

PAUSE, REWIND, REFLECT

**VIDEO CLUBS THROW
OPEN THE CLASSROOM
DOORS**

By Miriam Gamoran Sherin and Katherine A. Linsenmeier

Carl Witter’s Algebra I class is discussing a multiple choice problem involving percents. Standing at the overhead, Witter asks students to raise their hands to vote for the answer they think is correct. As they vote, students talk among themselves. Lakisha asks a friend, “Why are you raising your hand for that one?” Her friend explains, “It’s gotta be C.” Another student responds, “No way!” Across the room, Sonia calls out, “All I know is that it’s not A.” Shortly after, Lakisha looks at Witter and asks, “Are you trying to trick us?” The teacher smiles and laughs as he continues to count the raised hands. After Witter completes his tallies, he turns to the class. “Sonia had an interesting comment. Sonia, why are you so sure it’s not A?”

The classroom is a complex environment with many things happening at once, all of which the teacher must continuously monitor. In the example above, Witter tallies the students’ votes, trying to get a general sense of what the class understands about the problem. At the same time, he’s hearing students’ comments, listening for clues about how individuals understand the content. And through it all, he’s considering how to proceed with the day’s lesson. This would be a challenging task for any teacher,





and Witter is aware of that. In general, he feels like he does a good job of keeping track of what's happening in his classes. Yet Witter senses that there is probably more that he could do to try to pay attention to the really important things going on.

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL VISION

In our work, we have been exploring the ways that teachers attend to and make sense of what is happening in their classrooms. To do so, we draw on the idea of professional vision — that members of any professional group learn to make sense of events that are significant for their occupation (Goodwin, 1994). For instance, when an archeologist stands at the site of an ancient ruin, patterns in the texture of rocks and sand typically stand out. Similarly, a meteorologist can recognize various shapes and colors within cloud formations. We believe the same is true for teachers: Teachers' professional vision involves being able to notice and interpret significant events that take place in a classroom. Professional vision helps the teacher decide where to focus attention and what interactions are most critical at the moment.

Despite the importance of teachers' professional vision, we find that teachers do not always have opportunities to reflect on and further develop their professional vision. During instruction, a student's comment or question typically demands an immediate response. It is not always realistic for the teacher to pause and consider a comment in depth. Similarly, in the moment of instruction, a teacher does not usually have time to carefully consider various options for how to proceed. He or she must make decisions quickly and continuously throughout the day. Teachers need a way to be able to step back and think about their professional vision without the immediate demands of instruction.

VIDEO CLUBS

For the past 15 years, we have explored how video

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clubs can be used to help develop teachers' professional vision (Sherin, 2000). As in a book club, participants in a video club come together around a common text — in this case, a video excerpt from a participating teacher's classroom. Typically, a group of teachers within a single school form a video club, meeting once or twice a month and taking turns bringing video clips to share with their colleagues. In some instances, a facilitator helps to guide the group's discussion; in other cases, teachers choose to proceed on their own.

In some ways, video seems like an obvious choice to support teachers' professional vision. Video offers a permanent record of what took place. Thus a teacher does not have to rely solely on memory to recall what occurred. Instead, video can serve as a window into a teacher's practice. Also, video does not demand a response from the viewer. With video, a student's question

or comment can be a prompt for reflection rather than a call for action. Finally, in a video club, teachers have the opportunity to look inside each other's classrooms. This contrasts with many teachers' experiences of isolation. In fact, a colleague may notice aspects of instruction that the teacher in the video had not been aware of previously.

Still, the use of video does not guarantee that teachers in a video club will automatically explore their professional vision in productive ways. Using video effectively calls for close attention to the goals teachers bring to the task and to establishing shared norms for discussing video (Linsenmeier & Sherin, 2009; van Es, 2009). Thus, when Witter approached us with a desire to establish a video

club at his school, we offered the following guidelines. Each guideline reflects a particular approach to viewing video that we have found supports the development of teachers' professional vision (Sherin & van Es, 2009).

ATTEND TO THE EVIDENCE

When many teachers first look at video of their classes, they think about all the things they might have done or believe they should have said. For example, in response to viewing the lesson described above, Witter might have commented: "This is a pre-algebra topic that my students really need to understand. Do you think when I asked Sonia how she eliminated one answer, I distracted other students from thinking about how to get the correct answer?"

