

Viewing Teaching on Videotape

Through video clubs, teachers gain opportunities to investigate their teaching practices and to better understand what is happening in their classrooms.

One of the greatest resources that teachers have is their previous teaching experiences. But after years of instruction, the familiar becomes routine, and teaching may lose some of the excitement that it once held. To maintain and to stimulate teachers' interest in their work, teachers must identify new ways to become intellectually engaged in teaching.

A New Lens

For the past six years, I have developed and participated in video clubs with several groups of teachers. Video clubs give teachers opportunities to watch and discuss videotapes of their teaching and to develop new techniques for viewing and explaining classroom interactions. The clubs can foster renewed interest in teaching.

For example, I served as a facilitator in a video club with four middle school mathematics teachers. We watched a video from David's class, in which the students compared two graphs. In the video, a student offered her opinion on the difference between graphs *b* and *c* by observing that on graph *c*, "there's a point."

David: What's she saying, "There's a point?"

Ron: I think she's saying that there's a point on the graph where [the slope] actually changes.

Nancy: Or stops.

David: She thinks that [graph *c*] actually changes slope, and you can see it. It's linear and then linear again.

John: But I think that the [slope] changes in *b* also.

David: It does.

John: It looks like a straight line.

Nancy: [Is she] saying it's more . . . abrupt [in graph *c*]?

David: Let's watch and see.

The video club enabled these teachers to closely examine a student's comment and to make sense of what she said. In addition, the teachers used the video

to interpret what occurred during the lesson. The teachers did not talk about what David, the teacher, should do next or how to "repair" the student's thinking. Instead, they focused on understanding what took place in the classroom. During instruction, a teacher must focus on what to do next, but while watching a lesson on video, that teacher can approach teaching differently.

Reflection, Focus, and Community

Video clubs are opportunities for teachers to review their classroom interactions in ways that are different from their standard daily practices. How do videos provide teachers with a new lens for viewing instruction? Three features make video clubs successful contexts for reflecting on practice.

A student's question no longer needs an immediate answer. A comment from a student can initiate a time for reflection.

More Time to Respond

When watching videotapes of classrooms, teachers are not constrained by the demands of instruction. They do not have to respond to the video with the immediacy that teaching calls for. Student behavior observed on video does not require an instant pedagogical response. A student's question no longer needs an immediate answer. Instead, a comment from a student can initiate a time for reflection. Teachers can review a video, examine what is taking place in the classroom, and try to explain why.

There's not that issue of, "I need to keep this classroom running, and I need to help all the students. Should I call on this student because it will help his or her self-esteem? Or do I not call on this student because this student has participated [already]?" Those are all the things that a teacher is thinking about . . . and those are things we don't have to decide when we're examining it on tape.

Narrower Views of Classroom Interactions

Teaching involves keeping track of many simultaneous activities. In contrast, participants in video clubs can take a much narrower view of what is happening in a

classroom. For example, the participants might decide to ignore management issues for the moment and concentrate on understanding the nature of the teacher's questions. Or they might decide to investigate what students understand about a specific topic without looking at whether all the students in the class participated in the activity.

As a teacher you have to focus on everything. . . . But here we were able to free ourselves from all the other little things that happen in a classroom and just focus on the discourse. . . . You don't have to be attentive to a hundred things, you can focus on two or three. It's a rare luxury.

