Math as Political

Overview

A common perception of mathematics is that it is a "universal language" or it is "neutral". This activity is designed to challenge those perceptions of neutrality and demonstrate that choices in the mathematics classroom, even down to the problems that are given to students, are political.

Objective(s)

Teachers will

- Identify political implications of problem contexts

Materials Needed

Laptop
Projector
Math as Political Slides
Is Math Politically Neutral? Article
Writing Utensils
Access to the Internet
Reflection Handout

Lesson Outline

LAUNCH
Read the quote - Share the quote from Gutstein and Peterson from the Math as Political Slides. Ask students to reflect in writing on the Reflection Handout. Have teachers share out what their initial impressions are on the thought of math being political. **Identify the politics** - Share the two problems from the Math as Political Slides. Have the teachers use the Reflection Handout to reflect on the role of context in a math problem.
EXPLORE
Shared Reading - Using the "Say Something" learning strategy. Read the Is Math Politically Neutral? Article. Pairs of Teachers will share an article, decide on a portion of the article to read to stop and then say something to each other. This process will repeat until the article is read in its entirety. Teachers should feel free to write on the article, underline, etc. **Solo Reflection** - Teachers will be prompted to reflect on the article in the Reflection Handout.
SUMMARIZE
Reflect and Question - Prompt teachers to consider the final question in the Math as Political Slides. Be sure to communicate that time and space should be shared while considering the question.

Facilitator Insights and Questions

Facilitators should be sensitive to teachers who may get nervous about "introducing" political ideas into the mathematics classroom. The point of the activity is to show that political statements are already in the math classroom but to be intentional about how we position mathematics and not ignore it.

Additional Resources (aka Going Further)

Felton-Koestler, M. D., & **Koestler, C.** (2017). Should mathematics teacher education be politically neutral? *Mathematics Teacher Educator*, *6*(1), 67–72.	Article that discusses how mathematics teacher educators must make choices about what and how they challenge and disrupt pervasive views about mathematics teaching and learning, and how these choices are in fact political.
Wager, A. A., & Stinson, D. W. (Eds.). (2012). *Teaching mathematics for social justice: Conversations with educators*. Reston, VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.	Book that explores what teachers of mathematics for social justice have to say about its role in the mathematics classroom.

References

Felton, M. D. (2010). Is math politically neutral. *Teaching children mathematics*, *17*(2), 60-63.

Gutstein, E. and Peterson, B. (Eds.) (2005). *Rethinking mathematics: Teaching social justice by the numbers*. Rethinking Schools.

Koestler, C. (2012). Beyond apples, puppy dogs, and ice cream: Preparing prospective K-8 teachers to teach mathematics for equity and social justice. In A. Wager and D. Stinson, (Eds.) *Teaching mathematics for social justice: Conversations with educators.* Reston, VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.