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Guest Editorial

Egan J. Chernoff

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Math Ed Reviews The Popularization of Mathematics

Egan J Chernoff¹
University of Saskatchewan

Almost 25 years ago now, immediately after I bungled a seemingly simple probability problem—in front of my fellow math majors at University College of the Cariboo, to boot—I made my long walk of shame over to the library. On the way, in my head, “Martin Gardner, Martin Gardner, Martin Gardner...”, so I wouldn’t forget. Once in the library, a mishmash of my relationships with the human Librarian, card catalogue, little slips of paper, public pens and pencils, and a lot of walking between book stacks, I finally found it. What I found that day in the library was, technically, Martin Gardner’s “Mathematical Games” column, which was always published on the last few pages of (seemingly every copy of) *Scientific American*. What I had really found, though, was a portal to the popularization of mathematics. I’ve been obsessed ever since.

During my subsequent stretches as an education student, high school math teacher, math ed graduate student and sessional lecturer, and now professor of mathematics education, I have differently dabbled with the popularization of mathematics, which I continue to read, definitely. I’ve even had and have (e.g., Chernoff, 2021) regular columns of my own, which attempt to popularize math ed and the teaching and learning of mathematics. I’ve also noticed a few things over the years.

The first thing that I’ve noticed is that, relative to mathematics, there is (barring notable exceptions) a dearth of well-established popularizers of mathematics education and the teaching and learning of mathematics. However, I do see (read: wish) popularization of math ed becoming better established as the field ages. Second, the math ed community is rarely drawn upon, relative to mathematicians, to review popular accounts of mathematics. To remedy the latter, I have, in this special issue, drawn upon the strengths of many colleagues to review 29 popular accounts of mathematics. As you will read, they do so from perspectives well-rooted in the field of mathematics education, which has, I contend, resulted in a unique contribution to mathematics education *and* the popularization of mathematics. Lastly, I wish to notice that pulling together a decently sized project such as this one during the COVID-19 pandemic was no easy task. Thank you to those colleagues that helped me pull this all together. To the many colleagues who dropped out of the project for various reasons and at various times, I have left one, out of the originally planned for 30, reviews in your honour.

References

Chernoff, E. J. (2021). The Metre as a Metric: Canada’s COVID-19 Conversion Kerfuffle. *Canadian Journal of Science, Mathematics and Technology Education*, 21(3), 571-595.

¹egan.chernoff@usask.ca