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Creating opportunities to learn in mathematics education: a sociocultural perspective.

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Summary: The notion of ‘opportunities to learn in mathematics education’ is open to interpretation from multiple theoretical perspectives, where the focus may be on cognitive, social or affective dimensions of learning, curriculum and assessment design, issues of equity and access, or the broad policy and political contexts of learning and teaching. In this paper, I conceptualise opportunities to learn from a sociocultural perspective. Beginning with my own research on the learning of students and teachers of mathematics, I sketch out two theoretical frameworks for understanding this learning. One framework extends Valsiner’s zone theory of child development, and the other draws on Wenger’s ideas about communities of practice. My aim is then to suggest how these two frameworks might help us understand the learning of others who have an interest in mathematics education, such as mathematics teacher educator-researchers and mathematicians. In doing so, I attempt to move towards a synthesis of ideas to inform mathematics education research and development.

Classification: C30 C60

Keywords: opportunities to learn; sociocultural perspectives; teacher development; community of practice; Valsiner; zone theory; mathematics teacher educators

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