**Reflections on Revoicing: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly**

**Alicia Burdess**

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**Dr. David Pimm**

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I have learned throughout my journey as a mathematics teacher that students learn mathematics by engaging with rich problems, by engaging with other people, and by engaging with their own thoughts. I have been trying to allow this philosophy to guide my teaching and, in doing so, have shifted my focus from teaching mathematics to helping my students develop their own understanding of mathematics. Classroom discourse has played an important role in my teaching. I believe that discussions between students and between the students and the teacher directly affect the learning environment (where they learn), the learning skills (how they learn), and the understanding of mathematics (what they learn). After reading Jean Krusi’s article, Revoicing: the Good, the Bad, and the Questions, I have had to question my classroom discourse, specifically how I use revoicing in my classroom and the effects that it has on my students and on their learning. Krusi defines revoicing as “any form of restating an idea presented by another” (Krusi, p. 118). I have started to pay attention to my use of revoicing: what I say, when I say it, how I say it, and why I say it. I have spent these past three weeks not only observing my use of revoicing but also trying to change its use to see if I can make my classroom discourse more positive and authentic. Just like Krusi, I am interested in “starting more meaningful conversations” with my students to enable them to “take more ownership of the mathematical discourse in the classroom” (Krusi, p. 117). Through observation and reflection, I have determined my use of revoicing to be good, bad, and ugly. Thanks to Krusi, I have become aware of the revoicing that happens in my classroom; I have learned how powerful it is and, like her, I am left with questions.

**The Good**

I do not spend much time talking during a lesson; therefore, my students get a large amount of time to work, discuss, and learn together. They spend most of the class discussing with each other in partners or in groups. They work together to play with numbers, create ideas, and solve problems. I use proximity and voice to help keep students on task, to redirect their thinking if needed, to provide further information, and to validate their work and effort. When I revoice during their group work, it is mostly to repeat what someone has said so that everyone can hear, to share an important idea with the whole class, or to redirect the class to another task or concept. I often ask the students to revoice their ideas and the ideas of their peers. Krusi describes this type of revoicing as rebroadcasting to give students voice. After observing and reflecting upon my use of revoicing, I have concluded that I use it most often to rebroadcast the ideas of students. However, I have noticed that I also use it to clarify a statement, add mathematical vocabulary to an idea, challenge an incorrect answer, or encourage the re-evaluation of a response. These functions of revoicing played an important role in Jean Krusi’s classroom and her article made me take notice of them in my own. I also noticed other functions of revoicing in my classroom. I often use revoicing to check for understanding, to change the direction and flow of a discussion, and to intervene in regard to misconceptions when necessary. Revoicing has been a very practical tool as it has allowed me to keep track of where my students are and has helped me to plan my lessons. Noticing the many roles revoicing plays in my classroom has made me question if I could be using it more to my advantage and to the advantage of my students’ learning of mathematics. My noticing has also made me question the other ways I use revoicing in my classroom.

**The Bad**

When I revoice, I am often taking away opportunity from my students: opportunity to contribute, to take risks, to take ownership of their own ideas. By increasing my voice, by continually rebroadcasting my ideas and their own, I am putting more importance on what I say instead of on what they say. I am teaching them to listen for my voice because it will present the right answer, validate the good idea, and lead them in the right direction. Krusi worried that the students may think that an idea only counted when the teacher said it. If I am always rebroadcasting for students, are they even listening to each other or are they waiting for me for validation? This is definitely not helping them build understanding, trust in each other, or confidence in themselves.

Krusi also discusses wait time after asking a question and after getting an answer. I have observed that I do not wait long enough in either of these situations. I do not wait long enough for students to respond to me or to each other. I also do not wait long enough after their responses so that they can evaluate and react to what is said. This is why I have struggled with whole- class discussions. The students know that if they wait long enough, I will continue the discussion by myself and give them the answer I was looking for. Instead of responding directly to one another, they are responding to me and are allowing me to respond to myself. They can also tell by my tone and inflection if a response is right or wrong; I want to let the students react, discuss, and evaluate each other’s responses instead of waiting to hear what I have to say.

