

Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

Dan Meyer (00:00):

Okay, we are recording. Hey folks. Welcome back to Math Teacher Lounge. <laugh>

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (00:06):

Hardly off to a rocking start.

Dan Meyer (00:06):

Yeah. Yeah. <laugh> Did you like my energy there? Hey folks. Welcome back to Math Teacher Lounge. It's a new season with your host Dan Meyer. And...

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (00:15):

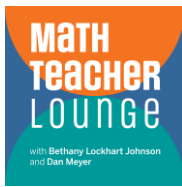
I'm Bethany, Lockhart Johnson. How's your summer Dan?

Dan Meyer (00:22):

Summer for me feels really hectic as we prepare, here at Amplify, for the new school year, and everyone's starting these new math programs. So I've been feeling quite amped up, like usual in the summer. But also, my kids started big kid school. So I've been seeing the educational system from the role of a parent and all the anxieties and I worry, will I be my kids' teacher's most annoying parent <laugh> ... So what kind of math curriculum you using? Oh, have you heard of core counting? Can I lead a math center? What's this worksheet about? I'm really worried my kids are just overall gonna hate my vibe when I come around their classes. Uh, <laugh> so lots going on with me.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (01:06):

It's already happening for me and I have a toddler.



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

Dan Meyer (01:10):

<laugh> There we go. Anyway, that's what I'm up to. That's how I'm feeling. I'm curious how you're doing. We haven't chatted in a while. We're excited about the podcast, but it's been a bit, you know? Bethany got a break from me and my antics over the summer. So, how are we finding you here, as we ramp up to the new season?

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (01:24):

Uhhhh. Well, let me just tell you, I have a toddler. That's kind of all I need to say. Except that's not all I will say. Of course, I'll say more. I am exploring, I'm dipping my toe into the extracurricular toddler activities; the music classes of the toddler world, the creative movement of the toddler world. And yeah, I have lots of opinions and lots of things to say about the teachers. And I'm like, Ugh, I can't wait to be room mom. And just like...<laugh>

Dan Meyer (01:55):

Just let it rip, you know?

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (01:57):

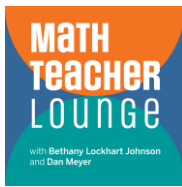
I have opinions on everything and just hope I don't get kicked out of the class.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (02:05):

It's been an eventfully recharging summer and we are ready for this new season. And in fact, we're so ready that we decided that we were gonna mix up this season. Just a, just a tiny bit. Shall I explain Dan?

Dan Meyer (02:21):

Yeah. Let's do it.



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (02:22):

So we have loved all the different topics that we have explored in the Math Teacher Lounge world, but we kind of feel like we need to do some more deep dives. So for this season and the foreseeable seasons ...

Dan Meyer (02:38):

We'll see how it goes.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (02:38):

Let's stick with this season. For this season. We're going to be exploring a singular theme.

Dan Meyer (02:46):

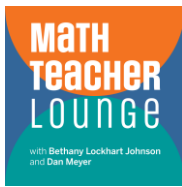
We're not bouncing around. Yep. We're not bouncing around from a guest to guest going on whatever shiny thing in the river bed catches our eye. We're gonna take one theme and see where it goes. What we working with here this season?

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (02:57):

This season, we are going to be exploring the idea of joyful math, joyful math. And Dan, the question I have for you is, is the term joyful math one that you use on the regular?

Dan Meyer (03:10):

No, it definitely is not. I think that joy and math are very rarely, you know, connected in the popular mind. Number one, and number two, you know, I'm kind of an ornery fellow, so that's not my natural kind of description of math. But we decided that it feels like an important one at the moment, because a lot of math teaching--a lot of teaching in general, math teaching in particular--math teaching is often not a joyful discipline for students, where, you know, I've done some research where you look at what people type into Google. And I looked at like, what



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

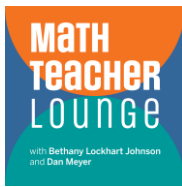
they...why am I bad at X? And I looked at that for where X is math, where it's science, where it's reading, where it's history. And it was just wild to see how many more hits there are out there on the Internet for "why am I bad at math?" People don't really associate math with joy, but also we're looking at joyful math in terms of joyful math teaching. Math teaching, teaching in general, is a tough field at the moment with a lot of teachers leaving teaching. And those who remain are having a lot of soul searching and thinking about, why am I here and how do I sustain this work? And in an environment that seems hostile to my interests or my talents, or work-life balance. And so that'll be the theme that we're gonna kind of uncover over the course of our season, talking to various interesting guests, including one today about, yeah, joyful math teaching and joyful math.

