

Memorandum

January 13, 2006

To: Jeff
From: Mark
Re.: Conference Summary & Related Reflections

Thank you for the opportunity to observe, videotape, and confer with you about your mathematics teaching on the morning of Monday, the 5th. This email is to reflect on strengths of your teaching, areas for improvement, and other thoughts which we developed through this work.

As you pointed out to the students during your opening in the Sharing Space, the lesson takes place between two topics on the charted learning path for the Unit. As you shared with the class, you were concerned with formative assessment results in Friday's class focusing on congruence, similarity, and constructing shapes to defined parameters. You posted two essential questions to guide this return to Friday's content.

(1) Why are some shapes congruent, and some not?

(2) For those that are not, what would be needed to make them so?

Your impressions are that the class was focused, on task, and that students demonstrated mastery of the concepts that you were returning to here. The evidence that you cited took three forms: (a) your observation of the table groups' process and results in the Mixed Card Draw that served to Activate and Engage, (b) the results of the partner construction activity that included definition of resulting shapes as congruent, similar, or neither during Explore and Discover, and (c) your observation during the partner speeches that students offered one another, addressing the two essential questions to Organize and Integrate. The students' behavior, as well as your own, matched your most optimistic estimate of what would actually take place during the lesson – a strong showing, given Friday's process and results.

You chose to use this formal observation to "try on" the Elements of Performance in Area 4 of the *Framework for Effective Teaching* as lenses through which to reflect on your teaching. To accomplish this, you identified strengths and areas for growth in your teaching in terms of the five Elements.

4a. Connects students' prior knowledge, life experience, and interests with essential questions and learning outcomes.

This lesson clearly drew on these factors, as it evolved directly from Friday's struggles. As you reflect on the opening of the unit, however, you recall little attention to such connections. Reflecting on challenges along the way, such as Friday's results, you are identifying this as a unit that you will strengthen through making these connections in the future. You have a number of thoughts as to how you might accomplish this.

4b. Uses a variety of instructional strategies and resources to respond to students' diverse needs.

You identified three specific strengths that were evident in this lesson. First, the range of activity and types of engagement represented in the Mixed Card Draw, the partner construction activity and ensuing dialogue in the Share Area, the partner speeches that elicited the students' reflections on their learning – for your ears as well as theirs, and the Exit Ticket activity that offered closure and provided you data to guide your planning. Second, at the outset of the construction activity, you invited any partners that might choose to do so to join you in the Share Area to work on the task together. This offered a shift from the relatively independent practice of the partner activity, toward guided practice with you for any who wanted the security of the shift. Third, you provided all three major sets of instructions during the lesson auditorily, visually in ways that remained accessible to the students, and kinesthetically by actually demonstrating each step along the way.

You identified an area for growth that you related to our earlier work in Area of Performance 3: that of differentiating formative assessment strategies to accommodate students' needs. While you and I both observed all students to be engaged in the tasks of this lesson, the tasks were the same for all, with the exception of the option that you built into the construction activity. Neither of us observed specific issues with this in this lesson, but you are alert to the fact that you do not tend to differentiate assessment strategies.

4c. Facilitates learning experiences that promote autonomy, interaction, and choice.

This represents an area of strength throughout your work, as you and I both perceive it. Your follow through with cooperative learning and collaborative strategies clearly addresses this Element of Performance. These strategies and structures were, once again, evident throughout the lesson, from partner-based tasks to team-based Mixed Card Draw to partner speeches.

You are pondering a possible area for growth, that of balancing independent tasks with the partner and team-based tasks that you are prioritizing. Your focus here is based on a value that you hold, that of teaching students for independence. As I reviewed the videotape, I focused in part on what you refer to as your "roves" – your pattern of circulation among groups as they work. It was apparent that your "roves" seem aligned with the priority that you place on teaching for release of responsibility. You were on the move, seldom pausing unless you observed a specific reason for doing so. When needed, you did indeed stop – at every stop, beginning with a question for the group or partnership.

4d. Engages students in problem solving, creative and critical thinking, and other activities that make subject matter meaningful.

You noted that the Mixed Card Draw served as an exemplar in terms of how it aligned with this Element of Performance. You noted a second strength, in that you had created essential questions – a component of the Units of Study that you use – at the lesson level, then actually asked that the students address them directly in their speeches to their seasonal partners. Given the open-ended and deep nature of essential questions, I concurred with your observation.

As an area for growth in this Element, you identified the fact that this lesson was needed in the first place. You remain on high alert about how it was that the students' performance during Friday's lesson was so disappointing. Somehow the learning path up to Friday's formative assessment activities needs significant review and reconsideration. You agreed to apprise me of your conclusions.

4e. Promotes self-directed, reflective learning for all students.

You see this as an area for growth, given the specifying language in the Element's rubric. While you see student engagement in the learning tasks of a Unit as a strength, your students are not as actively engaged in self assessment. As to personal goal-setting by students, you are accustomed to the practice in the area of citizenship, but have not focused on this approach in the academic learning area.

I appreciate your investment in trying on the lenses of the *Framework for Effective Teaching* to consider the strengths and areas for improvement in the lesson that I observed. Thank you for this opportunity to observe and confer about your work. I will provide you with a copy of the videotape, as you requested. I look forward to hearing further about your reflections on this Unit and its learning path. Please let me know what questions you have about any of the remarks in this Conference Summary.