Focusing the Conversation:
How Video Improves Teaching and Learning

INTERVIEWS ABOUT THE MYTEACHINGPARTNER-SECONDARY (MTP-S) COACHING MODEL

Learning Forward

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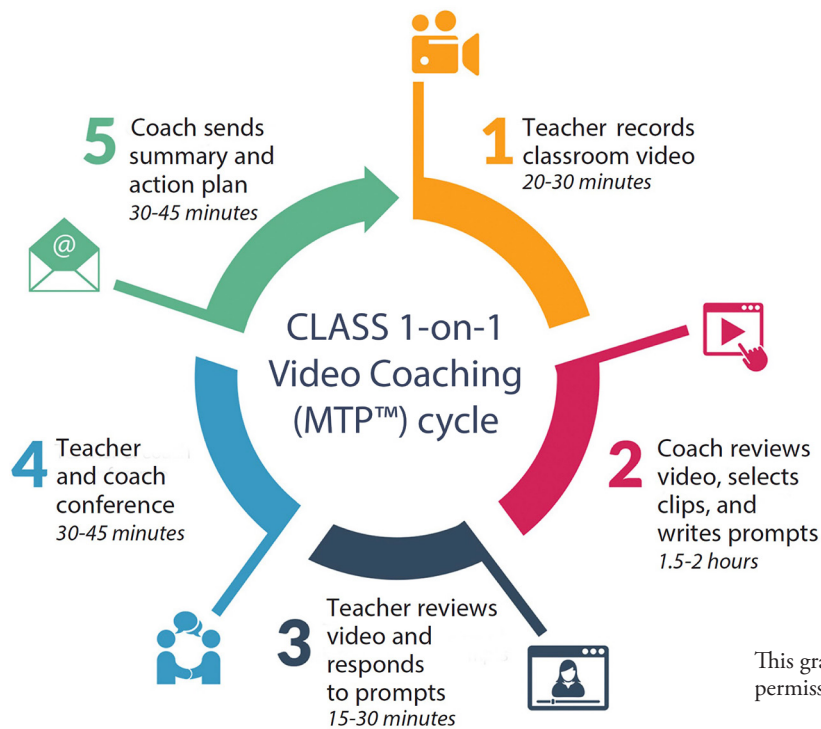Copy editor:
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The MyTeaching Partner-Secondary (MTP-S) coaching program for middle and high school teachers builds on research studies about effective coaching that have shown positive effects on teacher and student outcomes. For more detailed information about MTP-S, please see the "Resources" section at the end of this white paper.

For the past five years, Learning Forward has engaged in a project led by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to better understand the MyTeachingPartner™ (MTP™) coaching model, especially its use in secondary schools (MTP-S). The project was funded by a 2017 grant from the U.S. Department of Education through its Education Innovation Research Program. Learning Forward's interest in MTP comes from its longstanding belief in the value of coaching as an integral part of a complete professional learning program because of coaches' ability to provide day-to-day support for learning.

The MTP-S model aligns in many ways with the Standards for Professional Learning, which guide educators on acquiring new knowledge and applying new learning to improve practice and sustain improvements in student learning.

This paper draws on interviews (both virtual and in person) with 20 teachers and 11 coaches in seven districts who experienced the model during the 2022–23 school year. This paper will describe the process of the MTP-S model, present the key findings, and close with considerations for a school or district preparing to embark on coaching.

CLASS 1-on-1 Video Coaching (MTP™) cycle

1 Teacher records classroom video
20-30 minutes

2 Coach reviews video, selects clips, and writes prompts
1.5-2 hours

3 Teacher reviews video and responds to prompts
15-30 minutes

4 Teacher and coach conference
30-45 minutes

5 Coach sends summary and action plan
30-45 minutes

This graphic is used with permission from Teachstone.

How does MTP-S work?

The MTP-S program focuses on teacher strengths. MTP-S intentionally does not seek deficits in instructional practice; the model and scripted process allow teachers and coaches to identify and discuss what teachers already are doing well in their interactions with students. Together, they decide how individual teachers can build on their existing assets. The guided coaching conversation enables each teacher to become an observer and analyst of her own instruction. By building teachers' senses of efficacy and trust, the process encourages them to buy into the coaching process. As teachers and coaches develop and deepen their relationship, their coaching interactions lead to improved student outcomes.

