



WHAT LEADERSHIP LOOKS LIKE

VIDEOS HELP ASPIRING LEADERS GET THE PICTURE

“One of the principals came in and said, ‘I have read everything under the sun about how to be an instructional leader. I am clear about what that is. I just don’t know what that looks like, and without knowing what it looks like, I don’t know if my interpretation is accurate.’”

— Mariah Cone, School Leaders Network national director, Los Angeles, Calif.

By Lynn V. Clark

Finding out what instructional leadership looks like is at the center of a new trend in leadership development: videos of practice. These range from minimally edited videos of a leader’s own practice to highly edited clips that focus on successful leadership actions in authentic school settings.

While videos of practice are widely used in teacher education, they have only recently become a critical part of leadership development training and coaching models. National programs such as New Leaders and School Leaders Network have developed expertise in ways to combine videos of practices proven to drive student gains with criti-

cal self-reflection and job-embedded application. Facilitators in these programs find that videos, when appropriately integrated into the learning experience, can be powerful tools to move school leaders’ practice.

Meet three facilitators of leadership development programs who use videos of practice to work with leaders at various stages of development: emerging leaders, aspiring principals, and principals. Each facilitator has extensive experience designing and developing leadership coaching and development sessions. All three direct national and regional programs and facilitate group and one-on-one sessions with school leaders. Although each facilitator uses video in different ways and for different purposes, they agree that these videos are the most effective way to prompt critical reflection about what successful leadership practice looks like.

TARA GOULET PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITH VIDEOS OF ONE'S OWN PRACTICE

Tara Goulet uses videos of one's own practice with teacher leaders, coaches, and assistant principals to develop their leadership practice. These leaders are part of New Leaders' Emerging Leaders Program that operates in New York, N.Y., and in 11 other cities across the country.

"We used the videos that they captured of themselves within our group sessions to talk about adult leadership," says Goulet, director of the Emerging Leaders Program. Goulet uses a video viewing protocol to provide a framework for participants to share videos of their own practice with other emerging leaders in both face-to-face and virtual sessions.

"Let's say I was the person who videoed my leadership team," she says. "I would be the person introducing the clip to the group, setting it up for them, and telling them what they are going to see in the video."

As participants view the video, they reflect on specific questions relating to the focus of the session,

and, after the video, the group debriefs and provides feedback. "Then we ask the person who was involved in the video to reflect on what the feedback means to them — how it changes how they view things — and they sort of step back and find there are places in the video that they hadn't even thought about before," she says. In addition, Goulet directly addresses participants' concerns: "When you are using videos of one's own practice, you have to be mindful of the vulnerability in the room — to create a space and say it out loud: This is uncomfortable."

Goulet emphasizes the importance of establishing a climate of trust as participants view videos of their colleagues' practice: "It's a very different experience to view your own video with teachers that you know — in front of a group of people that you become intimately connected to — than it is to view a video of people that you don't know."

Building trust is the key to open, honest communication.



Goulet

• "Having never done this before, I was skeptical because we only require a three- to five-minute video clip. I found myself surprised, and the participants were surprised as well, that you can capture so much within three to five minutes. You can capture communication, or lack thereof, body language, messaging — what is transparent and effective versus that which isn't. You can capture outcomes, clear strategies, and next steps."

— Tara Goulet, director of New Leaders' Emerging Leaders Program, New York, N.Y.

"People want to be nice at first because you are sitting right next to that person," she says. "But it takes building trust in that community for participants to get to that place where they feel like they can talk honestly." To speed the process, Goulet asks participants to view each other's videos individually with headphones, then provide feedback one-on-one or in groups of three. Feedback can last as long as one to two hours per session.

LESSONS LEARNED

The following tips and tools represent some of the collective learning of these three facilitators and provide a starting point for trainers and coaches who are interested in using videos of practice to prompt leadership development.

1. Create a safe environment for participants to share honest feedback.

"You need protocols, you need norms, and you need to build trust within the group," Goulet says. Although it is standard to establish informal rules, or norms, at the beginning of professional development sessions, Goulet takes it a step further by providing specific guidelines, or pro-

ocols, for viewing and debriefing videos of practice. She also refines and resets group norms throughout the year as participants develop trust and deepen their discussions. She adds that participants need repeated practice: "One video is not going to change the world, because people aren't going to be comfortable."

2. Choose videos that are focused, relevant, and real.

Wilson says that it is difficult to find videos of leadership practice, and existing videos often require purchasing a site license to use them. He networks with colleagues in the field, and they share websites where videos can be found. He looks for five- to 10-minute videos that reflect

MICHAEL WILSON COACHING WITH VIDEOS OF OTHERS' PRACTICE

Michael Wilson, co-director of New Leaders' Aspiring Principals Program and director of its Principal Institute, uses videos of other leaders' practice to coach aspiring principals who have gone through New Leaders' Emerging Leaders Program and are ready for the next step. That next step is a one-year residency at a site where they take on increasing administrative and leadership responsibilities while at the same time refining their leadership practice through seminars and job-embedded coaching.



Wilson

Aspiring principals, working in cohorts of 10 to 20 participants, meet with members of other partner districts for a three-week summer workshop and one-week workshops during the fall and spring. Ten city districts participate in the program, and the workshops rotate from city to city. Coaching is an integral part of each workshop and continues once participants are back at their school site.

