

If I Can See Myself, I Can Change

Teachers can combine videotaping with peer coaching to help each other transfer knowledge of instructional skills into active classroom practice.

Photographs by Alan Robertson



Bill Williams, science teacher at Lafayette High School, adjusts the camera for his part in Williamsburg-James' successful peer coaching program.

“From your notes write the objective of Denise’s lesson.” The teachers jotted the objective and continued to note the complexity of thinking required, the task analysis, critical attribute, and elements of lesson design.

All were writing. Jane stopped and stared in space, chewing her eraser while she thought. Whispering to each other, Jackie and Patsy compared notes.

“Sam, perhaps you could share your comments with the group.” After he read the objective and analyzed it, I remarked that some viewed it as a comprehension objective, while others viewed it as an objective at the application level. After several minutes of discussion during which teachers referred to a handout on Bloom’s Taxonomy, most agreed it was an application objective.

Moving to strengths of the lesson, Renee explained that the combination of “teaching to an objective” with “maintaining focus” contributed to overall effectiveness. Although each had chosen different examples from the lesson, they all agreed with Renee’s conclusion. Denise laughed, pleased at her peers’ comments.

As we began to discuss Denise’s improvement, John mentioned task analysis. “Did you leave out an important step?”

Nodding, Denise explained how she

needed to let the students write sentences of their own first. "But I didn't realize what was nagging me about this lesson until I watched the tape today and listened as the group analyzed what I did. Now I know what I want to do differently."

Denise's experience is not uncommon to teachers in Williamsburg-James City County, Virginia, Public Schools. These teachers are learning to coach one another using a video camera and recorder. Unlike the typical peer coach, who observes and collaborates with one teacher, these teachers observe and collaborate with many. Unlike the typical peer coach, who relies on the spoken and written word to provide feedback, these teachers rely on the videotape record to provide feedback. For the first time in the experience of our school division, the most important scene in schools, classroom instruction, is being recorded and analyzed.

Technology and Training

Videotaping equipment and intensive training are the cornerstones of the Peer Coaching Program. Begun in 1985-86, this program uses state-of-the-art technology to help teachers transfer their knowledge of instructional skills into active classroom practice. The components identified by Joyce and Showers (1982) as essential to successful skill development provided the training design:



Susan Miller, English teacher at Lafayette High School, teaches a lesson for the camera as well as for her students, a lesson that she will view in the company of her fellow teachers.



At first the camera seems an intruder in the classroom, but time and experience make teachers comfortable with videotaping, and feedback about their teaching enhances their confidence

- study of the theoretical basis of instructional skills;
- observations of demonstrations by experts;
- practice and feedback by knowledgeable observers; and
- coaching to provide companionship, feedback, analysis, and adaptation.

The use of videotaped lessons facilitates the recursive nature of this process. The camera records an unalterable picture of each lesson, which is illuminating to teachers. Viewing diverse lessons, teachers see many applications of the theoretical basis. Demonstrations captured by the camera can readily be analyzed for their portrayal of skills. The lesson remains available for peers to analyze and discuss, providing additional feedback about lesson successes and difficulties. The analysis and discussion among peers gathered around the television monitor extends and accentuates the companionship started with the film-

ing of the lesson. Each time teachers experience the process, collegiality grows between and among them.

Peer coaching is a direct outgrowth of the Instructional Skills Program we implemented in 1983-84. In this program (an introductory course teachers can opt to take) teachers study instructional theories, view demonstrations of effective instruction, and practice with feedback in their classrooms. Through the process, teachers learn to recognize which instructional skills are already a part of their repertoires and which they need to develop to enhance their teaching. Although a trained observer coaches teachers in the classroom during Instructional Skills, coaching does not continue afterward. Therefore, we designed the Peer Coaching Program to provide teachers with the technology and training necessary to integrate newly acquired skills successfully into their active repertoires. All 38 teachers in the school system completed the In-

structional Skills Program prior to participating in Peer Coaching.

Given the complex, time-consuming nature of learning to coach, we have extended the program over two years. The objectives define the focus for each year:

• *Peer Coaching I:*

1. Operate the video equipment to record lessons.
2. Use the videotape for analysis of self and others.
3. Analyze instructional skills present and/or absent in lessons of self and others.
4. Demonstrate an improved understanding and application of instructional skills.

