

### Calvin's Story

The following is an excerpt from *Introduction: Building an infrastructure for equity in mathematics education*.

In order to discuss building an infrastructure for equity in mathematics education, I will use Calvin's story to provide a context for discussing Weissglass' four points. Calvin's story is one of nine stories in a larger research study that captures the stories of successful African American middle school mathematics students (see Berry, 2003). Calvin's story is powerful because it provides a perspective rarely discussed in the educational discourse.

Calvin is a sixth grade African American male student in a school district located in the southeastern part of the United States. As an elementary school student, Calvin earned the highest level of achievement on his state's standardized mathematics test in grades three, four, and five. In addition, he scored in the ninety-eighth percentile on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in mathematics. On all standardized measures in mathematics, Calvin has performed well and in most cases has excelled. In addition, he has earned relatively good grades in mathematics by earning A's and B's consistently. Calvin stated that mathematics is his favorite subject and that mathematics comes naturally to him and is easy. He loves challenging mathematics problems and mathematics puzzles.

Calvin's mother acknowledges that her son is in need of a variety of stimulation in order to prevent boredom. She stated that Calvin needs to feel that his teachers are interested and care about him in order for him to be productive in class. Both Calvin and his mother admit that he can be a handful in class. His behavior is not always that of a model student; however, they believe his behavior is well within acceptable classroom norms.

At the end of fifth grade, Calvin was excited about going to middle school. At the time, teachers identified students eligible to take a mathematics placement test to gain entry into an upper-level pre-algebra mathematics course for six graders. Calvin was upset because he was not selected and there were students selected to take the test that he considered were not as "good as math." Calvin's mother inquired about the criteria for selection of taking the placement test and discovered that Calvin met all the criteria except one, teacher recommendation. Calvin's fifth grade teacher indicated that although Calvin scored well on assessments, his behavior and his inability to sit still would not make him a good candidate for pre-algebra in sixth grade. In a conference with the middle school guidance counselor, Calvin's mother inquired about his being placed in pre-algebra. The guidance counselor responded that she would not want to place Calvin in a class he could not pass. The counselor assumed that Calvin would not pass the class without considering his previous performance. The principal at the middle school evaluated Calvin's situation and argued that pre-algebra is a rigorous course for sixth grade students and only disciplined students are capable of passing this course. Even though Calvin had performed well in mathematics throughout his schooling, school personnel focused their attention on behavior rather than achievement when evaluating his academic potential. When the sixth grade school year began, the pre-algebra class had no African American male students (Berry, 2003).

**Berry, Robert Q III. Introduction: Building an infrastructure for equity in mathematics education. "Calvin's Story." The High School Journal 88.4 (2005) : 3.**