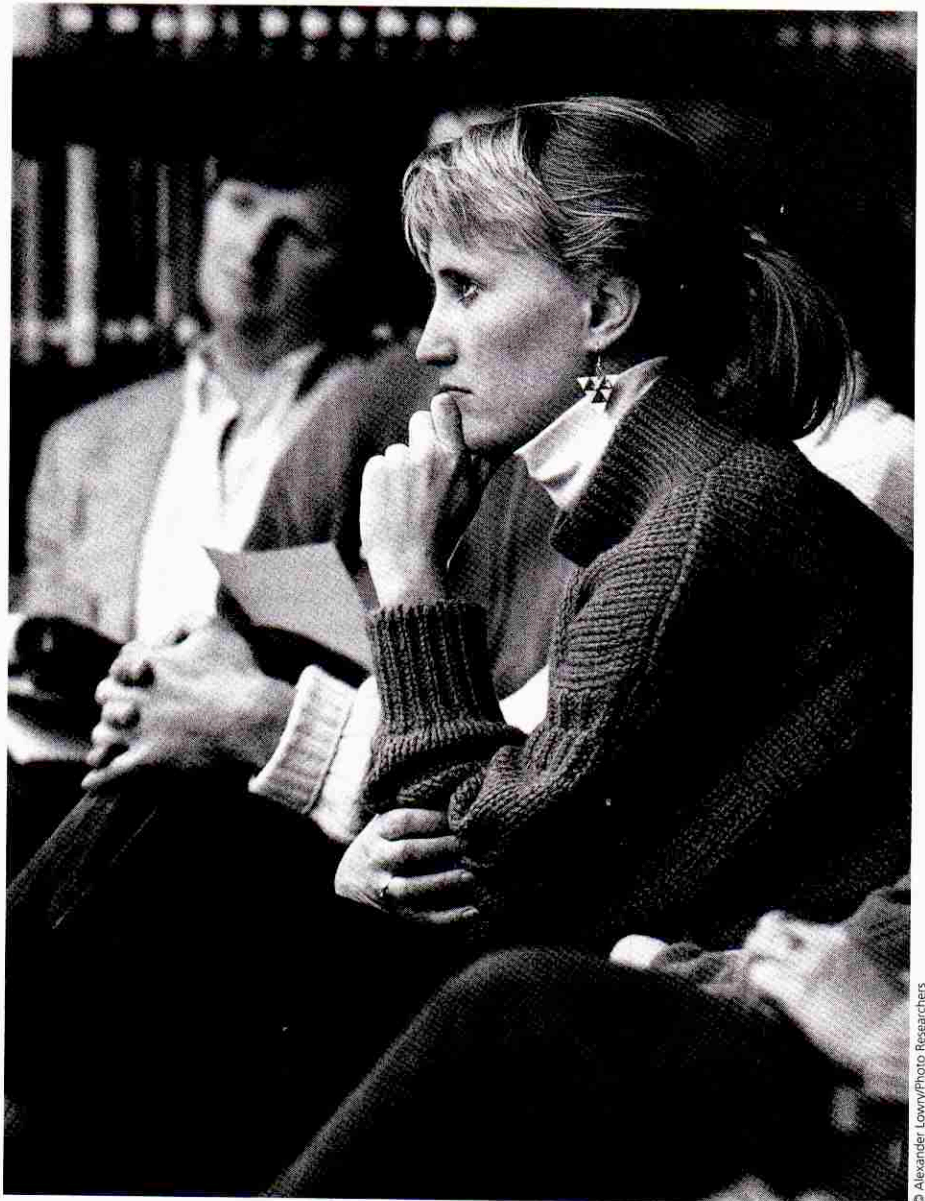
Teacher Communities

Video clubs bring together groups of teachers for the purpose of exploring teaching. Teaching is often an isolating activity that affords few chances to observe other teachers. Video clubs provide access to other classrooms and the opportunity to hear and discuss a variety of perspectives about what is happening. At departmental or grade-level meetings, administrative and curricular issues are often the focus. In a video club, teachers reflect on teaching practices.

What I find most valuable is that we as a group sit down together . . . to think about teaching and try to understand what happens in our classroom. It's the sense of community we develop as a group working towards a common goal . . . the sense of community among the teachers.