Selecting the participants

Schools and districts that enrolled in the MTP-S project identified potential coaches; some also identified teachers while others issued a broad invitation to teachers who might be interested in participating. From the beginning, teachers knew that recording their instruction was a required component of the project. Coaches and teachers were compensated for their time with a stipend provided by AIR.

Preparing the coaches

Once identified, coaches enrolled in two courses to prepare for their work. The first was a two-day course to learn to use the Classroom Assessment Scoring System®(CLASS®); the second was a three-day course on how to carry out the coaching process successfully. Before beginning their work with teachers, each coach had to become certified by Teachstone, the private company that sells the CLASS framework, the MTP model, and associated resources.

After certification, the coaches continued to receive support through regular one-on-one meetings with a "coach specialist" from Teachstone and participated in monthly one-hour group calls. Teachstone also gave coaches a handbook to guide the process and access to online resources and guidance for coaches and teachers.

CLASS: An evidence-based framework

CLASS is a well-researched and 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 Teachstone.

The CLASS framework focuses on interactions between teachers and students in three domains because research has shown that teachers' ratings in these domains are strong predictors of students' academic and social success. The three domains are:

• **Emotional support**, which assesses the extent to which teachers foster positive relationships and enhance children's growing sense of identity and autonomy.

• **Classroom organization**, which focuses on the ways teachers manage behavior, time, and attention in the classroom to ensure children get the most of each day.

• **Instructional support**, which measures the extent to which teachers provide cognitively stimulating learning experiences and feedback.

Within each domain, CLASS identifies a series of specific **dimensions**, such as teacher sensitivity or quality of feedback, and within each dimension, a series of **observational** indicators. For example, one of the observational indicators within the emotional support dimension suggests that teachers use a student's name when calling on them to respond to a question.

Organizing coach-teacher interactions

The coaching program is a partnership between the teacher and a trained coach who provides relevant, interactive, and ongoing feedback and support. The coach and teacher organize their work into cycles, each following a predictable pattern (see graphic on page 3). Coaches began by orienting teachers to the CLASS domains, dimensions, and observational indicators. Before each coaching cycle, the coach and teacher agreed which aspect of classroom interaction would be the focus of the upcoming cycle.

In the MTP-S cohort, participating coaches began by orienting teachers to the CLASS domains, dimensions, and observational indicators. Before each coaching cycle, the coach and teacher agreed which aspect of classroom interaction would be the focus of the upcoming cycle.

To begin the coaching cycle, teachers recorded 30 minutes of their own instruction and uploaded this footage to a secure platform accessible to their coach. Teachers decided for themselves which lesson to record and when to do the recording. Teachstone provided each teacher with an Apple iPod and instructions on how to set up the camera on a tripod and record their instruction.

Coaches watched the whole video and selected three short (between 30 seconds and two minutes) clips that showed an effective interaction of engagement between the teacher and the student. After selecting the video clips, each coach wrote a reflection email guided by three types of prompts from the CLASS framework. Always beginning with the "nice work" focus, the prompts grounded teacher reflections during coaching conversations:

- **Nice work** — This focuses on positive aspects of teaching and on building the teacher's own observational skills;
- **Consider this** — This focuses on the interaction and the effect on student behavior and engagement; and
- **Making the most** — This focuses on how the teacher is helping students engage with the content.

After viewing the video clips and giving the teacher written prompts, coaches met with teachers for about a half hour. The CLASS dimensions served as a touchstone for each conversation and provided a focus for both coaching prompts and teacher reflections and response. As teachers and their coaches progressed through the CLASS domains, all aspects of coaching — the content of the coaching conversations, the prompts that scaffolded teacher reflections, and the way coaches chose video clips to capture observable interactions — helped teachers recognize and improve (or increase the frequency or depth of) interactions that foster student engagement. At the close of the coaching conversations, the teacher and coach decided on next steps for the next session. Each coach wrote a summary including plans for next steps. The cycle then repeated.

