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Embracing Mathematics: On Becoming a Teacher and Changing With Mathematics
Author: Peter Appelbaum with David Scott Allen (and others).

My formal teacher-training began in 1972, and I have worked in schools and teacher-education ever since. I have read many books about education, generally, including many that focus on training school teachers, and many that discuss mathematics education, and some that specifically focus on training school mathematics teachers. Appelbaum and Allen’s book Embracing Mathematics, is one of the strangest of these books that I have ever come across.

Appelbaum explains the strangeness by declaring that it is, intentionally, an “alternative methods text” (p. xxi). Indeed! Part of this strange alternativeness is that it explores primary, secondary and post-secondary, and it is aimed at student-teachers as well as teachers.

Appelbaum’s Prologue begins with the question: “What does it mean to be a teacher of mathematics?” His own answer is subtle and imprecise. It rests on seeing the essence of mathematics in its use—what he calls “mathematizing”. He acknowledges that this is how the pioneering early 20th century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein approaches the challenge of defining something: explore how it is used! Appelbaum expands the idea of “mathematizing” further as being equivalent to “embracing mathematics”. Then he adds to this that, in his view, teaching is learning (as an alternative to the latter word he also uses the word “studenting” to highlight this), and learning is teaching; and he says, “I am always becoming a new person”.

The paradoxical conclusion is that if Appelbaum can say what it does mean to be a teacher of mathematics then he is no longer growing and changing, and hence is no longer becoming a teacher of mathematics. An “arrived” teacher is no longer an active growing-teacher.

The slippery subtleness of the discussion should be starting to become clear. The words seems to be simple and everyday, but they are used in challenging ways, and need careful critical consideration to reveal their (likely) intentions.

Almost certainly there is a good book in this challenging discussion, but it is well hidden—or, it is structured and written in ways that make it hard to know where you are, or what you are actually reading or meant to understand.

To begin grasping the richness of the challenges, it must be understood that each chapter (presumably by Peter Appelbaum himself) is followed by a reflective commentary by David Scott Allen, but then each chapter-reflection is itself followed by what are called “Action Research” discussions from a range of other contributors: Isaiah Manzella, Karen Cipriano, Ada Rocchi, Colleen Murphy, Kristen Iaccio, and Petal Sumner (all school teachers). There is more: each Action Research section is followed by a MathWorld section that poses questions, mainly mathematical, but some more broadly educational, like a worksheet. In one of several appendices, Bernadette Bacino offers solutions and hints for the six MathWorld sections. There is even a “songsheet” with words for a song called “Polya Was a Mathematician”, to be sung to the tune of “Joy to the World” (not the traditional Christmas carol, but the 1970 hit by Three Dog Night which starts, “Jeremiah was a bullfrog…”).

David Allen, a teacher in his own right and at one stage a trainee-teacher student of Appelbaum, introduces the whole book with a Preface, “How Can I (Better) Embrace Mathematics?”. He also has an almost-concluding Afterword, “What Will You Write in Your Chapter?” The book, if nothing else, offers itself as a large multi-voice conversation on its many topics, mainly concerned with thinking mathematically and communicating this to others. Clearly the reader is expected/invited to “embrace” his or her own “becoming” by joining the conversation—hence the challenge of writing one’s own “chapter”!

Following the “Brief Contents” that in the usual way lists the official name of each chapter and major follow-on sections, the rather larger Contents listing is an annotated summary of the broad ideas of each chapter and its major sections and contributors.

As noted, the effect is partly like being at a very noisy and busy party—a lot of people have the opportunity to do a lot of talking at you! When the discussions get going they use long paragraphs, and pages are often broken up by grey-shaded challenges to think about education, or mathematics, or both.