Understanding Classroom Interactions

To develop a video club that encourages reflection, focus, and community, club members must *investigate*, not *evaluate*, teaching. While watching an



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excerpt of instruction, teachers often identify with the teacher on the video and ask, "What would I do now?" "What else might the teacher have done?" "How could the teacher fix this problem?" Yet, what I find most effective is to set aside this focus on *what might have happened* and instead look closely at *what did happen*: "What are

the students understanding?" "What kinds of questions is the teacher asking?" "What is it that is confusing to that student?" No longer focused on making pedagogical decisions or suggesting alternative strategies, participants can explore other important factors that affect teaching and learning.

One obvious thing when we're watching a video is to think of all the things we could have done. That's just sort of an obvious thing. . . . We see it and we're all teachers. . . . But it's another things to just zoom in and say, "All right, let's understand what happened. Why was the teacher telling the student this? What had the student said that maybe prompted you to think he misunderstood something?"

This new perspective on viewing videos can influence classroom instruction. For example, in one video club, participants focused on interesting mathematical ideas or methods used by a student. They examined what the student's idea was, how it related to other ideas that had come up, and what the whole class understood about this idea. The teachers reported that they not only became more aware of students' ideas while watching the video, but also paid more attention to their students' thinking during instruction.

The teachers found themselves better equipped to interpret students' ideas that came up in class and more comfortable making pedagogical decisions on the basis of students' comments.¹ The teachers focused on understanding what was happening in their classes and used this information to decide how to proceed pedagogically.

Developing a Video Club

So how can teachers develop a video club with these goals at the center? To design the kind of group that I have described here, you must consider two key issues: selecting a focus for your group and choosing the video excerpts.

First, choose between selecting a particular focus for the video club discussions and addressing a variety of issues across the set of meetings.

Teaching is often an isolating activity that affords few chances to observe other teachers. Video clubs provide access to other classrooms.

Depending on the interests of the members, you may want to pick a particular theme, such as classroom discourse, student conceptions, or teacher questioning. Doing so initially can ensure that your group focuses on what did happen in the video rather than on what might have happened. As your video club becomes more established, the group may feel comfortable shifting topics on different occasions. Participants may want to spend a few minutes at the end of each meeting discussing which aspects of the meeting were most engaging and how to structure future meetings.

Second, set some ground rules for bringing video excerpts to the group. In the video clubs I have worked with, teachers generally met once a month for approximately an hour. In each meeting, the group watched a 10-minute video excerpt from one teacher's classroom. At the beginning of the meeting, the teacher whose video was being shown provided brief background information on the given lesson.

Although almost any excerpt will provide interesting material for discussion, some guidelines may be useful. To start, when selecting a video excerpt, a teacher should choose something that he or she finds interesting, not necessarily an example of his or her best teaching. Instead, choose a portion of classroom interaction that is worthy of explanation or interpretation by the

group—a whole-class discussion in which students raised a variety of ideas or a student's question that prompted a debate. Was there a moment in class when a student responded in a novel way? Or when students really seemed to get a particular concept or were confused by an idea?

Be sure that each teacher has a few opportunities to videotape his or her class before the video club meeting. Teachers might set up a video camera in a corner of a classroom. Or teachers might choose to focus the camera on a specific group of students or on one area of the classroom, such as the front board where students present their homework.

Video clubs can powerfully affect teachers' perspectives toward teaching and learning by allowing them to examine instruction outside the demands of the classroom and by presenting opportunities to develop new ways to look at what happens in their classrooms. When participants investigate teaching and try to understand classroom interactions, video clubs can be an exciting means to renew their interest in teaching. ■

¹ Sherin, M. G. (1998). Developing teachers' ability to identify student conceptions during instruction. In S. B. Berenson, K. R. Dawkins, M. Blanton, W. N. Coulombe, J. Kolb, K. Norwood, & L. Stiff (Eds.), *Proceedings of the twentieth annual meeting of the North American Chapter of the International Group for the Psychology of Mathematics Education* (pp. 761-767). Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse for Science, Mathematics, and Environmental Education.

Miriam Gamoran Sherin is Assistant Professor, School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University, 2115 N. Campus Dr., Evanston, IL 60208 (e-mail: msherin@nwu.edu).

