

# Reflections: 2015 NCSM Annual Conference

*Prepared by:*

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This was my first NCSM conference and after being a mathematics leader and coach for the past nine years, I was looking forward to expanding my learning, capturing new and innovative ideas and bringing these ideas back to my school district so I could more effectively coach and mentor our math teachers. All of my goals and more, were met at the conference and as I reflect on this event, I recognize that “Shining the Light on Learning” was a very appropriate theme for this year’s NCSM Conference. I feel very lucky and honored to be selected as one of the three Iris Carl Grant recipients. I thank NSCM for the opportunity and am very excited to return to my work with new information from the experts in the math education field so I can help our teachers reach their full potential in educating our students.

On opening day I found the keynote speaker, Dr. Jo Boaler ‘s presentation profound especially when she said, “The role of praise in encouraging fixed mindset is that students do not persevere. Memorizers are the lowest achievers and the highest achievers are those who think about big ideas and connections. Mistakes grow your brain because a synapse fires when we make a mistake and again when we are aware, we made a mistake. So teachers should encourage mistakes and change classroom culture to openly value mistakes. Superior performance and automaticity is reached when the symbolic linguistic and visual spatial is involved by crossing both sides of the brain.” I was with her till the end when she concluded with the thought that “inquiry math is powerful, when it is open and alive and with a growth mindset, when there is a power of struggle, mistakes, depth not speed, and connections made.” How true and so well said!

The other sessions I attended continued with this thread of growth mindset and brain theory. The sessions provided me with many ideas and hands-on strategies on how to coach teachers. This information will help me encourage teachers to make the shift to the mindset of helping students take the responsibility of being involved in their learning by being the primary consumers of their own formative assessment data. One of the thoughts is by establishing routines for sharing, revisiting learning targets in a meaningful way and by teaching students how to utilize the formative feedback they are given by their teachers to the student own benefit.

As a Math Instructional Support Teacher I attended sessions that focused on providing professional development such as using Flipped PD presented by Skip Fennel, Beth Kobeth and Jon Wray. A Flipped Classroom is where students watch a video created by the teacher. In class, students work with what they are stuck. Flipping allow teachers to help the most needy students. Flipped PD for teachers addressed the when and how of providing teacher professional development. The ideas were very teacher-centered; including short interest burst type sessions, which provide teachers with multiple possible discussion points and reflections. It was an honor to be introduced to Dr. Skip Fennel and Dr. Beth Kobeth during a relaxing evening out and be able to converse with them.

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Dr. Maggie McGatha of the University of Louisville validated my belief that as a coach I have to move from a more directive continuum to a less directive continuum by increasing my own content knowledge, pedagogical skill, leadership knowledge and skills and by being part of an educational system that includes students, parents and administration. Dr. McGatha gave me the encouragement I needed on how to continue coaching my teachers on questioning strategies. She suggested posing questions in plural forms, the use of tentative language, asking open-ended questions, using positive presuppositions, asking higher order thinking questions and using an approachable voice. This type of questioning allows teachers help students make the connection to the standards of Math Practices. The point was reinforced and hit home when we participated in the activity of matching the questions to the math practices. I plan to share these thoughts with other teachers here in Maryland.

Steve Leinwand was entertaining as well as profound in his statements such as: "Great coaches makes a teachers life harder and better". His single most important message was "You work as a coach for kids because the kids need a math advocate". I certainly enjoyed listening to Dan Meyers and as he suggested, I hope at some point in the future we can use the technology available to us today to allow our student to write, own and share their textbooks. His statement "The best way to predict the future is to invent it" was very powerful and insightful.

Dr. Debora Ball spoke about "explicitness" being an uncomfortable place in mathematics education and yet that is what we need in order to create a space where students can experiment with possibilities. She said that requesting is not the same as teaching when rich mathematical tasks and situations are used and students are left to puzzle about them on their own. The videos we watched of teachers in the classroom and the discussions around them was empowering and helped me better understand the practical applications of the concepts she presented.

It was an honor and an experience I will not soon forget, to be seated with the daughter of Iris Carl, Francine Carl Walker and Nanette Seago during the Award ceremony and luncheon. Thank you again for providing me this professional opportunity to learn and grow and the chance to network with amazing and inspirational education leaders. This conference has helped me recognize that I can do more and therefore moving forward I plan to be involve in NSCM as much as I can and also plan to share what I learned at the Boston conference with other teachers here in Maryland. Again, thank you.