

**SEEING
TEACHING
THROUGH
A DIFFERENT
LENS**

THE
MYTEACHINGPARTNER-SECONDARY
COACHING MODEL

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By highlighting and maximizing teachers' strengths, this innovative coaching program is the kind of effective professional learning that has a positive impact on student engagement and achievement.

It can be challenging to discern exactly how teachers impact student learning and how to maximize the teacher-student relationship. However, one instructional coaching program with a strong evidence base is helping educators improve interactions with students in ways that increase student engagement and achievement.

The MyTeachingPartner (MTP) coaching program has an extensive evidence base and a successful history of implementation, first in early childhood settings and, more recently, at the secondary level. For the past three years, Learning Forward has engaged in a project led by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to better understand the model, especially its use in secondary teaching through the version called MTP-Secondary (MTP-S). The AIR project is funded by a 2017 grant from the U.S. Department of Education through its Education Innovation Research Program.

A key goal for Learning Forward in this partnership is to elevate the voices of the coaches and teachers who are using the program. Their voices complement what we know about coaching from meta-analysis (Kraft et al., 2018) and careful description of design, protocols, and assessments that comprise coaching programs (e.g. Killion et al., 2020). Their voices help us understand the mechanisms and processes that lead to successful coaching and can inform decisions about planning and investments related to professional learning.

To that end, this paper highlights three elements of

the MTP-S program that participants say has a positive impact on their teaching and on student learning. Learning Forward hosted a virtual meeting in July 2020 for participants in the AIR-led project to discuss their experiences with MTP-S; some of the observations included in this paper are from that meeting. A few of the quotes in this paper are taken from videos on the AIR website [secondarycoaching.org](https://www.secondarycoaching.org). The three elements are:

- The innovative use of short video clips that allows teachers to observe and analyze their own instruction;
- The intentional focus on teachers' successes in the classroom as a basis for coaching that is strengths-based; and
- The systematic attention to how classroom interactions can be used to improve student engagement and learning.

Because the MTP-S program brings classroom interactions into sharp focus through the lens of the video camera as well as the lens of intentional, structured reflection, the metaphor of a camera lens seems fitting to describe the critical elements of the MTP-S experience. We use the metaphor throughout this paper to highlight how the MTP approach provides a lens through which coaches and teachers view teachers' actions as well as a way to focus on what teaching that engages students really looks like.

About the MTP-S coaching program

PROGRAM DESIGN PARAMETERS

The MTP-S coaching program engages middle and high school teachers from any content area in consistent, repeated personalized learning cycles. Each cycle follows a standard, five-step process that typically occurs over the course of two weeks. The classroom practices promoted by MTP-S are those shown to improve student engagement in studies of the interactions that occur in classrooms among teachers and students.

EVIDENCE BASE

Two recent randomized control trials studies found that MTP-S has positive impacts on student achievement: One found positive impacts on middle and high school student achievement and engagement in small and rural districts, another in urban middle and high schools that found not only improvement in student achievement, but also a reduction in racial discrepancies in exclusionary disciplinary practices. Follow-up revealed that, even after the project ended, teachers who had participated in the coaching intervention maintained lower disciplinary referral rates and consistency of referrals by race. (See the list of studies on p. 13 for detail.)

HOW MTP-S TRAINS AND SUPPORTS COACHES

Each MTP-S coach begins by getting certified through a two-day training in how to recognize the classroom interactions that have been shown to support student engagement. Coaches then complete a three-day training on how to carry out the coaching process successfully. A Teachstone expert, called an MTP coach specialist, provides ongoing support. Specifically, each coach participates in regular one-on-one meetings with a coach specialist, focused on a recent coaching cycle, and participates in monthly one-hour group calls during the first year of support. These calls support coach implementation of the MTP-S model and development of coaching competencies.

This coherent system of support ensures each coach follows all the specifications of the coaching model, including keeping the feedback focused on classroom interactions that support student engagement. Teachstone also provides a handbook to guide the process and online resources and guidance for coaches and teachers.