Dan Meyer (04:43):

And to help us think about what joyful math teaching looks like, we figured we'd first look at what UN-joyful math teaching looks like. It happens to be the case that we've been in a pandemic as you might be aware, and teaching has been challenging. And the NEA, our National Education Association, surveyed its member teachers and asked them the following question ... Gave a list of issues that school employees have experienced and asked, for each one indicate how serious of a problem this is for you. This is a survey where more than half of members said they are more likely to leave or retire sooner than planned because of the pandemic. And this is almost double the numbers from July, 2020. It's really hard to keep track of teacher departures and unfilled vacancies across states. So I don't wanna like blow this up out of proportion, but it does indicate some real challenges in teaching. So Bethany, I was curious, what do you think like at the top of the list, like what kinds of factors, issues facing educators would you imagine there are?

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (05:48):

So if I'm to understand you correctly, these are reasons someone is not actively experiencing joy in the profession of teaching. Like why would they leave?



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

Dan Meyer (05:58):

Exactly.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (05:59):

Well, the number one thing that came to mind for me, well, okay. Wait, wait, one other caveat I need to ask about, you said specifically pandemic-related or just in general, because if it's pandemic-related, then I think, well, there's health issues, right? That people are concerned about, but in general, the thing that came to mind was a lack of support from administration districts, lack of funding, and overcrowding in classrooms. Like, you know, I saw somebody had 40 students in their classroom. So those are the two things that I can imagine like top on someone's list that would make them experience less than a joyful day.

Dan Meyer (06:44):

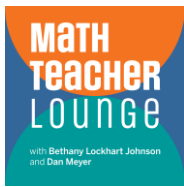
Yeah. There's a bunch of you're kind of identifying here. So number seven on the list is lack of respect from parents and the public, which is like 76% of teachers call that out as serious for them. Others that you kind of circled around in terms of resources go like, not enough planning or unstructured time in the job kind of ties into resources. Yeah. But there's others that are on the list that I'm curious, you wanna take on the swing at it, given what I've said here,

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (07:15):

I feel like too much being asked of them, like being asked to wear too many hats, like they're being asked to not only teach their class, but also cover all the vacancies and supervise recess and, you know, make a delicious, nutritious lunch. That's what came to mind. Am am I close?

Dan Meyer (07:33):

Yeah. Number four on the list, unfilled job openings leading to more work for remaining staff. People covering, you know, not just the kind of external to teaching



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

work like you're describing, but also just taking on like losing your prep period, to take on a class that has been unfilled for all kinds of reasons. Yeah.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (07:54):

Yeah. I've only gotten the fourth. Give me one clue, one clue about ...

Dan Meyer (07:59):

So, I mean like, so number one is general stress from the coronavirus pandemic, you know, which I feel like ...

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (08:06):

I mentioned that.

Dan Meyer (08:07):

I'll give you that one. Yep, yep, sure. And then number two, close behind, is feeling burned out, which I think ties into what you're describing as well. I'm giving Bethany credit on that one. The third one is very different from the ones you've been describing. I think I cannot in good faith give you even partial credit for this one. I'll just say it. Student...

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (08:28):

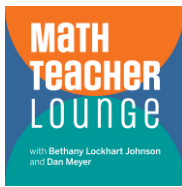
Wait! Dan, this is not how you give clues.

Dan Meyer (08:31):

Here's a clue. It's student absences due to COVID19. It's really hard to deal student absences. That's your clue.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (08:40):

That wasn't a clue that you told me.



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

Dan Meyer (08:43):

Yeah, let's see. I think that's largely it. There's also pay is too low, is on the list; student behavioral issues, on the list. And I think that about covers it. So all of that, that basket of items has led to more than half of teachers in this survey, saying that they're more likely to leave or retire from education sooner than planned. And I don't know. I think we all know teachers who have bailed.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (09:08):

I've never played a board game with you, Dan, but if we ever play a board game, we're gonna work on your clue giving, 'cause I want to keep guessing. And you just told me.

Dan Meyer (09:22):

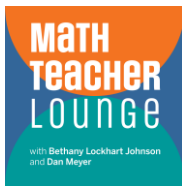
Yeah. Yeah.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (09:22):

In all seriousness, the <laugh>. In all seriousness, I think yes, the stress of the pandemic and students being absent, what some folks are calling unfinished learning, all of those pieces do play into it. But a lot of those things that you're mentioning on the list are things that are not unique to the pandemic, right? Like those are things that I feel like there is some modicum of control that we could have over shifting the way the culture of the teaching profession is going so that we could create a more joyful experience for educators, administrators, and students.

Dan Meyer (10:03):

Yeah. Good call out. That's exactly right. We could tax the people who are not in the classrooms more and increase the pay to classroom teachers. You know, there we go.



