

Introduction to the *JRME* Equity Special Issue

JRME Equity Special Issue Editorial Panel

Beatriz D'Ambrosio
Miami University

Danny Martin
University of Illinois at Chicago

Marilyn Frankenstein
*University of Massachusetts,
Boston*

Judit Moschkovich
*University of California,
Santa Cruz*

Rochelle Gutiérrez
(Special Issue Editor)
*University of Illinois
at Urbana-Champaign*

Edd Taylor
Northwestern University

David Barnes
*National Council of Teachers
of Mathematics*

Signe Kastberg
Purdue University

This article provides an introduction to the *JRME* Equity Special Issue. It includes a rationale for the special issue, the process for selecting articles, and a description of the kinds of articles that will appear in the special issue. It concludes with a set of questions that teachers and researchers can and should ponder as they read the articles in the special issue.

Key words: Equity/diversity; Race/ethnicity/SES; Research issues; Social and cultural issues; Social factors

This special issue arises out of interest from the Board of Directors of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics to better understand how issues of equity play out in today's mathematics classrooms.

The *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* has a history of publishing special issues on equity. In one sense, this volume follows that trend. However, this special issue is different. Recognizing that a term such as *equity* can mean many things to many people (see, e.g., Atweh, Graven, Secada, & Valero, 2011), we chose to narrow the scope. We issued a call for submissions that highlighted how *identity* and *power* play out in mathematics teaching and learning in schools and in broader policies and practices of mathematics education. We were especially interested in the "sociopolitical turn" that is taking place in the field (Gutiérrez, this volume) and in capturing what this turn means for practitioners and researchers alike. We

did not favor a particular theoretical lens but rather believed that it would be useful to showcase a variety of perspectives and conceptual tools.

We believe that issues of identity and power are important to investigate, particularly at this point in time, for two reasons: (a) mathematics continues to hold an (undeserved) position of high status in our increasingly global society, and (b) new conceptual tools have become available in research that can allow us to better understand how identity and power are constructed.

Several scholars (many international) have been investigating mathematics education from a sociopolitical view, documenting ways in which mathematics teaching, learning, research, and policy are not neutral activities. This work challenges us to think differently about the field and to dig deeper in our analyses of equity, rather than recycle issues that are already accepted. With a vibrant subset of the mathematics education community working diligently on these issues, we did not believe that a special issue on identity and power with four to five articles would suffice. Instead, we include in this volume 11 research articles (4 invited) and 3 dialogue pieces (1 invited) that cover a range of perspectives and foci, but which all illustrate that mathematics education is always social and political. These articles highlight how mathematics education (e.g., teaching, learning, policy, and research practices) has implications for not just what we consider success or achievement, but how we come to view and (re)use mathematics, how we conceive of education, and how one is viewed by others as well as how one views oneself. This special issue examines how mathematics education as a field contributes to the ways in which individuals are constructed in schools and in everyday social interactions; who is seen as intelligent and who is not; whose voice is heard and who is silenced.

In this issue, we sought to highlight both veteran and emerging scholars. We invited the contributions of researchers whose work we believed could generate the types of manuscripts we hoped to receive. The articles by Walshaw, Stinson, and Nasir and Royston are examples of these invited articles. Among people who investigate issues of identity and power, Walshaw is best known for her emphasis on postmodernism and poststructuralism as it relates to mathematics. We thought many researchers in the broader mathematics education community were unfamiliar with this postmodernist/poststructuralist perspective and could benefit from hearing how power is constructed within mathematics education. Focusing on the experiences of a high school mathematics student and a preservice teacher, Walshaw highlights how gendered/raced/classed identities develop out of social interactions when individuals attempt to become proficient in mathematics.

Stinson's article follows in this poststructuralist tradition but focuses on African American adults who were successful mathematics students, reflecting on their high school experiences. Stinson highlights the complex and often invisible work that these students do every day to negotiate the stories that are told about them by others. Focusing on African American males, Nasir and Royston return to previously analyzed data in an attempt to demonstrate how a sociopolitical lens can shed light on identity and power and offer new findings. The authors show that students

can be positioned as competent at estimating average scores in basketball by themselves and peers while at the same time being positioned as incompetent at school mathematics by their teachers.

