



## **An Educator's Perspective on Evidence of Quality Teacher Practice: Isabel Morales**

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## **ABSTRACT**

An alumna of UCLA's Teacher Education Program teaching twelfth grade government and economics 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**

**Isabel Morales**  
**May 19, 2011**

Welcome to Room 403, a Government and Economics classroom where technology, collaboration, and student empowerment reign supreme. Right away, you'll notice the row of gleaming computers lined up next to the mobile laptop cart that students use on a regular basis. The students sit in collaborative groups, researching the effects of poverty on women, children, and people of color. Bulletin boards cover the walls, displaying students' artistic representations of Constitutional rights and typed reports. You'll notice the colorful Tree of Gratitude, comprised of paper leaves on which my advisory students expressed the elements in their life for which they were thankful. On the leaves, among the words *family*, *friends*, *iPods* and *health*, appears my name: *Ms. Morales*. I can't help but feel that I must be doing something right if my name is on the Tree of Gratitude.

As a product of UCLA's Teacher Education Program, I entered the LAUSD workforce armed with a social justice agenda, ready to teach and inspire. I learned that multiple methods of assessment allowed students of different abilities to demonstrate mastery of skills and content in ways that a traditional exam could not. For this reason, my students participate in numerous collaborative assignments such as debates, simulations, and community-based projects. This year alone, they have debated the constitutionality of new airport security measures in a mock Supreme Court hearing; engaged their peers in a school-wide mock midterm election; and even organized a public gallery of student artwork at CARECEN (Central American Resource Center) to inform the local community of its constitutional rights. The students were extremely proud of

their art gallery, as it was completely student-driven – the students were responsible for securing the location, setting up the exhibit, and providing food, music, and spoken word poetry for the guests. At the event, the students presented their artwork, informing the members of their community about their constitutional rights in a clear and accessible manner. As a teacher, it is rewarding to watch students demonstrate critical thinking, research skills, creativity, persuasive argumentation, and confident speaking abilities.

It is often difficult to quantify this data in ways that are acceptable to policymakers and evaluators of student performance and teacher effectiveness. In an effort to prove to outsiders that my students are learning, I give my students a test at the beginning and end of the semester, comprised of questions from the United States naturalization exam. An overwhelming majority of students score poorly at first, but by the end of the semester, every single student shows improvement. Although growth on test scores is an important indicator of student learning, it does not illustrate the full range of learning that takes place in my class. I expect students to not only learn basic course content, but to also use this knowledge to become informed, engaged, and empowered members of society. My students can name their elected officials and recite the responsibilities their jobs entail, but being able to use their voices to advocate for change is a more difficult lesson that they must also learn. To teach this lesson, I had my students research their local city council members, write letters expressing community concerns, and go to a City Hall meeting to deliver these letters and speak to their elected officials. The experience was eye-opening and empowering for many of the students, which they expressed in letters addressed to City Hall officials after the visit. “I learned that City Hall was *my* building,” expressed one twelfth-grader. Another student wrote, “I learned that I have a person representing my district

who actually cares about improving the community, and I'd like to meet with you again at another time discuss my concerns." Statements like these make me proud to be a teacher, and reinforce my belief that students develop advocacy skills in my class that they will use for the rest of their lives.

As teachers, we have been taught that test scores alone should not be the only criteria by which students are assessed. The same should be true when it comes to assessing teachers. Much of the current literature on education focuses on schools as the providers of a 21<sup>st</sup> century education. My colleagues and I work hard to provide a relevant and applicable education, teaching more than just content standards. We teach global awareness, technological competence, interpersonal communication, resourcefulness, and a myriad of other skills that are not easily measured by test score data, but can be seen by any visitor that steps into the classroom.