

Life, Liberty, and Mathematics for All:  
44<sup>th</sup> NCSM Annual Conference  
April 23-25, 2012  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

### **Reflections of One Iris Carl Grant Recipient**

As I typed and saved all my notes from the NCSM conference this spring, I had the opportunity to reflect on everything I had experienced over the three days in Philadelphia. I found that I had focused my choice of sessions on two topics: Response to Intervention (RtI) and mathematics coaching. Between sessions, I had opportunities to network with other math leaders from across the country as well as with some of the vendors.

Last spring the Manitowoc Board of Education created a “math specialist” position. After interviewing two candidates, the administrators offered me this new position. During the interview I had been asked to describe my vision for the role. I believed then, and now, that the teacher in this position has to provide leadership to the district math committee, work collegially with all those teaching math, work collaboratively with the grade 7-12 math department head, and support the growth of teachers’ mathematical content knowledge for teaching.

Receiving the Iris Carl Travel Grant allowed me to attend a conference where all the sessions fit my vision of the role of the MPSD math specialist! It was hard to choose knowing that implementation of the CCSS was imminent in the fall and that a number of teachers were reticent to make a move toward integrating the Standards for Mathematical Practice into their instruction. I felt it would improve my relationships and effectiveness with the elementary teachers if I had more specific instruction in “coaching.” Over the course of the conference, I attended a number of sessions on mathematics coaching and was able to reflect on reasons why teachers find change difficult, things coaches fear that impede their ability to move teachers

forward, and possible “moves” a coach can make when faced with difficult or reluctant teachers. My learning on this topic will continue this summer and next fall as I read resources suggested by the presenters during these sessions (i.e., *Content-Focused Coaching: Transforming Mathematics Lessons* and articles in the “Coaching Corner” of the NCSM website).

My second goal was to bring back information on how other districts’ secondary schools had implemented levels of prevention/intervention and how they had made high levels of math accessible to many or all of their students. I also found many sessions on exactly this topic! I’m thankful so many educators are willing to share their journeys. All of the presentations I attended mentioned a book by Dweck, *Mindsets*, which I hadn’t read and now must. Helping children change from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset was something that all of these success stories had in common. They all had opportunities for students to experience a second “dose” of mathematics instruction and support during the day as well. In some cases the additional math time was spent previewing the upcoming material which then provided students with more confidence as they entered the regular math classroom. In other cases, support math classrooms offered instruction in previously unmastered skills and understandings. Everything I heard aligned with what I had read prior to traveling to Philadelphia: Students must gain the missing conceptual understandings to move forward, but they don’t always need every single skill taught in isolation.

One thing I didn’t expect was the amount of networking I would be able to do during the NCSM conference. Because the meals are sit-down type events with speakers, I was able to talk in small groups with others at my table at each meal or evening reception. I met people from across the country who are working on the alignment of the 2004 version of EveryDay Math to the CCSS and was able to exchange email addresses for later sharing of resources. I met people

developing applications for tablets who had vetted other applications and shared their findings. I was able to share my vision and practice for our newly created math specialist position with others who were trying to plan mathematical professional development for the 2012-13 school year.

Finally, in a smaller setting than the NCTM exhibit hall later in the week, I was able to have lengthier conversations with vendors about the attributes of their current products and their plans for the future. In one instance when the salesperson was unable to answer my questions, she found the author and introduced us. We proceeded to have a 30 minute conversation about aligning newly written text materials to the Common Core Standards!

I know it was unlikely that I would have been able to attend the NCSM Annual Conference as a first year math specialist without the Iris Carl Travel Grant. I know now that the event offers many supports to the math education leadership around the world. I believe that I will take the information I learned this year and build on it. I hope to return in future years to both share information from MPSD's implementation of a math specialist teaching position and to gain knowledge about other successful programs and research concerning providing access to challenging mathematics to all students. I also know a new math leader whom I will nominate for next year's award. Thank you for the opportunity to continue to grow in my understanding of mathematics education.