SETTING UP THE LENS

An innovative use of video

A hallmark of the MTP-S coaching program is the innovative use of video clips. Teachers record a video of themselves teaching for about 30 minutes at times of their choosing, then upload it to a secure platform that shares it with their coaches. The coach watches the whole video and selects three short clips that show an effective interaction between the teacher and the student(s) — or among students — that encouraged engagement.

These clips focus coaches and teachers on specific moves that occur during instruction with the goal of increasing the use of particularly effective interactions in a teacher's everyday practice. The brevity of the video clip compels the teacher and coach to focus on that one interaction in a way that isolates that moment in time and draws out reflection about what happened and the related impact on students. In this way, the teacher's practice becomes more visible while the intensive examination makes the interaction more memorable, making the teacher more likely to appreciate and repeat that particularly effective strategy.

Rachel Post, a teacher from a large urban district in Maryland's Prince George's County Public Schools, explains the power of watching her own teaching on video: "You are doing something vulnerable by recording yourself, but even if I didn't feel great about what I had recorded, my coach would find something good in it." With the anxiety of seeing themselves on video assuaged, teachers can concentrate on what they see about their classroom.

"Watching yourself on video is so honest," Post says. "And there are things you really miss when you are a

teacher You can't really see exactly what it is like in your classroom. Watching yourself on video, you can really see what it is like, and you can't really hide behind any excuses."

The video clips force a tight focus on classroom interactions while also creating objectivity for the coaching conversation. Rather than an evaluative perspective from the coach or a discussion about the whole arc of a lesson, there is an almost clinical examination of one particular teaching move.

Concentrating on a carefully chosen classroom moment — rather than whenever the observer happened to be in the

classroom or a series of items on a checklist — allows the reflection and discussion to focus on the interactions in the classroom that improve student engagement and, in turn, student outcomes. "It's there in a video, so there are no assumptions," says Destiny Woodbury, an MTP coach specialist. "That's what we see, and that is what we are going to talk about as a teacher and a coach."

Coach and teacher agree before each cycle begins which features of classroom interactions to focus on — emotional support, classroom organization, or instructional support. Then, after viewing and choosing



"Watching yourself on video, you can really see what it is like, and you can't really hide behind any excuses."

— Rachel Post, teacher

clips from the video, the coach writes reflection prompts for the teacher to respond to before their next coaching session.

The written prompts from the coaches come in three types, specified in the MTP-S handbook and supported in coach training: *nice work*, which focuses on positive aspects of teaching and on building the teacher’s own observational skills; *consider this*, which focuses on the interaction and the impact on student behavior and engagement; and *making the most*, which focuses on how the teacher is helping students engage with the content.

Robert Pianta, who developed the MTP program, said in a 2019 interview with Learning Forward, “It is really important that the video clips always start with a section that we call ‘nice work,’ where the teacher is hearing and seeing herself lauded for the appropriate interaction and the effective interactions with a student” (Foster, 2019).

After the video viewing and written prompts, coach and teacher meet for about a half hour to review the clips and the teacher’s reflection and discuss how to strengthen or expand on that effective practice in the next cycle. The coach writes a summary, including collaboratively developed next steps. The cycle then repeats.

The recurrent cycle encourages teachers to see their actions and their students’ reactions in an analytical way and provides an opportunity to pause and reflect on practices that work, making it more likely that the teacher will repeat the effective practice. “As a teacher, you are so focused on implementing instruction and making sure that students are engaged, but seeing how they are engaged is really important,” says Jennifer Downey, a teacher in the rural district of Louisa, Virginia.

The combination of the tight focus of the clips and the coaching conversation creates an opportunity for immediate takeaways. Rather than using videos to see an entire lesson, or viewing video exemplars as some

initiatives do, MTP videos are short and selected to show teachers what they already do effectively to engage students or facilitate students engaging with each other.

“It doesn’t have to be a razzle-dazzle lesson that they’ve prepared especially for me,” says Meg Ryan, an experienced coach in Louisa, Virginia. “It should be something typical — a class discussion, a lecture, or group work. What I am looking for are brief moments of effective interactions between the teacher and the students or among the students. What is that teacher doing in that moment that’s working? And that’s where the whole strengths-based approach comes in.”

