

Exploring Parents' Experiences with Standards-Based Curricula

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Parents may have a hard time relating to curricula that focus on conceptual rather than procedural understanding (Remillard & Jackson, 2006), because such curricula engage students in activities that are different from those that students experienced in previous generations. Therefore, we report on a study in which we explore how parents make sense of such curricula. To that end, we engaged parents with tasks from their children's curriculum. Our report details both the tasks with which we engaged parents and the parents' ways of thinking about mathematics that emerged as they interacted with those tasks. We found that in some cases parents' previous experiences with school mathematics interfered with their ability to make sense of the tasks in a manner consistent with the curriculum authors' intentions. However, we also found that their previous experiences with informal mathematics could be leveraged to support their endeavour to make sense of tasks from a standards-based curriculum in a manner consistent with that intended by the curriculum authors. Nevertheless, we also believe that the school-based tasks used in the study encouraged parents to interpret their children's curricular materials in terms of their own experiences with school mathematics rather than in terms of their informal knowledge. This study contributes to the field's understanding of the complex process of sense making that is necessary for parents (and adults in general) to relate to standards-based mathematics curricula, and it raises questions about how parents might be supported in that process.

References

- Remillard, J. T. & Jackson, K. (2006). "Old math, new math: Parents' experiences with standards-based reform." *Mathematical Thinking and Learning*, 8(3): 231–259.