I think that I am using revoicing because I am interested in the students’ understanding, but the way I use revoicing does not promote conversation, inquiry, or argument. Krusi noticed that she was asking the types of questions to understand students’ thinking but was not adept at listening to their answers and following up with more questions. I see myself in her reflections. I have been focusing on posing the right questions and presenting the right problems and not enough on facilitation discussions and anchoring learning.

**The Ugly**

I often use revoicing as a punitive form of discipline. I use it to keep students on track, to make sure they are following along, and to embarrass them if I perceive that they are not paying attention or if they are disrupting the class. I often ask students to repeat what other students have said, not to encourage discussion and learning, but because I know they were not listening. I had not given much thought to what I am inadvertently teaching my students, how I use revoicing to control behaviours and not to enhance understanding. I had not reflected on the power of revoicing and the negative role it sometimes plays in my classroom. This seems very counterproductive because I realize how important revoicing is to the learning environment. If I am teaching students to pay attention and to repeat back other people’s ideas, I am not teaching them to think for themselves, question responses, clarify answers, or discover knowledge.

I have also noticed that I use revoicing to move students on the conveyer-belt of learning. I have used it to make sure the class understands before moving on to the next outcome. By revoicing a correct answer to the whole class, I am making sure that everyone hears it and understands it, thus fulfilling my job as a math teacher: covering the program of studies and teaching the curriculum. I notice that I often ask a question, wait for the right answer, repeat it, and continue. This does not encourage the development of critical thinkers, nor does it foster deep understanding or create confident learners.

**The Questions**

I decided to ask myself two of the same questions Krusi asked herself. What would happen if I revoiced less? What would happen if I used revoicing differently?

Krusi found that as she limited her revoicing and increased her pauses, her students would share their ideas more often. She found that her students would take turns more often in discussions, for longer periods. The students also tried to explain to help others understand. She found that they seemed to listen to each other better and think more deeply about the mathematics. For the last three weeks, I have been actively trying to speak less, to wait more, and to only revoice when I think it is important. I have tried to encourage the students to revoice for themselves and for each other. My students responded in much the same way Krusi’s did. When they started to realize that I could out-wait them, they shared more of their ideas. When I did not interrupt them with an answer, they would elaborate on their own as well as on the answers of others. When I waited after a response, the students would react. When I was successful at staying neutral, students would risk more and discussions would last longer. While the class was discussing the properties of circles, the students started arguing about the radius and diameter. The discussion continued to determine how to calculate the circumference. I held back and observed. I was amazed at what they achieved without any revoicing on my part. This made me realize that my voice was often holding them back, distracting them, and making it difficult for them to engage in authentic discussions.

**Conclusion**

“Classroom discourse is somewhat like a dance, in which the moves vary depending on the partners” (Krusi, p. 133). Before I started paying attention, I thought that my voice was not an important part of my classroom discourse. I have made so many changes to my teaching over the past three years: I no longer lecture in front of the class, I no longer show students how to solve problems on the whiteboard, and I no longer tell them the right answers. Nevertheless, my voice still plays a powerful role in the classroom. It can enable or undermine thinking; it can create opportunities for thought and it can take them away; it can encourage or embarrass. Even though Krusi believes that it is important for a teacher to revoice less in order to empower the students, she also states the importance of a teacher using revoicing to “model mathematical language and arguments” (Krusi, p. 131). My use of revoicing is something that I continually have to observe, reflect on, and improve. Just like Krusi, I need to “pay careful attention to times when my revoicing could help students develop mathematically and times when refraining from revoicing would empower my students to take greater ownership of the mathematical conversation and give them more opportunities for their own learning” (Krusi, p. 133).

**References**

Krusi, Jean. “Revoicing: The Good, the Bad, and the Questions” In *Promoting Purposeful Discourse*, edited by Beth Herbel-Eisenmann. Virginia: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2009.