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (10:11):

Oh. Bingo. Why didn't we ask you sooner Dan, for your wisdom.

Dan Meyer (10:15):

Yeah. I'm ... solved by Dan. Yeah, good point though. So I read that and yeah, I think that there's been some ... people have critiqued the NEA for being very alarmist about teacher departures as the year has ramped up. It has not been quite the flood of departing teachers as was predicted and thank heavens for that, but we should still be very bummed if teachers are unhappy and wanting to leave and feel like they can't leave. That is definitely not good. So we were really excited to bring to the table, someone who is just a very joyful teacher and one in a very intentional way. Someone who has a lot of discipline in how she approaches the job and the students in it and tries to create a joyful environment for herself, Kanchan Kant. Kanchan is a math and computer science teacher at Newton North High School in Newton, Massachusetts. She's been sharing her love for math with her students for the past four years, while also being instrumental in setting the culture and ethos of the math department at her school in her role as the assistant department head. We welcome you on the show Kanchan to help us understand joy and math teaching. Thanks for being here.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (11:29):

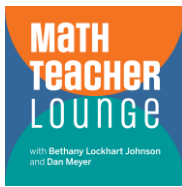
Welcome!

Kanchan Kant (11:30):

Thank you for having me. I really appreciate it.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (11:33):

One of my friends, her son was asked as his first math homework assignment to write out his math bio. And I loved that idea because we got to hear a little bit about your bio from like a broader perspective. But if we were to ask about your math bio,



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

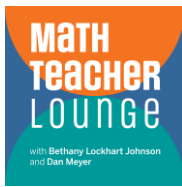
I will speak for myself to say like, automatically certain images flash into my mind, right? To think about my relationship, my evolving relationship with math. But I'm so curious if I was to ask you, what's your math bio? How did you become the person, mathematically speaking, that you are today? Would you mind sharing a bit about that?

Kanchan Kant (12:10):

Of course I would love to. So I was born and raised in India and I belong to a family which considers mathematics to be extremely important to succeed in life. My father used to have me add and subtract license plates since I was four years old, when we were out and about. I loved math in school, it just made like complete sense to me. It was logical and you know, it was my favorite subject. I loved it all through high school. I had a confidence speed breaker in undergrad. When in my second semester I almost failed the engineering math course that I took. That was the first time math felt like too much and not like my best friend, which it was supposed to be. So it was a while before I could summon the courage to take on another math course in college.

Kanchan Kant (12:56):

But once I did that, it was like old times. I realized I had to persevere through the challenging bits. And once I did that, it started to make sense again. And through my journey, as an educator speaking to people from various backgrounds and like coming to the United States, I realized that math is challenging for everyone at one time or another. For some people that is elementary school. And for some others, it is college or even later. Either way does not mean that you are not a math person. When I was in college, I felt I was not a math person. Whereas my sister, my very own sister said the same thing about math in middle school. Both of us use math every day. And we are definitely, definitely math people. So for me to be a math person is to persevere, to approach problem-solving in a logical manner, and to find the joy in the process, as well as the answer.



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

Dan Meyer (13:47):

That's wonderful. Yeah. A lot of people, have a moment where they feel like almost betrayed by what they thought was a close friend of theirs, with math, where it's like, wait, I thought we were tight. You know, I thought we were cool. You and me. And there's that moment. And I wonder if that's been a useful moment for you to, you know, bring back now and then as a teacher with students who might feel that even, you know, in high school or in a secondary school as a kid.

Kanchan Kant (14:15):

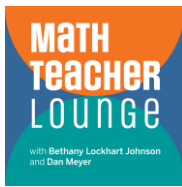
Absolutely. Like when I talk to students and tell them, yes, I had difficulty in math too. It has not always been easy for men and there are still things I struggle with sometimes, then it's like more modeling for them that you have to persevere, you should persevere. And once you do that, it makes sense and you can feel successful. So, almost every year I end up sharing the story with my students.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (14:38):

There's so much value in that, right? That you are sharing that vulnerability with students. And to say your relationship with mathematics has not been, you know, smooth sailing the whole way through. There were times when you had to work harder than others.

