

The Common Core and the Professional Development of Teachers.

The appearance of the Common Core and its apparent acceptance by the States creates the need to attend to the issue of its acceptance, interpretation and implementation by the U.S. teacher corps, especially at the secondary level. This issue cuts both ways. On the one hand teachers need to be supported and encouraged as they take ownership of Common Core and its implications for curriculum and classroom practice. On the other hand, teachers and educators will collectively need to mediate the differences in content emphases and norms of practice that will inevitably emerge if the Common Core, especially at the secondary level, is to become a guide for the mathematics learning of all our students, for example, both for students preparing for mathematics-intensive careers and students who are not.

Common Core presents a political opportunity with major implications for professional development for teachers. There are some parallels with the post-World War II era during which the nation's awareness of the need for advanced mathematics and science presented an opportunity for the research mathematics community to establish and professionalize itself. One could argue that the current era presents an analogous opportunity to the community of mathematics and science teachers to enhance their profession in similar directions. Career-long professional development is the norm in the mathematics profession. The profession continually educates and enhances itself through scholarly books and papers, conferences, peer reviews and a host of other mechanisms. The result is perhaps the finest system of graduate education and mathematics research in the world.

Analogously we have before us currently the opportunity to use the nation's gradual recognition of its need to attend to the teaching of mathematics and science as an opportunity for the teaching community to advance its own professionalism. Again the goal would be establishment of norms of professional excellence, adequately rewarded and recognized, generated and maintained primarily from within the profession itself. Particular goals and strategies would have to be worked out in conjunction with the teachers themselves, but might well include articulation of a professional career ladder, with advancement based on superior practice, standardization of mentoring and internships requirements and practices, and provision of time and opportunities that allow for analysis of practice and the production of resources for colleagues. Of course these are all things that would require working conditions that permit a modicum of continuing scholarship, review, and reflection on practice. That will not happen in a day, or, on a large scale, even in a decade. But the call that gave birth to the Common Core, and the powerful political and economic constituencies that made that call, create a realistic opportunity to set the process of achieving that ultimate goal in motion.

The sheer size of the profession, as well as political and sociological realities, dictate that a system of career long self-improvement, advancement and recognition of

excellence must, in the final analysis, be brought into being and maintained by the profession itself. This is the norm not only in academia, but also in most professions that have moved into positions of societal esteem and influence in our history. The rest of us can, and indeed should, act as enablers, much as colleges and universities acted as enablers for research mathematics a half century ago. But teachers themselves, through leadership from within their ranks, will have to be the engines of change.

We know how to nurture teacher-leaders, to support them as they enhance their own professional competence and skill, continuing to do mathematics, to analyze their practice and to become resources to their peers and the profession. And there are pockets of intelligent, energetic, forward-looking teacher-leaders in many parts of the country, attached to many different programs, initiatives, and individuals, capable of leading continuing professional development for their fellow teachers.

Other professions have done it. Let's begin to identify those with whom we can lay the groundwork for an effort, necessarily small at the outset, to demonstrate what can happen when teachers themselves take control of their professional destiny, with the goals of continual self-renewal, increasing quality, and mutual support and recognition.