



An Educator's Perspective on Evidence of Quality Teacher Practice: Beatriz Mendez

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ABSTRACT

An alumna of UCLA's Teacher Education Program teaching sixth grade math in Los Angeles Unified School District, answers the question - If someone came into your classroom, what would you offer as evidence of the quality of your professional practice and why?

An Educator's Perspective on Evidence of Quality Teacher Practice

Beatriz Mendez
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When you enter my classroom you will notice I am a math teacher who encourages teamwork. My tables are arranged in groups of four, allowing each student to have a shoulder partner. The walls display student work both done individually, as well as in teams. Another wall contains the names of high achievers from each class period. My classroom also includes the basics, such as a display of math words, an agenda, a calendar of the homework and events for the week, an ELMO document reader, and five computers. I want my students, parents, and anyone that may come into my classroom to know that I have a plan. My plan is to let my students know they are expected to be aware of daily activities and work. They are expected to copy and turn in assignments. They are expected to produce quality work that can be admired by anyone. Lastly, they are expected to become conscious that hard work will be rewarded. Nevertheless, real quality teaching consists of more than the room or materials alone. I firmly believe that the seating arrangement, the work around the room, and the technology of the ELMO are only brought to life by the students themselves.

The students give meaning to everything I do. I intricately inform myself about my students through assessments, data, and informal conversations we have during passing periods, lunchtime and afterschool. I analyze the information and consider their strengths and weaknesses and see the type of person they are. Gathering the information creates a profile of the student and I start matching them to a partner I believe they are suited for. I do not randomly place students in seats; rather, I plan out a possible combination of four students that may create a positive learning experience for one another. Creating these matches is heavily based on

conversations I have with my students. Our informal conversations hold such honesty; their inhibitions cease and they speak out their emotions, fears, laughter and what they hold dear. Knowing them informs me if they need a partner who is shy, caring, or outgoing. And you will be able to observe the difference it makes in the interactions between my students, which elevates the quality of their mathematical learning.

Once the students are arranged in seats, the story begins. Students must produce work that can be showcased around the room. The seating structure bolsters students' comfort in asking for help from one another. Having them in a team of with students of differing abilities facilitates cooperative learning strategies and assists students in creating a successful product. During a typical team assignment, you can walk into my room and observe my students working on a team poster. You will see each member working on only one section. I divide a poster into four sections, making each member responsible in accomplishing one of the parts. I prescribe a certain member to a specific section, allowing me to differentiate accordingly to their math level. Therefore you will see students being accountable for the work and communicating their ideas in displaying a math concept. If it were an individual activity, you can walk into my classroom and observe my students working on creating a 2-D model using a ratio. You will see partners measuring each other, conversing about the lesson at hand. If it is a classroom discussion you step into, you will see students coming up to the board sticking post-its with responses about grades they have received or about their thoughts on issues such as immigration, peer pressure, and drugs. These activities place my students' knowledge and experiences at the forefront of the class. They bring out the diversity of my students and contribute to the classroom dynamic.

Another piece of evidence that shows the quality of teaching in my classroom is the use of a document reader, called the ELMO, which facilitates many whole-class activities and makes it easy for students to share their knowledge with the class. Through the ELMO, you will see my students being assessed through warm ups and journal prompts. The students will be displaying their work under the ELMO and using the microphone to explain their work, or will be the writer as I ask the class guiding questions. Also through the ELMO, you will see me showing videos that connect to the math concepts, and even music videos about math, and you will hear my students sing along!

I believe being a teacher means being a life-long learner. I am a second-year teacher and as such, I am developing in this profession each day. I know that if someone were to step into my classroom they would *see* mistakes, but I am also equally certain that they would find much evidence of quality in my teaching practice. I have learned from my lows as it forces me to adapt, experiment, re-shape, and re-design. Like a scientist, I continue to experiment by creating lessons and trying them out with my students. Fortunately, they are nowhere near scientists' inanimate subjects; students are dynamic and lively, which is what makes my job incredible. I believe, that as an educator, I have the power to open doors to them, let them out, and trust they will advocate for their futures. Therefore, in this stage of my professional career I am proud of knowing that even though I have just begun, I am not only showing quality, but also providing my community with quality teaching.