

MATHEQUITY HOURS: FOSTERING WHOLENESS IN A MATHEMATICS LEARNING COMMUNITY

ABSTRACT

The authors of this article work together on *Designing for Equity by Thinking in and about Mathematics*, an NSF-funded Mathematics Science Partnership aimed at closing the opportunity gap for Black secondary students who have been systematically marginalized in their mathematics experiences. In this article we share a strategy for fostering wholeness in our professional community of mathematicians, educators, district project leaders, and teachers: the Mathequity Hours. We describe three examples of how Mathequity Hours functions: (a) connecting equity conversations to mathematics teaching practice; (b) opening mathematical conversations in the context of equity; and (c) connecting these conversations to student learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

The authors of this article represent a racially and professionally diverse subset of a community working together on *Designing for Equity by Thinking in and about Mathematics* (DEbT-M)¹ an NSF-funded Mathematics Science Partnership aimed at closing the opportunity gap for secondary students who have been systematically marginalized in their mathematics experiences. The name honors Gloria Ladson-Billings' (2006) stance that the United States does not have an achievement gap, but owes an “educational debt” to millions of underserved students.

In working to address this educational debt, DEbT-M includes significant PD for secondary teachers in mathematics and equity, described in Section 3 below. But in doing this professional work, we found that we had to create a new space, “Mathequity Hours,” in which we work on mathematics and equity *together*.

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To situate our work, we open with quotations from three Black professors of mathematics, authors of this paper and leaders in the DEbT-M community:

When people come and say, ‘I hate math,’ they’re saying, ‘I hate my mathematical experience,’ right? Because math is objectively a beautiful, profound expression of human thought. That is a fact. You cannot expect someone coming from high school math to have a reasonable critique of mathematics. They’re saying, ‘I was devalued in this experience.’ I hear that. And I say to them, ‘I’m sorry that’s the experience you had, but I’m here to present you with another one. And you have to be open to that. So: are you willing?’ - *Aris Winger*

I try to make myself visible. - *Michael Young*

As an African-American male, it is a load to carry in terms of just existing and walking in this society of ours. These are things that I have to compartmentalize: the dysfunctions of our society, so that I can be about the mission and vision of the work trying to create the next generation of mathematical scientists. But when you're examining your own bias, and engaging others around that, you have to engage that compartmentalization in such a way that you open up. There is a vulnerability that comes along with opening up that was surprising to me [in DEbT-M], because of compartmentalizing for so long. - *Idris Stovall*

Why start with these three statements? We share a little more about the mathematicians and the basis for those quotations in their lives.

In 1997, a professor sent Aris, then a college student at Howard University, to the American Mathematical Society–Mathematical Association of America Joint Meetings in San Diego. Until then, he had seen mathematics as a solitary endeavor for someone who loved mathematics, which he does, and always has. But suddenly he saw a new vision of how mathematics is done and shared as a professional community activity.

The conference trip is one example of the powerful actions of supportive teachers, professors, and mentors who recognized Aris’s potential. As a high school student from Washington, D.C., he was valedictorian of Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, a rigorous and prestigious public school. His mathematics teachers helped him feel at home in school while holding him to a high standard of academic excellence. He felt valued, seen, and supported at Dunbar, and then again at Howard, where he was an ambitious, dedicated student. When he got to Carnegie Mellon University for his Ph.D. program, he felt well prepared. New mentors there saw his potential as a mathematician, pushed him, and nurtured him. His quotation comes out of this experience of feeling *valued* in mathematics, of knowing how extraordinary that is, and wanting others to have similar experiences.

Aris offers a vision of what mathematics can be for a student who finds himself in circumstances in which he is valued. Michael’s quotation shares a different point of view from someone who is also extremely dedicated to mathematics.

