

**Final Paper: Part 2 - Revised Stance on Quality Teaching**

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Throughout the course, I have identified numerous ideas in order to define *quality teaching*. I began by proposing that quality teaching is quality learning. While I appreciate this definition's attempt to redefine ourselves as quality teachers by means of our students as quality learners, it doesn't take into account the numerous factors that are outside of what a teacher can control; time, materials, teacher workload (Kennedy, 2010, p. 594), or "learner willingness and effort" (Fenstermacher, 2005, p. 206). As I continued to reflect upon and debate the scholarly thoughts presented, my definition began to shift to reflect more specificity. I identified incorporating student discussion, the use of engagement strategies, daily reflection of practice, a necessity for having strong content knowledge, a purposeful attention to actualize caring (McBee, 2007), and the high-leverage practices of collaborating with other professionals and communicating about students with parents/guardians (TeachingWorks, 2015) as the most important tenets of quality teaching. While I still agree with all of the aforementioned, I started to realize that certain tenants of my definition, and the number included, did not reflect a priority or specificity towards the areas that I currently need to focus on the most in order to effectively progress and improve my teaching. As such, now my definition of quality teaching more explicitly focuses on a smaller number of specific tenants that I believe my current reality as a teacher requires that I further inquire and reflect on in order to advance myself towards my personal goals in teaching. In order to do this, I must focus on skillfully providing students with opportunities for discussion and partake in regular and purposeful collaborative discussions with my peers about my practice.

As I identified in the Video Analysis assignment, incorporating discussion into a classroom can be a challenging "complex practice which may take teachers years to master" (Grossman, 2009, p. 277) but purposefully structuring opportunities for students to engage in it is an important component to quality teaching and student learning (Mosle, 2014). In the recent reality of increased "standardization of school knowledge in the interest of managing and controlling it" (Giroux, 2002, p. 2) the focus that outsiders have been pushing on education is a stronger emphasis on ensuring the occurrence of successful teaching, or making sure that the learner "acquires, to some reasonable and acceptable level of proficiency, what the teacher is engaged in teaching" (Fenstermacher, 2005, p. 191). This has had a multifaceted effect of putting more emphasis on data produced after teaching has concluded, overlooking the actions and efforts that take place during actual teaching, and focuses time and energy on factors that are outside a teacher's direct control, as the results are "learner dependent" (p. 196). While successful teaching is an important outcome, this mind frame doesn't personally help me focus on how to achieve it and doesn't advance me in my goal towards quality teaching. Instead, I choose to focus on the methods and practices I can implement to help students acquire knowledge, like discussion. Teaching the skills necessary for student discussion and then integrating opportunities to apply that in the context of subject-matter content fulfills "the need to give students an active voice in their learning experiences" (Giroux, 2002, p. 4). In my classroom students and I work to understand that discussion helps us as learners to comprehend our own views better and provides us with opportunities

to recognize different ideas we couldn't come up with on our own. For example, as we work to identify the properties necessary to have purposeful and meaningful discussions, teamwork, active listening, and respectful responding, we are able to use them to engage in conversations about narrative text that advance student's learning goals of comprehension. To reference another example, in my original stance on quality teaching, I shared that when students are able to express their thinking in math and have those ideas affirmed, challenged, and/or reflected on by their peers, they understand their ideas better and gain new perspectives they couldn't come up with on their own. This is evident in my room when we solve multiplication problems like  $25 \times 23$ . Some students immediately gravitate to using a rote skill driven algorithm, like the US standard algorithm, to solve this equation. When students are able to share their ideas, students who recognize the simplicity of applying the partial product method of multiplication are able to explain a more effective and efficient method. (Ex:  $[(25 \times 10) + (25 \times 10) + (25 \times 3)] = [250 + 250 + 75] = 575$ ) As students are continually challenged to explain their thinking and evaluate the reasoning of their peers, they become better at thinking about problems, more adventurous in trying alternative methods to solve them, and as a result, experience a more complete, successful, and quality learning experience.

It is certainly true that "classroom teaching is relational work" (Lampert, 2010, p. 22), however, this is not only isolated to the interactions between students and teacher. It is also related to the important and necessary communications between teachers and their fellow peers and colleagues. Unfortunately, "in many public schools today isolation is more often the mode of being for teachers than collaboration" (Jewett, 2012, p. 21) which causes most teachers to rely on practicing inquiry, asking questions about their teaching that lead to reflecting on and revising their practice (Dewey, 1933), through standard professional development. The issue, however, remains that "most professional development experiences fail to affect what teachers do in the classroom each day" (Grimm, 2014, p. 24). As an alternative, increased collaboration with peers, identified as a high-leverage practice, leads to "increased likelihood that teaching will be effective for student's learning" (TeachingWorks, 2015). I still acknowledge the fact that collaboration with other professionals can be difficult because "most teachers in this country have zero time to work together on new pedagogical approaches and share feedback" (Mosle, 2014) as I first identified in my Video Analysis assignment, but I argue that because of its importance to quality teaching, and in effect its positive impact on student learning, teachers must work to find the time to do so. John Hattie, author of "Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning" (2012) synthesized over 50,000 studies related to achievement in school-aged students, and provided research based examples that support this argument.

Within a school, we need to collaborate to build a team working together to solve the dilemmas in learning, to collectively share and critique the nature and quality of evidence that shows our impact on student learning, and to cooperate in planning and critiquing lessons, learning intentions, and success criteria on a regular basis. (p. 171-172)

He reasoned that if we were to spend less time arguing structural concerns that are often out of our control, (ex: lower class size, different tracking methods, mandated professional development sessions) then maybe we could finance more time to "plan teaching, discuss student needs, secure special services for students, and manage school policies" (TeachingWorks, 2015). Through reflecting on the importance of collaboration as it relates to my definition of quality teaching, I realized that I am very fortunate to not only have willing participants to collaborate with, but to have regular opportunities to do so during the common planning time that I have with my fellow 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers. However, I

openly admit that this time could and must be better utilized to more regularly and systematically communicate and reflect with the purpose of directly improving an aspect of our teaching. Also, at my school, TLT: Teachers Learning Together, a process of observing and then sharing affirmations and wonderings, has been an important first step in helping to open a dialogue of collaboration with my colleagues. However, I now hope to provide leadership in helping to expand this initiative and make it more productive by incorporating focus questions, "a question that reflects an area about which [a teacher] wants to learn more" (Grimm, 2014, p. 25), better methods of observation like scripting, counting, and tracking (p. 27), and more specific post-observation debriefings as a way to "use time [more] effectively" (p. 28).

One's conception of quality teaching should never be stagnate. Instead, it should continually evolve and be used as a tool to identify a teacher's current and specific needs by highlighting the most important tenants that will help the teacher focus their practice and change it in order to positively impact students in a meaningful and profound way. In my current reality, I believe that continuing to focus on improving my ability to integrate discussion throughout the day as well as creating opportunities for collaboration with peers will advance me towards my goals of enacting quality teaching.

**Word Count: [1445]**

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