

I teach 4<sup>th</sup> grade at Hiawatha Elementary School in Okemos, Michigan. This K-4 building has 378 students who represent diverse racial and social economic demographics (NCES, 2014). During my two years at Hiawatha, I have tried to positively impact the learning of my students. However, there are factors that have been outside of my control; time, materials, and teacher workload (Kennedy, 2010, pg. 594). Still, "we expect teachers to find a way to be effective" (pg. 596) and as teachers, we have to focus on the factors that are within our control and do everything in our power to positively impact student learning. One factor that is outside of a teacher's control is how a student spends his/her time outside of the classroom, or rather, how learning is reflected upon, reviewed, and extended at home. In order to positively impact this while also demonstrating my ideals of quality teaching, I knew I needed to create a resource that could continue to engage students from home, provide students with strong content knowledge, and communicate with families about their student's learning. Using Weebly, an online website builder that features easy to use drag and drop tools, I created my classroom website: [www.hiwatharoom430.weebly.com](http://www.hiwatharoom430.weebly.com)

Keeping my students engaged continues to be an important component to my definition of quality teaching. Just as teachers "must attend to both the conceptual and practical aspects associated with any given practice" (Grossman, 2009, pg. 278), so too must students. With this in mind, I created online lessons that students can use to review, reference, preview, and practice concepts. For example, under Subjects > Puzzling > Unit 3 > Lesson 3.1 starts off with a narrative text that presents the premises of a function machine. It uses pictures and diagrams to show the different parts of a function machine (ex: in, out, and rule) and then includes videos that explain the concept. Lastly, it provides a "let's try it" section with links to online activities that give students an opportunity to practice the concepts. These components all work together, giving students a wide variety of resources to engage with in order to understand and apply the material. Although the primary purpose of this was to provide students with a structured place to engage in the material at home, I regularly have students use it in the classroom. In situations where students are not displaying an outer attention (Dewey, 1904, pg. 7) or it is clear to me that they are not understanding the lesson, I provide them access to the website as an alternate form of instruction to help engage them in actual practice.

Providing my students with quality teaching requires that I have "a strong foundational knowledge in subject matter" (Fenstermacher, 2005, pg. 202). While a student's success in attaining content knowledge is learner dependent (pg. 196), a teacher has a critical role in helping impact this. When a teacher has a strong content knowledge they are able to "explicitly explain, model, represent, and provide examples of content" (TeachingWorks, 2015). In the online lesson 3.1, providing multiple on-level examples of a factor machine presents students with various avenues to understanding. Knowing the subject in-depth and how it connects to higher-level math has allowed me to purposefully scaffold each lesson with continued learning in mind. For example, knowing that function machines are a simplified version of algebra, I strategically incorporated the word "unknown" as it relates to solving for variables. This was not in the lesson, but by providing this small addition, it elevates the lesson and works to build background knowledge for future lessons.

Another way the website allows me to enact my ideals of quality teaching is that it provides me an additional opportunity to communicate with families about their student's learning. As a high-leverage practice, communicating with families drastically "supports student learning" (TeachingWorks, 2015).

Sometimes the algorithms taught in math are different compared to what student's family members learned in school. The Puzzling page provides families with detailed explanations of the concepts their students are learning helping to "support parents and guardians in fostering their child's success." For example, many family members are familiar with solving for an unknown variable (ex:  $3+x=7$ ). Yet when presented as a "what is my rule" or "complete the factor machine" problem, they might be confused, making it challenging to help their student with homework. The online lessons facilitate communication, particularly if asking "what did you learn in school today?" delivers an apathetic response.

**[743]**

### **FOCUS QUESTIONS**

1. How might I modify or add to the structure of the Puzzling lessons to better "support parents and guardians in fostering their child's success?" (TeachingWorks, 2015)
2. After passing a bond, our district will be distributing personal devices (Chromebook) for each students this year. How might I utilize the website more during the school day in order to continue advancing my ideals of quality teaching?

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**Description of Artifact** (Less than 120)

My artifact is a webpages from my classroom website. The website is designed to be an online space where students can review, reference, preview, and practice concepts that we are learning. It provides students with a detailed description of the concept, supporting visuals, example problems being solved on video, and online activities for opportunities to practice the concept. Primarily the purpose is for students and families to have a good resource to use and access from home, but we also regularly use it during lessons to help improve student engagement and understanding. [92]

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**My artifact is an excerpt from the Data Notebooks I use with my 3rd grade students. The pages are used to set goals, both personal and academic. They are designed to allow students to track and watch their progress throughout the year. Some pages show specific benchmarks or targets that students are working towards. Students use these notebooks on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis depending on the subject matter. Periodically throughout the year they share these notebooks with me and with their peers.**

- 1. How might I revise or add to my Data Notebook to incorporate and promote the building of a caring community, a belief held by both McBee (2007) and myself in my Initial Stance on Quality Teaching?**
- 2. How can I more effectively utilize Data Notebooks to improve my students' writing?**

**Clarifying Questions**

What are your specific goals for a caring community? What does that look and sound like to you?  
What parts of McBee's definition of a caring teacher are most important to you?

