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What do calculus' students think about mathematical theory?

This talk will report on 56 students' perceptions of mathematical theory and what it is useful for. The students were individually exposed to one of four different approaches to teaching a Calculus topic and then engaged in a task-based interview. Based on the data and with the goal of characterizing students' views of mathematical theory and how they (don't) use it for problem solving, 5 categories came up. I will present them with examples of students' statements. The analysis strongly suggests that students view theory only as explanatory and (therefore) unnecessary for problem solving. Furthermore, they don't recognize the role of theory or generalized examples in developing problem solving techniques. We reflect on the (negative) implications of students' perceptions of theory and propose to discuss possible remedial strategies.