We think video is most powerful when practitioners take a different approach. Rather than wonder *what might have been*, we recommend that teachers focus on understanding *what did take place* in the video. Thus, we encouraged Witter and his colleagues to consider what the class learned from his focus on Sonia's elimination of answer A. In our experience, teachers

find value in this shift in focus. As one teacher explained, "At first, I kept thinking about how I should have asked a different question or why I didn't give another example. After a while, I saw that it was interesting to look at what I had done and what students had said. My lessons were interesting, if I just took the time to look."

ATTEND TO THE DETAILS

Developing one's professional vision involves focusing on the details of classroom interactions. Video clubs provide teachers with an opportunity to do just that. With video, a teacher can ignore certain aspects of instruction and pay attention to the lesson in a more narrow way. As one participant said: "As a teacher, you have to focus on everything. ... [In the video club] you don't have to be attentive to a hundred things. You can focus on two or three. It's a rare luxury." Even though many students were talking at once in Witter's class, reviewing the moment in a video club let Witter and his colleagues take the time to focus on each individual comment. They asked, "Why does Lakisha think it's a trick question?" and "Sonia can eliminate one answer, despite not knowing the correct answer. What does this say about her understanding of percents?"

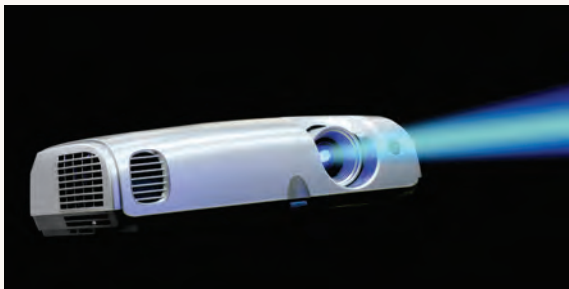
In several video clubs that we have studied, teachers chose to focus their discussions on students' mathematical thinking. Teachers watched the video with an eye toward the mathematical ideas that students raised, they tried to make sense of these ideas, and at times they compared the ideas of different students (Sherin & Han, 2004). Teachers found this experience valuable.

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POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF A VIDEO CLUB

- Provides common text to ground discussions of what takes place in classrooms.
- Offers space for sustained reflection on classroom interactions.
- Counters norm of privacy among teachers and promotes professional community.



GUIDELINES FOR VIDEO CLUBS

- Attend to the evidence: Focus on what did take place, not on what might have been.
- Attend to the details: Focus on specific aspects of classroom events (e.g. student thinking).
- Attend to what's typical: Focus on examples of everyday practice, not on exemplars.

Their comments included: “[It was so useful] to really think about student thinking. You don’t have that time in class. I don’t have that time in class. ... [Here] we reflect on it and actually see what they were saying.”

Also important is that this sense of looking closely at students’ thinking influenced the teachers’ instruction. Teachers responded: “[The video club] has helped me slow down my own thinking [in class.] ... I’m actually listening to what [students] are saying and responding to what they’re saying. ... I don’t just assume I know who’s got it.” Choosing a detailed perspective when viewing video can help to bring important features of one’s classroom into better focus.

ATTEND TO WHAT’S TYPICAL

Because teachers do not often have opportunities to share excerpts of teaching with peers, there may be a tendency to bring moments of best practice to the video club — a lesson that went particularly well, an explanation from the teacher that students grasped right away, a demonstration that went off without a hitch. While these are important and memorable for teachers, we think that it is more valuable to share excerpts of *typical* instruction in order to develop one’s professional vision. This includes moments when all did not go well, when students seem confused, or when a problem was misinterpreted by the teacher. Those are the moments that stretch one’s professional vision, that require one to reflect deeply on what took place in class and why. As one participant said, “It wouldn’t have worked to just show each other what was best. The value was in having something to talk about.”

Witter’s classroom video was a richer prompt for discussion

because it was not perfect. For example, as the lesson continued, Lakisha argued for an incorrect answer, and her explanation was difficult to understand. Discussing this in the video club required Witter and his colleagues to think hard about why students held different ideas about percent.

Teacher 1: “She found 1%, and then multiplied it by five, and then had to add it to the original amount.”

Teacher 2: “And maybe, was she was confused about .05? And thought it was 0.5?”

Witter: “She had sort of two methods up there on the board.”

Rather than provide an opportunity for teachers to simply agree that a lesson had gone well, typical moments of instruction — with all the complexity and uncertainty that is visible — provide a chance to think more deeply about classroom interactions.

For teachers exploring video clubs, these guidelines are a starting point for thinking about how to organize and focus discussions. As Witter explained following his experience in a video club: “The [video] doesn’t lie. ... It’s a really good way to look at your own practice ... to step back and learn to observe your own classroom. And then to have to talk about it among peers You’re definitely going to learn something.”

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