What parts of writing are you looking for students to improve in? An overall sense? Just mechanics?  
Ability to write for extended period of time? Writing to answer a question? Narrative writing? I think knowing what your goals are for them in writing, will help to figure out how to utilize the notebooks to match that.

What type of writing do they do during the year? What is the focus of the writing curriculum?

Are there any district writing-based assessments?

**1. What was your overall impression of the Peer Coaching Cycle? What was the greatest benefit from the process? What, if anything, was the biggest struggle?**

Critics of anthropology believe that just by observing a culture, you inevitably change it. Knowing I was being observed and evaluated on the experience created a little added pressure and nervous energy. However, my overall impression of the Peer Coaching Cycle was incredibly positive. I regularly share my work and ideas with friends and family, but often only receive "cheerleading" feedback (remarks that are only positive). I found the greatest benefit from the peer coaching process was receiving well-crafted and thoughtful constructive feedback. My peer offered large and even drastic changes for me to consider, like transitioning my current math block to a completely new workshop style schedule. Yet, this and other suggested changes were rational, supported with examples, and if I choose to implement them, could make a real positive impact on my teaching and my student's learning. And while this is a great benefit, it is also a struggle. When we already do things that "work," we resist changing to something else. However, if we don't practice keeping an open mind and stay willing to change, we can easily find ourselves becoming trapped in our own ideas, when something different could work even better. [196]

**2. Based on the feedback from your peer, how, if at all, might you revise your artifact for future use? If you do not plan to revise your artifact, please provide an explanation.**

Based on feedback from my peer, I plan to...

- add an online formative assessment for each section. I think this idea could be very helpful for students (and me) as another way to help monitor learning.
- integrate a "Family Corner" section for student's families to reference. A lot of this material is already on the website, but by highlighting it in a specific section, it will help to better navigate families to the information they will find most beneficial in trying to help support their child at home.
- include a "Try It At Home" section with at home projects that will allow students opportunities to extend their learning and make more real world connections.
- try using it during a Math Workshop style lesson. This change will help me to more effectively differentiate, provide better individualized instruction, and integrate usage of the website and personal devices in a more consistent and thoughtful way. [152]

**3. After completing the cycle, how would you respond to your focus question(s)?**

**How might I modify or add to the structure of the Puzzling lessons to better "support parents and guardians in fostering their child's success?" (TeachingWorks, 2015)**

- I wonder if there is a way I can highlight the information I want family members to be aware of as a way to help support them in participating in their child's learning at home. Maybe I could try including videos (ex: screencast) that explain the homework and how to help their child solve the problems. I could also provide descriptions and directions for at home projects that could extend their child's learning of the concepts and also help promote authentic learning grounded in purpose and real world applications. [89]

**After passing a bond, our district will be distributing personal devices (Chromebook) for each students this year. How might I utilize the website more during the school day in order to continue advancing my ideals of quality teaching?**

- I wonder if a change in the structure of some of my lessons would be necessary to help facilitate the opportunity for students to utilize the website more during the school day. Something I know other teachers do that is effective is Math Workshops. This provides the teacher with opportunities to better attend to the differences in their student's learnings AND also gives students structured opportunities for individualized practice - something I think my website and access to personal devices could play a large role in. [86]

**4. In thinking about how you coached your colleague, what do you think you did well? How might you improve as a coach in the future?**

As a coach, I think I did well at forming my thoughts and suggestions in a respectful but constructive way. I appreciate the idea of restraint (Jewett, 2012), however I also understand the importance of receiving specific answers to specific questions. I felt I was able to balance these ideas by providing my colleague with some larger conceptual suggestions, like starting writing portfolios and including monthly reflection forms to help build a caring community, and still allow her to expand and construct answers to her own questions. Still, perhaps I could have gone even further in my specifics and provided my colleague with more examples of questions she could ask or reflection tasks she could have her students complete. [119]

**5. How, if at all, do you envision yourself implementing something similar to peer coaching in your own school?**

Currently, our district is engaging in TLT: Teachers Learning Together, a process of observing and then sharing affirmations and wonderings. This has been an important first step in helping to open a dialogue of collaboration, however, I think a few elements from peer coaching might make it more productive. For example, having the teacher ask a specific focus question will help to identify what they feel they need help with in order to improve their own practice. Open wonderings sometimes help a teacher identify things they might not have thought about before, but a focus questions "is relevant to [the teacher's] challenges, content, and students" (Grimm, 2014, p.26). [108]

**Word Count: [750]**

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