Michael’s quotation is short, but powerful. He is making a statement about a Black man’s experience in mathematics that runs across disciplines, across institutions, across life: the invisibility of Black people in our White culture. Michael, as a Black mathematician, who has achieved great academic success, still has to fight for visibility in the field. This is a hard thing to talk about: it’s easy to dismiss someone’s feeling of being “invisible.” Michael is often the only

Black mathematician in a room, so he's clearly *physically* visible. But his whole life, he has been aware that his opinions have not been treated with the same regard as others'. His whole life, he has been surprising people with his mathematical abilities: one of his high school teachers admitted that she hadn't expected him to be as good at math as he was. And he was very, very good; this particular teacher eventually trusted him to teach the class for her when she was absent. Likewise, college mathematics is a social experience for many students, but for Michael it was not. Many of his college peers - other students who had been in his classes for years and not "seen" him mathematically - were surprised to find out *at graduation* that he was headed to Carnegie Mellon for graduate school. They hadn't talked to him about mathematics during their classes together, and during the time of applying for graduate schools, they hadn't considered that he might be doing the same, to share the experience with him as they applied to graduate school and jobs themselves. Now, at professional conferences, it's easy for colleagues to exclude him from mathematical conversations. He has been extremely successful at every level of his mathematical career, and yet, he has to fight to be seen. He has to try - one of a small number of Black mathematicians in this country has to *try!* - to make himself visible.

Next is Idris's quotation. In DEbT-M, Idris is collaborating on a mathematics program with the school district that contains many of the schools within the underserved, under-resourced communities in which he grew up. It is quite an experience for him hearing teachers, administrators, and researchers talk about the schools he went to as a child, and talking about the children that he once *was*. We in the DEbT-M community owe it to him to say "if you're willing to do this work, you compartmentalize however you want," because he says he has to do that, and it makes perfect sense that he has to do that.

But. If DEbT-M can provide a space in which Idris can be Dr. Stovall, who won a full ride to Hampton University, who was the first Black student to finish a Ph.D. at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, who is a Black leader at an Ivy League University – but also be Idris, the person who once was a child carrying many of the same burdens that the children in this district are - if he can hold onto both of those identities at the same time, and *not* have to compartmentalize, then he is offering a rare gift to the DEbT-M community - the mathematicians, educators, district leaders, and teachers who participate, and the children in the schools in which those teachers and administrators serve.

Because it's already one thing to see Dr. Stovall as an accomplished mathematician, as what he calls “a proof of concept” in this work. What's even harder – what gets at the real mission of DEbT-M – is to see each child in the schools where he grew up as potential Dr. Stovalls. When he comes as both – the former “potential Dr. Stovall” in this large public school district, with all that he had ahead of him – and the successful Dr. Stovall, with all that he has in front of him, still – he offers an opportunity to do just that.

So how is he able to be both? He operates in DEbT-M as a professional mathematician, lending his expertise in the mathematics immersion.

But as a culture, we're not used to holding race and mathematics in our minds at the same time. So if we want to allow Dr. Idris Stovall to bring himself as a Black man and a mathematician – and this is true for Dr. Michael Young and Dr. Aris Winger, too – we have to create spaces to do that. In this paper, we lay out the design of one such space in DEbT-M, Mathequity Hours.

2. GROUNDING THE WORK

2.1 What is DEbT-M?

The authors of this paper are three Black men, one White man, and four White women. Professionally, we are mathematicians or mathematics educators. We each bring expertise in one or more of the following: race studies, archeology, socio-history, critical pedagogy, mathematics, habits of mind, and education research. We represent a subset of the professionals involved in DEbT-M, a partnership between Education Development Center, Inc., Iowa State University, the University of Pittsburgh, Duquesne University, a large urban school district, and a smaller suburban school district.

In some sense, we are all research participants in DEbT-M, because we believe that we have to study our own work in order to improve. The quotations in the opening of this paper were taken from interviews of the mathematicians to learn how their own thinking and practice was changing. However, for ease of reading in what follows, “teacher participants” are secondary mathematics teachers who self-selected for participation in DEbT-M. The authors and other staff, including district leadership, acted as participants in all PD when present but not facilitating; however for clarity, we will refer to that group as “facilitators.”

