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On the idea of learning trajectories: promises and pitfalls.

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Summary: In this paper, I briefly describe the origins of learning trajectories in mathematics education and then consider three points for us to keep in mind as we study learning and apply our findings to serve the purposes of understanding and addressing the problems of practice. 1. The idea that learning progresses is not especially new. What do we know about learning mathematics and how does it fit with the idea of a trajectory? 2. Learning trajectories focus on specific domains of conceptual development and may be limited in characterizing other valued aspects of the mathematics curriculum. 3. Learning in school is function of teaching. Too tight a focus on learning trajectories may lead us to oversimplify or ignore critical drivers of learning associated with teaching. My goal in making these points is not to state the obvious but to foreground the question of what the idea of learning trajectories affords us education researchers and practitioners, and what it might obscure.

Classification: C30 D20

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