The brevity and specificity of the video clip keep the focus on a skill the teacher already demonstrates and a shared understanding of what types of interactions lead to student engagement. The specificity and targeted nature of the conversations drive improvements over time. Teachers appreciate the structured and specific feedback.

“When you look at a piece of the lesson instead of looking at the whole lesson, you really strengthen that area of your teaching,” says Adam Fedewa, a veteran teacher in Lansing, Michigan. Woodbury, the coach specialist, says, “Aligning specific feedback to teacher behaviors is what can cause these behaviors to change.”

The collaborative discussion of the video helps teachers answer the persistent question of what it looks like to connect with a student and get that student to engage academically. “MTP helps teachers to observe their own practice,” says Woodbury. “When [they’re] able to see what [they’re] doing . . . teachers become more intentional and more effective in their own practice through that increased awareness.”

The teachers turn the lens on themselves, both literally and figuratively, as they work through the cycles, supported by coaches who employ a very particular filter to guide improvements.

USING A FILTER

Strengths-based coaching

The coaches use the filter of a strengths-based approach to identify and maximize what a teacher is already doing in the classroom to effectively engage students, with the intent of maximizing and replicating those practices. Coaches — and, over time, the teachers themselves — apply that filter to what they observe and analyze so that they expand positive and effective interactions.

“I’m not looking for places where the teacher could do better,” says coach Ryan. “I’m not looking for places where she made a mistake. I’m not looking to point out that Johnny in the back wasn’t paying attention. I look at that video, and I pick three really strong, effective moments that she had and then write a prompt for each of those. ... [F]or example, I will ask, ‘When you were engaged in a feedback loop with that student, how did that lead to deeper understanding?’ ”

Helping teachers witness their own effectiveness and their own progress over time builds their sense of self-efficacy. “Teachers love this framework because they are getting positive affirmations, and that motivates them to keep going in their classroom,” says one coach. The positive and supportive coaching relationship is a driver for improvement, especially because it is nonevaluative. “It was the highlight of my week to meet with (my coach) because it was just positive and exciting and made me think, ‘OK, now I can’t wait to teach again tomorrow.’ ” says Courtney McCampbell, a special education teacher in Lansing, Michigan.

“Having that positive approach really reinvigorated my teaching and reminded me of when I was becoming a teacher and all the different strategies to consider,”

McCampbell says. “And rather than being overwhelmed by these thick books and these 50 things I could do to manage my classroom, it was, ‘Let’s look at this one aspect, let’s work on that, let’s build on that. You already have the groundwork there, so let’s build on it.’ This allowed me to grow as a teacher.”

Fedewa says, “All the coaching that you get really focuses on the positive aspects of your lessons and lets the teacher and the students grow together, which is what it is all about. I am in that last handful of years of teaching, and this kind of rejuvenated my career. The program sparked me to do better in the classroom.



I think that was contagious to the kids, and they found the confidence in themselves to move forward as students.”

The coaching results in ongoing capacity building for and by the teacher. The strategic use of video and the focused coaching conversations help teachers develop the skills they need to be more objective observers of their own practice, so they become experienced in analyzing their own actions and their students’ reactions and making adjustments to increase engagement. “It really helped me be more reflective in my teaching and to think about what worked, what didn’t work, and how to tweak things, not

“I look at that video, and I pick three really strong, effective moments that she had and then write a prompt for each of those.” — Meg Ryan, coach

only for the next year when I teach this lesson again but also how to tweak things throughout the day,” says Nicole Minor, a veteran teacher in Lansing, Michigan.

The consistent focus on building on strengths forges trust over time as teachers witness how the coaching improves their instruction. “I will admit that I had some reservations at first,” says Jerilyn Williams, a reading and English teacher in Lansing, Michigan. “But my experience with Malikah (the coach) was just amazing. She was not judgmental or critical. She really homed in on the good things that I do, the things I do well, and really encouraged me to try different things.”

With this focus on strengths, teachers’ dispositions toward being coached shift and improve at all stages of their careers. “I have been teaching for a long time, I have been doing well, and I have always been a highly effective teacher, but there is always room for improvement, and my coach helped me to see that,” Williams says.

