

How to Use This Book

This book consists of forty-one relatively independent messages intended for many audiences—teachers, families, teacher educators, and other leaders. Each message presents a discussion of an issue or challenge related to school mathematics or to the broader system within which we teach at the elementary and secondary levels. The messages are threaded with stories from my experience with teachers and students. My observations and recommendations have emerged from my compelling need to make sense of and put into context what I read, see, hear, and learn from others.

This may not be a book you read from front to back, but I encourage you to read all of it eventually. Feel free to read the messages in whatever order you choose, based on which issues challenge you, which topics resonate with you, or which titles appeal to you at any particular moment. Each of the messages connects to other messages in various ways. You might choose to follow a path suggested by the related messages listed at the end of each piece, rather than reading the messages in numerical order.

The messages are arranged in three parts, each with a slightly different focus. Part I encompasses overarching, global issues especially appealing to a general audience, including policy makers and those outside of education, as well as curriculum developers and school leaders. Part II targets school and community issues relevant for local decision makers and communities. Part III looks more closely at issues of interest in schools and classrooms, especially for teachers. Throughout each part there are messages that reach across all audiences, as we all deal with issues and decisions that affect mathematics teaching and learning in and out of the classroom.

Together, the messages address many of the issues we face in school mathematics, but they are not intended to present a comprehensive overview of the entire area of mathematics education. Rather, they are intended to stimulate personal reflection and interactive discussion, sometimes around delicate topics not always addressed in school settings. Accordingly, each piece concludes with reflection and discussion questions for teachers, families, leaders, and policy makers. To continue the discussion, these questions are followed by the list of related messages, as well as a list of further readings, consisting of books, articles, websites, and so on related to the issues, themes, or stories in the message. In keeping with the emphasis on stimulating reflection and discussion, I have included a range of readings that sometimes present different or opposing points of view.

I hope the reflection and discussion questions help you process the ideas presented in the message, reflect on how you agree or disagree, and consider possible actions to take in your classroom, school, or community. For those who support others in learning and leading, I hope you will also use these questions as you work with groups of teachers, future teachers, teacher educators, coaches, families, administrators, or other educational leaders to challenge the status quo and to consider how we might take action to change the system where it needs to change.

I have proposed many ideas related to the challenges we face in our classrooms, schools, communities, and nation, and many more ideas can be generated as others engage in the discussion. But turning ideas into solutions that work in any particular setting calls for committed and coordinated dialogue, planning, and action. I hope these messages stimulate, enhance, and reinvigorate the work that dedicated educators and citizens undertake to reach the goal of a high-quality mathematics education for every student.