"Identifying and exploring questions, reaching beyond perfunctory narratives, and making arguments that challenge rather than assuage the Meno's of the modern world—these are the foci for *The Sophist's Bane*. A more worthy initiative is beyond imagination."
The Sophist’s Bane is the refereed scholarly journal of The Society of Professors of Education. The Society was founded in 1902 when the National Society of College Teachers of Education was first formed in cooperation with the National Education Association. Among its early presidents were Charles DeGarmo and John Dewey. The Society is an interdisciplinary, professional and academic association open to all persons, both theoreticians and practitioners, engaged in teacher preparation or related activities. Its purpose is to serve the diverse needs and interests of the education professoriate. The Society’s primary goal is to provide a forum for consideration of major issues, tasks, problems, and challenges confronting professional educators. The Sophist’s Bane is published twice yearly – fall and spring – and welcomes submissions on an on-going basis. The journal will consider manuscripts in the form of research, reflections, essays, reviews, or philosophic inquiry. We especially encourage new authors and creative forms of representation. Additional information about the Society, The Sophist’s Bane, and its sister publication, Professing Education, can be found at the SPE website: www.unm.edu/~jka/spe/index.html.
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ARE WE ADEQUATELY HANDLING EQUITY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN THE STANDARDS MOVEMENT?

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Recent studies have created enough documentation on the existence of an achievement gap that it seems we should be ready to move toward solutions. The first twelve years of the 21st Century attest to the growing diversity within our population and schools, as well as the implications for this nation's future successes. Now, more than ever, our educational system must consider all of its clients. This essay looks at the problems of equity in relationship to diversity, by analyzing the recent standards-based movement in U.S. education.

The Achievement Gap

The emotionally charged cost of the achievement gap reality cannot be denied. Citing legal cases that show our march through time for the cause of equality could prove inspiring if not for the continued inequities made apparent through test scores. Wang and Kovach (1996) noted that the accomplishments of Brown “have fallen short of the vision of a universal school system that provides all children with equal access to our schools (Wang and Kovach, p. 27).

Standards-based Reform Movement

In the growing urgency to address the needs of the future, standards-based reform hopes to remove the guesswork of educating students by identifying what students should know and be able to do. An approach based on publicly defined standards of achievement instead of standardized tests has earned the support of equity-focused educators Eke Garcia and Pearson in that “the setting of standards for all children becomes a completely open process... perhaps the hidden biases that have led to low level learning for poor and culturally diverse student populations may become more visible” (cited in Lachat, 1999, p.4).

Standards-based reform is founded on content standards that define what children should know and be able to do, and performance standards that set specific expectations for various levels of proficiency. Product is emphasized over process and skills in reasoning, problem-solving, and communication over accumulation of isolated facts. Assessment focuses on progress instead of failure, and the use of rubrics to identify growth. Utilization of these standards can aide: (a) state education agencies and test developers to design statewide assessment systems; (b) teachers to organize curriculum and instruction; (c) textbook publishers to develop educational resources for schools; (d) teacher pre-service and in-service programs (Lachat, 1999).

Equity and the Standards Movement

Standards could be a step in the right direction to address Slavin's (1998) desire of building a high floor under the achievement of all children and replacing an at-risk label with an "at-promise" mind set. Equity-minded educators see the need to do so as imperative for the future: “We cannot have a just or peaceful society if major segments of it see little hope for their children” (p. 8). In order to move beyond promise to fulfillment, equity and diversity must play an integral role in development and implementation of standards (Johnson, 1996). Lachat’s (1999) assertion that individuals involved in the standards-based movement are committed to a vision of society where people of different backgrounds, cultures, and perceived abilities have equal access to a high quality education offers an indication that such goals are conceivable (p. 3). Supporters like Ravitch believe the standards movement will form an effective alliance between the frequently combative ambitions of excellence and equity (cited in Lachat, 1999).