Beyond inviting pieces for this special issue, we also requested manuscripts that dealt with issues such as racism, classism, and the politics of language. The first set of manuscripts we received were reviewed by the entire editorial panel and served as a means for us to calibrate our standards and expectations for articles that would appear in this special issue. Manuscripts in this first set were returned to authors to revise and resubmit or were rejected because they were not seen as sufficiently aligned with the theme of the special issue. Once the expectations of the panel were calibrated, we turned to a combination of internal (editorial board members) and external reviewers to evaluate new submissions. All manuscripts that were reviewed internally and seen as sufficiently aligned with the special issue theme were then sent out for external review. We chose an open review process where authors and reviewers were known to each other—a practice common in other countries—because we aimed to create greater dialogue between authors and reviewers.

In selecting manuscripts, we sought a balance between the kinds of topics explored (e.g., addressing racism, language, culture, identity, power) and the foci of research (e.g., students versus teachers, out-of-school or adult practices versus in-school practices, teaching versus research). We gave preference to articles that showcased the voices of people who are normally invisible or silenced in mathematics education, such as students living in poverty, bilingual learners, community members, and elders. We also sought a balance between articles that highlighted international contexts versus ones in the United States. And we required researchers to articulate clearly the implications of their work for schooling as a social practice.

We found in our discussions about individual manuscripts that similar misconceptions and challenges arose for authors who were attempting to address issues of identity and power in mathematics education. We were very stimulated by our discussions—the multiple perspectives that arose—and thought that it would be useful for the broader mathematics education community to have access to these topics. As such, we produced a set of three short articles that address themes that consistently arose in our discussions: language, racism, and the position of the researcher. For issues of racism and the position of the researcher, we felt members of the editorial panel had sufficient expertise to offer useful perspectives. As such, we recorded our conversations about these topics, edited them, and offer them as dialogues that we hope will stimulate others to join in and respond. In the dialogue article about addressing racism, we highlight how teachers and researchers are often more comfortable talking about race, but not racism; how the field of mathematics education is implicated in the construction of race; and how we still have insufficient knowledge about the contexts and experiences of Latin@,¹ African American, and American Indian students to inform policies and practices that will be in their best interests.

Another dialogue article by the editorial panel explores the ways in which researchers' lived experiences, ideological stances, and purposes for doing research all influence the designs of studies; the types of research questions that get asked; the manner in which participants take part in the research; the ways in which data are analyzed; the types of findings that are presented; and, ultimately, what mathematics education as a field is able to say about the world.

Because not all members of the panel had expertise in language issues, we invited Mamokgethi Setati and Judit Moschkovich to develop a short article that arose from their dialogue. We thought that a difference in location and focus (Setati in South Africa studying multiple languages versus Moschkovich in the United States studying bilingual Latin@ learners) would allow a broader audience of readers to connect with many of the similarities and differences that arise in the politics of language in mathematics education. In their dialogue, Setati and Moschkovich highlight the tensions, questions, and myths that arise for teachers and researchers around language issues and showcase how race and language are interconnected.

The article by Meaney, Trinick, and Fairhall continues this focus on language. Situated in New Zealand at a language-based school, Meaney and colleagues highlight the ways in which Te Rao Maori community members and elders perceive of mathematics and learning in ways that differ significantly from government officials who oversee school curricula. When these community views are taken seriously, they shift the goals of teaching and allow for practices that support students' expanding cultural and linguistic identities while learning dominant forms of mathematics.

Focusing on how students position themselves and are positioned by others within mathematics classrooms, Esmonde and Langer-Osuna examine the ways in which high school students negotiate their intellectual and social authority when placed in small groups to work. Like Stinson, they highlight the complex work that students do to develop and protect their identities, work that is invisible to most teachers. Taking a similar stance on positioning, Turner and colleagues show how elementary bilingual students in an after-school mathematics program take on problem-solving roles that influence the kinds of identities they create. This article also highlights the role that teachers can play in leading students through assigned tasks and the framing of mathematical discussions.

