

CHAPTER 30

Personalized Professional Development

How Teachers Can Use Videos to Improve Their Practice

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Preparing for Evaluation with Video Self-Reflection

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Sheila signs in to the early education and care center at 6:45 a.m., 30 minutes before the children will start to arrive. She wants to look over her lesson plan again, as she is not sure when the external evaluator will be coming for her observation. Although Sheila stayed after her shift yesterday to ensure all of her materials were together and she was prepared, she is still anxious about how her observation will go. She wants feedback on her teaching and interaction with the children, but there is barely enough time in the day to get everything done. She wants to learn how to work smarter in order to give the children in her care the best education she can

Early childhood educators are eternally busy; they are also continuously bombarded with new curricula, instructional strategies, and evaluation methods. Although many early childhood educators understand the value of using state-of-the-art, research-based practices, there is growing concern over how little time educators have to review their instruction (including the environments and activities they create), to document children's learning, and to reflect on the impact of their teaching.

Given the limited staff and resources of most early childhood programs, it may seem impossible to engage teachers in systemic professional development. But

there is one option that is accessible, ongoing, and effective: video self-reflection. Many professions use videos to evaluate and improve performance. For example, athletes watch video clips the day after a game to improve their skills and to learn from their opponents; politicians critique videos of their speeches and review the reactions of their target audiences. For busy teachers, videos can be a powerful form of reflection because they allow teachers to watch without distractions their delivery of instruction and children's responses to it. This practice is becoming more widespread, particularly given its use by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and by researchers studying professional development strategies and effective teaching methods (Brownell et al. 2005; Cherrington & Loveridge 2014; Early et al. 2017).

"We are going to do *what*?" Sheila hears herself exclaim as her director announces that, beginning immediately, each staff member is going to have to video record a segment of their teaching each week. "I do not want to be a movie star! I do not want to see myself on video," Sheila hears another teacher say. Although the director tries to frame it positively, saying, "You are all the stars of your classroom," that hardly helps dispel the utter panic in the room. The director tells staff they will be watching their teaching in order to improve. Sheila isn't sure what this means, or if she should even ask.

Although Sheila's fear is understandable, ongoing, classroom-based, personalized professional development is essential for teachers seeking to refine their practice—and reflection is a critical part of the process. "Reflection is an important human

activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it. It is this working with experience that is important in learning” (Boud, Keogh, & Walker 1985, 19). As Sheila is about to discover, reviewing videos of one’s teaching is an excellent strategy for meaningful reflection.

Reflection works best with the guidance of a framework that focuses on specific questions to support targeted self-reflection (Calandra, Gurvitch, & Lund 2008). Some teachers may choose to select parts of existing frameworks, such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, known as CLASS (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre 2008) or the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Third Edition, known as ECERS-3 (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer 2014); others may decide to develop their own guiding questions (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson 2015).

If teachers use a reflective lens to view themselves on video and can avoid being judgmental, they may answer questions such as “What else might be included that could enhance instruction?,” “Did the lesson go the way I intended?,” “What are the children in the environment doing?,” and “What went unnoticed in the moment of teaching as far as child development or guidance?” Reflecting on these questions helps teachers identify their strengths and weaknesses and helps them to consider how to build on their strengths.

Sheila’s fears are eased when her director tells the staff two things: (1) the videos will be used in conjunction with the state’s teacher evaluation tool and will help the teachers improve their scores, and (2) the videos will be viewed only by the teacher and the director. Although initially uncomfortable, Sheila can see how using the state tool as a framework while watching herself and her students during lessons may help her improve her teaching.

The Process

To get an adequate sample of instruction, teachers should plan for 15- to 20-minute videos (though their self-reflection may focus on a shorter segment of the video). Using the identified framework to pinpoint a specific aspect of instruction, the teacher or director can select a practice, center, or time of day to record the teaching sample.

For example, if Marcus, a toddler teacher, wanted to address the CLASS dimension “Regard for Student

Perspectives,” he may choose to make a video of himself engaging toddlers in conversations in the dramatic play center. He would score this dimension while watching his video, making note of situations in which he exhibited behaviors associated with that dimension and situations in which he might have missed opportunities to address the dimension. The director would also view the video according to this CLASS dimension and provide feedback. The teacher would have the benefit of the CLASS framework and an additional perspective from the director, who might help him appreciate his strengths and see opportunities he might have missed.

Sheila sits down in the break room with her headphones on and watches her first video. She has a copy of the state assessment tool she will be using to reflect on her teaching. She takes a deep breath and presses Play. After an initial period of self-consciousness, she settles in to using the framework to comment on her teaching. It is not as bad as she thought it would be; she laughs at herself for initially putting off recording the video. After she finishes watching, she looks at her notes and makes some additions. She is excited about discussing her reflections with her director and getting feedback.

The Payoff

Once teachers overcome the initial discomfort of watching themselves on video, they are able to assess meaningful aspects of their instruction that they may miss in the busyness of their day. Teachers are able to identify their areas of strength as well as areas of need, and the framework provides a shared vocabulary and focus for the teacher and the director.

As Sheila enters the break room, she breathes a sigh of relief. She has just completed her planning meeting with the director, where she received feedback on this month’s teaching video. The director was very supportive in pointing out the things Sheila excelled in. She also felt that Sheila had a much better understanding of not only what she needed to improve on, but the steps she needed to take to make the necessary improvements. In the break room, other teachers are talking about their teaching videos and are beginning to share teaching strategies.

Sometimes, teachers voluntarily start sharing their videos and learning from each other. In a recent study, teachers who engaged in video self-reflection created

an informal learning community through discussion of their teaching videos (Grantham-Caston 2018). Teachers who were stronger in some areas offered insight and assistance to teachers who were struggling in those same areas. One teacher commented that this process helped her to see her worth as an educator and prompted her to seek state trainer certification in order to help other teachers. Other teachers noted the value of having both teacher-recorded and director-recorded videos, as that led to much greater variety in the times of day and types of lessons recorded.

Sheila smiles as she thinks about her next state observation. She knows she will be much more at ease and better prepared. By the time her next state evaluation visit occurs, she will have used the video self-reflection process five more times. She now has the vocabulary and the awareness to contribute meaningfully to that conversation. Rather than be intimidated (as she had been previously), she is now confident and looking forward to the feedback as an opportunity to continue her growth as an early childhood professional.

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