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Pandemics and Issues of Equity

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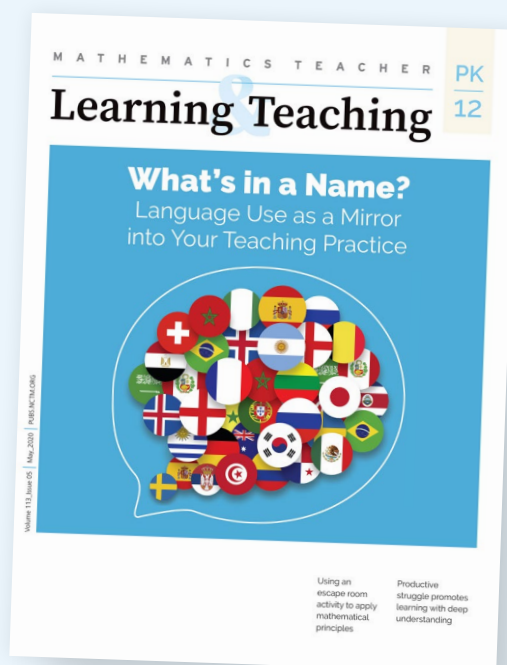
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Pandemics and Issues of Equity

Ear to the Ground features voices from various corners of the mathematics education world.

Naomi A. Jessup, Jennifer A. Wolfe, Oyita Udiani, and Crystal A. Kalinec-Craig

As the world made a drastic “digital turn” during COVID-19, mathematics teachers and teacher educators (MTEs) found themselves making the shift online, often with limited opportunities to reflect on how the change would advance or exacerbate inequities. Many MTEs noticed that the transition of mathematics instruction to remote learning did not eradicate systemic inequities but made issues explicitly visible. Prospective teachers (PTs) and their MTEs faced multiple challenges mirrored by K–12 teachers, students, and families: unreliable internet connectivity, uncertain and inequitable expectations for participation, and negotiations of work and familial obligations (Barrett-Fox 2020). Remote instruction only raised more questions about MTEs’ practices addressing equity, access, inclusion, and privilege.

These transitional issues reminded us as teachers and MTEs that equity demands responsive accommodations (Aguirre et al. 2013). Gutiérrez’s (2018) expansion of equity toward rehumanizing

mathematics education said, “Not until we seek to stand in the shoes of our students, to understand their conceptions, will we be on the path toward recognizing and embracing their humanity” (p. 2). Thus, we considered how moving to remote learning and the emotional stress caused by the pandemic spurred a critical and rehumanizing interrogation of MTEs’ practices: to seek the humanity in their PTs as whole humans and to reconsider whether established practices of assessment and instructional delivery promote equity for each PT. Therefore, it is worthwhile to consider how MTEs support PTs to take a rehumanizing approach in their emerging practice in ways that fundamentally reevaluate instructional practices and policies.

In what ways did the pandemic-induced transition evoke new questions of equity, access, and privilege that had not been in the forefront or considered before the pandemic? We invite you to engage in a directed “Notice and Wonder” (see table 1) about some of these

inequities made visible during remote learning.

First and foremost, teachers need to work (and are working) in building authentic caring relationships with their students. In thinking about your practice, what aspects of active caring and building relationships with your students are possible through the virtual space? When attending to relationship building, what tools are you using that might privilege some students over others? How have students co-constructed and designed the learning space?

As such, we hope that these questions push you to consider the implications of remote learning and how to collectively address inequities toward closing the opportunity gap for PTs. Addressing these inequities cannot be accomplished without first building authentic caring relationships with your students and co-constructing an inclusive learning environment. We offer a few suggestions for modifying classroom practices:

- Determine accessibility of digital devices to develop instructional plans that account for and honor the range of students' needs
- Allow multiple modalities for engaging in class (e.g., interactive slide decks and

collaborative whiteboards online) for collaboration and participation

- Provide students flexibility in how they participate (e.g., keeping their cameras on or off).

Thus, MTEs can learn to notice when their expectations for participation, grading, and engagement are privileged (Kern 2020) and to wonder about new ways to adapt learning activities to achieve key learning goals and equity in rehumanizing ways. —

Table 1 Inequities Highlighted during the Pandemic

Consideration	Notice	Wonder
Consider Differences of Equity	What differences do you see (if any) in K–12 vs. postsecondary settings during the transition?	Are these differences amplified on the basis of geographical location and across student populations?
Consider the claim: “Grading during a pandemic is grading students’ behavior, compliance, access, and privilege” (Kern 2020).	What elements within the claim do you agree with? Why?	How can teachers address the tension of grades as a tool for compliance no matter the context (e.g., remote, face-to-face, pandemic or not)?

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Naomi A. Jessup, njessup@gsu.edu, is an assistant professor at Georgia State University in Atlanta. Her research focuses on examining mathematics teaching practices, curriculum, and parental partnerships from critical perspectives.

Jennifer A. Wolfe, jwolfe628@math.arizona.edu, is an associate professor of mathematics at the University of Arizona, Tucson. Her research focuses on equitable teaching practices in mathematics teacher preparation and professional development.

Oyita Udiani, udiano@vcu.edu, is a bio-mathematician and assistant professor at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond.

Crystal A. Kalinec-Craig, crystal.kalinec-craig@utsa.edu, is an associate professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Her research interests lie at the intersection of elementary teacher education and issues of equity.

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