters attempts to summarise our learning about the achievement of both equity and quality agendas in mathematics education and to move forward the debate on their importance for the field. Some educators may take the stance that a focus on one may necessarily lead to a sacrifice in the other. Others may see the two agendas as necessary for each other and that a focus on one without the other is problematic. Finally, some educators may position their work within one or another agenda but in opposition to how that agenda has been historically construed In this collection we are interested in a variety of conceptualizations and mappings of the terrain on how quality and equity agendas relate. Following are examples of issues that authors might want to address:

Theoretical Issues

1. What discourses are useful for understanding equity and quality?
2. How are concerns for equity and quality contradictory and/or synergistic?
3. How do the themes of equity and quality in mathematics education play out within an international context and/or in different local contexts?

Research Findings

1. What does research in general say about the achievement of quality and equity agendas?
2. What can we learn from specific research studies or programs relevant to either/both agendas?
3. What kind of research is needed to deal with the achievement of both quality and equity?

Reform in Mathematics Education

1. What can we learn from teachers' experiences in classrooms or schools about balancing, increasing and/or tradeoffs between quality and equity in our programs?
2. What lessons can we learn about collaboration between different stakeholders about achieving the equity/quality agendas?
3. What policies exist/are needed in different international contexts for the achievement of equity/quality?

Authors are invited to submit papers in one or at the intersection of some of the topics above. They are also encouraged to produce different kinds of papers such as:

1. Theoretical papers

2. Papers reporting empirical research
3. Research-based essays and debate papers

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Process of contribution

We seek expressions of interest from authors who wish to contribute a chapter on any issues relevant to the focus of the collection. In particular we are interested in teams consisting of more experienced and novice writers, and in teams that involve authorship from and across different societies and across different types of participants (teachers, researchers, students, policy makers, parents; etc.)

This was truly amazing: people actually interested in mathematics for the great unwashed masses? There are of course a lot of people teaching the great unwashed masses but there had always seemed to me to be some sort of quiet resignation about not being able to do much in that regards. And this seemed to be something a bit different.

So ...

[To be continued]

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