While the authors have different experiences and come from different disciplines, genders, and races, we have a shared set of beliefs: 1) an explicit focus on race is essential to our work; 2) all students are able and deserve to engage in a community that authentically reflects how mathematicians think about and do mathematics; 3) teachers want to act in their students’ best interest; 4) the system of school mathematics has precluded students from engaging in serious mathematics; 5) we have an individual and communal responsibility for reshaping this system to provide each student access to advanced mathematical ideas; and 6) mathematics involves ways of thinking that individuals can learn to use to raise and approach problems and

experience the world. These beliefs represent a galvanizing force in our work at the intersection of equity and mathematics, and drive our approach to research and PD for secondary teachers.

Our shared beliefs led us to create PD consisting of a two-year experience for secondary teacher participants in mathematics, education, and equity. Three weeks of summer PD *originally* included:

- A morning **mathematics immersion**, in which we brought together facilitators and teachers. The emphasis was on the critical importance of content knowledge and how mathematicians do and think about mathematics. The content connected the mathematics of secondary school and the mathematics used by mathematics professionals.
- An afternoon **equity** portion in which facilitators and teachers worked together to understand the education system generally--and the system of school mathematics specifically-- and how inequity manifests and is perpetuated in these systems. They thought about what constitutes evidence of equity and inequity and how to collect that evidence. Teachers then enacted a multi-year efforts to disrupt inequity in their classrooms.
- In the first year of DEbT-M, teacher participants, facilitators, and district administrators participated in a two-day *Courageous Conversations* (Singleton, 2014) training, facilitated by district staff who were trained *Courageous Conversations* affiliates.

When equity issues arose in the mathematics immersion, we wondered how to handle them: interrupt the flow of the mathematics or save those issues for equity PD? Michael Young suggested that we create a new space, a space we called *Mathequity Hours* (“Mathequity”), to deal specifically with equity and race issues in mathematics. The joining of the terms was purposeful, to emphasize that this space was about math and equity at once; as such, it was a

space to foster wholeness. In this context, “whole” means being a person and a mathematician at the same time, no matter your race, your gender, your discipline, your history with mathematics, or your age. Teachers also considered how to foster that wholeness in the students in their mathematics classes.

In Mathequity sessions, we set up tables of five or six people, composed primarily of teacher participants, but also including facilitators. The rules of Mathequity were that we would speak honestly about the identified topic of the day, guided by *Courageous Conversations* protocols (Singleton, 2014). It was a structured free-for-all, with teachers setting the direction of issues that arose around the topics. Reflecting our belief that teachers want to act in their students’ best interests, the Mathequity facilitators trusted that the issues teachers themselves surfaced would be what they needed to address.

What gave Mathequity its power? We developed a trajectory to support teachers - and ourselves - to feel ready and able to change our practice in ways that (1) recognize mathematics as a profoundly human activity and (2) fundamentally reshape the classroom experience in ways that value, engage, and focus on students of color. As Idris shared in his opening quotation, we “engaged... in such a way that [we] open up.” Mathequity represented a commitment to making sustained changes through conversations in which people allowed themselves to be vulnerable.

2.2 Grounding our work in existing literature

Gutiérrez (2008, 2009) pushes us to consider current framings of equity in mathematics education as a focus on equality, or sameness, rather than an approach centered on *justice*. In DEbT-M, focusing on the identities of Black children was essential to taking a justice-centered approach. Literature helps with that in specific ways. For example, Berry, Pinter, and McClain

(2013), in their critical review of the history of Black children in mathematics education, point to the unfolding of an exclusionary system that has (a) been de-segregated by law and then re-segregated through tracking; (b) not attended to the specific needs of Black children; or (c) approached Black children from a deficit perspective. This history affects the way that individual Black children experience and learn to navigate schools. Berry (2008) identified factors that supported Black male middle grades students in achieving upper level mathematics. Educators can act as advocates or fail to recognize the potential of Black students, which is echoed in the work of Stinson (2006). Further, Gholson and Martin (2014) remind us that we must recognize the intersection of identities, as exemplified by Black girlhood, confer certain opportunities and challenges on those with those identities. Gholson and Martin (2014) highlight the importance of social interactions in Black girls' experiences in the discipline of mathematics in school and how teachers can influence those.

