

DEVELOPING A MATHEMATICS EDUCATION COMMUNITY IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Paola Sztajn
University of Georgia

When highlighting the ten most important principles from research for professional development, Clarke (1994) listed as one of these principles the notion that professional development opportunities should “involve groups of teachers rather than individuals from a number of schools, and enlist the support of the school and district administration, students, parents, and the broader community” (p. 39). Since the early 1990s, educational researchers have highlighted the importance of working with schools as organizations (Fullan, 1990), considering schools as a unit of change (Wideen, 1992). Teachers working together and sharing their mathematics teaching experiences are the tenets of Project SIPS (Support and Ideas for Planning and Sharing in Mathematics Education). This is a school-based professional development project to help teachers improve the quality of their mathematics instruction by building a mathematics education community within their school.

SIPS began in May 2001 with an Eisenhower Higher Education Grant, after teachers voiced their interest in improving their mathematics teaching. All homeroom teachers at the school and some of the special education teachers have been involved in the project since it started. Several Project SIPS activities have been working towards fostering the development of teachers’ mathematical repertoire and the establishment of a mathematics change support network at the school. As part of the project’s first year, teachers participated in a 4-hour introductory mathematics workshop to all teachers, bimonthly half-day grade-specific workshops during school hours, and monthly mathematics faculty meetings after school. During the project second year, teachers are involved in monthly grade-specific collective planning sessions and mathematics faculty meetings. Teachers also have weekly help from a mathematics resource specialist assigned to the school, opportunities to observe each other teach, and observation sessions followed by debriefing with mathematics educators.

This report highlights some of the difficulties mathematics educators face in working with all teachers in one school. Issues such as trust, time, administrative support, and expectations are at the core of the project’s findings about what it takes to develop a mathematics education community within an urban elementary school.

References

- Clarke, D. (1994). Ten key principles from research for the professional development of mathematics teachers. In D. B. Aichele & A. F. Coxford (Eds.), *Professional development for teachers of mathematics* (pp. 37-48). Reston, VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.
- Fullan, M. (1990). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Wideen, M. F. (1992). School-based teacher development. In M. Fullan & A. Hargreaves (Eds.), *Teacher development and educational change* (pp. 123-155). Bristol, PA: Falmer.