

6-23-21

Dear Representative Fowler Arthur,

Martin Luther King said, “ I have dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” I have a nightmare that my children, including my daughter with Down’s syndrome will be judged by their skin color and be put in a class of racial oppressors.

Let me introduce myself. My name is Carolyn Behr-Jerome. As a mathematics teacher of over 20 years, I strongly support HB 327. Having come from a family of educators, I understand the importance of a quality education. In fact, my father was a strong advocate for forming teacher unions in Michigan in the 1950’s. (He was once told that men shouldn’t be teachers.) When someone asks me what I do and I respond with “I teach Math,” their response is usually “ I hated math” or “I’m sorry.” Rarely am I given a response of “I love math,” and I find this sad as I love mathematics. Trying to teach math in a way that would inspire and encourage my students and allow every student to learn math has always been my goal. My classroom is one where all students feel free to express themselves, make mistakes, and reap the benefits of hard work. That brings me to why I must speak up against Critical Race Theory, in whatever pretty package it is wrapped: 1.) it categorizes those with “white” skin to be collectively guilty—the solution to past racism is present racism, 2.) it replaces equality with equity – white students and those from higher-income households are unfairly given more opportunities, and 3.) it actively discriminates against “privileged” races and advocates distribution of power and wealth.

I have a nightmare that my children and my students will be found guilty of being nothing more than “white.” The divisive and dangerous teaching of collective guilt has infiltrated mathematics research and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. I have used resources from NCTM frequently over the years. I especially enjoyed their magazines like *Mathematics Teacher* and *the Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* . In the March 2021 issue of the Journal, Luis A. Leyva penned “Black Women’s Counter-Stories of Resilience and Within-Group Tensions in the White, Patriarchal Space of Mathematics Education.” In the first paragraph Leyva wrote “I argue that a Black feminist revolution has not arrived in mathematics education, where racial-gendered ideologies thrive and limit opportunities for building intersectional solidarity (p. 117).”

At first this sounded like an interesting study until I read that the framework was “grounded in tenets of critical race theory (p.121).” The first tenet was “interest convergence, which acknowledges that racism benefits white people, and they will only advance racial justice if it results in some advantage or it does not jeopardize their dominance (p.123).” The second tenet is “rooted in the ideology of whiteness as property, frames inquiry about institutional resources and privileges, that are socially constructed to be white people’s protected property (p. 123).”

I have a nightmare that my children and my students will not be given an equal opportunity to succeed and fail, regardless of their race or gender. I am a firm believer in equal opportunity not equal outcomes; equity is not equality. According to biography.com, Jaime Escalante, the ground-breaking Bolivian-American mathematics teacher who had numerous students succeed on the AP Calculus exam, said he “strove to reach his students and to get them to live up to their potential.” He got them to learn with hard work, not because they were oppressed. He was successful because he believed these disadvantaged students could get out of their situation with an education. It wasn’t handed to them. They had to earn it.

But in April I received an email from the Ohio Department of Education inviting me to participate in a webinar called “Adopting Materials Through an Equity-Focused Lens.” Was my nightmare coming true? The description of the webinar seemed innocuous enough until I read about the “opportunity myth” defined as a “false promise that if students do what they’re asked in school, they’ll be set up for success—ant that if they *don’t* succeed, they must’ve done something to blow their chance.” See <https://edreports.org/resources/article/adopting-materials-through-an-equity-focused-lens-designing-an-instructional-lens>

Jo Baler wrote a book called Mathematical Mindsets: Unleashing Students’ Potential through Creative Math, Inspiring Messages and Innovative Teaching. Carol Dweck also discusses this mindset in her book Growth Mindset. In both books the idea is presented that all students can learn mathematics. I do believe all students can learn mathematics. Every student should have an equal chance for success and then should be rewarded for their achievement. For example, if I was willing to work hard and practice a lot, I could learn to hit a baseball. However, I will never be a major league baseball player. I believe every student, unless they have a learning disability like my daughter, can be proficient at arithmetic, can follow algorithms (instructions) to reach a certain outcome, and think critically about data presented. Not every student will have the desire or interest to study advanced mathematics. Some students may have to work harder than others (like Jaime Escalante’s students). Some students may need additional help, like my daughter does.