Martin (2007) suggests that successful teachers of Black students need the following four capabilities: (a) comprehension of Black children's social realities, (b) attention to developing mathematical, academic, and racial identities of their Black students, (c) recognition of mathematics as a means of empowering their Black students, and (d) participation as a change agents to work against deficit views of Black students. Gholson (2013) provides three concrete steps to ensure we can do that: (1) identify racial messages children receive, (2) study the local environment at the intersection of issues of race and mathematics, and (3) recognize the sociopolitical history for the community of each child. DEbT-M in general, and Mathequity in particular, works to support teachers who welcome Black children to their mathematics classrooms in a way that values their identity and provides them with a feeling that they belong there.

2.3 Collecting artifacts

We video-recorded and transcribed all PD sessions, both to collect evidence of teachers' thinking and to improve our own facilitation skills in this complex environment. These data and participant writings from the PD experiences make up the bulk of the artifacts in what follows. In addition, data including semi-structured interviews between authors about the experience and an assessment of participating teachers habits of mind (Sword, et al., 2015) are discussed. The artifacts and assessments were collected during the summer PD sessions. Interviews were conducted throughout the subsequent school years.

3. EXAMPLES FROM MATHEQUITY

The following examples illustrate how Mathequity works in practice to foster wholeness.

3.1 Example 1. Opening mathematical conversations in the context of equity: the case of “the answer” in mathematics.

Shared mathematics experiences serve as contexts for conversations in Mathequity. In the summer of 2016, in the mathematics immersion PD, the mathematics team spent significant time de-emphasizing “the answer” as the sole goal of mathematical activity, instead emphasizing the processes and thinking that *led* to answers teachers gave.

In Mathequity, we stepped back from that mathematical experience that the teachers shared, and connected it to the experience of *school* mathematics. We asked teachers, “What does ‘the answer’ mean to you?”

Teachers responded:

- Sense of closure
- Makes me feel like I have a good understanding of the problem
- Sense of accomplishment

We dug into this last response, wondering how the answer and accomplishment are connected. One teacher observed that the answer can provide “a sense of accomplishment that validates your work, and sometimes even your culture.” Another suggested that a correct answer can affirm alternative ways of thinking about problems for those who have done something different. But partly because of the shared mathematical experience, the teachers started to think about how a focus on processes instead of answers could affect how children feel *heard* and thus valued in mathematics class.

Emphasizing mathematical processes and what we can learn from our own mistakes has pedagogical advantages, but in particular an equity advantage: people – adults and children – feel valued in their participation in mathematical thinking and discussions. Focusing on mathematical process shifts the purpose of the answer from “validation” to tools to learn - to present a starting point for a discussion, or to create opportunities to ask new questions.

The power of this discussion became clear when teacher participants were asked to retake (after 14 months) a Mathematical Habits of Mind assessment written for high school teachers (Sword, et al., 2015). While taking the assessment, a White female middle school mathematics special educator stated that she was no longer “afraid” of this test because she understood that it wasn’t the answers that mattered, but her thinking. A qualitative change occurred in her assessments from Year 0 to Year 1, in a willingness to try items she did not know how to solve. Two of the items she left blank on the Year 0 assessment demonstrated real attempts on Year 1. A Black female teacher noted a parallel experience for her students in emotional support classes, the majority of whom are Black: “my students don't even attempt [the state test]... but when they took [it] this year it shocked me; they were really trying! Even if they didn’t know it, they were willing to attempt it. They didn’t care if they got the answer right or wrong. They just wanted to

attempt it. That was really a success for me...” Schoenfeld (1988) illustrated mathematical issues that result from focusing on “the answer,” and we need to attend to equity issues that arise as well. In unpacking a shared mathematical experience, Mathequity supported humanizing mathematics learning.

