ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

VIDEO CAN MOTIVATE TEACHERS TO IMPROVE THEIR SKILLS

BY JODY A. FLOWERS

For many of us, the role of a coach is ubiquitous throughout our childhood into our adolescent years. From the time we participated in youth soccer, Little League, dance classes, or music lessons, coaches were there to guide us. Coaches build relationships, encourage us, demonstrate techniques, provide motivation — all to heighten our efforts and expand our skills. Many times, it is these special people who inspire us to teach.

Yet when educators enter the classroom, this kind of guidance and support often vanishes. Or worse, the term coach takes on a pejorative connotation because only struggling teachers are assigned a coach. But when done right, coaching improves teaching and students' achievement by leading teachers to focus on the skills that address social, behavioral, and academic needs.

One of the benefits of coaching is the opportunity to see oneself through another's eyes and reflect. A growing trend enables this process by leveraging one of today's most popular forms of communication: digital videos and on-demand video training. But when you mention video observation, fear often spreads across teachers' faces as if they just woke up from a recurring nightmare.

Why are we hesitant to capture our professional interactions with students on video? Outside of the classroom, we willingly have our personal interactions videoed, watched, and rewatched. We turn to YouTube to post and watch step-by-step tutorials on repairing a heating element in the dryer; we post our marriage proposals and our child's game-winning hit on Facebook; we Skype with grandchildren.

Professionals in other fields frequently analyze themselves on

video. Professional athletes spend hours honing their skills through video analysis; attorneys video themselves practicing opening arguments or coaching clients; plumbers, mechanics, and electricians video their craft to demonstrate their work. It could be argued that teachers' interactions have more long-term impact than any other professional skill, yet video observation and reflection is not yet the norm in schools.
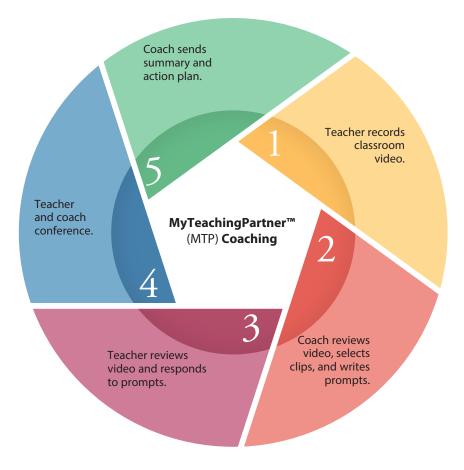
When we do video coaching correctly, reflection becomes the driving factor and continuous improvement becomes second nature. As a result, teacher-student interactions become more intentional, and the quality of teaching and learning improves (Gregory, Ruzek, Hafen, Mikami, Allen, & Pianta, 2017).

I have witnessed this as a district coach in a research project on scaling up effective video coaching. The lessons my colleagues and I are learning are beneficial not only for our teachers and their students, but hopefully for others beyond our districts.

THE VIDEO COACHING MODEL

My work with video coaching began when my school district, Waco ISD in central Texas, qualified for a grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education to study a research-based coaching model called MyTeachingPartner-Secondary 1:1 Video Coaching (MTP-S).

The model is based on the CLASS instructional framework developed by Robert C. Pianta, Bridget K. Hamre, and colleagues at the University of Virginia. CLASS focuses on interactions between teachers and students in three areas — emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support — and rigorous studies have shown that teachers' ratings on these dimensions are strong predictors of students' academic and

MyTeachingPartner™ (MTP) **Coaching**

1 Teacher records classroom video.

2 Coach reviews video, selects clips, and writes prompts.

3 Teacher reviews video and responds to prompts.

4 Teacher and coach conference.

5 Coach sends summary and action plan.

social success (Allen et al., 2013; Hamre, Piana, Mashburn, & Downer, 2007; Mashburn et al., 2008).

Teachstone Training, which trains educators to use the MyTeachingPartner coaching model, teamed up with Learning Forward and the American Institutes for Research to support a cohort of secondary English language arts and math teachers in using the coaching model in secondary schools. They are researching what it takes to scale the coaching model, which has been shown to be effective in other contexts (Allen, Pianta, Gregory, Mikami, & Lun, 2011; Gregory et al., 2017; Hamre et al., 2010).