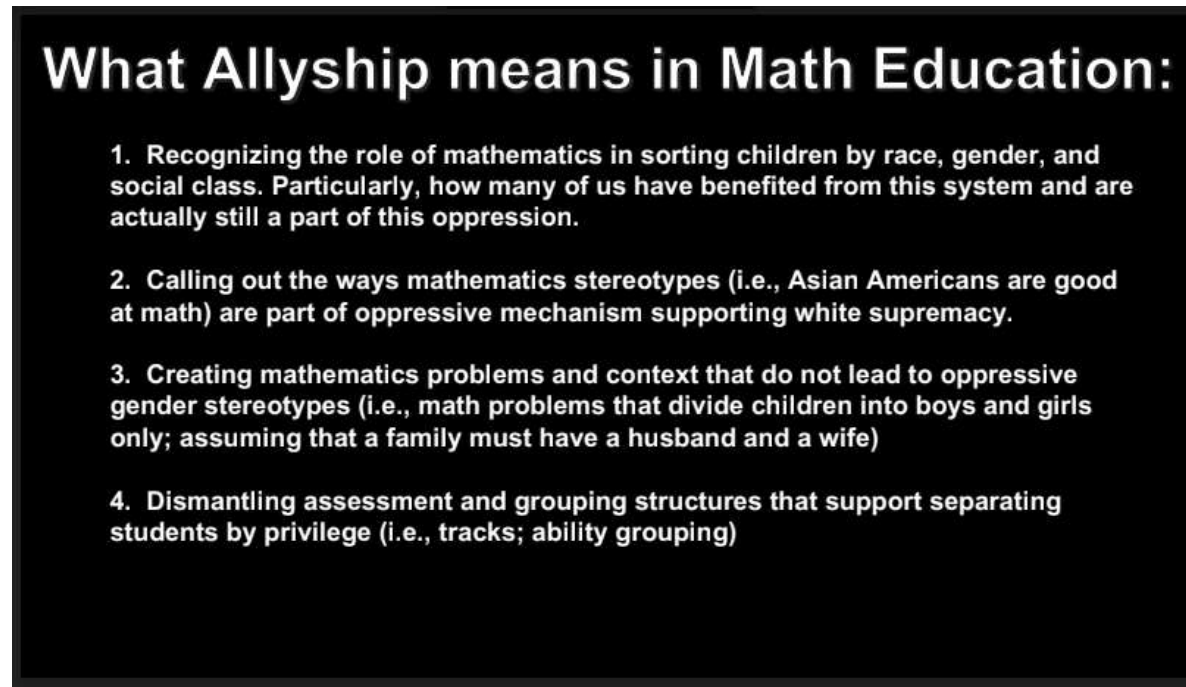
I have a nightmare that someday my children and my students will be denied an education because they don’t fit the quota. The Equity webinar OCTM presented also reports that teachers and students involved with honors curriculum need to be more diverse. I teach honors curriculum. My ability to teach these courses is not based on my gender or skin color. Nor should someone be placed in the position to teach such courses based on skin color or gender. Students admitted to these classes should be admitted based on their merit, not on the color of their skin.

In May, I received an email that raised some additional concerns. It was an invitation by the Ohio Council of Teachers of Mathematics to a Town Hall meeting called “Racism & Social Injustice – The Story of Self: How your personal narrative plays a vital role in the classroom.” See <https://ohioctm.wildapricot.org/Racism-and-Social-Injustice-Town-Halls>.

I found this on the OCTM website.

“OCTM has held several public, online Town Halls since June 2020 to address and challenge racism, social injustice, and other oppressive forces in our schools and communities. We focus on **what we can do as mathematics educators to promote antiracist, anti-oppressive policies and practices in schools and classrooms.**” <https://ohioctm.wildapricot.org/Diversity-Inclusion-Equity>

Here is a slide from a townhall about “Allyship” one of the Town Hall topics:



What Allyship means in Math Education:

1. Recognizing the role of mathematics in sorting children by race, gender, and social class. Particularly, how many of us have benefited from this system and are actually still a part of this oppression.
2. Calling out the ways mathematics stereotypes (i.e., Asian Americans are good at math) are part of oppressive mechanism supporting white supremacy.
3. Creating mathematics problems and context that do not lead to oppressive gender stereotypes (i.e., math problems that divide children into boys and girls only; assuming that a family must have a husband and a wife)
4. Dismantling assessment and grouping structures that support separating students by privilege (i.e., tracks; ability grouping)

I have a nightmare that this divisive ideology will permeate my mathematics classroom. If we don't stop this now my nightmares will come true and my children...our children and our students will be indoctrinated to hate each other. Students won't fail or succeed based on their merits but instead on their privilege. Teachers will be forced to take professional development that encourages students be taught differently based on the color of their skin.

I've seen our books start using ethnically diverse names in story problems to not using any names at all. Now NCTM and OCTM are instructing teachers not to use gender in story problems and probability problems. I've heard of local schools abolishing Honors Mathematics curriculum

Marxism in a mathematics classroom? After all $1 + 1 = 2$, correct? That doesn't depend on the color of your skin. Those issues would be left to the History classes. Although the Pythagoreans did assign sexes to the numbers – women were even and men were odd. Sure, the historical figures of mathematics are mostly men. The first woman mathematician, Hypatia, was brutally murdered. Our numerical system, often called Arabic numerals, was first presented to western civilization by Leonardo Fibonacci. He learned them from the Muslim merchants. Eventually,

historians realized the Hindu-Indians were actually the first to use the numbers so today we refer to them as Hindu-Arabic. Can you imagine if Fibonacci only shared these numerals with those who shared the same ideology? We might very well still be using Roman Numerals.

Finally, I leave you with a thought about Dr. John Patterson, my high school History teacher and Ohio State Representative from the 99th district. I was a student in his class my Junior year. (Do you know he still remembers where I sat?) It wasn't until 20 years later, when I became a teacher at Jefferson Area High School, that I found out my former teacher was a Democrat! He taught me to think critically and never once tried to influence me to think the way he did. That's the kind of teacher I want to be. But I won't be if I am found guilty of being white.

I have a dream that my children and my students will one day grow up in the United States of America, a place where the government does not have the right to force belief in collective guilt, race essentialism, or racial superiority theory.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Behr-Jerome