Students’ graphing activities: Re-presentations of what?

Students’ representational activities are key to their mathematical development. Specifically, students’ representational activities in constructing displayed graphs can afford them the figurative material necessary to engage in and abstract mental operations. In this talk, I draw on Piagetian ideas to frame the sophistication of students’ ways of thinking for graphing. Namely, I illustrate distinctions between those ways of thinking dominated by sensorimotor experience and those ways of thinking dominated by the coordination of mental actions. Against the backdrop of these distinctions, I argue that we, as educators and researchers, need to broaden students’ representational experiences. Instructionally, doing so can afford students increased opportunities to construct productive and generative ways of thinking for mathematical ideas and concepts. In terms of research, broadening students’ representational experiences enables researchers to form more viable and detailed working hypotheses of students’ ways of thinking for graphing and related topics.

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