3.2 Example 2. Connecting our work to student learning: the case of “disrespect.”

Opening with, “Who gets left out in math class?” one Mathequity session involved a discussion of how “leaving out” *happens* in math class. What arose was that in the normal course of classroom interactions, moments of disrespect occur, student to student, teacher to student or student to teacher. These moments are often complicated by issues of race and cultural conflict (Milner, 2010); in our partner districts it is common for teachers and students to be of different races. This often leads to unintended consequences. For example, Black male youth can invoke a persona through “cool pose”: a physical manifestation of aloofness and studied disinterest (Majors & Billson, 1992). This may be misread by teachers, principals and other adults as defiance and disrespect, while it is often a way to maintain integrity in the face of adversity.

In Mathequity, we discussed “respect” in general, and “cool pose” in particular. Aris asked, “What do we do to students who disrespect us?” Responses included a list of punitive actions that we as educators had taken in “revenge”:

- I don’t give them extra time;
- I ignore them;
- I do not give them second chance grading; and
- I lower my expectations.

Each of these has implications for students’ classroom experience: we remove opportunities for them to learn and be successful. Mathematics is well known to be a gatekeeper

to graduation, college and future careers. Realizing the cumulative effects of these missed opportunities led to understanding that the resulting disrespect we express in retaliation is far more detrimental than the original perceived disrespect. Students get “left out.”

Discussions began regarding how to change our responses in these situations so that “disrespect” on the part of the learner, intended or perceived, does not interfere with how we value them or the opportunities for learning to which they are entitled. We came to consensus that it is not students’ responsibility to show respect in order to access learning opportunities. That does not mean we do not address or try to understand disrespect; rather, that this must be separate from the learning opportunities we provide.

An essential insight emerged for participating teachers *and* facilitators, many of whom teach in college settings: these moments of “disrespect” are *not about us*. One way we can deal with disrespect is to depersonalize it: keep the child at the center, remembering that this class is not about how we *teach* math, it’s about how children *learn* it. The children will say and do things that seem off base, but we can choose not to mind because we understand it’s not personal; “it’s not about me.” About facilitating this experience, Aris said, “I want to be clear: we did that together. I didn’t come up with that answer. We sat in that room and figured it out. We talked. *We* came to that conclusion - ‘it’s not about us.’”

3.3 Example 3. Connecting equity conversations to our own mathematics teaching; connecting ourselves to “the system.”

The book *Radical Equations* quotes Ella Baker on changing systems; she says, “in order to see where we are going, we must not only remember where we have been, but we must understand where we have been” (Moses & Cobb, 2001, p.3).

Toward that end, a powerful set of conversations were driven by “acknowledgement letters.” These letters were written by teacher participants and facilitators to acknowledge and forgive actions we may have taken in the past as teachers of mathematics. The facilitators wrote and read their own letters aloud first, then asked the teachers to write and share parts of their own letters with the group. One facilitator (Eden) used this example in her letters²:

I apologize, Sonia (black female), for making you feel less than capable when I was trying to encourage others to be as courageous as you in admitting your mistakes. No one followed your example and thus I set you up to appear to be the only person in class who did not know.

Another facilitator (Aris) used “you” in his letter because he is speaking to himself as another person:

Yes, too often you thought their failure was their fault and had nothing to do with you.

Yes, you too often mistook silence for understanding.

Yes, you had thoughts of surprise when the Asian kid asked you for math help.

Yes, you had bad memories of high school when those two black female students were laughing in the back and that made you not want to help them.

Yes, you have favored the white male, favored the loud, internally derided the shy, demanded that those you have given no voice to speak up and ask questions.

And NO! I am not being too hard on you. You want to get better, don't you?

By looking honestly and compassionately at ourselves as facilitators, we allowed the teachers to do the same. In sharing these vulnerabilities, we brought visibility to our own imperfection; we

² All student names in what follows are pseudonyms

modeled our own willingness to be open to learning, and to conversations in which we were likely not to get things “perfect.” We felt compassion for each other and for the students we have hurt. We talked about race, and we talked about it in the context of our own mathematics teaching practice. This was an individual and *shared* practice. Sharing this practice positioned teacher participants to support each other in pathways to more equitable teaching practices.