Dan Meyer (14:55):

Yeah. Really fun to hear about you and your father as well. I tried to ask my five-year-old to do some skip counting the other day, like, okay, cool, you're hot stuff. You can count, you know, up by ones, but what about by twos? And the moment really fell flat. And I watched myself becoming the kind of parent who is whose enthusiasm for math is one day resented by his children. I feel a lot of, yeah, I felt your anxiety Kanchan, with math itself. And now I feel anxiety as like someone who loves math and loves to teach math and may one day alienate the people closest to him. <laugh>



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

Kanchan Kant (15:31):

I don't like that future. I have a three-month-old. I do not like this future of mine. If I have to go through what you're going through. Uh, oh, <laugh>

Dan Meyer (15:38):

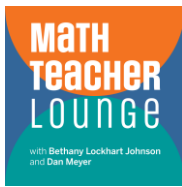
You got this. So Kanchan, you're going back to the classroom coming up here at the time of this recording. It's a few weeks out. And we're thinking about like the kind of ways that math teachers sustain a disposition that is joyful. How are you feeling right now, as far as going back to class after this summer? Are you feeling excited, anxious, some combo, tell us about it.

Kanchan Kant (16:01):

I would say combo, but more excited than anxious. I was on maternity leave, as I mentioned, before the school year ended, and I missed the students dearly. Like, my students are what gives me hope in the darkest times. They are thoughtful. They're empathetic. They're so eager to learn. And very soon into my teaching career, I realized that if I take the time to get to know my students and make them feel safe and seen in my class, teaching them math would be so much easier and so much more fun. So I'm a little worried about this being like fourth year into the pandemic, but let's see. Last year I felt the students were finding it difficult to interact with and work with their classmates because they had not been doing it for so long. So I'm hoping this year would go a little better and I'm really looking forward to working with them and building community and see how it goes.

Dan Meyer (16:53):

So if I'm understanding you correctly, you are feeling very well recharged here. You had basically an extended summer with this maternity leave, basically just like a lot of rest and relaxation over the last, like several months. Um, if I get you here. So



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

anyway, I'm glad for that for you. And, yeah. I also hear you on the difficulties of teaching post pandemic or mid pandemic. Anyway, thanks for sharing that.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (17:19):

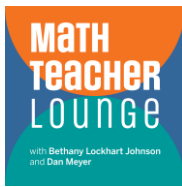
What I love is I hear you being so intentional, like thinking about those relationships and thinking about that community that you want to build, you know? How do you hope that you're gonna cultivate joy in your teaching this year? I mean like, are there certain routines or disciplines that you specifically call forth or that you think other teachers should think about?

Kanchan Kant (17:41):

So at the start of every school year, I dedicate like about three to four weeks to set up the classroom culture, both social and academic. I call my classroom a learning community. We start with community circles, we do icebreaker activities, group building and all those kinds of things. But most importantly, we do a lot of collective problem solving. So I try to present students with problems, which can be solved using multiple strategies and have multiple entry points, basically they are low floor, high ceiling problems. These could be stretch problems that they have seen before, like concepts that they already know or logical puzzles, or just wrapping their heads around different problems. Then I have students share their strategies. The more strategies they have on the board, the more successful I think the problem was. Every year, inevitably, students come up with strategies that I've never ever seen before for the same problems that I do.

Kanchan Kant (18:35):

And so I have students come up to the board, they would share their strategies. If they're not ready for that, they would walk me through their strategies. And I would write their name on the board with different colored markers and everything. Basically to give them choice and agency. It also shows them that the process of doing the problem is so much more important than just getting the right answer and that it is okay to make mistakes in our learning community. I use a lot of



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

vertical whiteboards, some concepts and problems align so well with the vertical surfaces, especially when students can explore together, learn from each other. So I do a lot of that. As for routines, I would say consistency is the key. I consistently reinforce that I want to hear multiple strategies, that it is okay to make mistakes. I am willing to learn from you as much as you're willing to learn from me. So all like that consistency in culture more than the routines, is I feel important to bring that joy.

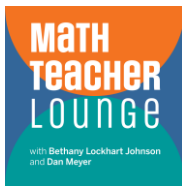
Dan Meyer (19:29):

That's super interesting. Thanks for that. So I've heard, I hear two common objections or two common concerns to using rich tasks or doing problem solving. And I think I heard like answers to those two common reservations within what you described there, but I wonder if we can kind of bring it to the surface. And so one of the reservations is around the time that those problems take and another is that teachers often feel like, well, I might be surprised, you know, I might not know what to do with what a student does. And I thought I was hearing like some very interesting answers to both of those kinds of reservations from you, but would you just surface those up if you have some.

Kanchan Kant (20:09):

So in terms of time, I feel if I spend the time at the beginning of the year, setting up that community and doing those problems, it makes learning the math and learning the concepts much more faster throughout the rest of the year. And even when I am trying, like, even throughout the year, if we are doing a warm up problem, as I call it, which has multiple strategies, that's gonna clarify so many more concepts when we talk about those five, 10 strategies of doing the same problem, then going through multiple problems to clarify those concepts. So for me, it actually saves time instead of taking more time.

