

ZMATH 2011e.00112

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‘Sometimes I think wow I’m doing further mathematics ... ’: Balancing tensions between aspiring and belonging.

Atweh, Bill (ed.) et al., Mapping equity and quality in mathematics education. Dordrecht: Springer (ISBN 978-90-481-9802-3/hbk; 978-90-481-9803-0/ebook). 285-298 (2011).

Summary: What can the particular context of ‘further mathematics’ tell us about conceptions of quality and equity in mathematics education and their changing interactions over time? Further mathematics A-level is a traditional gate-keeper qualification in the United Kingdom, but many state schools lack the resources to teach it. A national project to widen participation has promoted further mathematics and allowed students to opt in to out-of-school classes. In this chapter, I argue that choosing further mathematics links quality and equity to understandings of the self as individual project and narrative. I show how the promotional texts of further mathematics use metaphors to sustain and address tensions between quality and equity. Drawing on interviews with one student, I identify how these representations of further mathematics intersect with liberal ‘practices of the self’. I argue that quality as depth is a powerful construction that inevitably disables students from understanding themselves as belonging within further mathematics.

Classification: B10 D20 A40

Keywords: advanced mathematics; discursive practices; identity; interviews; neoliberalism; participation; educational policy; equal opportunities; educational research; questioning; sociocultural aspects; choices; FM Network; advanced level courses; poststructuralist perspective
doi:10.1007/978-90-481-9803-0_20