

Deliberate Innovation

Marcus Deja, Kent ISD & MCTM Recording Secretary
MarcusDeja@kentisd.org @DejaMarcus



How are you feeling at this moment as you prepare for a school year like you have never experienced? Stressed? Anxious? Paralyzed? These emotions, coupled with uncertainty, release cortisol into our bodies that tell us that something is wrong and that we need to get ourselves out of the situation. Although we may not be able to physically relieve ourselves of the current stressors, we may find the path we are looking for through shifting our mental perspective.

Recently a fellow Michigan Council of Teachers of Mathematics (MCTM) educator named Diane Owen-Rogers shared a question she heard from Dr. Tonya Matthews from Wayne State University that continues to reverberate - **"How can we move from creative coping to deliberate innovation as we enter the school year?"** Shifting our perspective towards accepting the current situation and the triggers that this year will bring towards one of "deliberate innovation" is liberating. What might be your deliberate innovation for your personal self and your professional self as you recognize this time as an opportunity ripe for new vision and new actions that include the advancement of learning for ALL students?

Adrienne Marie Brown in the book "Emergent Strategy" expounds on this idea in stating "How we live and grow and stay purposeful in the face of constant change actually does determine both the quality of our lives, and the impact that we can have when we move into action together." What actions or innovations might we engage and amplify this year? In what ways will you make your beliefs explicit to yourself and others and act in accordance to these values?

COVID has further exacerbated the inequities that exist within our societies. Mathematics education is but one lever that we may pull to recreate environments that are more equitable and inclusive; and therefore antiracist. A mathematical advocacy organization, TODOS, recently published a document titled "A Mo(ve)ment to Prioritize Antiracist Mathematics." This document, in part, calls on "leaders in mathematics education to rethink collective action. We have to reimagine the role of parents working with

teachers and school systems." How might you bring upon subtle, or seismic, shifts to integrate the voices of parents and caregivers to be partners in the planning and implementation of their child's learning? What avenues could be co-designed to bring their perspectives into the learning plan?

Part of "creative coping" is trying to get back to the nearest sense of normalcy we experienced in education. Virtual or face-to-face, we know the old normal is far from what we are currently experiencing in classrooms. Additionally, we know our students and children are sponges and are integrating these experiences in profoundly acute ways. How do we want them to remember the school year of COVID? What awareness and skills do we hope they integrate? Trust, appreciation, grace are a few skills we can authentically foster. Let's keep learning mathematics, let's just do it in a community where students know their classmates have their back and can lean on each other in a time of need.

As emails continue to roll in and schedules continue to shift, challenge yourself to put the screens down and ask yourself what deliberate innovations you want to see? Don't be afraid of what lights a fire in you. Instead, write that idea down and continue to clarify that vision. Bring others into that vision and be vulnerable enough to take action towards it by talking to your principal or bring it up at a staff meeting. You owe it to you students to pursue this passion. More importantly though, you owe it to yourself.