Dan Meyer (20:43):



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

Hmm. That's super interesting. It's an investment I'm hearing from you that, yeah, you might not be hitting the curriculum quite as hard early on, but that all of a sudden you're in the spring and it's like, oh wow, we've been moving so much faster through territory that has been more challenging. What would you say to you know, comfort concerned educators or to address the concern that I don't know what I'll do with these five, 10 different strategies. You say, I always see strategies that I've never anticipated. Like, it's a good thing, you know, like you're happy about that. I think that's a very intimidating thing for lots of educators. What would you say to that?

Kanchan Kant (21:19):

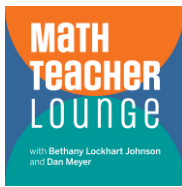
I think like, for me, it's a good kind of discomfort. That means like a student is teaching me something, which is actually doing two things. One modeling for them that I'm willing to learn and that I don't know everything. And two, also telling them that they're mathematicians. They know what they're doing. They're not just receivers of math, they're actually creating it. So for me, that is very, very important.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (21:43):

I love that so much. When you think about your students and you're about to start this new school year, how do you hope your students will experience math in your classroom?

Kanchan Kant (21:53):

So I hope my students can see the beauty and joy of math. They can see that math is a way to see the world and not as something we have to do to get through school. So my hope for my classroom is that we can learn to problem-solve and persevere through problems and learn from each other and not just get through the curriculum. Because like, I think math is a wonderful way to learn these skills, which are so important when you get out of high school. Most importantly, I just wanna make sure that my students see themselves as mathematicians. And like one of the things that like I have to share with you that, because one of my



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

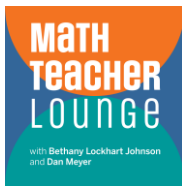
highlights for the year has to be the Desmos art project. I do it every year for the past three years, I think since I've started teaching sophomores. And I do it as a unit assessment for functions and my students design something that is meaningful to them, using all the different kinds of functions and colors and shading and everything that you can think of in Desmos.

Kanchan Kant (22:49):

Thank you so much for that though. It is such a cool way for me to see them do that. Like I have seen such amazing creations. One of my students once made a scaled working model of a solar system wherein the planets were rotating at relative speed. The Saturn had rings and they were like asteroids and everything. And then it was beautifully done. Then there was another one who did a very, very detailed whale scenery, her reasoning. I wanna be a Marine biologist and I wanna study whales. So this is what is meaningful to me. So like that one project is just a culmination of everything that I want students to see in math and in my classroom. And like I do more of those kinds of things, but that is one thing that it's one of the highlights of my year.

Dan Meyer (23:32):

That's awesome. I love hearing that. Yeah. Shout out to the team at Desmos Studio for building and continuing to develop a tool list that so good for art and animation, even, in addition to some mathematics with a more computational kind. Yeah, that's really exciting. What's interesting to me is that you teach high school, and I think that like students at that age have a very well-defined sense of what math is and who they are as mathematicians. And then along you come, you know, and like offer this really interesting disruption, you know, in their sophomore year of high school that like, oh, this can be totally different, this relationship who I am. And that's just really exciting. I imagine it's a very surprising year. I would imagine that first month, I would imagine is a very surprising month for a lot of your sophomores.



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

Kanchan Kant (24:20):

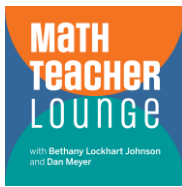
Yeah, it is. I mean, that's why I take that time to build that community because then that sets the tone and the relationship that we're gonna have for the rest of the year. Students get to know how to work with each other. They get to know each other, that whole piece is like super important because of that.

Dan Meyer (24:35):

Yeah. That's awesome. So here's the thing, like we're exploring these ideas about joyful math teaching and what it will take to cultivate restore, reclaim joy in math, teaching this next year. And you've offered us these really interesting ideas some, some very, you know, philosophical and some technical about how you spend time in ways that lead to joy in the spring for you and your students. Love that. We don't want to as hosts, as researchers, investigators of this joyful math teaching idea, we don't wanna say it's all up to teachers to change their mindset, to do different technical practices, and that will lead to joy. We also wanna be really attentive to the environment that surrounds you, the people who are around to support you, the policy makers, the social structures that influence your joy in very significant ways. So what we would love to know from you is, how are you supported by the greater educational community in keeping your joy in your work? I'm thinking, especially about administrators, you know, front office, staff, parents, even, can you name a few ways for those sorts of people who listen to this podcast, how they can cultivate a math teacher's joy this coming year?

