

THE LEADING Teacher

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EVERY EDUCATOR ENGAGES IN EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EVERY DAY SO EVERY STUDENT ACHIEVES

Professional learning playback

BUILD
SUBSTANCE AND
COLLABORATION
THROUGH VIDEO
ANALYSIS



When humanities teacher Katrina Traylor asks students to write a goal for the semester, she models by writing her own goal on the overhead ("to improve students' reading skills") and explains how it is not the only thing she wants to do, but it is her highest priority. When humanities teacher Armon Kasmai asks students to do a close reading of a text with annotations, he sits down with them and does the reading alongside his class. And when debate teacher Maya Gomez asks students to do speed drills where they read a speech as loud and fast as possible, she takes the lead and does this potentially embarrassing task in front of the class herself.

— An explanation of video segments available on the website for the June Jordan School for Equity (<http://ljsse.org>)

By Valerie von Frank

At the June Jordan School for Equity in San Francisco, staff who had been part of curriculum teams, critical friends groups, and high-functioning professional learning teams for years found themselves asking, what's next?

They answered the question by videotaping their lessons and discussing the videos in ways that have led them to closely define their practices and reach a new level of professional learning.

In March 2010, the school's co-director, Matt Alexander, was reading *The New York Times Magazine* when he saw an article about Doug Lemov and his book, *Teach Like a*



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Champion: The 49 Techniques That Put Students on the Path to College (Jossey-Bass, 2010). Alexander read the article closely and investigated the book, in which each section describes a videotaped teaching strategy, why it's important, and how it works. It was an aha moment. He took the idea to the staff.

"Most of these techniques didn't fit with our pedagogy and (the school in the article) was not like our school at all," Alexander said, "but we liked the idea of moving from the theoretical subtlety, the complexity of teaching, to being able to say, 'That's important. What does that look like? What are the specific moves?'"

"So we said: Let's do it ourselves in a slightly different way."

Viewing themselves

That way began with teachers volunteering to be videotaped in lessons they believed they taught well.

"We said in the beginning that we would just focus on strengths, build examples of good practice," Alexander said. "You honor those strengths and build from them."

The school applied for a local grant that turned an AmeriCorps intern into a limited-term staff member to tape and edit the lessons. At the start, teachers simply watched

the video. They didn't follow a formal process; they didn't use a facilitator. They discussed in a staff meeting what they saw, Alexander said.

"It was like flying blind," Alexander said. "We knew something good would come out of it, but we didn't know exactly how it would work."

As the discussions evolved, he said, teachers began to find commonalities for what they viewed as quality teaching. They had studied National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the California Standards for the Teaching Profession, and with those documents in their minds, they began

to form their own list of what they observed in the tapes.

"Within a couple of months, we were able to outline our pedagogy, based on what we were seeing in our classrooms, what these videos showed examples of," he said. "It was an inquiry-based process of what existed rather than what should exist. We defined the pieces of our pedagogy."

As the viewing continued, the school's two co-directors and lead teachers from each curricular area worked in their weekly leadership team meetings to develop a protocol for watching the videos (see tool on p. 6 for an adapted version of their protocol). The staff experimented with different

WHO OR WHAT IS JUNE JORDAN?

June Jordan was a writer and activist whom author Alice Walker called "the universal poet." In 2003, when a group of parents, teachers, and students set out to create a different kind of school, they founded it in her name. The June Jordan School for Equity is a small high school that is part of the San Francisco Unified School District. It is structured to ensure class sizes of 25 or less and teacher loads of 100 students or fewer. Teachers share leadership and participate in key decisions about the school's operation.

The school's 250 or so students live primarily in San Francisco's southeast neighborhoods and are primarily low-income and working-class. While African-American families are being displaced by gentrification in nearby neighborhoods, the school still has the highest proportion of African-American and Latino students of any high school in San Francisco. Many students who remain in the surrounding area still experience significant crime and violence. For example, in 2007, a quarter of the city's homicides took place in one of the school's feeder neighborhoods, which houses just about 5% of the city's population. The majority of students will be the first generation to attend college.

The school was founded on the idea that students who had experienced trauma, violence, or limited opportunities needed a school that would support them in overcoming the feeling of disenfranchisement and help them meet their potential, according to Matt Alexander, who helped found the school. Teachers offer perspective and role models through the curriculum. A framework for social justice is infused throughout the curriculum. For example, students studied sexism and patriarchy in 10th grade English, giving them a sense of social forces that might have influenced their own families.

June Jordan School for Equity

San Francisco, Calif.

Grades: **9-12**

Enrollment: **250**

Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	4%
Black:	33%
Hispanic:	46%
Chinese:	6%
Filipino:	6%
Other:	7%

Limited English proficient: **16%**

Free/reduced lunch: **62%**

Special education: **15%**

ways of using video observations. For example, during the full staff meeting at the start of the second academic year, the three-person science team watched a group member's video and deconstructed the lesson "in a fishbowl," allowing other staff members to observe the team using a protocol to discuss the video segment. The whole staff, then, debriefed the experience.