The deeply personal nature of the letters meant that teachers sometimes invoked prayers or pointed to times in their personal lives when they had not treated the people around them respectfully. They also described interactions with particular students. In the following excerpts from teachers’ letters, with names withheld to preserve privacy, a thread recurs: teachers recognized that their enculturated perspectives positioned certain students as somehow “less than,” and felt resolved to change those perspectives. One White male middle school teacher challenged his perception of the “problem:”

... I am too quick to give up on the challenging student. Convenience at times has been my goal, and this makes it easier to let the difficult student go. Misbehaving students are not an interruption to my work, they are my work.

A White female middle school teacher discussed how her perceptions of children prompted her to change the nature and rigor of the mathematics she taught:

Over the course of that year, I began to see students of color as unable to participate in rigorous assignments, especially those in CMP2. I believed these students needed mundane math assignments that included multiple opportunities for repetition as well as instruction led and facilitated directly by me. I need to include here that this was the way in which I was taught. I believed that because I taught a class in which every student was identified with either an ESL, Special Ed. or Read 180 label, they were unable to

complete the assignments in the CMP2 book. I rewrote the entire curriculum. I took out anything that I felt was too hard and didn't require true thinking. I did not allow group work because that's when chaos would erupt. I believed a quiet classroom meant I was a good teacher. I led every conversation; I gave assignments that allowed for no student creativity; and I definitely didn't learn anything about the students that I stood in front of every day. That's how I survived that year. I owe every student that I taught that year an apology.

Another White female high school teacher recognized the potential impact of acting in response to her perceptions of students:

I am sorry for not meeting you where you were – and instead meeting you where I was comfortable, or where I expected you to be. I am sorry for thinking I knew just what your life was like because I grew up in the same neighborhood you did, for downplaying your reality, for not seeing your color, your culture, you. I am sorry for writing that referral – and that other one too – for helping to create a file that would inevitably define your educational career. A file that others would read in order to 'get to know you' ... a you I helped to create. ... I am sorry for calling on you when I knew you didn't know an answer, just to prove a point. What I am most deeply sorry for though, is remaining silent when coworkers would describe my class as 'the bad kids.' I am sorry for sitting quiet while peers joked about having job security based on you becoming an adult and starting a family of your own. I am so sorry for never defending you as fiercely as I wanted to, as I could have. I am sorry for not saying simply, "I disagree."

Several teachers identified particular students they had affected. A White female middle school teacher spoke of her own reactions to perceived student disrespect, illustrating the common tendency towards retribution previously discussed, while a White male high school teacher shared a failure and the resulting plea to do better next time.

You ignored Cameron. He told you that he struggled with math, and you told him that you would be there for him. You lied. You knew he was cutting your class, and you ignored it. You called home and spoke with his parents, but you never followed through. He needed you, and you turned away.

You mistook Sierra's attitude for disrespect. It was easier to turn away when she was on her phone or talking to her friend than to ask why. You did not take the time to talk to her, ask how she was feeling. Instead you took it personally, like a slap to your face. You said to yourself, "I will show her." You need to be better. You need to be the teacher you promised them you would be.

Another White male middle school teacher wrote:

Delonte, at the beginning of the school year I had great expectations for you. As the semester continued I saw that you weren't interested, you quit trying. I still saw the bright young man that you are. I still saw the potential. I still vowed to persevere to the end. But then I caved, threw my hands up in the air and I quit. I was done pushing. I didn't quit caring I just didn't have the stamina. I was at my end. I hope that the next Delonte I teach that I will have more drive to hang in there a little longer. I want people to see the genius in my Delontes.

A Black female high school teacher addressed herself in the second person as she recognized her growth, buoying her hope for progress toward becoming the teacher she wants to be:

This past year was much better for you than last year. You demonstrated extended patience, stronger consistency, improved questioning, and organization. You kept up with grading in the first semester. There were some great ideas you executed, too. You tell people that you had a great year and that you're very proud of your accomplishments. You are. I believe you have every reason to be proud of the strides you've made this year. Just as I acknowledge the beauty in your management of many responsibilities, it's important to acknowledge ways in which your actions had lasting impacts on students.