Kanchan Kant (25:54):

I would say trust. I think more than anything, educators want administrators, parents, the greater educational community, to trust them to be professionals and experts in what they do. That does not mean that we don't want to learn, that we don't want feedback, that we don't wanna get better. It just means that we keep the wellbeing of our students as our top priority. And we would like to be trusted to do just that. Also just keeping in mind that whether we like it or not, we are still adjusting to the new normal while recovering from the worst of the pandemic



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

times. A lot of us are recovering from trauma, a lot of our students are recovering from trauma, and we need time and space for our social and emotional wellbeing.

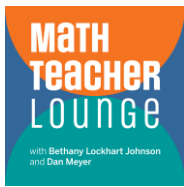
Dan Meyer (26:35):

Yeah. I'm really curious, Kanchan, you've done a lot of work in your area with your grading team and in thinking about equitable and biased resistant instruction. I'm curious how you see those efforts lining up with creating joyful math learning conditions for all students, not just students from a dominant culture of math doing, let's say.

Kanchan Kant (26:55):

For me, creating an equitable environment in a classroom is most important because once you have that, that's when you have the relationships, that's when you have the culture, that's when all students actually thrive. So to that end, our school and our department has been doing a lot of work around grading practices. We actually assess how we grade students, where the bias is, what we can do to make them more bias resistant. Should we move to mastery based grading? Like that's something I've been experimenting with for the past two years. Through the pandemic, I started doing mastery based grading so that my students can get more opportunities to show that they have learned the content. And so like just little things which help bridge the opportunity gap. I would say another project that our school undertakes is called the calculus project wherein we have students in Black, Latinx, and low income families sign up for that and are recommended for that. And then we do summer classes and yearlong support to preview the material for next year, not as a remedial class, but to actually set students up for success in AP classes for the coming year. So we have the community buildup. We have the courses we have like math support. It's a very beautiful thing actually. And I've been working with that program for four years now. So yeah, so those are my ways of creating more equity in our school.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (28:19):



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

That's so beautiful and I deeply, deeply wish you had been my high school math teacher. And I have to say that the theme that I kind of keep hearing is this intentionality. How you are so intentional about your work, not just with what your students are learning, but how they're learning it, how they are engaging with this subject and how they are building their own relationship. You talked a little bit about your relationship over the years with mathematics, but how are your students building that relationship? And so I'm just very appreciative of you sharing that with us and with our listeners. And we are so excited to have learned a little bit about, like, I feel like I got a little mini peek into your classroom.

Kanchan Kant (29:03):

Thank you.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (29:04):

And can I say that if you are listening to this prior to October at NCTM Los Angeles, you will get to hear Kanchan Kant speak at Shadow Con. Can I give that away, Dan? Is that, is that ...

Dan Meyer (29:23):

You can drop that. Yeah, It's pretty top secret.

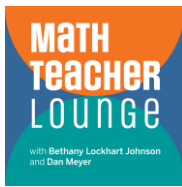
Bethany Lockhart Johnson (29:26):

Can I drop it?

Dan Meyer (29:27):

Yeah. Do it. Yeah.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (29:28):



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

Dan and I will be in the audience cheering you on. It's been a joy to learn with and from you, and we are so excited to just, you know, kind of keep marinating on some of these ideas about how we can continue to be intentional about creating joyful math spaces for our students. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Kanchan Kant (29:49):

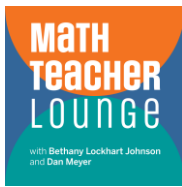
Thank you so much. It was a real pleasure.

Dan Meyer (29:57):

So Bethany, I loved hearing Kanchan talk about both her, just her joyful personality, but how she cultivates joy through craft and technique through, you know, through the various ways she interacts with students in intentional ways, that those make the job more joyful for her. And I thought it was really interesting to hear her talk about how autonomy is the thing that she needs most in her job environment to feel like she can be joyful in her work. In that context, I saw ... something on Twitter popped up for me in my, you know, my many Twitter wanderings. This is a segment we might call, Dan finds something on Twitter and shares it with Bethany. Which we'll tighten that up a little bit, but I'm sending this over to you right now, and I'd love to know as you check this out, what you're seeing and what you're thinking and we'll chat about how it relates to our interview here in a moment.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (30:47):

All right. I'm ready, send it over. It's opening. So this appears to be a document by the way, outlining, maybe it's a district, maybe it's administration, they're outlining expectation type and expectation guidelines. Hmm. Okay. And these are lesson plan expectations. Expectation type. Timeliness. Plans are due no later than 6 p.m.. Friday prior to the week of instruction. Comprehensive, all activities for the week for all subjects taught should be included and complete by due date and time. Plans should have at minimum, the following, see template for detail. Okay. So then it goes through the things that the plans need to have, the topic title, target, the objective, the activities, the sequence, the display agendas to be displayed backward design. Okay. So basically <laugh>, we were just talking about,



