6th Grade Classroom Visit
Christine McLaughlin, Sixth Grade Teacher, Blair IB Magnet School
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Michelle Selvans

I visited a 5th-6th grade Science&Math teacher's class for a Friday afternoon, to teach two of her classes (6th graders, who study Earth Science for the year in CA) about Plate Tectonics, and how the idea was pieced together by scientists over the last 400 years. I'd sent the workshop I made ahead to the teacher, and she printed out a copy for each student, and set up her computer so I could show larger color versions of figures. Laurie dropped off a This Dynamic Earth poster for me in advance as well, so that we could use it for part of the workshop, and leave it with the class afterward. On my way into the classroom, I was asked repeatedly if I was 'the scientist', and so introduced myself and said a little about the aspects of the Earth I study before starting the workshop.

I put the workshop together (1 hour) to lead students through the accumulated evidence for Plate Tectonics, through a series of 10 questions about lines of evidence that collectively led to realizing that Plate Tectonics occurs on Earth. Eight questions have associated figures (of bathymetry, earthquake and volcano locations, age of the seafloor, etc.), and ask the students to describe the patterns and details they see. The ninth gets at density variation between oceanic and continental crust, and for that I passed around two rocks of similar size but different weights (I started the rocks around at the beginning of the workshop, so each student would have plenty of time). Students partnered up and took notes on their observations for each question, and volunteered answers to the rest of the class as we went along. Finally, I opened the floor to any further questions they had relating to Plate Tectonics, several of which were great (about hot spots, or how we know the age of the oceanic crust, details I hadn't covered). I wrapped up by showing a few slides from the IRIS teaching guide for the recent Haiti earthquake (which had happened only two weeks prior to my visit), and answered questions about the effect on people of large earthquakes around the world.