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Will defend their dissertation on

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Title:

A STITCH IN TIME: UNDERSTANDING THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE MATHEMATICS TEACHING ASSISTANTS AND THEIR SOCIAL NETWORKS

Chair: David Slavit

Abstract:

This qualitative multi-case study examines how culture influences the professional teaching practices of international graduate mathematics teaching assistants (iGTAs) and how their social networks mediate teaching development within a U.S. university context. Drawing on data from interviews, classroom observations, reflective artifacts, and the social network diagrams of four iGTAs at Storm Tide University (pseudonym), the study investigates the nature of their prior teaching backgrounds and the ways culture shapes their instructional practices, professional growth, and adaptation over time. Findings show that iGTAs enter U.S. classrooms with distinct teaching backgrounds that reflect a continuum of instructional readiness shaped by prior educational systems, linguistic and cultural histories, and professional experiences. While these differences influence early instructional confidence, they do not determine long-term teaching development in isolation. Instead, shared institutional structures that include coordinated courses, peer collaboration, and a graduate teaching seminar were found to further mediate early experiences and support convergence toward reflective, student-centered practice. Across cases, culture influences iGTAs' professional practice through five interrelated dimensions: institutional mediation of teaching norms and accountability; societal culture and professional vulnerability; classroom culture as an interactional space for negotiating authority and pedagogical decisions; relational ecologies of professional growth shaped by social networks, mentorship, and career trajectories; and cultural capital in emerging pedagogical contexts, particularly in interpreting students' ambient use of generative artificial intelligence. These dimensions reveal that teaching development is not a linear process of adjustment for iGTAs, but an ongoing process of cultural negotiation, institutional learning, and relational engagement. The study highlights iGTAs as knowledgeable professionals who actively interpret and adapt their teaching practices across contexts. By foregrounding iGTAs' cultural assets and social networks, the findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of teaching development in undergraduate mathematics and offer implications for designing supportive, culturally responsive professional learning environments for international graduate mathematics instructors.