



VIDEO COACHING ADVANCES TEACHER PRACTICE IN PALAU

BY IDA REKOI KILCULLEN AND LUCIA TABELUAL

Alii! We send greetings from pristine Palau, our homeland encircled by the brilliant waters of the western Pacific Ocean. Palau is a nation of 20,000 people in the westernmost part of Micronesia, 2,000 miles south of Japan,

830 miles southwest of Guam, 400 miles north of Papua New Guinea, and 950 miles southeast of the Philippines.

We are the Indigenous people of Belau, the traditional name by which we call our nation, now known as the Republic of Palau. In 1947, the United States assumed administration of

Palau under the auspices of the United Nations as part of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands following World War II. In 1982, Palau signed a compact of free association with the United States, which took effect on Oct. 1, 1994, codifying our independence.



Charmaine Bitlaol, Palau Ministry of Education specialist for English language, captures a video of Delina Kebekol, Palau Ministry of Education specialist for Palauan studies, as she models how to teach dual language lessons on colors to students in a kindergarten classroom. Photo by Adam Geller



Jay Watanabe, Palau Ministry of Education specialist for Palauan studies, creates a virtual PLC for first-year Palauan studies teachers in the Edthena Video Coaching platform, while Charmaine Bitlaol, Palau Ministry of Education specialist for English language, uploads videos of model lessons she has recorded of teachers for the video library. Photo by Diane Lauer

Because of this compact, the United States Department of Education supports Palau’s education, and our 18 schools follow its standards and policies. For example, our students learn English in addition to the Palauan language, thus all students are multilingual learners. Our students also strive to meet Common Core-aligned academic standards. Our students’ performance is measured by standardized assessments that provide critical data to principals, teachers, students, families, and our nation as a whole.

The mission of the Palau Ministry of Education is to ensure that our students will be successful in Palauan society and the world. Schools are the heart of our communities, reflecting the rich culture of our nation. They incorporate a unique blend of traditional values and modern

methodologies to support learning for our diverse and geographically dispersed student population.

We recognize the responsibility of ensuring that every student has the capability to thrive in a complex, globalized environment. To do so, our educators use video technology to capitalize on our cultural ways of learning while applying the rich body of research related to student and professional learning from around the world. The use of video for virtual learning, virtual coaching, and self-reflection enriches our educational landscape — and advances learning for our educators and students.

VIDEO COACHING INITIATIVE

Three years ago, we began working with video coaching, which aligns with Learning Forward’s focus on engaging

educators in continuous improvement, to support our principals. We contracted with an outside consultant who had experience using video for professional learning and teacher collaboration.

We selected the Edthena Video Coaching platform and began incorporating video into our coaching cycles, led by school principals who were paired with a curriculum specialist from the Palau Ministry of Education.

These coaching cycles were designed to help principals build their instructional leadership skills. The pairs led planning conversations with teachers, recorded classroom observations, then facilitated coaching conversations using the observations we captured to elicit new learning.

A year later, curriculum specialists and principals began using video

coaching to further augment coaching cycles through deep reflection and ongoing collaboration directly with teachers. The video coaching practices took hold quickly with our curriculum specialists.

First, we used short, targeted videos to demonstrate a specific instructional strategy. We continued with snapshots of lessons taught by teachers shared with specialists for the purpose of getting feedback. Now video is one of the best ways we can share best practices across our island nation, as our teachers do not always have the opportunity to visit other schools.

We found that video coaching enables principals and teachers to receive support and feedback from Ministry of Education specialists more frequently. Given Palau's geography, specialists may be located far away, prohibiting them from conducting regular on-site visits. However, asynchronous coaching allows both principals and teachers to collaborate with specialists, reflect on their practice, and receive valuable feedback at any time.

For principals, this feedback helps them build on the ways they deliver feedback to their teachers and supports their instructional leadership skills such as leading data-driven conversations around newly adopted student assessments. This feedback is extremely beneficial to early career teachers and teachers who receive subject-specific coaching. Beginning with principals and having them be active participants in this professional learning process has built momentum with teachers.

The Edthena platform allows all educators to record, share, and collaboratively review teaching practices remotely and asynchronously. Using a platform for video coaching and reflection provides opportunity for ongoing collaboration and professional learning.

Using recorded teaching segments helps us more quickly build a shared definition of collective efficacy, which is strongly correlated with accelerating student achievement (Hattie, 2012).

This process has also helped calibrate teaching expectations among the specialist, the teacher, and the school principal, creating a shared vision of what high-quality instruction looks like in our schools and across our nation.

ACCELERATING COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

Through this implementation, we immediately recognized the time-saving impact of using video, especially for the specialists working with principals and teachers. Some schools are only accessible by boat, so making frequent trips to every school is not often feasible. "We may have to plan a half- or full day of travel just to visit some of our schools," said Charmaine Bitlaol, Ministry of Education specialist for English language.

With video coaching, our specialists can record a video when visiting a school and analyze it multiple times for a future coaching conversation. They learned how powerful it is to record a video of themselves teaching a model lesson in one school and then share it with teachers at another school.

Delina Kebekol, Ministry of Education specialist for Palauan studies, describes how important this can be for teachers: "If there is a teacher who needs some ideas for lesson delivery, we can just take a video, share it with them, and they can watch it, review it, and do the lesson at their school."

We also learned video works equally well for sharing best practices between teachers in the same building. Tanya Patris, Ministry of Education specialist for English language, works with 9th-grade English language arts teachers in a professional learning community (PLC) format at Palau High School in central Koror, the largest city and home to about half of our country's population. "My teachers at Palau High School are right next door to our central office, so traveling is not an issue, but I can say video coaching saves us time and energy," she said.