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

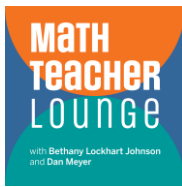
overwhelm. And when I see this document, listeners, have you ever received something from your administrator or anyone, let's take it more broadly, that is requesting something of you that would take so much time to complete and be so out of touch with your lived reality that it really genuinely sucks the joy out of the experience.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (32:25):

So the first thing that I see that this document, and again, the goal of whichever district's plan this is, is that these expectations will lead--now, mind you, I am a fan of like, you know, looking ahead, I'm not a like, oh, hey, what am I gonna teach in five minutes? No, but the idea that then it lays out all of the things in such detail that you're gonna be teaching feels like one of those pacing guides where, oh, move on to the next page, whether or not your students have any sort of sense making whatsoever. So my first thought is, oh, sad. I have to stay here. I'll be there past 6 p.m. But I'm gonna be there trying to make the plans for the next week based on what I think my students have learned. Hmm it's sounds like a little bit of a bummer. Dan, what did you think when you saw this and did I do a fair description of what it is?

Dan Meyer (33:25):

No, it's, it's a tough one to describe, 'cause it's basically a wall of text and commands from an administrator who like, I just have to imagine has just like acres and acres of teachers trying to beat down their door to teach at this school, if this is how you're gonna treat your teachers. I mean just, yeah. The idea of having a week... I'm with you, you don't wanna just like, just jump in by the seat of your pants, but the idea of having a full week of lessons for every section you teach, every prep you teach, planned and submitted with every minute, basically morseled out to different goals. It says down here, you gotta like, for all of these, download a CSV of grades and whatnot and attach those. It's the sort of thing, like you said, there are some edicts that you get from administration where you just have to laugh or just like, you have definitely missed like what I am willing to do here. It's so



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

far beyond. Yeah. I can't imagine it. And it just felt like, yeah, it was a great way to get teachers like Kanchan to feel like a real lack of autonomy. Like it's this would not work. I don't think.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (34:33):

And it's not even like willing to do. Like, let's say you're even willing to produce it. Let's say that me, the rule follower is like, okay. I'm gonna attempt to meet these demands. One, most teachers were just, you know, they probably would put baloney down there anyway. Not saying that I would, but I'm saying like, it's clearly just a hoop that they're having to jump through and two...

Dan Meyer (35:04):

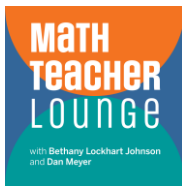
Yeah. Compliance, right?

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (35:05):

Yeah. Compliance, compliance. There you go. And two, yeah, it feels like it's about control and not trusting the teacher. And I love that. Kanchan said that trust is what she needs. Right? You're hiring me. Yes. I still have lots to learn, but you're trusting me and you're creating an environment where I can continue to learn from and with my students. And if I was being asked to submit this tome every Friday before six, that is predicting, what does it say, anticipating the steps necessary for student mastery? You know, I kind of feel like maybe it's like that one or two teachers where maybe they feel like, oh, I don't trust that teacher or that teacher isn't doing a good job, whatever. We better do this for all of the teachers, but then it's not gonna change the practices of that one teacher and all the other teachers are gonna be resentful.

Dan Meyer (36:00):

Like if there was like feedback that came back to you on, you know, on lesson plans or there was some like something that was very constructive or productive, like



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

maybe that would be different, but it really just feels like these are gonna go into a digital drawer somewhere and not be looked at, at all.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (36:15):

Yes. The digital drawer. Like I'm gonna send you this report and then nothing is going to happen with it. Except that four hours of my time. Well, you wouldn't do it, but <laugh>...

Dan Meyer (36:29):

You've worn me down. You've worn me down. I'm now putty in your hands and more compliant for the next thing. And I also just wanna shout out the administrator today, who I emailed asking about like a teacher participating in a project and this administrator said, I have a standing policy not to email teachers over summer break, which you know, as administrators out there doing just the good work, you know, trusting teachers, watching out for them, trying to be a force multiplier for teachers, making the road wider, the way easier for teachers. So shout out to y'all doing the out there. Really appreciate that.

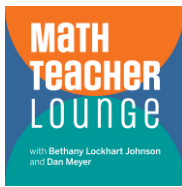
Bethany Lockhart Johnson (37:04):

Okay. Wait, wait. About that email thing, quick question. Did you ever check your email over the summer?