The process of letter writing is not simply self-flagellation. As suggested by Ella Baker, we are acknowledging how we have been part of a system that maintains inequity. We are not “outside”; we are part of the system. This is imperative. To be able to challenge that systemic machine, we have to understand our own role in it. In understanding that role, we call ourselves to action.

4. PRELIMINARY EVIDENCE OF THE IMPACT OF MATHEQUITY

Within the space of Mathequity we focus on things we can *do*. We can attend to how we present mathematics. We can choose how to react to students' actions. We can examine our own actions critically but with compassion.

We believe that participating in DEbT-M changes us as people, teachers, learners, and doers of mathematics. We strive to bring that change into our various other professional roles, including college teaching. Michael reflected,

[DEbT-M] has changed my practice [in college mathematics teaching], changed my language, and changed my perceptions. This semester I'm teaching calculus. The first

exercise is a math identity survey so people can talk about their math experiences and I can come to understand them better.

Teachers also reflected on how participation changes their practice. One teacher wrote, “I look at each student differently now - each student is their own story.”

The following reflections from one Black and then one White female teacher, recognize that their stories are in fact intertwined with those of their students.

If nothing else, it's been a forum where I can talk about being a black student and a black teacher, and what those experiences have meant to me -- how they have influenced my teaching. Our work has challenged me to examine the defeating ways I think about myself and my students, the limits I have placed on us...

...to me the most important aspect that's come up while teaching is my comfort towards...black students... I talked last summer about my inability to relate to them, which I didn't realize was so hard for them, having a White female teacher and them being black men, or female students. And I just thought, you know, they're all students, but ... it's important for me to realize that they are black students and I need to reach out to them, and not that I'm going to be able to understand what they're going through but being able to show them I'm willing to listen.

We are still in the process of analyzing teacher reflections, but even in this sample, powerful themes emerge. We see recognition of students as individuals, recognition of the importance of race, and recognition of roles in perpetuating inequities. And over and over, we see themes of striving to do better. It's promising. We are also collecting student data, surveys about students'

beliefs about mathematics and about themselves as learners, and classroom observation video to understand how this work affects teachers' practice and outcomes for students.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Mathequity is about humanizing mathematics spaces. In Mathequity, we discuss what we need to do as mathematics educators to reimagine our current classrooms as spaces in which middle and high school children feel valued as children and mathematicians: valued, visible, and brimming with mathematical potential, as the mathematicians expressed in the opening quotations.

As we think about how to implement Mathequity or aspects of Mathequity in other settings in which we work, there are elements of the work that make it challenging that we want to keep in mind. For example:

- We are saying to teachers, who already have almost impossible jobs, “there is much more to do.”
- We cannot predict the direction of Mathequity conversations when we introduce the day's topic. We cannot prepare for all that will unfold.
- We, DEbT-M staff and teachers, have to acknowledge our own roles in systemic inequity.
- We have to get to know the teachers and their relationships with each other early in the process. We cannot create a community without acknowledging complex *existing* communities. We wish we had understood that better before we started Mathequity, but we learned.
- We are unlikely ever to know for *sure* how - or which of - these conversations change teachers' practice.

- The work doesn't end. We have to continually commit ourselves to connecting across racial boundaries. We cannot say, "ok, we've now solved this" - not in ourselves and not in our communities.

But we have supports. We offer each other community: yes, the problems feel unsolvable, but we aren't alone in our efforts to address them. The guidelines provided by *Courageous Conversations* (Singleton, 2014) help us build trust and space. We offer each other compassion and inspiration. And the teachers keep returning, keep participating in these conversations, keep thinking deeply about their practices. It's worth the effort.

In DEbT-M, we operate out of this belief: as we are transformed, so are the systems in which we operate. DEbT-M takes the stance that there are people who are saying, "I was devalued in this experience." Like Aris, we hear them. We have to be open to that, as a field. We have to be willing to build these spaces, to have these conversations. They're risky; they're time consuming. But as a field - a connected set of fields - we have to ask ourselves: are we willing?

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