

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY IN LEARNING TO TEACH MATHEMATICS

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The current environment of reform in the United States, prompted in great part by calls published by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, has created the opportunity for those who are learning to become teachers for the first time to partner with experienced teachers who are learning to teach in a new way. For the past four years, the Learning to Teach in a Reform Environment (LTRE) project has been investigating this learning process for six secondary school mathematics teacher education students from Western Michigan University. During their two-semester pre-intern and one-semester intern teaching experiences, these students partnered with teachers from a school that was implementing the Core-Plus Mathematics Project (CPMP) curricular materials. They also attended two week-long summer workshops with teachers from the school to learn more about teaching the CPMP curriculum effectively. The partnership was designed to provide three key benefits beyond a traditional field experience: 1) including the preservice teachers in a community of learners that had made a commitment to continually improve their teaching to meet the challenge of current calls for reform; 2) putting the preservice teachers in classrooms with teachers who were learning to teach an innovative mathematics curriculum; and 3) ensuring that the field experience was consistent with the teacher education coursework at the university.

Extensive interview and observation data was collected from the participants during their pre-intern and intern teaching experiences and follow-up data was collected through their second year as full-time teachers. In this short oral presentation, results of the analysis around the issues of community will be discussed. These issues include: the effect of participating in a community that is in the process of redefining itself, the different nature of discussions depending on which members of the community are present, and aspects of the community that the interns sought out or tried to recreate in their permanent teaching positions. Looking at these issues leads to a better understanding of the role of community in optimizing the benefits of field experiences.

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