Dan Meyer (37:11):

Uh, yeah. That's one way in which I was the, you know, I just love email, you know? Oh. Someone wanted to reach out. Oh, oh, Banana Republic wants to tell me about new clothes that are on offer. <laugh> I mean like, it's just, I love those personal emails. So yeah, I did check my email over the summer.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (37:26):



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

Somebody emailed me recently and they emailed me at like two in the morning. And because I currently have a toddler, I received the email at four in the morning because you know, the best thing to help myself fall back asleep is to hop on my phone, right? Like I'm already up trying to get my toddler back to sleep. I might as well start scrolling. Anyway, so the person had this little thing at the bottom of their email and it said, I have, something to the effect of, I have really like wonky work hours. I may be sending this outside of the like more standard nine to five. But please don't feel pressure in any way to respond outside of your time. Would you appreciate that, seeing that or does it make you feel like you should respond? 'Cause I almost responded at four in the morning, and maybe that says something about ...

Dan Meyer (38:15):

They're telling you not to respond.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (38:16):

I know it was helpful.

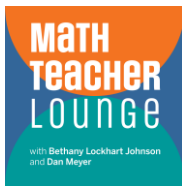
Dan Meyer (38:18):

It says don't, but you're like, what if they're saying that because they really expect me to respond and this is one of many ways that you and I are different. I'm always happy to see that.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (38:29):

Do you respond? I've texted you in the evening because you know I have some wonky hours. Do you respond to things, like where's your boundary there? Or when you were in the classroom, where was your boundary there? Did parents have your phone number?

Dan Meyer (38:43):



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

No. I gave kids my cell phone number for a couple years and it was a wobbly experiment. But parents will email, you know, back and forth with you. And I think the best thing to like ... I love just like adding some friction, some latency into the kind of the chain, you know, like I hate going like back and forth, like da, da, da, da, and then like respond and then da, da da respond. And it just like goes back and forth. So just like just sitting back for an hour or two hours, you know, not responding, just let someone cool down, calm down. Email just gets you more email. That's like if you send an email, you are just making it more likely to get more email. It's a, you know, it's a problem.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (39:20):

Are you one of the zero people?

Dan Meyer (39:23):

My inbox is at zero. Most days before work.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (39:26):

You're joking!

Dan Meyer (39:28):

I end work every day with inbox, at zero.

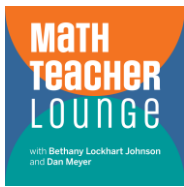
Bethany Lockhart Johnson (39:31):

You're joking!

Dan Meyer (39:32):

That's just, you know.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (39:33):



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

Who are you?

Dan Meyer (39:34):

You know, you should take my life coaching, Bethany. I'll give you a discount since we're math teacher, lunch pals. But, um yeah. I can help.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (39:44):

Thank you for qualifying where our pal-dom lives. I wouldn't even tell you how many are in my inbox. Point is, if you are actively starting the school year, we celebrate you and we are here and over the next few months, we're gonna be diving into joyful math and that definition's gonna keep evolving. But I wanna say something that is making me feel a little joyful, Dan. You ready?

Dan Meyer (40:15):

Tell me.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (40:16):

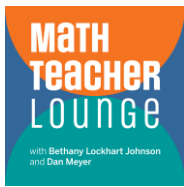
You and I, in person, at NCTM, the National Council for Teachers and Mathematics. It's coming up and we are going to be recording Math Teacher Lounge, live. Live, in person! And I hear there's gonna be like a t-shirt cannon and there's gonna be, you know, like musicians marching through the aisles or something.

Dan Meyer (40:46):

A marching band?

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (40:46):

A marching band!



Math Teacher Lounge transcript
Season 4, Episode 1
Joyful math teaching with Kanchan Kant

Dan Meyer (40:46):

Trained animals. Yeah.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (40:48):

But the point is, I'm so excited, Dan. And you know, when I see you, I might just, it's been so long since I've seen you, Dan. I'd love to give you a big old embrace.

Dan Meyer (41:04):

You might just, you might just cry. Yeah. Yeah. It'll be great. Yeah. It's gonna be awesome for you folks to see me and Bethany have a real awkward first hug since the pandemic. And, uh, but it's gonna be a blast to hang with us in person. We'll have some special guests, probably, some interesting segments. You folks should stop on by at NCTM, if you're gonna be there. Highly recommended.

Bethany Lockhart Johnson (41:29):

Now, we will be broadcasting that episode. You're gonna get to hear ... we're gonna record it live. It's gonna happen. In the meantime, you can find us at MTLshow on Twitter, or you can find us in our Facebook group, Math Teacher Lounge. We can't wait to hear from you. And we'd love to hear what makes math joyful for you? Where can we add a little bit more joy to you this, this season? So thrilled to be back. Thanks for listening.