Many people are familiar with teaching mathematics for social justice (Frankenstein, 1983, 2009; Gutstein, 2006). This work highlights the ways in which mathematics can be used as a tool for reading society's injustices and for transforming society to be more just. But, because we have so few documented cases of teachers addressing social justice in mathematics and the cases we have are of very

¹We use the @ sign to indicate both an *a* and an *o* ending (Latina and Latino). The presence of both endings decenters the patriarchal nature of the Spanish language, where it is customary for groups of males (Latinos) and females (Latinas) to be written in the form that denotes only males (Latinos). The term is written Latin@ with the *a* and *o* intertwined—as opposed to the more commonly used Latina/o—as a sign of solidarity with individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and queer (LGBTQ).

experienced teachers, many researchers and teachers narrowly conceive of social justice as a curriculum-driven issue (e.g., developing social justice projects for students to complete in mathematics class). Many people fail to question how the identity of the teacher and the context in which she works affect her attempts to embody a practice that affirms and expands students' identities while helping them (re)create power for their own purposes. Some teachers may look at their initial attempts to teach mathematics for social justice as not measuring up to the few cases of successful teachers that have been documented. Yet the work of teaching is likely to look different for different individuals working in different contexts.

Focusing on a professional development course for practicing teachers, Bartell uncovers the thorny process by which teachers learn to develop a practice of teaching mathematics for social justice. In her article, she illustrates how the identities of teachers, students, and researchers create opportunities, challenges, and tensions. The article by Gregson² focuses on a long-time activist and mathematics teacher who works at a social justice high school but who does not use curriculum as her primary means to address equity. By emphasizing the tensions in teaching, Gregson brings forth complexity in the everyday work of teachers who recognize that teaching mathematics involves building identities and constructing power.

Using life-story analysis, Walker focuses on four successful African American mathematicians. In her article, she investigates the mathematical literacy that is produced in school contexts and in African American homes and communities and how those forms of literacy relate to mathematicians' identities.

In looking across the submissions and seeing that, other than the introduction, none of the articles addressed researchers or policy, we invited Danny Martin to write an article investigating the role of race in mathematics education research. In his article, Martin illustrates how the internal structure of the mathematics education research enterprise operates in ways that inscribe whiteness as the norm and position others as deviant or inferior.

Throughout the articles in this special issue, the reader is offered a perspective on mathematics education that challenges "whitestream" views of marginalized students. With different agendas driving their research and different lenses/tools at their disposal, the authors in this volume underscore the complexities at hand when identity and power are constructed. At the flip of a switch, we see that individuals who are in one moment perceived as incompetent can suddenly be perceived as experts. It is clear from the articles in this special issue that individuals engaged in mathematical activity not only participate in the construction of their identities but also actively resist and reshape the processes that seek to construct them.

This special issue seeks to model the phenomena we investigate. That is, the articles that appear in this volume are not just about students' and teachers' identities, but also about researchers' identities. In the articles, the authors have posi-

² In accordance with the policy of the *JRME* Editorial Panel regarding potential conflicts of interest involving the Equity Special Issue editor, the review of and publication decisions for this manuscript were handled by M. Kathleen Heid.

tioned themselves within their work, offering details about their lives and stances so that their identities can be seen as part of, not separate from, the (re)making of power in mathematics education.

We invite you to read the articles in this special issue so that you may better understand the sociopolitical turn that mathematics education is currently taking and can join the dialogue. As you read, we encourage you to think about your own mathematical experiences with learning, teaching, policy, and research. Ask yourself:

- Where do I fit within this broader dialogue?
- How do my identity and the identity of those around me influence what I think mathematics is or what the enterprise of mathematics education should include?
- How might I become more cognizant of the ways in which individual and group identities are constructed through mathematics education?
- As a member of the mathematics education community, in what ways do I participate (un)knowingly in the construction of power and identity?
- What actions can I take to be more deliberate about the ways in which I want mathematics education to operate?
- How do the issues of identity and power transcend applications to mathematics teaching and research and connect to larger struggles for social justice?
- How do the issues raised in the articles spur me to think and act in ways that will impact the life possibilities of each child I am teaching in his/her life outside of the mathematics classroom?

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