The MTP process supports teachers who often don’t recognize exactly what they are doing well or who are focused on only their weaknesses. It also encourages teachers to build their own capacity to reflect on their

practice and connect their own improvements to the improvements of their students, regardless of their teaching experience.

“As educators, we’re so hard on ourselves,” says coach Ryan. “We always want to think about what we did wrong. But, over time, the teachers could really see, ‘Oh, I did have a good positive interaction with that student when I asked him some deeper questions,’ or, ‘This group really was having a positive interaction with each other when I had them do some peer dialogue.’ ... [T]he whole MTP process of being strengths-based really flips the teacher’s mindset. It really gets them to focus on those things that they’re doing well.”

The strengths-based approach is especially important in settings where teachers are under extra scrutiny, such as those in priority schools or schools on improvement plans. “Another element that is meaningful is that in so-called ‘priority schools,’ teachers are often criticized about test scores,” says Williams. “That is burdensome. To have someone come in and identify your strengths is so different. It’s recognition and validation. That is huge for my morale as an educator.”

A CLEAR FOCUS

Improving classroom interactions

The use of video clips and a strengths-based approach create the ideal circumstances to focus the MTP-S coaching on interactions between teachers and students and between students. This specific scope allows teachers to home in on the interaction students need from moment to moment, much the way that a camera lens focuses on the subjects of a photo while still allowing the scenery to be part of the picture.

In MTP-S, the lens that does the focusing is the Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS®) framework of domains and dimensions (see box on p. 10), which provides specific, clear language about the interactions that need to happen in a classroom to engage students in the learning process. MTP-S participants rely on this shared understanding and common language as they work to improve teacher facilitation of student engagement.

The shared goals provide structure for identifying what is effective practice as well as for the discussions. “The ultimate goal of this work is to help teachers interact more effectively with children, which leads to improved implementation of the curriculum and, in turn, improved social and academic outcomes for children,” coach Woodbury says. “That’s why we’re all here.”

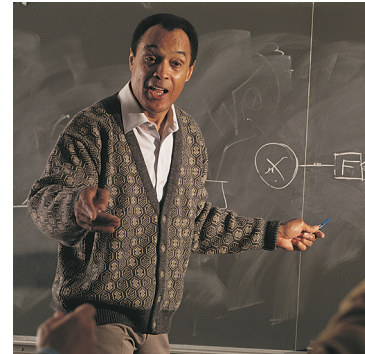
In the 2019 interview, Pianta explained the research base behind this approach. “We have good evidence that if you work on how teachers are teaching the content, you can activate the classroom environment for better content learning.

“We did a study a couple of years ago of MyTeachingPartner across four content areas, middle

and high school,” Pianta said. “What we found was that students were more engaged and motivated, the quality of teacher interactions increased considerably, and the students’ scores on state tests went up by [almost] 10 percentile points. And we didn’t do anything with teachers’ content, we just helped them learn how to engage students in ways that made the content more meaningful — make the content more conceptual, create a more active classroom, attend to student perspectives.”

The coaching cycles focus on various tools in a teacher’s repertoire over time, targeting one skill related to teacher-student interaction at a time for each cycle. The teacher and coach discuss and come to an agreement about what skills in what particular CLASS dimension and domain they want to improve in each cycle. The spotlight can be on skills ranging from improving classroom management to fostering student voice in new ways.

For instance, teachers looking to foster positive relationships and motivation would focus on interactions that fall within the domain of emotional support. “We’ve all heard the old saying that the students don’t care what you know until they know that you care,” coach Ryan



The spotlight can be on skills ranging from improving classroom management to fostering student voice in new ways.

says. “The CLASS domain of emotional support really delves into that. It talks about having a positive climate in your classroom and positive interactions between the teacher and the student and among the students.

“We all know in middle and high school that those peer relationships are key,” Ryan adds. “If you walk into a classroom and the peers aren’t getting along and there’s not a safe environment where they feel like they can learn, then engagement is definitely going to drop.”

