

Mathematics education can mean disempowerment or empowerment. It does not contain any strong 'spine', but could collapse into rigid forms and support problematic features of any social development. However, mathematics education can also contribute to the creation of a critical citizenship and support democratic ideals. The socio-political roles of mathematics are neither fixed nor determined. In this sense I talk about mathematics education as being critical.

I see critical mathematics education as a preoccupation with challenges emerging from the critical nature of mathematics education. Critical mathematics education refers to concerns which have to do with both research and practice, and a concern for equity and social justice being one of them. Here I want to refer to the following challenges: (1) How do processes of globalisation and ghettoising frame mathematics education? (2) What does it mean to go beyond the assumptions of Modernity? (3) How should 'mathematics in action', including a mixing of power and mathematics, be interpreted? (4) What forms of suppression can be exercised through mathematics education? (5) How could mathematics education provide empowerment?

Such questions reflect an uncertainty with respect to the possible socio-political functions of mathematics education. Facing this uncertainty, this aporia, is a characteristic of critical mathematics education. This cannot be based on any political or epistemological foundation. Our situation is similar to those who need to construct a ship while swimming around in the open sea.