

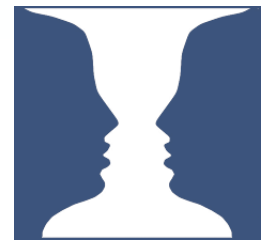
Putting a lens on teacher practice

VIDEO-BASED PEER COACHING

Video-based peer coaching offers teachers the rare opportunity to view and reflect on classroom teaching and engage in evidence-based discussions that can lead to improved practice.

Effective teachers frequently reflect on how to improve their practice: Did I scaffold the lesson well? Did I give students enough processing time? How can I help students connect these two key concepts?

Reflecting on one's own classroom practice can be like looking at that famous optical illusion in which, depending how you view it, you see either two profiles face to face or a vase in the middle. The phenomenon of seeing either one image or the other, but not both at the same time, is similar to what teachers experience in the classroom — they "see" only half of their classroom practice. That is, from their vantage point, they can see the classroom and their students, but they can't actually see themselves engaged in the process of teaching. Video can help teachers complete the picture.



Video is a powerful tool for inquiry-based professional learning that gives teachers the rare opportunity to view their own classroom practice, reflect on what they see, and engage in evidence-based discussions that can lead to changes and improvements in their practice.¹ In this issue of CenterView, we focus on one particular type of video-based professional learning: *peer coaching*. We describe what video-based peer coaching looks like in action, potential challenges, and action steps to start effectively implementing this valuable form of professional learning.

Video helps teachers to see what they normally can't see

Using videos in professional learning is not a new concept. Video offers teachers a more thorough view of their own practice — by allowing them to see themselves engaged in the process of classroom teaching. Classroom videos also provide real-life examples of teaching in action that can be shared among peer teachers for group reflection and feedback. Among peers, video provides an opportunity to see inside colleagues' classrooms — a practice not frequently available to teachers due to conflicting schedules and limited access to substitutes.

“Teachers often have a skewed view of how their lesson went or how instruction is going. They don't see what we see as observers. Using video provides a great window into their own classrooms that they otherwise don't get.”

—Kari Horn Lehman,
 Professional Development Specialist, EL Education

¹ Borko, H., Koellner, K., Jacobs, J., & Seago, N. (2011). Using video representations of teaching in practice-based professional development programs. *ZDM Mathematics Education*, 43, 175–187.

Sherin, M. G., & van Es, E. A. (2009). Effects of video club participation on teachers' professional vision. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 60(1), 20–37.

van Es, E. A. (2012). Using video to collaborate around problems of practice. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 38(2).

While video-based professional learning for teachers can take many forms — such as self-reflection or mentoring — peer coaching with video is a particularly powerful approach to improving teaching practice and building teacher capacity.

What is video-based peer coaching?

Video-based peer coaching starts with a set of teachers analyzing teaching and learning through video segments provided by one of the teachers. In each session, a *focal teacher* typically selects a video segment of his or her teaching to share with one or more *peer coaches*, who observe and discuss specific aspects of the focal teacher’s classroom instruction. (The term *peer coaches* refers to the fellow teachers who are engaged in the inquiry-based process of examining and discussing the focal teacher’s classroom practice; the peer coaches are typically colleagues of the focal teacher and are not necessarily teachers in leadership roles.)

Teachers might join a video-based peer-coaching group, such as a video study club, because they share the same content area, pedagogical approach, or interest in using inquiry to improve their own and others’ teaching practice. All participating teachers — whether the focal teacher in the video or the peer teachers participating in the inquiry — can learn from the instructional moment captured in the video by examining the classroom practice and discussing their observations. Conversations may be guided with a protocol — a set of structured prompts — to help unpack and explore a teacher-identified problem of practice (i.e., an issue that is observable and related to a particular practice a teacher wants to improve).

Nuts and bolts

Videotaping a lesson doesn’t need to be technologically complicated or expensive. It can be as simple as using a cell phone or tablet to videotape all or part of a lesson, after which the teacher can upload to a shared server like YouTube or Vimeo. The footage can be focused on teacher instruction and could also include instances of student participation. (Permission to videotape students can often be handled through a letter home with an opt-out option and an explanation that only a small group of teachers will view the footage for professional learning purposes.) To enable the most useful feedback, the focal teacher selects both the footage to share and the inquiry question to guide the discussion.

Video-based peer coaching in action

The following are two examples of video-based peer coaching being implemented by organizations focused on teacher professional learning.