Because of the emphasis in the MyTeachingPartner coaching model (and in the CLASS framework on which it is based) on interactions between teachers and students, the use

of video is essential to the purpose and practice of coaching. As educators, we can't really know what our interactions with students look like until we actually see them.

MTP-S is a strengths-based coaching model. Coaches focus on what teachers are doing well and how they can build on it. This builds trust and buy-in to the coaching process. As teachers view themselves in positive moments, it ignites the fire for teachers to stay motivated, reflect deeply, and, most importantly, become self-reliant observers of their work.

THE VIDEO COACHING PROCESS

Waco ISD is one of three districts participating in the first cohort of the research project, along with Lansing Public Schools in Michigan and Louisa County Public Schools in central

Virginia. Once our district joined the study, teachers volunteered to participate.

By random selection, half were placed in a control group, in which they videoed themselves during one class in the fall and one in the spring but received no coaching through the MTP-S model. The other half were placed in the treatment group and participated in 1:1 coaching throughout the year, kicked off by professional learning sessions introducing the CLASS language and MyTeachingPartner coaching model. As the coach for our district, I also engaged in regular professional learning and coaching with staff from Teachstone.

To begin each program year, teachers set goals they would like to achieve during the professional learning process. In keeping with the Implementation standard in the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011), the coach and teacher commit to continuous improvement based on constructive feedback and reflection. Each teacher engages in eight to 10 coaching cycles. Each cycle consists of five steps and takes place over a two-week period.

STEP 1: Teacher videos a lesson.

The teacher chooses a class on which he or she will focus throughout the year, and videos and uploads a lesson of his or her choosing every two weeks, with the intention of discussing with the coach whether and how his or her interactions with students embody the interactions captured by the the CLASS framework.

STEP 2: Coach observes.

The teacher and coach decide which CLASS dimensions to focus on, and the MTP-S coach watches the full video, selecting three one-minute clips that best capture the teacher's observable interactions with the dimensions chosen for that cycle. The coach writes a summary of the dimension observed in the clip, a brief description of the

observed interactions, and a prompt that directs the teacher to reflect on the actions and dialogue within the clip. The coach sends these to the teacher within two days of the videoed lesson.

STEP 3: Teacher responds.

After viewing the one-minute clips, the teacher submits a written response to the prompts, and the coach plans a conference with the teacher.

STEP 4: Teacher and coach meet.

During a 30-minute conference that can take place in person or through video chat, the teacher and coach review the clips and the teacher's responses to the reflection prompts, discuss an approach to maintaining and duplicating these positive interactions in a sustainable way, and plan the focus of the next cycle.

STEP 5: Coach develops an action plan.

The coach writes a summary of the conference and produces an action plan that includes viewing exemplar videos, a short reading assignment, and specific actions to practice before videoing again.

This 2 week cycle of teacher-coach interactions repeats itself throughout the school year. During the first year of the grant, most treatment teachers completed nine to 10 two-week feedback cycles with their MTP coach.

OVERCOMING THE BLINKING LIGHT

To make setup easy and comfortable, teachers receive an iPad to video the class and access to a Teachstone app to upload the video to a private Teachstone dashboard used by the teacher and the coach. As with any digital device and process, technological issues can arise, but they are usually easy to deal with.

The main challenge with video coaching is overcoming the coach's and teacher's discomfort with hearing and seeing themselves on video. When we first approached teachers about

participating, their initial concern was not about having coaches observe their practice, but about having to hear their own voices.

One teacher said after his first cycle, "That's what my students have to listen to each day? Oh my." But after the third cycle, that same teacher reflected on how critical it was to see and hear what his students are seeing each day so he could better understand how peer dialoging and back-and-forth exchanges play a vital role in the effective pacing of his lessons.

On average, it takes three to four cycles for the camera to "disappear" for the teachers and students. It helps that teachers focus on three very short (one-minute) clips and that coaches help them view the clips through a carefully crafted lens focused on the CLASS dimensions. As one teacher said, "It's watching yourself so you can plan through the eyes of your students."

