

# Learning & Teaching

*Mathematics Teacher: Learning and Teaching PK-12*, is NCTM's newest journal that reflects the current practices of mathematics education, as well as maintains a knowledge base of practice and policy in looking at the future of the field. Content is aimed at preschool to 12th grade with peer-reviewed and invited articles. *MTLT* is published monthly.

## ARTICLE TITLE:

## AUTHOR NAMES:

## DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER:

 VOLUME:  ISSUE NUMBER: 
**Mission Statement**

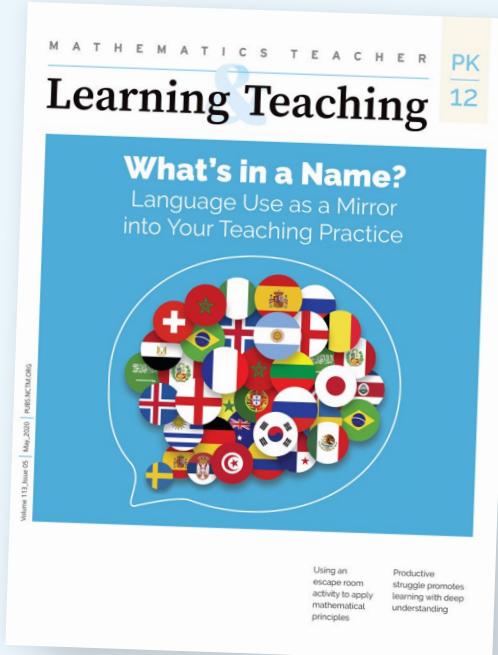
The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics advocates for high-quality mathematics teaching and learning for each and every student.

Approved by the NCTM Board of Directors on July 15, 2017.

CONTACT: [mtlt@nctm.org](mailto:mtlt@nctm.org)



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
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# Learning without Borders

Ear to the Ground features voices from various corners of the mathematics education world.

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Jenise Sexton

We were not created to operate within silos; we were meant to relate to one another. This idea is so essential in our classrooms, especially during times of social unrest and social distancing. In my opinion, being intentional in creating opportunities for students to relate to one another will be the pivotal point of this era of COVID-19 and racial injustices. When you believe in something deeply, it should drive you to action. My action can be seen through the focus of our outdoor classroom.

We meet outside, in a nearby recreational park, under a pavilion, to relate to one another about something we have in common, engaging with mathematics. We call it Math Preview Group because we preview concepts students will encounter within their classrooms. But it is so much greater than previewing mathematics concepts. It is relating to the conceptual ideas, making mathematical connections,

and becoming mathematically literate children of color.

We banded together in 2019 because students began to embark on a new journey, middle school. The start of sixth-grade mathematics has the potential to catapult students into a mathematized world that would bring about a love and understanding of the beauty of mathematics or a disdain for that which seems unrelated. A determination not to allow the latter to happen was the fuel that continuously stoked the mathematics flame.

Displaying the beauty of mathematics calls for explicit connections among each member of the relationship, mathematics, and students. And believe it or not, this cannot be done without first there being a relationship between the instructor and the students. In figure 1, students work with partners to play Zip, Zilch, Zero to reinforce their understanding of zero pairs and

adding integers. Opportunities like these provide a window to see the thinkers, engagers, and communicators they are, gaining insight into their sense of humor, any reservations they may have, experiences they have had previously, and how they relate naturally to others. Plans can be created to meet them where they are, as they are, and for who they are.

To begin our time together, we hook students by using a game or hands-on activity to get them excited about what is to come and connect their thinking to what will be discussed during our hour together. For example, in figure 2, students play Expressions Twister as an opener for working with combining like terms. As we go through the lesson, explicit connections among concepts are made between and among student thinking and mathematical ideas. Oftentimes, mathematical recordings or visual representations are

**Fig. 1**

Pairs of students compete in the game of Zip, Zilch, Zero.

**Fig. 3**

Students translate concrete mathematical representations in their Math Preview Group notebook as they make sense of how Algebra Tiles™ are tools to display algebraic expressions.

**Fig. 2**

Expressions Twister is an engaging activity for students to reinforce their understanding of the parts of an expression.

captured (see figure 3). Students recorded work with concrete manipulatives as a mathematical representation in their dedicated Math Preview Group notebooks. They are encouraged to use any takeaways from group in their regular classes.

Follow the journey of these young mathematicians at <https://jenisesexton.com>.

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Jenise Sexton, [jenisesexton12@gmail.com](mailto:jenisesexton12@gmail.com), serves as the Mathematics and Special Education Content Integration Specialist at the Georgia Department of Education. She is passionate about ensuring that each and every learner's needs are met and believes that when students' needs are met, they will succeed.

doi:10.5951/MTLT.2020.0286