Exploring Mathematical Writing in Linguistically Diverse Classrooms

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Abstract: New standards and assessments place increasing pressure on teachers to help students write mathematically, a task few are prepared for. How teachers interpret the push for “explanations” will impact all students, especially those learning math in their second language. This study engaged 3rd-5th grade teachers in professional development over two years, exploring features of mathematical explanation and designing lessons that highlight rhetorical moves of this new genre. Quantitative and qualitative data expose the most valued features of written explanations, the importance of attention to audience, a possible trajectory of students’ writing development, and ways to support bilingual students. This work sheds light on how teachers and students learn what it means to write an explanation, with implications for professional development and assessment practices.