• *Peer Coaching II:*

5. Record lessons by completing a script tape.
 6. Plan and conduct feedback sessions with peers about their lessons.
- Each school received a set of equipment purchased from Chapter II funds, including color VHS video camera, VCR recorder, camera bag, recorder bag, tripod, connecting cables, wide angle lens, and secure storage cabinet. Teachers in Peer Coaching have sole access to use of the equipment.

Substitutes provide released time for teachers to attend five workshops during the school year. During the time between workshops, each teacher tapes a peer's lesson, is taped by a peer, and meets with the school team to review and discuss the lessons. Substitutes are frequently used to provide time for teachers to tape lessons and meet with the school team. When teachers return to the workshop, each brings one lesson to share.

Pictures of Reality

Our evaluation confirms the program's premise that use of the camera, coupled with intensive training, facilitates transfer of skills into the teacher's active teaching repertoire, as a result of six factors.

1. Teachers concentrate on their teaching when they observe videotapes of themselves. The camera enables the teacher to view and analyze his or her teaching objectively. The

words of one teacher summarize the benefits: "I can see what happened, not what I thought had happened. . . . Self-evaluation is the most valuable to me."

2. The videotape creates an unalterable memory of the lesson. By viewing and reviewing the tape, teachers can reflect on their teaching. One teacher expresses the value of the record. "Many-times I wish I could think of a better way to present something, but I can't remember exactly what I said. By videotaping the lesson, I can review exactly what happened and decide how to change the lesson before I teach it again."

3. The feedback from the camera validates concretely the feedback of knowledgeable observers. Words of the observer become pictures of reality. "The tapes have enabled me to analyze my own actions. Most of the time my teaching is much better than I anticipated. The tape gives me something concrete as a back-up to my colleagues' comments."

4. Viewing demonstrations of others helps teachers resolve instructional dilemmas. Teachers frequently express the desire to develop a library of exemplary lessons that illustrate curricular and instructional difficulties: "If a teacher is having a problem teaching a certain skill, she can view another teacher teaching the same skill and learn from it."

5. A group of peers gathered around the television monitor viewing, analyzing, and discussing each other's teaching is powerful reinforcement to the individual and to the group. As the teacher on videotape listens to peers discussing his teaching, he becomes more aware of his strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. The pride is visibly evident on the teacher's face when his peers commend his performance.

6. A successful coach needs intensive training for an extended amount of time. Coaching requires teachers to learn many new skills. Time is necessary to allow skills to develop in the proper sequence. Teachers also need time to learn how to operate the equipment, to become comfortable seeing themselves on tape and having



The videotape creates for the teacher a picture of reality: "I can see what happened, not what I thought had happened."

others see them on tape, to analyze and prioritize skills, and to learn how to provide feedback in a way that is collegial and constructive.

Through the Camera's Eye

The success of peer coaching with videotapes supports Showers' (1985) view that coaching is a cyclical process that develops in stages. During the stage of initial skill acquisition, teachers rely on accurate, specific non-evaluative feedback to master the interactive steps of the strategies. As skills are learned, coaching continues to a more complex level at which the skills are transferred to the classroom, where the teacher learns how to apply strategies while accommodating students, materials, and the environment.

Our experience suggests a few issues for further consideration. First, even after two years of training in the coaching process, teachers request additional training at yet another level of complexity. They wish to learn how to discuss teaching and learning with peers even more specifically. Second, we've learned that the training of coaches evolves in stages. Teachers

who have experienced the isolation of the classroom for a number of years need adequate time and opportunity to adjust to a new environmental context. "Public" teaching doesn't occur just because administratively we decree it. To refine our program, we will need to address these and other issues that arise.

The video camera can make a useful contribution to building "communities of teachers who continuously engage in the study of their craft" (Showers 1985). Videotaping accompanied by peer coaching enables teachers to direct and manage their own professional growth. □

References

- Joyce, B., and B. Showers. "The Coaching of Teaching." *Educational Leadership* 40, 1 (1982): 4-10
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