In another example, teachers are often encouraged to elicit or make space for student voice as a way to foster student engagement. Yet this is a practice that can be challenging to understand and incorporate on a day-to-day basis. The MTP-S coaching related to this CLASS domain helps teachers appreciate why and how to encourage student voice through the interactions that take place in the classroom.

“MTP helped me become a better teacher for my students, and it helped me look at student voice as more important than just, ‘Oh, let me get all this content in,’” Minor says. “It helped me think about how I can change this lesson to help students get what they wanted out of the class.” This is an especially timely consideration as the global pandemic and social justice concerns impact students’ ability and willingness to attend and engage in school (Carlson, 2020).

The MTP coaching model emphasizes consistency in effective interactions regardless of content area. Because of this, MTP-S can complement other coaching programs or models that might exist in schools and districts. The focus on observable interactions and engagement also ensures that the coach remains an expert even if the grade level and content area shift. Coaches train their lenses on the interactions that increase student engagement and student outcomes, building teachers’ capacity to do the same, to encourage growth in teachers and students.

MTP-S also helps teachers use interactions that support classroom productivity. “One of the dimensions we learn about in the MTP program is productivity and how to make progress toward that idea and theory,” Fedewa says. “If you have processes and procedures in place, you become more productive. What is chaos and frustrating is having a room full of kids who are all on different pages. That becomes more work than preparing

CLASS: THE UNDERLYING FRAMEWORK

The MTP-S program uses the Classroom Assessment Scoring System®(CLASS®), a widely used framework of teaching quality that measures classroom interactions between teachers and students. Developed by researchers at the University of Virginia, CLASS has been validated by use in thousands of classrooms and is disseminated and supported by the for-profit organization Teachstone.

The secondary CLASS framework is organized by three domains of interactions: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. Each domain is broken down into several dimensions, such as teacher sensitivity or quality of feedback, with aligned indicators.

To make progress within the CLASS domains, all aspects of coaching — the content of the coaching conversations, the prompts that scaffold teacher reflections, and the way coaches choose video clips to capture observable interactions — help teachers recognize and improve (or increase the frequency or depth of) interactions that foster student engagement. The teacher completes a cycle every two weeks, each taking about two hours. Teachers engaged in the AIR project described in this paper complete six to 10 cycles a year, which takes less than 20 hours total.

a good lesson plan. Through MTP, you become a lot more productive in the classroom.”

McC Campbell agrees. “I found that thinking about productivity and thinking about how to make my class better, it actually ran smoother and I felt like I was spending less time because it was more organized,” she says. “The coaching helped me narrow down my thinking. My lessons got clearer and cleaner — and it almost saved time. It made life easier.”

A snapshot of high-quality professional learning

MTP exemplifies effective professional learning in the sense that it has clear goals and is sustained over time, embedded in the daily work of educators, and focused on building the capacity of educators to implement their curriculum effectively so that all students can learn.

Several aspects of the model are especially supportive of educator development, including its intentionality, recurrent cycles, embedded routines, and emphasis on student engagement. The innovations in the model that focus on teacher strengths and purposeful and strategic use of video clips make the program exciting and engaging as well as effective.

These aspects of the MTP-S model are also aligned to the evidence- and experience-based Standards for Professional Learning, developed by Learning Forward. These standards, as well as the federal definition of professional learning under the Every Student Succeeds Act, call for professional learning to be sustained, embedded, and focused on continuous improvement. These guiding frameworks also call for reflection that is specific to a teacher's practice and references established expectations as well as support for adjusting practice so that it more closely aligns with expectations. (To learn more, see learningforward.org/about/professional-learning-definition.)

MTP-S teachers find that the experience is very much embedded in their day-to-day practice. "It wasn't an extra piece that I had to add to a lesson plan or an

extra piece that I had to add to my day," Minor says. "It helped me to improve what I was already doing. I didn't see it as extra work."

In addition, the MTP-S engagement is strategic and relatively limited in the use of time, a busy educator's most critical resource. A teacher in the MTP-S program completes a cycle every two weeks, each taking about two hours. In the AIR-led project, teachers complete six to 10 cycles a year, so the engagement requires less than 20 hours total over the year.

MTP-S coaching supports educators across the teaching career continuum, an important strength given the profession's chronic attrition challenges.

