Twitter Thread by George Stone



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What do you think your students might draw if you asked them to draw a mathematician? What if you asked them why someone would hire a mathematician?

This study asked exactly that to 470 year 8's across 5 countries. The results are depressing. But also hilarious.

Thread...
1/n

Here are some of their drawings:
"an old stain, he's too lazy to wash his shirt" "fat from doing nothing but maths".

2/n

This student drew a mathematician that is apparently a devil teacher...

3/n

This is umm... concerning

4/n

"You should all know this"

5/n

I think this drawing is a role reversal...

6/n

"A mathematician reduced to teach in pre-school"
Don't forget these students were asked to draw a mathematician not to draw a maths teacher.

7/n

Now the depressing parts. The gender difference is striking. These are year 8 children and their image of a mathematician is overwhelmingly male.

8/n

One female student drew a female and wrote "I drew a woman mathematician because there seems to be only men mathematicians and I wanted to depict a woman doing the work a man usually does. My drawing is of no particular person"

9/n

The study was conducted in 2000 and the authors suggest that the reason the UK children drew the most female mathematicians was because of the prominence of Carol Vorderman on Countdown.

10/n

Then students were asked “If you have a leaky tap or faucet, you need to hire a plumber; if you break your leg, you need the services of a doctor. List below all the reasons you can think of for which someone would need to hire a mathematician:”

11/n

While there were many reasonable answers (see table below), others included "no one would be as stupid to hire mathematician" and "“He will do my homework and go to school in my place" and "I don't know".

12/n

It was clear that the students in the study didn't actually know what a mathematician was or what they did. "As our analysis proceeded, we came to conclude that as far pupils of this age are concerned, mathematicians are essentially invisible"

13/n

How often do we really tell our students what mathematicians do? Do they know that maths has many open & unsolved problems? How do we represent mathematicians? Why would so many students draw maths teachers as such authoritative or such foolish characters?

14/n

Interesting to reflect on these points as maths teachers, mathematicians and members of society as a whole.

Read the full paper here https://t.co/Oiwa7dlSCu