



## PME-NA EQUITY STATEMENT

PME-NA Steering Committee, November 2019

### What does equity mean for PME-NA?

PME-NA views equity broadly to include ideas ranging from access to educational resources, to positioning students as capable and humans as valid sources of knowledge, to questioning the curriculum and high stakes assessment practices, to promoting critical social justice perspectives of mathematics as sociopolitical. We frame equity as a continually evolving process of growth rather than as a destination that can be reached. Central to our view of equity is a humanistic perspective of mathematics as a discipline<sup>1</sup> that drives and is driven by human endeavor. We advance the understanding of mathematics as having stories and histories created by, used against, interpreted by, and harnessed by humans. We echo calls to action such as that of Gutiérrez (2018), who makes a case for rehumanizing mathematics by “privileging the voices of teachers, students, and communities; attending to intersectionality” (p. 3) and “seek[ing] to highlight where power dynamics have played out in the history of mathematics and where mathematics might come to serve the people as opposed to vice versa” (p. 4).

### How has PME-NA attended to equity?

The aforementioned equity perspectives have not only been highlighted in PME-NA’s themes and promoted by PME-NA’s plenary speakers through its entire history, but have also been given an increasingly prominent place in recent conferences. For example, the theme for PME-NA 36 (a joint conference with PME in Vancouver) was *Mathematics Education at the Edge*, which aimed at the explicit goal of “exploring issues with groups that are often positioned at the edge or periphery of educational research, such as social justice, peace education, equity, and Indigenous education.” In PME-NA 37 (in East Lansing, Michigan), Robert Berry provided a critical analysis of the policies and practices of mathematics reforms that affect marginalized students’ learning experiences. The year following, PME-NA 38’s (in Tucson, Arizona) theme was *Sin Fronteras: Questioning Borders with(in) Mathematics Education* where the community was encouraged to reflect upon and challenge “geographic, political, cultural, and language borders.” In one plenary session, Maria Trigueros spoke, primarily in Spanish, about building bridges between theories. At PME-39 (in Indianapolis, Indiana), Rochelle Gutiérrez presented on Living Mathematx by drawing upon Indigenous views as a way to rethink mathematical practices as more sustainable and ethical. In PME-40, Marta Civil discussed equity themes

<sup>1</sup> There is a long history of mathematics education and research as not being humanizing nor equitable to all. Consider the multiple examples of inequalities in mathematics education history including eugenics and segregation; the role of sorting and tracking; and biased “standardized” testing. PME-NA is an organization that responds to long-standing and emerging issues in the field of equity in mathematics education. The goals of PME-NA seek to use the tools of research and inquiry as a means of returning to the fundamental assumption that mathematics education is complex and intrinsically human.

across time including a funds of knowledge perspective, then Laurie Rubel responded with commentary with an eye toward the future by politicizing the cultural dimensions of mathematics education. We highlight this work not to praise ourselves, but to acknowledge that there is still much room for PME-NA to grow.

PME-NA has made great strides in the past 41 years regarding its stance toward equity and research that seeks to rehumanize mathematics education, but we also see new challenges and opportunities in the future. In the table following this statement, we outline some accomplishments in PME-NA's history, and areas of growth among three categories: inclusion, engagement, and vision.

### **How can we extend our vision for equity?**

To reiterate, equity is not a singular goal with a prescribed endpoint; we see equity as a state of existence comprised of perpetual expansion and de/recentering. Thus, we look at what is yet to come, toward future shifts in norms and practices that will decenter whiteness, patriarchy, and other hegemonies in which we exist. We propose the following two ongoing aims as a starting point for making sense of the complex and unending work in which we have chosen to engage: (1) recentering education in mathematics education, and (2) recentering equity and criticality.

*We must recenter education.* For all of our field's past conversations about where the mathematics is in mathematics education (e.g. Battista, 2010; Confrey, 2010; Heid, 2010; Martin et al., 2010), a question which has been occasionally weaponized and leveled at equity researchers in our field whose work is perceived to foreground equity and social justice at the expense of normative mathematics, we have expended minimal effort in asking the companion question, "Where is the education in mathematics education?" Drawing focus to this question provides a rich opportunity to critically interrogate our own practice. For example, we should consider how we can have a meaningful impact on a broader audience by using methodologies that promote a holistic model of education. If we posit that conversations about education do not occur in an echo chamber, then we should analyze how we diversify the tools we use (e.g., philosophical and ethnographic methodologies), the voices we hear (e.g., whose voices can pass the review process), and the voices that might hear us (e.g., the affordances and constraints of various publication outlets).

*We must recenter equity and criticality.* Because no research is neutral, all research must grapple with adopting a political position. Equity, as we broadly view it, can function as an ethical guide in navigating this tension. Thus, to construct ethical research, all research can and must concern equity on some meaningful level. Additionally, to be research, all research must be critical. We echo the sentiments of Patel (2016): In order to advance [mathematics] educational research, we must begin "with an intentional reckoning with the worldviews used to formulate, conduct, and share research" (p. 20). Though this suggestion carries multiple meanings, and though these meanings may be different for different people in different contexts, one of the unifying messages it promotes in light of what has been said above is that we must consciously reckon with, but not cater to, the fragility of privilege. Words such as "neutrality," "compromise," and "gentleness" are the refuge of privilege and injustice, though we recognize the pain that can accompany critical engagement with such myths of praxis. Mathematics, education, and the various intersections and extensions thereof are profoundly complex and profoundly human. Hence, any sense that is to be made of either must be made with the humility of consciously acknowledged humanity.

