An Educator's Perspective on Evidence of Quality Teacher Practice: Rahila Munshi

Author: Rahila Munshi
Date: May 19, 2011
Series Number: IPMS020-X041-2011

Center X is part of the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies of UCLA
1320 Moore Hall Box 951521
Los Angeles, CA 90095
www.centerx.gseis.ucla.edu

ABSTRACT

An alumna of UCLA's Teacher Education Program who taught high school math in the 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

Rahila Munshi

May 19, 2011

When you enter my classroom the first thing you may notice is the environment that my students and I have created as a team. Teamwork resonates from all corners and walls of my room. The desks are arranged in groups of four to facilitate cooperative group work, an abundance of technological features include a smart board, a document projector, graphing calculators, and computers. Perhaps most importantly you will find students freely and comfortably accessing these resources and using them to explore mathematical concepts and communicate findings to one another. The organization of the room keeps my students and me working as a team providing a medium for balancing my roles of leader, participant, listener, and communicator. You will see an organized agenda for the day-- the goal presented in accessible language, the content standard, and daily updated quotes and cartoons relevant to the day's learning goals.

Listen carefully, you might overhear Jesse laughing and pointing at the cartoon above my smart board that says "Keep in mind, learning is *not* a spectator sport (Would *you* be in shape if your P.E. teacher ran around the gym while you watched?)" Or you might hear Deanna and Christina giggling over the cartoon of a brain weightlifting that says, "Algebra is weightlifting for the brain." You might see a group of students working on the problem of the week, competing against one another to finish first but pausing to help each other if one gets stuck.

You will see a wall of student work containing group work from my AP Statistics class, in which students used pennies to plot and discover the central limit theorem (this having occurred the week before). You will see pictures of all of us laughing and smiling at our last field trip to

UCLA. You will see improved quizzes, exams, and awarded student work on the walls; each with personalized feedback and congratulating words for improvement. You will find a wall of updated college information about scholarships, sample dorm food menus, and athletics for corresponding colleges to spark and foster my students' interest in attending one of these acclaimed universities. You will find all students have a file of their own to keep materials and every group of four has their own Materials Box filled with resources they might need for our daily mathematic explorations and activities. Every corner of my room is meant to be interactive with the students and they have ownership over certain areas and partnership in the creation and the upkeep of this environment. This multi-faceted view of the norms and practices are key components to effective lessons and professional practice.

After having taken in the aesthetic surroundings of my classroom you might take a moment to observe how my classroom functions as a *whole*. You will find evidence to answer the following questions. Are students able to work effectively together? How do I guide my students through mathematical exploration? How do I balance group work, direct instruction, and independent work? My interactions with the students, and the students with one another, are additional components of my classroom environment in which both teachers and students work together to facilitate learning and exploration. Classroom rules and norms built on respect and different learning styles foster student thinking and build students' confidence to explore content and communicate findings. It is particularly important to me to balance these three forms of instructional practices: group work, direct instruction, and independent work. I believe the interplay and effective blending of these three strands of instruction is key to the success of one's professional practice in education.

Once you've experienced the environment of my classroom and observed my students and I interacting as a unit, you will notice the quality of student discourse that occurs during my lessons. Learning is socially constructed and student-based in our mathematical exploration. Student discourse will provide evidence of student learning and thinking. I might overhear a group declare they've found the incorrect answer to a group problem and I would then pass them a post it note asking them to discuss this finding with the group next to them (who got the correct answer). They would then assume a teaching role to explain their findings to the next group, the next group would respond and together they would find the correct solution through a combination of error analysis, conceptual discourse, and social construction.

My classroom and the lessons I carefully plan for my students to facilitate meaningful student discourse are of an ever changing and evolving nature. My role as a life-long learner is dependent on perpetually reflecting upon and analyzing my practice. I aspire to find daily doses of evidence to support the following questions: Do the students exhibit well-practiced and conditioned routines of explaining mathematical thinking? How do students respond to one another during group work that builds on exploration and understanding of mathematical concepts? Do students assume a teaching role in my classroom? Are they given the confidence, safe environment, and ability to hone their communication skills to help one another? What type of output are students creating during classroom time? What *meaning* do these outputs demonstrate with respect to conceptual understanding? Do my instructional strategies and lessons provide opportunities for students to attempt communication at both written and verbal levels?

Evidence of meaningful student discourse also would include students actively participating with one another during group work time. For example, students might be overheard saying to one another, "Let me show you how to solve the problem a different way. Can we prove that both ways work?" Another example would include allowing students to examine each other's outputs and listening to the ways in which students respond to one another. Students might be overheard asking one another to explain their work, often times saying, "Can you show me how you got this?" Evidence of student discourse would be found at multiple times and in different ways in an effective mathematics classroom. Fostering and developing student discourse in a classroom empowers students to take ownership of their mathematical understanding.

While many important pieces of evidence support the effectiveness of my professional practice, two pieces surface as most important in my three years of experience as an inner-city, secondary mathematics educator and mathematics department chair -- classroom environment and student discourse.