Author conversations

On engaging students

Eric Gaze
Bowdoin College

Honestly, for me, those have been my proudest moments — when faculty members have come up to me at conferences and said, 'You know, thank you for the curriculum that you developed. I just love teaching with that curriculum.' And you touched so many more lives, right, through the teachers who are using your materials.

When I'm working with students, I see what they're struggling on. Every week, I give my students articles to read so we talk about important public policy issues. The one that we were working on a couple weeks ago had to do with waiting periods for gun control. So it's an important public policy issue, right? And it speaks to, what is sort of the mathematical experience students need to fully participate in that conversation? And the article talks about — there are certain states that do have waiting periods, and gun violence has dropped by 17% in those states. Which essentially amounts to about a reduction of 36 deaths per average state. I mean it was sort of a dense sentence, right?

So again, I want my students to understand the argument that's being put forth by the authors of this article. And yet they get lost in the minutiae of all of those statistics. It's so easy for them to get turned around. And so what I try to do as an author, or as a teacher, is figure out — what is it that's sort of catching those students? What is it that's preventing those students from fully understanding the argument that's being put forth? This argument that involves statistics. And then, how can we scaffold the mathematics for those students? So again, they understand the argument, but also so that they can participate in the conversation.

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