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A Century of Leadership in Mathematics and Its Teaching

Forward-Thinking Orientations for Mathematics Education

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Continued on next page

TABLE OF CONTENTS
(Continued)

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

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NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Meeting the Social-Emotional Needs of My Students During the Pandemic Through the Use of Activity Lists

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Teaching mathematics during the pandemic as a high school teacher and instructional coach has been a transformative experience in prioritizing my students' social-emotional needs. To teach effectively in a virtual environment, I employed my knowledge of new and familiar technology—both to connect with students and to help them connect to each other. This was important since students expressed feelings of isolation from the lack of daily in-person contact in school. Social-emotional learning (SEL) has now become a priority in my approach to teaching mathematics. I felt this was essential for students' sense of belonging and emotional readiness to learn mathematics.

I attended workshops on hybrid teaching in the summer of 2020. My greatest takeaway from the training was the use of "activity lists." An activity list is a set of differentiated tasks that students can choose from to engage in the content at their own pace. In the 2020-2021 school year, I adapted and implemented activity lists in my classroom and used them as a vehicle for SEL. My activity lists are Google Docs that provide students with instructions and links to resources for each lesson. The lists also include learning objectives, check-in or kick-off activities, and written reflections about the content. Students can choose a modality to learn content (i.e., instructional videos, readings, small-group mini lessons in a separate Google Meet) and optional activities to extend the learning. I include SEL activities (e.g., guided meditations, mood meters) in the check-in portion of the activity lists before introducing new content. These activities built a community in my classes and provided a forum for students to address their emotional health.

In March of 2021, I surveyed the students to get general feedback about the course format. They expressed that they found comfort in consistency and options available for engaging in the course. A fully remote student commented, "I really like this format and having the ability to choose how I learn. It makes it easier also having a separate link available [to attend small-group mini lessons] for any questions that come up. I love the check-ins that we do." A hybrid student commented, "I feel like, this year especially, structure is needed, and I think this class in specific does have structure."

In summary, my use of activity lists has created an instructional experience for students that has enabled them to engage in SEL activities and control their learning by choosing a modality, path, and pace that meets their needs and learning preferences. In addition, this approach provided the structure and consistency students expressed was needed during this difficult time. Post-pandemic, I plan to continue my use of activity lists with an emphasis on SEL.