

EDITORIAL

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Fire is burning away forests and cities, floods are washing away coastlines and fertile land, glaciers, ice sheets and permafrost are melting away and disease has left us alone in our homes. You did not open up the pages of *For the Learning of Mathematics* to be reminded of these depressing facts. What has this got to do with learning mathematics? This is an important question. What role do mathematics educators have to play in addressing the challenges our species and our planet are facing?

As Editor of FLM, I ask myself, what role should and could FLM play? I believe that the long-term solution to our problems is education—education towards the aims FLM has. These aims are to generate productive discussion; to encourage enquiry and research; to promote criticism and evaluation of ideas and procedures; and to increase awareness that living together in societies and on a finite planet are complex enterprises about which much remains to be revealed and understood. However, many of our problems must be addressed immediately. So, what else could and should FLM be doing?

In terms of our immediate impact on the climate, I see limited possibilities. As with most of us as individuals, FLM's main impact is due to travel. I travel to meet with the board of the FLM Publishing Association once a year, and to academic conferences to scout out likely contributors. This year, all this travel was cancelled due to the COVID pandemic and we now know that we can manage some aspects of academic life without flying across oceans to do it. So, how much travel is justifiable?

One area where it might make sense for FLM to become more involved is in the (mis)use of mathematics in the media. I have been struck since the beginning of the pandemic by the wide variation in the quality of reporting of COVID statistics in media: a Norwegian tabloid newspaper [1] presents graphical representations that were good to begin with, and have improved steadily over time; in contrast, the BBC news regularly presents misleading information, insisting on comparing numbers of cases between countries, ignoring population differences, and offering graphs with inconsistent scales [2].

Social issues that have simmered for a long time are now boiling over in many places. Resistance against sexism, racism, and discrimination based on sexuality have become more visible. These social movements have also raised issues in academic publishing.

A group of editors of mathematics education journals has begun to meet to discuss how biases in the reviewing process might exclude scholars of some racial and ethnic backgrounds, and I am involved in these discussions. One question to be considered is the process of selecting reviewers. At FLM, we normally choose reviewers who have

published articles in FLM, as these authors have experience with our review process and have some sense of the style of article FLM publishes. This process means that any biases in our community are likely to be perpetuated, excluding people who are unfamiliar with those standards.

A related issue is language. When I applied to edit FLM, I informed the Board of FLM Publishing Association that, "I would seek to increase the geographical range of submissions, especially from non-English speaking communities." FLM only publishes articles written in English and French. The vast majority of the articles published are in English. This inevitably limits access to scholars from other linguistic backgrounds. In this issue, some of the authors work in non-English speaking countries, but almost all come from Europe or North America. My efforts to increase the geographical range of submissions have had limited success. We could publish articles in more languages, but we must also consider the needs of the readers. FLM aims to be a journal that is worth reading from cover to cover, and the more languages are included, the more readers are excluded.

The lack of geographical diversity is due to a number of factors in addition to language. Writing for FLM requires authors to be familiar with its style, and not everyone has access to the journal in its physical form. Our feedback on unsuccessful submissions encourages people to read articles on the website, but that is a different experience than sitting down with an issue and seeing all the articles as a package. There are also biases that arise from the composition of the advisory board and editors. Most of us come from English speaking countries and from North America and Europe. Part of the role of the editors and members of the advisory board is to look for potential submissions, but we are more likely to notice prospective authors in our vicinity.

Editors of journals spend time thinking about how ideas are expressed. Changes are evident in the pages of FLM that reflect wider societal changes. For example, in the early issues it is common to find 'he' used to refer to a person of unknown gender. In later issues, constructions such as 'he/she', 's/he' and 'they' are used. As we recognise the right of people to identify with their chosen gender, including a non-binary gender, 'he/she' and 's/he' become problematic and these constructions are used less and less in FLM's pages. Such changes in language have to be done carefully, as editors must also be sensitive to the needs of their readers who may not have English as their first language.

I welcome comments from readers about the role you see for mathematics educators and journals of mathematics education.

Notes

[1] See <https://www.vg.no/spesial/2020/corona/>

[2] See <https://www.bbc.com/news/coronavirus>