



Robert Pianta is dean of the Curry School of Education, founding director of the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, and professor of psychology at the University of Virginia.

In March 2019, Learning Forward's Stephanie Hirsh interviewed Robert Pianta, who developed the evidence-based MyTeachingPartner 1:1 Video Coaching program (MTP). MTP is one of the few coaching models that meets the evidence requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), based on studies of its effectiveness and efficacy. Rigorous research included in the What Works Clearinghouse with teachers in grades pre-K-12 has shown that MTP improves teacher practice and increases student engagement, peer relationships, and achievement.

Here are excerpts from that interview. Questions and answers have been edited for clarity and brevity.

A WINDOW INTO TEACHING

WITH EVIDENCE-BASED COACHING, TEACHERS OBSERVE AND REFLECT ON STUDENT INTERACTIONS

BY ELIZABETH FOSTER

Stephanie Hirsh: Your coaching work is based on a framework called the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, or CLASS. What is CLASS, and what should we know about it?

Robert Pianta: CLASS is simply a method we developed for an observer to spend time in a teacher's classroom to capture and record the elements of

his or her interactions with students. These are clustered in three broad kinds of supports students need. First, the emotional supports: Do teachers create a safe and comfortable place for learning, and are teachers attentive to individual children's emotional needs? Second, how do teachers organize the classroom: Does it run like a pretty well-oiled machine, and are kids

engaged and busy? Third, what are teachers doing to extend children's thinking and learning: Are they paying attention to concepts and providing kids with rich feedback on their learning?

These three big-bucket areas are described further in detailed dimensions that an observer will assign a rating to from 1 to 7. So if I was in a classroom, I'd watch for 15 or 20 minutes, I'd take notes, and then I'd assign a rating from 1 to 7 on each dimension based on what I saw in the teacher's behavior.

People who use CLASS are trained to use CLASS. This is important. If you and I are both in a classroom, we should both be able to use CLASS consistently and reliably.

CLASS is used in pre-K and with high school teachers and everyone in between. The system is modified based on where you are working, but the overall approach doesn't change at all. We take the approach that good teaching is good teaching is good teaching.

Hirsh: Research has documented the impact of the CLASS system on improved teacher practice and student outcomes. What does the research say?

Pianta: We could see and describe interactions all day long, but it's really important to demonstrate that what we are seeing when we improve these interactions actually matters for student learning. We now have over 300 studies in which we've done CLASS observations throughout the year, and students have been assessed on their learning at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year. In the majority of those studies, the results demonstrate that there is an association between teachers who score higher on the quality of their interactions in classrooms and students who are learning more than students in classrooms with teachers who scored lower. This tells us that what we're paying attention to what matters for student learning.

TO LEARN MORE

More information about the coaching model is available at teachstone.com/k12-video-coaching.

Hirsh: Can you talk about MyTeachingPartner, the video coaching program that is based on CLASS and has enough evidence to be listed in the What Works Clearinghouse?

Pianta: MyTeachingPartner is a structured coaching model designed to improve interactions in the classroom, using CLASS as the language and lens for those interactions. The coach is trained to observe those interactions effectively, and then the coach and the teacher engage in a series of about 10 coaching cycles over the course of the year.

If I am a coach and you are the teacher, we will agree on what features of interactions to work on — maybe qualities of emotional engagement or your instruction. Then you will send the video to me via the MTP website. I will pull out three short clips. Each clip is going to be 30 to 60 seconds long and gets posted to an internal website. The first clip is going to be an example of you effectively interacting with kids on that particular dimension we want to look at. We think that this first clip is really important because teachers need to see themselves and feel themselves being effective. The second clip is one where you're a little less effective, and the third clip is one where we talk about how the dimension connects to instruction and student learning, attention, or engagement. You'll examine and comment on your behaviors as well.

These experiences over the year result in direct feedback about your interactions with students. You are also learning a language and a lexicon for interactions and developing your

own observation and analytic skills. As a teacher, you learn how to describe your practice while also acquiring a set of tools to identify circumstances under which you're doing a pretty good job or not such a good job. And at the end of the day, it all rolls together to help teachers build a compass to help them navigate through a daily set of thousands and thousands of interactions with kids.

Hirsh: What you are describing aligns with Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning, and I'd like to hear more about how you think this is different than a lot of the professional learning that teachers experience.

Pianta: I think it's different for a couple of reasons. First, it's very focused, targeted directly and individually on a teacher's classroom and practices in that classroom. It is connected to the ways in which teachers get professional meaning, which is in their interactions with students. Teachers want to feel more effective and know that they're being more effective.

Teachers access the website at a time that's convenient. It is all handled through the internet so the teacher doesn't have to leave their classroom. You are not sitting in a generic 45-minute workshop that is not relevant to you as an individual teacher nor to your practice in your classroom. It's embedded and ongoing over the course of the year so not only will you have the opportunity to develop these skills but you're going to develop a relationship with the coach. We find that that relationship with the coach is a pretty important component. Imagine all the things we learn as adults. We connect with coaches, and it usually is individual, ongoing, targeted, and includes feedback that is meaningful.