And teachers began to use videos on their own. They wanted more critical feedback, Alexander said, so they began in their learning teams to review unedited footage together. They looked at longer segments of lessons, including both positives and not-so-great moments, during their regular, weekly hour-long common planning times, and discussed what they saw based on the four areas they had defined as a staff.

This "noticing," as researcher Elizabeth van Es (n.d.) defines it, is a benefit of using video in teacher learning.

Learning Forward BELIEF

Student learning increases when educators reflect on professional practice and student progress.

Van Es found that teachers using video began focusing more on how to teach a lesson, on curricular links between grade levels, and on the goals and structure of the curriculum. Additionally, she found in her study that "discussion of student thinking and curriculum became more substantive and teachers began to collaborate to achieve one another's goals" (in review, p. 14).

Alexander said continual questioning is helping the videotaping idea evolve. "We are constantly asking through our curriculum team whether it is working and whether teachers are having any problems with it so we can adjust," he said.

Not always smooth

Alexander said the initial emphasis on videotaping teachers' best moments helped defray potential resistance, but that did not mean the practice has been without challenges.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

WEBSITE

The Teaching Channel

This free website aims to "capture (teacher) techniques on video so that all teachers -- new or seasoned -- have a place to find inspiration." The website provides tools to take notes, share comments and ideas, download supporting materials, and build personal workspaces.

www.teachingchannel.org

ARTICLE

Pause, rewind, reflect: Video clubs throw open the classroom doors *JSD, October 2011*

Through video clubs, teachers develop professional visions. The authors outline the benefits as well as guidelines for creating one.

<http://www.learningforward.org/news/articleDetails.cfm?articleID=2351>

TEAM TOOLS

www.learningforward.org/teamtools

With each issue of *The Leading Teacher*, Learning Forward provides free sample tools from our books, newsletters, and magazines. Selections for this issue:



• Guiding questions for analyzing classroom lessons

Tools For Schools, May/June 2007

Teams can use this tool to guide conversations when viewing classroom instructional videos.

• Video analysis questions

Tools For Schools, May/June 2007

This tool can assist team members with questions designed to focus attention on aspects of teaching.

• Video analysis into practice: Course of action form

Tools For Schools, May/June 2007

This tool can help teachers reflect and develop their own goals by identifying specific areas in their own practice to improve upon or further develop and address after viewing a video.

• Classroom observation sheet

The Learning Principal, March 2008

Teams can use this observation tool to debrief a lesson they taught and viewed on video.

“Some teachers are much more comfortable than others doing this,” Alexander said. “Some don’t like seeing themselves on video.”

The co-directors don’t coerce participants. Alexander works with reluctant teachers to encourage them to find positive examples within their teaching. He said their self-consciousness sometimes stems from a lack of confidence, and some pointed attention can help. He drops into those classrooms, notes a positive element, and asks the teacher for permission to videotape the strategy.

The administrator’s role is key. Alexander said he at first wanted to review each video and discuss the observation with the teacher as a professional learning opportunity. Each teacher is videotaped about every four to six weeks, however, and the time needed for that volume made the idea impossible. As teachers began using the videos on their own in learning teams, it made the idea moot — staff had responsibility for their own learning.

Evidence of effectiveness

Alexander admits that it’s hard to quantify the impact of the new form of observation on student performance, but “I’ve seen a huge change in the quality of teachers’ conversations. These are the same people. It’s not like people weren’t wanting to have these conversations before, but the video makes the ideas concrete.

“If you don’t have a video in front of you,” he continued, “it’s hard to stay focused on the actual practice. When you put the video in front of people, they talk about what is happening in the classroom, and they can go back and look at it again. They can say, ‘What were you thinking at that moment?’ ‘What do you think the student was thinking?’ You can analyze what was happening in a way that all the protocols and the trust in the world won’t get you to.”

Research shows that video “allow(s) teachers time and space to share with their colleagues what they do in their classrooms and use their teaching as the focus of their professional development” (van Es, 2010, p. 58).

Alexander said the staff had tried — and failed — before to do personal observations in classrooms because time was an issue. He said the results are better with the video observations.

“Even when you do peer observations, the conversations aren’t as rich,” Alexander said. “When you’re debriefing a lesson, everyone is relying on memory. When you rely on memory, you’re often relying on emotional memory, especially if it was a stressful moment. Video frees you from the emotions and allows authentic conversations about what

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works, what doesn’t. You can take a meta-approach, which helps people to think about their body language and their tone. That makes a big difference.”

The effects on classroom management became evident, Alexander said, when one teacher who was struggling found help through peers’ videos demonstrating “Jedi awareness” and other identified practices. She worked out the challenge through videos and with her team.

“Classroom management is all about personal interaction — about tone, body language, timing — which you can only see by looking at it,” Alexander said.

In research, Sherin (2007) noted that video helps teachers develop their professional vision, “pay attention to new aspects of classroom events ... (and develop) new techniques for thinking about what they noticed” (p. 387).

Van Es (n.d.) notes that “video records of practice, along with collaborative and collegial interactions and discourse norms for analyzing issues in teaching and learning represented in those videos, can provide teachers opportunities to hone important skills for teaching.”

Alexander said the greatest effects at June Jordan are subtle. “People are talking about each other’s strengths,” he said. “It changes the culture.”

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