The stance is deliberately post-modern, and uses the reader’s reaction to the Quentin Tarantino film Pulp Fiction as a kind of cultural litmus-test. If you focus on the film’s violence, you are “modern” in mind-set; by contrast, if you focus on its humour you are seeing its irony and have a “post-modern” mind-set. That is, the film is seen as being different from how it appears, like a pop-star’s stage persona being different from the actual personage of the pop-star: here “irony” is the discrepancy between immediate appearance and possible underlying but different truth. [In my case, I know about the film, but have not seen it: what does that say about me?] Consider the Name (cited author) Index. Some familiar, possibly expected names are present: Polya, Lakatos, John Mason, Carraher, Lave, Davis and Hersh, Dewey, Escher, Fermi, Howard Gardner, Herbert Ginsburg, Herbert Kohl, Mellin-Olsen, Noddings, NCTM, Piaget, Reys, Vygotsky, Walkerdine. Some unexpected names also appear: Bettelheim (a psychoanalyst), Bourdieu (a French philosopher), Buber (a German existential theologian), Foucault (a French philosopher), Frankenstein and Powell (ethno-mathematicians), Freud(!), Noel Gough (an Australian post-modernist educational theorist), Edgar Allen Poe (an American literary giant), Rorty (a philosopher), Winnicott (a psychoanalyst of infancy and mother-
post-modernist view of a curriculum (and exploring the philosophical depths of a dent critical readers, and hell-bent on to student-teachers, unless they are confi-
ciate experienced teachers undertaking means to train student-teachers and stimu-
laries. This suggests that the materials in 
years developing and trialling draft
body of the text, with few of them identified
excellent. Sadly, they are buried in the
activities (problems and investigations) are
mathematics learned through ICT-
across curriculum areas; mathematics in
ered at all (e.g.: numeracy; mathematics
reading, group work).
Some topics are talked about but not explained, or do not offer indicative exam-
(e.g., rubrics: the word appears several times, with not a single rubricor part of a rubric ever presented).
Some valuable topics are highlighted and indexed (e.g., problem-posing, reading, group work).
Some essential topics are not consid-
ered at all (e.g.: numeracy; mathematics across curriculum areas; mathematics in the workplace; mathematics in everyday life; and mathematics learned through ICT-facilitated experiences).
Overall the many practical classroom activities (problems and investigations) are excellent. Sadly, they are buried in the body of the text, with few of them identified as easily retrievable index-items.
We can be assured that Appelbaum, and his co-contributors, have worked for years developing and trialling draft versions of the chapters and their mate-
This little book includes a CD which contains both the book contents in PDF format and some PowerPoint slides of each problem, which may be produced for the students, shown on a board or simply posed verbally as required. The book is actually a collection of the association’s Odd Moments sections from their publication Mathematics in School, published between 1993 and 2001, with additional teacher notes and explanations. A couple of examples:
#51 How many straight cuts are needed to cut a 4 by 6 bar of chocolate into 24 separate pieces. Can you do it more than one way?
This exercise is actually a special case of a simple and more general result that tells us the number of tears needed to split a piece of paper into n pieces is n – 1.
#68 In how many ways can you shade 3/8 of the squares of a two by four rectangle? In how many ways can you shade 5/8?
This problem lays a foundation for a revisit when considering Pascal’s Triangle in later years.
I highly recommend that any teacher of middle years mathematics classes should have a closer look at this publication and consider it for both a faculty and personal library.

The Creative Use of Odd Moments
Author: Doug French
Published: The Mathematical Association, Leicester, UK, 2007
ISBN 0-906588-626
Available from AAMT: $42.00 for members

Reviewed by John Gough, Deakin University

The Creative Use of Odd Moments is a publication from The Mathematical Association in the UK. It contains 80 exam-
short mathematical tasks and items of interest, with accompanying solutions, explanations and ideas for extensions. The tasks range in difficulty but would, in my view, be suitable for most middle years mathematics classes. Most are tasks which generally require some investigation and exploration, but which may be consid-
ered fairly superficially or in greater depth considering algebraic justifications, etc., depending on the cohort of students and the time available.

Reviewed by Carol Moule
You can write a book review and share your experiences. Other readers will always be interested in your opinion of the books you've read. Whether you've loved the book or not, if you give your honest and detailed thoughts then people will find new books that are right for them.

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Appelbaum, Peter Michael. Embracing mathematics: on becoming a teacher and changing with mathematics / by Peter Appelbaum with David Scott Allen. 1st ed. p. cm. 1. Mathematics—Study and teaching—Evaluation. Need help in math? Delve into mathematical models and concepts, limit value or engineering mathematics and find the answers to all your questions. It doesn't need to be that difficult! Our math books are for all study levels. Welcome to Bookboon. In order to provide our services we rely on a series of essential cookies to access our features. We also use a set of 3rd party cookies that allow us to deliver a better experience. Please read our Privacy Policy page, and if you agree, please click on the button below ot enter the site. Accept and Continue. Tony Brown, Olwen McNamara. Becoming a Mathematics Teacher. Identity and Identifications. The book is centered on how major curriculum reform shapes mathematics and the professional practices of teachers. This book documents in real time the implementation of a. Details are subject to change without notice. All errors and omissions excepted. No discount for MyCopy. Embracing Mathematics book. Read reviews from world’s largest community for readers. This alternative textbook for courses on teaching mathematics asks t... Start by marking Embracing Mathematics: On Becoming a Teacher and Changing with Mathematics as Want to Read: Want to Read saving...