Hirsh: That means that federal Title II dollars can be used to pay for this program because MTP meets the federal definition for professional

learning and it is recognized in the What Works Clearinghouse.

Pianta: We have research that looks at the coaching model as well as a college course that we've developed. We randomize groups of teachers to receive the coaching or not receive the coaching, or receive the course or not. We then compare them and compare the outcomes of the students they teach. We now have more than half a dozen randomized control trials — some fairly large with several hundred teachers across the country — demonstrating that teachers who received any one of those professional development supports are actually teaching more effectively at the end of the year than the teachers who did not receive those supports.

Hirsh: How do you get teachers comfortable with watching themselves on video?

Pianta: That's a little bit of a trick. We have now run more than 2,000 teachers through this experience, and very few of them will say I'm too uncomfortable watching myself to continue. And some of those videos are not the easiest videos for a teacher to watch, so great credit to those teachers.

A couple of things are important here. First, the coach and the teacher connect and engage beforehand so they can ease their way into the relationship as we provide the teacher with all sorts of information about MTP. It is also the case that the coach does not have a supervisory relationship with the teacher. This is not that kind of connection. All of the information in and related to the videos stays within the coaching relationship. And it is really important that the video clips always start with a section that we call "Nice Work," where the teacher is hearing and seeing herself lauded for the appropriate interaction and the effective interactions with a student.

Hirsh: We know all too well that

teachers don't always have the opportunity for meaningful feedback conversations, but that when they do, coaches are critical to that dialogue. Can you talk about how you develop coaches to foster this kind of relationship?

Pianta: I'm really glad you brought that up because we have learned a lot about coaches. As a field, we see all sorts of coaching, but when I ask what specific model is being employed, rarely do people describe more than a generic approach. So I think it's significant that our coaches are trained in this structured model to support the teacher and implement the model with a high degree of fidelity. We approach coaching in a focused and organized way so that we know we can replicate that coaching experience for teachers anywhere.

We didn't know this at first. We invented this initially to provide a support platform through the internet so coaches wouldn't have to travel. But what that did was enable the coaches' supervisors to be able to look at the prompts and the way that they were clipping video, so they could actually see the coach implement the intervention. (All of our coaches have their own coach who is looking at the kind of feedback that that coach is providing teachers and monitors for a high degree of fidelity.)

Hirsh: This is an evidence-based model that more leaders and teachers would surely be interested in if they knew about it. What do you want them to know?

Pianta: School district leaders need to know this works and that it works in places that look like your district with kids that look like your kids. I think we have stronger evidence than almost any other coaching model. We know this works for showing results on state standards tests as well as assessments of student engagement or motivation.

They should know that there is a

system that is organized for training teachers and coaches, so this is feasible and everyone knows what to expect.

We also need to be frank with districts about cost. This does take some effort and expense in training up front, but if you do invest, the likelihood of that investment translating into increased teacher effectiveness and increased student effectiveness is much higher.

It is also important to spread the word to teachers. I think the best resource we have is the teachers who have already participated and their stories. Over and over again, teachers who have participated say that this was the most meaningful, the most effective, and the most engaging professional development they have had. Teachers are professionals, and they care that the time and energy they spend on professional development has merit.

Hirsh: We know it is important that teachers have access to high-quality instructional materials so that they continue to develop their own content knowledge. Can you talk a little bit about how MTP can help address that challenge?

Pianta: There is no question that teachers, in particular secondary teachers, need to be content experts. If you are teaching chemistry, you've got to know the chemistry. But if you ask kids about their experience, they typically will tell you that their attention, motivation to learn, and effort is far more predicated on how you're teaching the chemistry than on the chemistry itself.

We have good evidence that if you work on how teachers are teaching the content, you can activate the classroom environment for better content learning. We did a study a couple of years ago of MyTeachingPartner across four content areas, middle and high school. What we found was that students were more engaged

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How coaching takes root

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A window into teaching

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and motivated, the quality of teacher interactions increased considerably, and the students' scores on state tests went up by 10 percentile points. And we didn't do anything with teachers' content, we just helped them learn how to engage students in ways that made the content more meaningful — make the content more conceptual, create a more active classroom, and attend to student perspectives.

Hirsh: What else do you want people to know about this work?

Pianta: We have a lot of examples of ways in which these tools have helped create life-changing teachers. We can all think of a teacher who empowered us and affected us. We need to think about all the children who haven't had those kind of teachers in their lives, and what could happen if they all had the opportunity to experience those

kinds of teachers. To do that, we want more teachers to have the opportunity to experience the kind of improvement and growth that MyTeachingPartner can support so that they in turn can support every student.

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