Video-Based Peer Coaching in Action: Peer-to-peer coaching cycle to promote growth in practice and coaching skills

EL Education (<http://eleducation.org/>), formerly Expeditionary Learning, is launching a video-based peer coaching model that uses an iterative approach in which two teachers offer video-based coaching to one another. In the coaching cycle, one teacher identifies an area of focus, captures her instruction on video, and shares it with a peer coach. Together, they watch the video and engage in constructive, reflective dialogue about the teaching event, with a particular emphasis on the identified area of focus. From this dialogue, the teacher identifies a goal and captures new footage of her practice to share. The cycle continues until both partners agree the teacher has reached her goal, at which point they switch roles and the second teacher becomes the focal teacher.

Video-Based Peer Coaching in Action: Inquiry to understand and refine instructional strategies

The Hollyhock Fellowship Program (<https://cset.stanford.edu/pd/hollyhock>) at Stanford University's Center to Support Excellence in Teaching (CSET) offers early-career high school teachers serving high-poverty students with two years of a highly interactive blended professional learning experience, including video coaching. Teachers participate in two-week summer institutes at Stanford University and, throughout the school year, actively engage in monthly video-based coaching with peers. Teachers share a video clip of their practice with a small group of Hollyhock fellows and a CSET instructional coach, who all watch the video independently and provide comments using an online video annotation platform. Afterward, the same team meets online via a web conferencing tool to engage in a teacher-led inquiry about the classroom practice, enabling teachers to extend their learning through collaboration and problem solving.

Challenges to video-based peer coaching

Video-based peer coaching can be a powerful way to cultivate teacher-led professional learning and improve instructional practice, though there are particular challenges to keep in mind when implementing this approach.

- **Vulnerability.** Many people — not just teachers — are uncomfortable watching themselves on video. In schools where classroom doors are often closed, teachers may feel vulnerable “letting others into their classroom” through video and being the focus of an inquiry.
- **Misconceptions about purpose.** Because some districts use video of classroom instruction as part of their observation and evaluation processes, teachers may be concerned that this professional learning is also a formal evaluation of their practice. The presence or participation of an administrator or anyone seen as a formal evaluator can get in the way of teachers sharing their vulnerabilities and having honest, reflective conversations about their practice.
- **Technology.** Teachers need to feel comfortable and knowledgeable about how to record and upload videos, and share access to their videos with colleagues.

Action steps for getting started

To help ensure that all teachers have a positive and productive experience with video-based peer coaching, the Center for the Future of Teaching & Learning recommends taking the following steps both before and during the process.

Intentionally create a safe space. Trust is essential. Teachers need to be assured they are in a safe space before sharing their practice with others. Create conditions that cultivate openness and build trust within the group. Start with a team of early adopters to help with teacher buy-in. Always make participation voluntary.

Be very clear about the boundaries and purpose of activities. Communicate clear boundaries. Deliberately articulate and define the purpose of video-based coaching with peers and communicate that it is led *by* teachers *for* teachers to promote inquiry, collaborative learning, and reflective practice. Administrators should send a clear message that these videos are for professional learning and never for evaluation.

Designate teachers to facilitate guided conversations focused on teacher-selected topics. Teacher leaders and other designated teachers can facilitate the video-based peer-coaching process and help to foster a teacher learning community. A structured process that promotes meaningful communication and problem solving — such as the protocols

described in *Focus on Teaching: Using Video for High-Impact Teaching* (2014) — can help guide the conversation and keep teachers focused on specific aspects of instruction.

Model the process. Inaugurate this professional learning approach with a designated lead teacher sharing his or her video segment first. Ideally, the video should depict pedagogy on the continuum of development and with an instructional focus for the group to explore and discuss. Emphasize that videos of classroom practice are not intended to be exemplars.

Give teachers time to practice. Teachers need practice with the technology and the process. Consider developing an FAQ document or a demonstration video that can be referenced for technology-related tasks such as how to record with a phone or how to upload a video to a shared server. Over time and with increased comfort, teachers will likely take more risks with the video segments and feedback they choose to share with peers.

As when introducing and implementing any new program with teachers, go slowly and invite teachers to participate when they are ready. Then, be sure to celebrate their risk-taking and collaborative spirit as they progress through the process of sharing and analyzing their classroom practice.

This issue is part of a series on the Teacher Practice Networks initiative and its efforts to broadly support teachers in implementing college- and career-readiness instruction.

Teacher Practice Networks initiative

The Teacher Practice Networks initiative is facilitated by the Center for the Future of Teaching & Learning at WestEd and supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It is made up of 35 local and national organizations working to support teachers' Common Core State Standards implementation using innovative professional learning strategies. To learn more about the Teacher Practice Networks, visit <https://tpn.wested.org/>.

Recommended resources for implementing video-based peer coaching

Knight, J. (2014). *Focus on teaching: Using video for high-impact teaching*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin.

Center for Education Policy Research. (2015). *Video club start-up guide*. The Best Foot Forward Project, Harvard College. http://cepr.harvard.edu/files/cepr/files/l2b_video_club_startup_guide.pdf



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