

**Gary Howard**  
**Achievement Triangle, Level 2**

Welcome back to the Achievement Triangle. This is Gary Howard with you again, and this time we're going to look at those points of intersection of the different sides of the triangle. For math teachers, that would be the vertices of the triangle, the points where the sides connect. Last time we talked about Knowing My Practice, Knowing Myself, Knowing My Students.

I'm going to first of all talk about the connection of Knowing My Practice with Knowing Myself. So that's a point of connection or intersection on the triangle that I refer to as Rigor. Because I'm serious about my practice, because I care passionately about being a good teacher, and also because I have pride in myself in knowing who I am in the practice of teaching, I see those two coming together to create what I call a seriousness, a solidity, a rigor about my work that I'm committed to. Now, I see this in good teachers, and the triangle's really talking about good teachers, which I assume you are, in taking the time to enroll yourself in this way. The rigor is not what sometimes some teachers talk about as "rigor mortis," which I like to use that, because we're not talking about a rigor which is so rigid that we don't have flexibility. This is a rigor that...where diversity increases in our school systems and kids bring increasing levels and types of diversity to our schools. My feeling is that's where the real teacher in us shows up. It's not that it's easy to teach in a monocultural, maybe suburban community that doesn't have a lot of diversity. It's still a challenge. But the more diversity we have in our schools, the more serious we need to be about paying attention to this issue of rigor and making sure that the things we're doing in our classrooms make sense. So that's our commitment to ourselves and our practice.

And then this other point, the next one, at the top, the connection of Knowing Self and Knowing Students, of course, that's the one of relationship. So that's the one where the self of the teacher connects to the self of the student. And this is that arena of having to know who I am. How can I connect with them if I don't have knowledge of who they are in all this multitude of dimensions of diversity that we talk about: race, class, culture, sexual orientation, religion, language, and others. So knowing enough sense of that, and being able to connect with them in a way that the kids feel that connection is authentic. And that's the key issue right here: that kids feel that we see them, that we care about them, that we're real with them. It's not a relationship of friendship or pseudoparenthood. It's a professional relationship that says, "I hold you responsible for your own intelligence. I hold myself responsible for my teaching. And what we're doing here is real." And we know that not all kids need relationships. That's very important to point out here, that not all of your students, as you know in your classroom, are kids that are going to learn without you, or kids that don't necessarily an indepth relationship with you. They're going to learn. But what we're talking about with cultural competence, culturally responsive teaching, is that dimension of those kids who have historically been marginalized by education, who haven't been able to enter into what I call "the house of success." So what I find in the literature and in my own experience is that disproportionately, those are the kids who need relationships. Relationship balance if

you'll put it that way; the power and importance of relationship growth. It goes up as student marginalization goes up. So, you take kids, African American kids, Latino kids, gay and lesbian kids, students in poverty, students who have low self-esteem or little past experience with success in education: relationships can be key.

And then we move around the triangle and we connect Knowing Students with Knowing the Practice, and that's what I call "the rubber hits the road" place, because that's where the kids learn "the stuff." So if I'm teaching math, that's where they learn to factor or algebraic equations. They learn how to, kids learn how to read and how to articulate themselves in writing. High school kids learn how to do advanced levels of thinking and writing. So that's the real work of connecting the practice with the kids. And the responsiveness that I see here is one that brings the intelligence of the kids into the classroom, responding to who they really are. I'm not teaching them as if they're some imagined kid that I think I ought to have in my classroom. I'm approaching them as who they really are. If I don't know them, I can't do that. If I don't know my practice, I can't do that. If I don't know myself, I can't do that. So the responsiveness is making the teaching act real for the kids, realizing that it's not so much whether the student is motivated it's whether the environment creates the context in which energy and the investment of the student can come in.

So these three levels:

- Rigor: being serious about who I am as a teacher because I take pride in my work
- The power of Relationships and knowing that connection with each individual student is key for many of them in their learning, particularly the marginalized.
- And then the Responsiveness: how do I structure my practice in a way that it invites the intelligence of kids into my classroom and makes it real for them.