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EARLI SIG 21 Conference – Learning and Teaching in Culturally Diverse Settings

Goteburg, Sweden – May 19th – 20th

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Title: Parental sources for understanding mathematical achievement in culturally diverse settings

Abstract

The last ten years has seen some fairly major educational reform for English schools. The introduction of Standard Assessment Tests as part of the National Curriculum in primary schools has led to a political drive to see more parents involved in their children's school learning. This is partly born out of educational and political concerns for the 'gaps' in children's school performances of different ethnic groups. This paper examines the ways in which parents attempt to understand how well their children are achieving in mathematics in culturally diverse settings. Borrowing from Gallimore and Goldenberg's (2001) 'cultural models' and 'cultural settings', as well as critical-developmental concepts of child development, this paper explores three parental sources of information: (i) the teacher, (ii) exam test results and (iii) constructions of child development. These theoretical positions open for scrutiny new and subjective dimensions of development, which include representations, meanings and experiences. The interviews with twenty-two parents revealed that whilst all of the parents expressed a wish for their children to do well, understanding their child's achievement is like putting together 'pieces of a puzzle' - leading parents to use sometimes intangible sources. Some sources were concrete, such as examination results. Other sources were symbolic, such as the representation of child development, and were less likely to be to be shared with the school community. Either way, these sources were open to parental interpretations and influenced by parents' own experiences and cultural representations.