Educational policy makers, who are ready to jump on the reform bandwagon, believing that standards alone will address educational inequities, should heed Gordon's warning that “it is immoral to begin by measuring outcomes” before we have addressed the inequities in funding, qualified teachers and instruction, and educationally sound environments (cited in Lachat, 1999, p. 9). As with all theoretically sound notions, reality checks are necessary. Lachat (1999) draws on a powerful statement from Education watch: The 1996 education trust state and national data book:

“The problem now is one of will. Experiences from real schools show that poor and minority students can excel if they are taught at high levels. But most schools don’t teach all students at the same high level...In fact, we have constructed an educational system so full of inequities that it actually exacerbates the challenges of race and poverty, rather than ameliorates them. Simply put, we take students who have less to begin with and give them less in school too.” (p.9)

One has only to read Kozol’s Savage Inequalities (1991) and Amazing Grace (1996) to understand the extent of these inequities. And realistically, some equity advocates fear the desire for excellence will leave disadvantaged, minority, and particularly LEP students behind, with justifications that socio-economic realities prevent attainment of the performance standards, followed by the accepted lowering of these standards (McKeon, 1994; Willie, 1997). Such consideration for equity issues prompted the development of a framework for opportunities-to-learn (OTL) to function within the standards construct (Stevens, 1996):

1. The quality and availability of curricula, instructional programs, and instructional materials;
2. The extent to which curriculum, instruction, and assessment align with standards that reflect high expectations for students;
3. Teacher capacity to provide high-quality instruction;
4. Financial and programmatic resources that support high levels of learning, including technology, laboratories, and school libraries;
5. Teacher and administrator access to sustained, long-term professional development;
6. A safe and secure learning environment;
7. Parent and community involvement with the schools;

While these opportunity-to-learn standards sound promising, their existence in theory is not tantamount to practice (McKeon, 1994). Compared to other industrialized countries, the United States has proven woefully inadequate in providing the funding necessary to equalize the educational experience for all children (Slavin, 1998).
any reform movement is to prove successful, political, economic, and community leaders will have to be held accountable for the progress of this nation’s future (Lachat, 1999; Slavin, 1998; Stevens, 1996).

Diversity, Teachers, Students, and the Standards Movement

Adopting the standards-based model is not a panacea by itself to address the issues of diversity for educators and students. Educators and policy makers should continue to engage in the pedagogical dialogue necessary to move beyond the rhetoric of high expectations for all toward creating environments conducive to that mission. A correlation does seem to exist between the aims of multicultural education advocates (Banks, 1994; 1-laberman, 1991; Sleeter & Grant, 1990) and the descriptors outlined by Lachat (1999) for students in standards-based learning:

1. Develop reasoning and problem-solving skills through real-world learning tasks;
2. Play an active role in constructing their own understanding of concept;
3. Explore issues and concepts in depth over time;
4. Take increased responsibility for their learning;
5. Use a wide range of resources including manipulatives and computer technology;
6. Participate in collaborative learning activities;
7. Demonstrate their understanding and skills (p.13).

Given the realities of our developing population, and the increasing inclusion of the student, especially disadvantaged, minority and/or limited English proficiency students, in the learning process, educators should examine their own perceptions, practices, and policies as they seek to develop their roles in standards-based instruction:

1. Organize learning around what students need to know and be able to do;
2. Enrich their teaching by cultivating students’ higher order thinking processes;
3. Guide student inquiry by posing real-life tasks that require reasoning and problem-solving;
4. Emphasize holistic concepts rather than fragmented units of information;
5. Provide a variety of opportunities for students to explore and confront concepts and situations over time;
6. Use multiple sources of information rather than a single text;
7. Work in interdisciplinary teams;

Including students as instruments in their own learning and the learning of others requires teachers to discover and utilize the wealth of cultural tools available to them (Delpit, 1995). Understanding and acknowledging the impact cultural diversity has on the educational process can assist educators and school communities in the development of environments equipped to meet high standards for all students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Pang, 1994).

Tools of Assistance for Implementation of the Standards in Culturally Diverse Schools

The essential factor in creating these environments involves the support teachers require. Current research around implementation of standards indicates the need for considerable time and staff development for teachers whose classrooms are culturally diverse (Delpit, 1995; Lachat, 1999).

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