The fact that MTP-S engages teachers at all points in their career is worth noting because all teachers deserve the opportunity to engage in constructive feedback cycles or productive discussions about their own teaching.

And because curricula, contexts, and student circumstances change over a career of teaching, every teacher needs information and coaching support to better understand what practices are evidence-based and high



"It helped me to improve what I was already doing. I didn't see it as extra work."

— Nicole Minor, teacher

leverage in terms of impact on students.

Daneric Johnson, an MTP-S teacher and now assistant principal in Waco, Texas, understands how important it is to recognize that all teachers can improve their practice. “In a lot of districts I have been in, if you are not the worst teacher or you are not the new teacher, people don’t really address you. They have bigger fish to fry. So, with me not being the worst and not being the new teacher, I needed something to help me reach my full potential . . . [MTP-S coaching] helped me to achieve but, more importantly, helped the students to achieve — and helped me see that students were achieving.”

The coaching cycles also provide opportunities for teachers to personalize their professional learning. Teachers have a voice in the practices and dimensions they focus and reflect on, which increases their interest and agency. Teachers can identify areas of concern or specific challenges at the start of each cycle, focusing the strengths-building process on areas of immediate

TO LEARN MORE

Visit **secondarycoaching.org** to learn more about MTP-S and the project. To try out MTP-S with grant support, email the AIR project team at **secondarycoachingproject@air.org**.

For more information about CLASS and the MTP coaching model, visit **teachstone.com**.

concern. As Jennifer Downey, a teacher in Louisa County, Virginia, notes, “Communication and the opportunity to discuss our teaching is what helps every teacher become a leader of his or her own professional development.”

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Additional resources

The following resources can help deepen your understanding of the coaching used in the MTP program.

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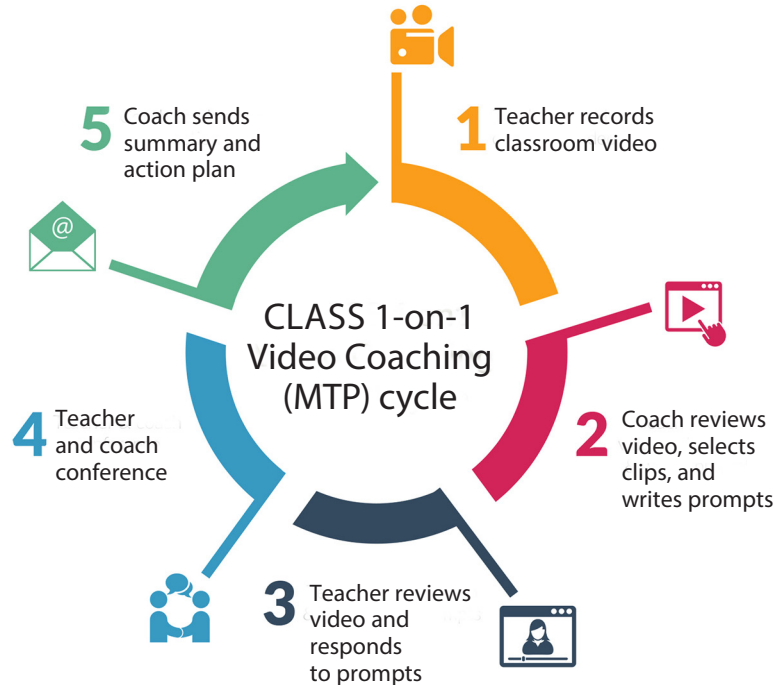
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How does CLASS 1-on-1 video coaching work?

Using video from teachers' classrooms and the CLASS framework, trained coaches provide individualized, targeted feedback and support through structured cycles:



This graphic is used with permission from Teachstone.

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Learning Forward is a nonprofit, international membership association of learning educators committed to one vision in K-12 education:

Equity and excellence in teaching and learning.

To realize that vision, Learning Forward pursues its mission to build the capacity of leaders to establish and sustain highly effective professional learning. Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning, adopted in more than 35 states, define the essential elements of professional learning that leads to changed educator practices and improved outcomes for students.

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