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MATHEMATICS AS (DOUBLE) GATEKEEPER, STUDENT AS BORDERCROSSER: A CASE STUDY

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In this paper, we consider “unjust uses of mathematics” (p. 15) for one student at a large public university in the southeastern United States (Stinson, 2004). We focus on the oppressive and withholding functions of one particular mathematics assessment as Jamesha attempted to cross the border into teacher education.

This case study traces the story of an undergraduate middle grades preservice teacher who was provisionally accepted into an urban teacher residency program for her final practicum and student teaching year, and then subsequently denied access to the program due to low scores on a mathematics entrance exam. Though Jamesha’s areas of concentration were language arts and history, she was required to pass a program admission assessment in mathematics that required knowledge of advanced mathematics in order to gain official entrance into the middle grades program and move forward in the urban residency program. After two failed attempts to pass the math exam, Jamesha studied alongside peers and professors and worked through test prep materials she and others had purchased. She took the test three more times and still did not receive scores high enough to “pass” the exam. Jamesha was removed from the residency program and denied admittance into the teacher education program. She was forced to change majors and in the following semester, she failed all of her classes outside of the education department. Jamesha remained determined to become a teacher; she decided to take the assessment a 6th time and reenter the education degree program.

In our consideration of this case, we utilize a poststructuralist lens (Foucault, 1981/2000) to think about mathematics as “gatekeeper” (Stinson, 2004) as well as mathematics and ‘teacher’ subject position construction, complication, and negotiation (Britzman, 2003; Davies, 2003). We pose and consider the following questions: How does mathematics assessment function as a border to teacher education for non-mathematics teachers? How is a student’s subjectivity constructed through assessment? “How does school mathematics as gatekeeper function? Where is school mathematics as gatekeeper to be found?” (Stinson, 2004, p.16).

The poster will map some of the ways that the mathematics program admission assessment functions as a gatekeeper for Jamesha. We will also consider how Jamesha’s subjectivity as teacher and mathematician was (re)constructed by the assessment, as well as how her subject position as a student in a large university affected her navigation and negotiation of the structures in place in the teacher education program and subsequently in her alternate degree program.

References