Even when teachers in the same building collaborate in person, they

can't always teach and observe each other in real time. Video enables them to share their videos privately with one another or their coaches to receive feedback and ensure their teaching is anchored in best practices. "This encourages collaboration between teachers, and it increases their professionalism and pride in the profession because they pay attention to the details of teaching," said Patris.

SEEING OURSELVES IN RESEARCH-BASED INSTRUCTION

Early in implementation, it was evident that the video coaching platform paired with instructional coaching was going to be successful. Video is universally accessible since everyone has a phone in their pocket and knows how to take and share videos.

Our teachers and content specialists adapted to this strategy quickly and began using it immediately. We soon realized the use of video was more than an accelerator of professional learning (Baker et al., 2017). For us, video provides something incredibly precious. Video is perfectly aligned with the cultural learning practices we typically use as Palauan people, and it empowers us to become the narrators of our own learning as we see ourselves in the research-based practice.

As Palauans, we teach by demonstrating and modeling. We learn by seeing, observing, and doing. We need to see what it looks like to be able to understand what we are teaching so we can do it well. We especially like to communicate and share, as well as connect lessons to something familiar and meaningful by using examples to increase understanding.

Video coaching and feedback is responsive to our way of learning. As native Palauans and second-language learners ourselves, we can attest that this is culturally how we learn. We need pictures, examples, and landmarks to learn, and video provides this.

The video coaching process also makes learning feel safe for our

teachers. Teaching can feel private — it’s the teacher’s classroom, their set-up, and their routines — and video coaching is respectful of that. Using a secure platform enables teachers to see themselves, identify areas where they may need help, and request support and feedback in a safe and welcoming way.

THE VALUE OF NONEVALUATIVE PEER SUPPORT

“There’s comfort for teachers when they reflect on a video of their own teaching. It’s not imposing, it’s not evaluative,” said Sarah Sugiyama, principal of Meyuns Elementary School in Palau. “Teachers are able to see where they need help and where they can improve, and then work to make those changes. This gives them more ownership over their learning.”

“Video coaching provides a positive and friendly way to also give each other feedback,” said Linda Ngotel, Ministry of Education curriculum specialist for social studies. “I think for us as Pacific Islanders, we need to see teaching happening — whether it is a teaching strategy or practice — not just have a conversation.”

She added: “I really like being able to view a teacher’s video and see everyone’s feedback, whether it’s from a school team, us, or a principal.” We are finding that the entire process brings us closer together as an educational community. When sharing video becomes a norm, or a common practice, it doesn’t feel evaluative, it’s just what we do. That is what we are striving for, an active, reflective community that learns together.

Video allows us to take an active role in the rich array of education research from around the world. As Indigenous people, video offers us the opportunity to navigate and own our path forward. It matters that we see ourselves in the educational landscape. We are energized by how we can use advanced technologies like real-time video capture and virtual coaching to foster our own growth.

Specialist Patris explains it this

way: “As a Pacific Islander, when I read books about education, I can understand the words, but I feel like the books were written for a different culture. I can’t see that culture. But when I see a person who I can relate to teaching it, then I can build on that. I say to myself, ‘I can do this, I can try this because I can relate to the person I am watching.’”

BUILDING A VIDEO REPOSITORY

With the videos captured by Ministry of Education specialists, teachers, and principals we are developing a digital repository, called the Palauan Ministry of Education Video Library. It showcases videos of exemplary instruction in English, reading, social studies, science, math, and Palauan studies instruction. Since exemplary practice can happen at any time, educators can now capture videos on the fly and then share them with others.

Videos uploaded to the library are tagged by subject, grade level, and instructional strategy. The library enables educators to easily and securely access, search for, and share videos of teaching greatness across Palau. In one example, Charmaine Bitlaol recently captured a video of Delina Kebekol modeling how to teach a dual language lesson on colors to students in a kindergarten classroom.

Bitlaol is especially optimistic about the opportunities to foster indigenous research and build on the rich instructional practices already present in our country. “I hope that our video coaching practices and video library will allow us to generate our own local research and contribute to the field of Indigenous research,” she said. “While we value the insights of others and access to technical assistance, we are realizing how video can empower us to lead our own instructional discoveries.”

EXPANDING THE USE OF VIDEO

This work has led the Palau Ministry of Education to adopt the

mindset that video reflection helps all educators improve their practice. Moving forward, the ministry hopes to expand PLCs beyond the 9th-grade English language arts teacher cohort to other high school content areas and increase the use of video to engage teachers in peer-to-peer collaboration and feedback.

We see the potential for first-year Palauan studies teachers to receive support from their coaches and peers. With only one Palauan studies teacher per building, video makes it possible for Palauan studies teachers to be observed, receive feedback, collaborate, and build a community with fellow role-alike teachers across the country. As the only speakers of Palauan in the world, these teachers know that teaching and preserving Palauan language, history, and culture to students is critical.

Nothing seems impossible now that we use video to navigate our own professional growth. Our continued work, reflecting on ourselves by seeing ourselves, is the greatest gift we have given ourselves, part of our many efforts to ensure our children are truly successful in Palauan society and the world.

REFERENCES

Baker, D., Carter, C., Hagan, P., Hayles, T., Rhodes, R., & Smith, K. (2017). Replay, reflect, refine: Video-based coaching accelerates teacher growth. *The Learning Professional*, 38(5), 40-44.

Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. Routledge.

Ida Rekoil Kilcullen (ikilcullen@palauschools.org) is director of curriculum and instruction for the Palau Ministry of Education. Lucia Tabelual (ltabelual@palauschools.org) is chief of the division of instruction, induction, professional development, and continuing education for the Palau Ministry of Education. ■