Survey of Math Practices

I am a big fan of surveys. I remember in that first Collins workshop, there was a survey about how often we used certain writing practices. All of the practices seemed like good ideas, and I remember inflating my scores. I basically lied to myself saying, "I do that. Well, not exactly, but I want to do that . . . ." It's only human nature to aspire to be better. However, before beginning something new, you need to get a sense of where you are starting, set some goals, and then find ways to reach them. Surveys can help us do that.

On the next page is a quick survey of math practices, things you might do in your classroom. Do not agonize over the questions, and if you don't teach math directly (i.e., if you provide classroom support or are an administrator), answer the questions as if you were the one in charge of the classroom. Which practices would you do most often? Be honest; the survey won't help you if you wildly inflate your scores. And, yes, you can use half scores if you need to.

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Taking the Survey

Use the key to answer each question with a number. Then total your score.

4 = daily

3 = two or three times a week

2 = two or three times a month

1 = once or twice a term

0 = never

1. *How often do you engage students with quick writing prompts to draw out background knowledge or make them puzzle over something they are about to learn?* _____ (Strategy 1: p. 19-45)
2. *How often do you ask questions in written format that promote higher-order thinking?* _____ (Strategy 1: p. 31-33)
3. *How often do you assess students with one or two quick, written quiz or open response questions—assessments that require short but clear answers and then are collected, corrected, and returned quickly?* _____ (Strategy 2: p. 46-78)
4. *How often do you use "test language" (compare, evaluate, justify, compute, the following, not, the figure below . . .) in your questions?* _____ (Strategy 2: p. 54)
5. *At the overhead or board, how often do you model your thinking as you work toward a complete and accurate response to an open response math question?* _____ (Strategy 3: p. 79-97, Strategy 4: p. 108-112, Appendix 6: p. 218-224)
6. *How often do you have students score an open response question using clear and specific criteria that aligns to your state or district's math standards?* _____ (Strategy 3: p. 79-97, Strategy 6: 133-136)
7. *How often do you teach students literacy strategies to show them how to read and understand math questions?* _____ (Strategy 4: p. 98-112)
8. *How often do you engage students in activities that strengthen and review math vocabulary and the most important graphics?* _____ (Strategy 5: p. 113-126)
9. *How often do you have students create their own math questions with graphics to match?* _____ (Strategy 6: p. 137-140)

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10. *How often do you develop and assign compelling, real world assignments in math and use specific criteria to score them?* _____ (Strategy 6: p. 127-151)

11. *How often do you review your state or district standards and use them to plan common assessments with colleagues?* _____ (Strategy 7: p. 152-155)

12. *How often do you bring samples of student work to department or grade-level meetings in order to assess understanding, compare data over time, and plan strategies going forward?* _____ (Strategy 7: p. 152-155, Appendix 7: p. 225-233)

Total Score: _____

Survey Results

What do the scores tell you? If you are competitive, you could add up your numbers to get a total score. The higher your score the more of these strategies you are using. However, getting a perfect score of 48 is not the goal because doing *everything* on the survey *everyday* is not the best use of your time.

It is more valuable to look at the score of each individual question. Given that the most precious resource in the classroom is time, analyzing how you spend your time is critical. Obviously, "teaching the math" is what should take up the vast majority of class time. But how do you do that? How do you make decisions regarding what is the most effective way to teach the math, and what additional, underlying skills need to be bolstered to support learning the math?

The survey should give you a sense of where you spend time trying to improve open response answers. If you rarely do any of the practices above, then it is my hope that you can add to your repertoire. If you are regularly trying many of the ideas from the survey, this book may help you increase their effectiveness. Additionally, by discussing and sharing your strategies with colleagues, you can begin to take on some of these challenges together, building on what works from previous grades.

Before moving on to the next section, go back and put a star next to three practices that you feel are vitally important. Star the ones that you feel would really make the most difference in improving open response answers. As you read on, look for ways to develop these strategies in your classroom.

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