

Reflection through the lens

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The Role of the Instructional Leader in Teacher Reflection

In schools, the middle leadership team is the driving force behind implementing change and enacting the vision of the principal. At St Philip's Christian College the principal has cast a vision that requires teachers to strive for excellence so that our students have the very best learning opportunities. The Faculty Leadership Team is encouraged to take on an instructional leadership role so that an understanding of excellence in practice is developed among the teaching staff. Excellence is achieved by deep and critical reflection on practice within a coaching context (Tripp and Rich, 2012). Effective reflection requires a deliberate and consistent examination of instruction and is an integral part of improving teacher practice. Authentic change through reflective processes requires an explicit lens so that analysis of teaching becomes specific thereby avoiding shallow judgements based on memory (Knight, 2017). Video capture of teaching is an effective method in which the focus of reflection can be narrowed and used by teachers to generate genuine reflections on practice.

Watching yourself on video can be confronting at first and it feels like an exemplification of listening to a voice recording of yourself. However, once you watch yourself over and over again, the novelty of watching yourself work wears off and you are able to make more precise observations of how your actions lead to learning and this is a powerful tool for improvement.

Utilising Disruptive Technologies

The Faculty Leaders at SPCC are expected to conduct regular lesson observations of their team and to spend time coaching each teacher to enhance the teacher's instructional practice. Faculty Leaders take an instructional coaching approach which is based on partnership where the coach engages in dialogue with teachers about what they want to improve in their practice and the steps they are going to take in



order to make that change. This approach removes the 'super vision' assumptions that exist with a top down approach and can limit the ability of the teacher to improve. The coach is not positioned as an expert but rather a partner in improvement (Knight, 2017). The process requires reflection on evidence which results in data-informed change.

Traditionally this process of data or evidence gathering has taken the form of spending a lesson observing the teacher in action and then a lesson coaching the teacher. Although this approach to instructional coaching is highly valued by teachers and team leaders the process is based on the teacher's memory of the lesson and the team leader's observations. Another issue that has arisen is the time between coaching sessions and the lack of formative

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Figure 1: Coaching cycle

observation that occurs between coaching sessions that would allow the teacher to calibrate changes in practice over time. In order to overcome these problems, the Faculty Leaders have embarked on a collaborative action research project whereby video is used to assist teachers and team leaders to improve instructional practice.

The use of video analysis is not new, however, the rise of disruptive technologies has enhanced teachers' capabilities to record lessons on a regular basis. Disruptive technologies are initially poor-quality innovations that evolve over time to become so powerful that they influence change in entire fields (Knight, 2014). Early use of video to record lessons relied on large video cameras that often needed to be set up by technicians not to mention issues in accessing and sharing the footage. In this digital age, every teacher with a smart phone has ready access to a powerful video camera and software that allows almost immediate manipulation and sharing of recordings. The potential of such technologies has been realised and harnessed by the Faculty Leaders to change the way in which lesson observations and reflection take place.

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The Reflection Action Research Project

The initial phase of changing the way in which coaching takes place was to investigate the hurdles

to introducing video as part of the coaching cycle, namely the technology hurdle. Teacher and Faculty Leaders experimented with a variety of technologies and sharing platforms and in most instances, closed YouTube channels are being used to share sections of lessons. Issues of teacher trust and willingness to record lessons also needed to be addressed and not all teachers are comfortable with the process. Collaborative sharing of recordings of lessons and peer coaching conversations, often facilitated by the faculty leader, has assisted in building trust and increasing the utilisation of video observations. Importantly, teachers who are involved in the project have reported that using video as a reflection tool has improved their ability to evaluate their teaching and implement changes to their practice.

The Video Capture Process

Once teachers were comfortable with the technology and were willing to take part, they followed a coaching cycle as shown in Figure 1.

- **Assess:** Teachers record lessons and view these independently and use a form to make notes of what they are seeing during the lesson. From their footage they select what they would like to focus on for the first coaching cycle. The teacher then edits this footage to a recording that is no longer than 15 minutes.
- **Share:** The edited footage is shared with the Faculty Leader who views this before the coaching conversation. The Faculty Leader also uses a form to record what they are seeing in light of what the teacher has identified they would like to work on.

- **Coaching conversation and goal setting:** The teacher and faculty leader make a time to meet and engage in a coaching conversation. The footage is used to frame the conversation and both the teacher and Faculty Leader work together to develop the goal. Again, the conversation is formalised so that both teacher and Faculty Leader have a record of the conversation.
 - **Implement:** From the coaching conversation, the teacher will have formulated steps in achieving the goal. The Faculty Leader provides support and guides the teacher, but as with effective coaching, the goal and the strategy are developed by the teacher. Throughout the implementation stage the teacher uses footage to formatively assess how they are going.
 - **Record and Share:** When the teacher feels as though they have progressed towards the goal, they record, edit and share their progress with the Faculty Leader. If the teacher does not feel as if they are making progress the footage can also be used to assist the Faculty Leader and teacher to reassess and take further action. In both cases, however, the teacher has made an evaluation on their progress. Again, this is formalised using a self-reflection form.
 - **Follow up coaching conversation:** The Faculty Leader and teacher meet again and share their evaluation or the conversation focuses on redirection if the teacher requires further assistance. At this point the teacher can choose to continue to work on the goal or they can repeat the process to move onto another goal.
- Each teacher aims to complete one cycle per term. Faculty Leaders are expected to undertake at least two lesson observations on each team member per term and the introduction of video to assist in this process has resulted in a more efficient observation process with teachers reflecting on their practice more regularly and purposefully. Although the project is only in the early stages of the action research spiral, teachers and Faculty Leaders have identified a number of benefits.

Benefits of Using Video

The following benefits have come to light:

- Reflection on practice has become very specific as opposed to the general nature of reflection from memory. Teachers can make overarching reflections from memory whereas video allows the teacher to relive the lesson and make specific reflections.
- Feedback from coaches is also specific and objective. Video allows the event to be seen by both teacher and coach and is therefore not open to interpretation. Conversations can be focused on what is seen and not what was observed and hence coaching conversations have become more authentic.
- Teachers can use video as formative feedback. They have been able to focus on identified changes in practice and through regular recording of lessons,

have been able to identify improvements to instruction between coaching conversations.

- Video reflection has improved ownership of change in practice and teachers have reported an increased sense of self-efficacy as they are able to choose their own goals.
- Teachers have reported that they trust the feedback based on video reflection more than the traditional approach to observation and feedback. This is likely due to the autonomy of the teacher to drive the goal setting and the objective nature of what is captured on the recording.

Conclusion

Although the use of video has had a long history in improving teacher practice, a teacher centred approach has had a positive impact on teacher reflection at SPCC. Not only has there been reported benefits to the way in which teachers and Faculty Leaders engage in the coaching process, it has also improved the Faculty Leaders' scope for instructional leadership. The observation of incremental improvements in practice has empowered teachers and increased their self-efficacy and ability to be critically reflective. Importantly, video does not replace the traditional approach to lesson observation but it does complement the significant role of the instructional coach in improving teacher practice for the benefit of student learning.

References

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- Tripp, TR, Rich, PJ 2012, 'The influence of video analysis on the process of teacher change', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28, pp. 728–739.

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By three methods we may learn wisdom:
First, by reflection, which is noblest;
Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and
third by experience, which is the bitterest.

Confucius

The real man smiles in trouble, gathers strength from distress, and grows brave by reflection.

Thomas Paine

The world is a looking glass and gives back to every man the reflection of his own face.

William Makepeace Thackeray