**Table 1: Accomplishments and Areas of Growth**

Theme	Accomplishments	Areas of Growth
<p><b>Inclusion:</b> Welcoming and making spaces for members of our community that have previously been othered</p>	<p>Offering bilingual sessions, multilingual proceedings, and interpretation services</p> <p>Encouraging graduate students to participate and play a role in the organization (e.g., steering committee, plenary speakers, local organizing committee)</p>	<p><i>Encourage more linguistically diverse submissions to honor the many ways we can communicate our work</i></p> <p><i>Continue to push graduate student ideas and visions to the forefront, offering them more presenting opportunities, and making the conference more affordable</i></p>
<p><b>Engagement:</b> Attending to and connecting with current issues affecting our field</p>	<p>Inviting critiques to dominant US educational research perspectives (e.g., intersectionality as a research methodology; informal messages such as post-it notes to offer critique)</p> <p>Establishing mentoring sessions to connect graduate students and early career faculty with more seasoned scholars</p> <p>Promoting working groups that address multiple areas of equity and social justice</p> <p>Hosting PME-NA at a wide variety of venues across North America</p> <p>Establishing travel scholarships for students and those with little institutional support to attend PME-NA</p>	<p><i>Open additional spaces for critiques to be disseminated more widely and to encourage more participation in the conversation (e.g., encourage more diverse plenaries that highlight the voices of LGBTQ+, immigrants, and people with disabilities)</i></p> <p><i>Create opportunities for these ideas to move beyond working groups and into the bigger conversation about the research of mathematics and mathematics education</i></p> <p><i>Create more networking and mentoring opportunities among members of PME-NA</i></p> <p><i>Bring the cost of the conference down and</i></p>

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		<i>seek more opportunities to host outside of the US</i>
<b>Vision:</b> Looking forward to ways PME-NA can grow in its orientation around equity for the future	Opening PME-NA to include a wide variety of stakeholders in mathematics education  Creating opportunities to engage in networking and socializing as a community	<i>Consider who we are still leaving out of the conversation. (e.g., district and administration leaders; specialists and coaches)</i>  <i>Reflect about the nature of networking and socializing events and the norms that perpetuate a marginalization of those who may not identify as participating in the work of equity in mathematics education</i>

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### References

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## PME-NA EQUITY STATEMENT, JUNE 2020 UPDATE

The PME-NA Equity Statement is a living document and must continually be updated. As the PME-NA Steering Committee has to make decisions about the future of the 2020 conference in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, we must recognize an even more sinister global epidemic: *racism*. Our earlier enactment of equity comprising Inclusion, Engagement, and Vision is not enough. Today, the global demonstrations for justice for Black lives lost to murder, like George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Riah Milton, Tony McDade, and countless others, remind us how mathematics educators' work for equity is not enough if their work is not specifically anti-racist and focused on action to dismantle racism as it exists in our schools, institutions, and even our own organizations, such as PME-NA.

We present here actions that could be characterized as critical, not just to examine the way various worldviews connect in our research, but to prioritize anti-racism and actions that destroy racism as crucial to our research.

1. Examine the role of racial privilege in your own research and the theoretical frameworks you use. For instance, are students categorized as low, medium, and/or high students, based on historically-racist mechanisms used to assess mathematics achievement? How does your work redirect and re-conceptualize research [and practice] away from deficit depictions of knowing and learning?
2. Unearth how anti-Blackness might exist within your research paradigms. For instance, does your work reiterate a deficit-oriented focus on the achievement gap, without critically analyzing the historical ways that “gap-gazing” depowers students of color? How does your work deemphasize and disrupt the “gap” rhetoric as a focus of mathematics education research? How can we question the current frame of the “achievement gap” in mathematics, such as presenting mean scores by racial categories?
3. Scrutinize how voices of color are featured in your work. How are these voices untokenized, so they speak on issues beyond equity and racism? For instance, how does your research group or your institution not just give access to scholars of color, but systematically engage them to really do the work of mathematics education research? How does your work disrupt the racial exclusions within scholarly citations?
4. Closely listen to, reflect on, and internalize research that is not like yours or involves scholars who hold different social identities than yours. How do you listen to learn rather than to evaluate or critique? For instance, how can your understandings of what is and what is not valid in mathematics education research be connected to your social privileges and networks? How does whiteness as the invisible, normal culture permeate the ways you view and take up research that comes from a different experience?

We, as the PME-NA steering committee, understand the many uncomfortable feelings and emotions that have surfaced as the demonstrations for justice continue. And we take the stance that, within the work of mathematics education research, Black Lives Matter.