STRENGTH-BASED OBSERVATIONS

Another challenge is that it can be difficult for teachers to understand a strengths-based approach to coaching. These types of coaching interactions and their effectiveness float in the wake of many teachers' previous experiences with observations.

Many observations teachers have received come from a place rooted in check marks, required walk-throughs, and supervisory requirements. Many of these interactions typically end with "what could you have done differently" paralysis, causing them to become numb to any strengths that may be observed. The process can be demotivating.

In contrast, the video component allows coaches to highlight positive examples of teacher-student interactions. Trust develops as the teachers see a trend in the clips and reflective prompts created by their coach. When teachers reflect on their specific words and actions that result in favorable student reactions, the process becomes easier to duplicate.

Since each cycle is specific to research-based CLASS dimensions, the results quickly increase the buy-in from teachers and the students. By the third cycle, teachers in our district had become comfortable with the framework and confident that no surprises or evaluative "buts" were lurking behind the coach's feedback.

During end-of-year cycle conferences, treatment teachers made comments about the strengths-based approach and how it solidified their commitment to the coaching process. For example, one said, "I knew each time we reflected on the videos, I was going to hear positive feedback, not advice." Another said, "The questions from my coach were open-ended, and I felt like I could reflect without judgment or correction."

PREPARATION AND SUPPORT FOR COACHES

To ensure the coaching process is effective and smooth, each coach works closely with a Teachstone expert, engaging in biweekly video chats with the expert and other coaches. Designed to mimic the same processes used in the coach-teacher relationship — what psychologists sometimes call parallel process — coaches see and practice the skill sets needed to successfully maintain fidelity of the framework in a safe, nonthreating atmosphere. This includes building trust, listening actively, encouraging teachers to problem solve, and providing feedback, not advice.

Professional learning for the coach begins with becoming grounded in the CLASS framework, reading relevant literature on the many facets of instructional coaching, and viewing and reflecting on video clips that demonstrate the cycle steps of focus. The coaches reflect together, developing and sharing their ideas and building capacity to duplicate collaboration with teachers.

During regular calls, coaches read and act out scenarios so they can practice the arc of conversations and

OVERVIEW OF CLASS DOMAINS AND DIMENSIONS			
Dimensions	**Emotional support**	**Classroom organization**	**Instructional support**
	• Positive climate • Teacher sensitivity • Regard for student perspectives	• Behavior management • Productivity • Negative climate	• Instructional learning formats • Content understanding • Analysis and inquiry • Quality of feedback • Instructional dialogue
	Student engagement		

feedback within a teacher conference. Role-play helps expose and reshape poor habits of phrase to avoid mimicking evaluative conferences. Phrases like "What would you have done differently?" become "What is something new you want to try next time?"

Positive, generic compliments like "good job" or "way to go" become more specific with relevant details like "I noticed that you ask students to prove their answers to get students to return to the text," highlighting strategies that went well and can be duplicated easily.

In addition, coaches begin to hear the balance of talk between coach and teacher. Conversations involve active listening that results in feedback loops — there's equity in the discussion. These practices spill over to the teacher conferences, then into the classroom with students.

Another parallel process used throughout the coaching model is videoing and discussing clips. MyTeachingPartner coaches video and share their work with their Teachstone coach specialist just as teachers do with their coaches. This not only improves coaches' skills but models the process they are using with teachers.

The impact of parallel processes spreads as the cycles continue. Coaches find themselves talking less and listening more. Teachers reflect and discover wisdom and answers on their own, instead of passively waiting for advice.

Authenticity becomes the signpost of conferences. Acceptance permeates the relationships among coaches and teachers and teachers and students.

CHANGING CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES

The results of this video coaching model scale-up study will be available in two to three years. In the meantime, our anecdotal experience is that video coaching allows teachers to become more aware of the factors that impact relationships, safety, and learning that should take place in a classroom.

The MyTeachingPartner coaching model allows coaches and teachers to work together to change experiences in the classroom. Those experiences, even small ones, can change a student's trajectory. Think of the student who is afraid to ask a question because her teacher doesn't realize his tone of voice is harsh, or the one who disengages from school and drops out because he thinks none of the adults care about what he's interested in. With video coaching, we can see those unintentional messages we send and change them so that we can change students' futures.

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A window into teaching

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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