Before each coaching session, participants view a short video of practice Wilson selects for them and study it to see how it applies to their specific situation and consider why Wilson referred it. Wilson gives participants a list of questions and things to look for in the video and asks them to reflect in writing. "When I come back to the school — which I would call the laboratory — then I would look for some of the things in their reflections, and we use the video to center our conversations," he says.

Over the past few years, these conversations have become less scripted as Wilson allows the learner an opportunity to share more of his or her own aha moments and other observations. However, Wilson still controls the conversation. "If I see they are going in a different direction than I want them to go — not looking at what I wanted them to see — at that point, I might do a follow-up and narrow their focus with

• "I have found that it is one thing
• for me to talk about my previous
• experience of being a principal,
• but it is another thing to actually
• be able to show them examples
• that are contemporary and
• relative to their experience —
• seeing someone else live that
• experience and successfully
• navigate it."

— Michael Wilson, co-director of New Leaders' Aspiring Principals Program and director of the Principal Institute, Washington, D.C.

more questions," he says.

Wilson chooses videos that are relevant to leaders who are still developing their practice. "I look for the videos where someone may say, 'We did it this way and it didn't work, we tried this way and it didn't work, and we are still kind of rebounding.'" In addition, he looks for video examples of leaders participants can relate to so that they will be encouraged to try new things and learn from the leaders' mistakes.

NATIONAL SCHOOL REFORM FACULTY PROTOCOLS

The National School Reform Faculty is a professional development initiative focused on developing collegial relationships, encouraging reflective practice, and rethinking leadership in restructuring schools, all in support of increased student achievement. Its website offers free protocols at www.nsrffharmony.org/protocol/a_z.html. A protocol consists of agreed-upon guidelines for a conversation. This type of structure permits very focused conversations to occur. The following two protocols are recommended for use with videos of practice:

- Peeling the Onion: www.nsrffharmony.org/protocol/doc/peeling_onion.pdf.
- Consultancy: www.nsrffharmony.org/protocol/doc/consultancy.pdf.

the demographics, achievement, and grade levels of participants' school sites. He also tries to find principals who are not perfect so that participants can "relate to the person enough to try some things."

3. Provide guidelines to focus participant viewing.

Before each video, Goulet talks to participants about what they will be seeing. She is very specific about what she wants participants look for in the video. "Sometimes I will generate a T-chart and ask, 'What does the principal value, and how do you see that in action?'"

4. Use group discussion protocols to relate the video to specific leadership actions.

All three facilitators stress the need for a tight fit between the focus of the session and the video, but they also have discovered ways to push the thinking and deepen participant re-

MARIAH CONE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WITH VIDEOS OF OTHERS' PRACTICE

Mariah Cone uses videos of other leaders' practice in her work as national director of School Leaders Network, a collaboration among school leaders to understand and solve problems of practice in their schools.

Cone meets monthly with cohorts of 10 to 12 principals to develop leadership practice. She places one or two video clips at the center of each session. "The first step is to be really clear about what you want to accomplish in that session," she says, "then I make sure that that the video clips tightly align to what I want them to walk away with."

Cone says it is important to create a meaningful context for the video before viewing and to address anything that is going to be different from participants' own school setting. Next, she provides guidelines to focus obser-



Cone

ations during viewing. "I will watch a clip two or three times to ask, 'What did I look for that got me the most amount of evidence around this question or outcome?' And then that is what I tell them: 'This is what I want

you to look for and collect some evidence on. How do you see that in action?' " Finally, Cone cultivates an environment that supports critical reflection: "We really have to create that space where they can take it in because those videos are so loaded with content.

If they haven't had time to get their mind right, or if they haven't taken enough of a pause from the fire that they are dealing with on campus, they can't attend to the video."

After viewing the video, she asks participants to discuss the leader's actions and reflect on their own practice as part of small- and whole-group

“I think that, all too often, we ground our work in the words of others, but not necessarily in that visual. I think videos of practice open up a lens to be able to say, ‘We are not going to tell you what this is. We are going to show you.’”

— Mariah Cone, School Leaders Network national director, Los Angeles, Calif.

discussions. She uses a protocol such as Peeling the Onion (see box on p. 44) to isolate problems participants face. "That helps us transition from the ideal to the real," she says. Cone ends each video viewing session with time to reflect individually in writing. "Even people who are highly reflective in leadership often don't have time to pause and ask: So what does this really mean, and how do I think about this?"

reflection through protocols and innovative grouping strategies. Facilitators use the protocols from the National School Reform Faculty (see box on p. 44) for large- and small-group discussions. In addition, participants meet with the same partner or group of three each session to hold each other accountable.

Perhaps the greatest lesson facilitators learned is about their own practice. Each has stepped into the process, using their own videos of practice to address issues of vulnerability with participants and collaborate with colleagues about what using videos of practice to prompt leadership development looks like. "I actually spend two or three times a year recording myself doing adult facilitation so I can reach out to another colleague and say, 'Hey, tell me what you think about how I facilitated this,'" Wilson says.

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ABOUT NEW LEADERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS NETWORK

New Leaders ensures high academic achievement for all students by developing transformational school leaders. School Leaders Network provides ongoing leadership development for principals to make sure all children graduate with college and career-ready skills. With support from MetLife Foundation, the two organizations are partners in researching the impact of using video to train and support school leaders.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- New Leaders: www.newleaders.org.
- School Leaders Network: <http://connectleadsucceed.org>.
- MetLife Foundation: www.metlife.com/about/corporate-profile/citizenship/metlife-foundation/index.html.