

Just Math:

Social Justice and Relevant Mathematics

CMC ReMI committee

How do you start teaching mathematics for social justice?

The corollary to accepting that “it takes time” is that one should enter the water gradually. Students may think you’re from Mars the first time you ask them to use mathematics to study their own lives: few have had such experiences. The same applies to teachers. If one has never taught critical mathematics, it is hard to learn how. Teachers need to be patient with themselves and students. Start slowly. (See Gutstein and Peterson [2005] for several lesson and topic ideas that will assist you in getting started.)

So how do you get students to talk seriously about their lives? Why should they trust you/me especially if you’re/I’m not from their community?

Good teachers know how to listen, and they learn to be trusted adults in young people’s lives. They care about their students and their futures. This is not news. These things are necessary—however, my argument is that they are not enough. My experience teaches me that to teach critical mathematics requires different knowledge than what researchers generally discuss, and different kinds of relationships with students. Yes, teachers need mathematics knowledge specific to teaching mathematics (Ball, Lubienski, and Mewborn 2004). They need to know how to assess students, orchestrate discourse, ask meaningful questions, create productive classroom communities, select good mathematical tasks, and understand general and specific curricular and pedagogical issues (Franke, Kazemi, and Battey 2007). Furthermore, when teaching “other people’s children” (Delpit 1988), they need knowledge of the culture and experiences of their students and communities (Ladson-Billings 1994). But that is still not enough for critical mathematics. They also need to “develop political relationships” with their students (Gutstein 2008). These relationships—

include taking active political stands in solidarity with students and their communities about issues that matter. Political relationships also entail teachers sharing political analyses with students as much as possible. Finally, they include talking with students about social movements, involving students themselves in studying injustice, and providing opportunities for them to join in struggles to change the unjust conditions. (Gutstein 2006b, pp. 132–33)

Excerpts from Book: *Teaching Mathematics for Social Justice* **Essay within Book:** Reflections on Teaching and Learning Mathematics for Social Justice in Urban Schools by Eric “Rico” Gutstein