The cycles and the coaching share an explicit purpose — to encourage teachers to repeat and build on what was effective. The recurrent cycle encourages teachers to appraise their actions and their students' reactions analytically. Coaching conversations give teachers further opportunity to pause and reflect on practices that work. As a result, teachers are more likely to recall them later in similar situations and repeat effective practices.

Key findings

Interviews conducted with the participating teachers and coaches following the conclusion of their cohort revealed key findings about the three major elements of MTP-S: teacher-collected video clips, intentional focus on teacher strengths, and the regular cycle of coaching.

1 **The video clips gave teachers a rare opportunity to step back and see themselves in action, something that few of them had experienced. In addition, using a video clip to focus the conversation between teacher and coach means teachers experienced intense personal attention about the work that matters to them the most: their own practice.**

- Videos slowed down the action so teachers could observe moments and interactions that may have seemed small but were actually significant.
- Video revealed smaller and potentially more significant moments of interactions between students and teachers, and among students.
- The brevity of the video clip ensured that conversations among teachers and coaches focused on one interaction or strategy and avoided digression into irrelevant pieces of the teaching action.
- Videos reinforced what teachers were already doing well and created a greater sense of efficacy.

Using a brief video clip during one-on-one coaching conversations emerged as the pivotal practice of the supplemental cohort of the MTP-S project. Teachers and coaches repeatedly remarked on the power of watching a video of their own teaching. They contrasted this practice with watching videos of other teachers teaching — a common learning technique, according to these teachers, and far less effective.

To a person, every teacher and coach named the use of the video clip as the most influential component of their coaching experience. By reflecting on videos of their own instruction, teachers learned valuable lessons about their teaching because they saw themselves in action. They believed their teaching practices had improved in ways that would lead to more positive learning outcomes for students. Because MTP-S employs videos to identify teachers' strengths, the videos became the centerpiece of coaching conversations and built a sense of efficacy among the teachers. In addition, participants found that having the clips embedded in a routinized coaching cycle kept everyone focused and ensured momentum within sessions. "It was my clip. It was my time," said one Michigan teacher. "I felt like I was the only one that [the coach] was talking to."

"What we plan to do and what we actually do is very different and exposure to that reality is eye-opening. Watching themselves teach was more eye-opening than anything I would say," explained a Texas coach. "[A]nd the control is with the teacher. She is making the decision about what to record and what to share. Teachers were completely in the driver's seat to choose what day recording happened, and what lesson they would record. After capturing their lesson, they watched themselves perform what they said they were going to do. Teachers don't often do that," the Texas coach observed.

One veteran teacher, a National Board-Certified Teacher and experienced with videos about teaching, was a fan of the brief video clip. "When you can discover it and see it for yourself in a video, that makes it stick. That's worth my time," she said.

Said another teacher from Michigan, "The 'aha moment' comes more from watching yourself teach."

A principal also became a fan of using videos during coaching. "The power of video was so huge. Teachers would say, 'What I thought was happening is not actually what I'm seeing happen.' For early-career teachers, especially, video really accelerates the development of the teacher eye. That takes time. Video puts it in your face," she said.

"I'm hungry for more video observations," acknowledged one New York teacher.

2 The coaching cycle's intentional focus on student engagement paid off with numerous changes in practice during the coaching cohort.

The video clips allowed teachers to observe fleeting interactions with students that might occur unobserved during the course of busy instruction.

Several teachers learned, for example, that often they were not calling on students by name but pointing at them to respond to a question. One of the CLASS indicators encourages teachers to call students by name, not simply to point or nod at them. "I was surprised to learn that I wasn't already doing that. When I changed and started doing that and when I encouraged students to use each other's names, that brought even more respect into the classroom. I felt like we already had that, but I could see that, when they used each other's names, they grew in confidence," said one Wyoming teacher.

Another teacher reported a similar experience. "When you watch yourself, you find that you're just pointing to student and not saying their name. I realized that I actually could have said their name, and that would have been more inclusive," she said.

Once, when reviewing a video clip, one Michigan teacher noticed that a girl sitting in the back of the room wasn't very engaged. After that, the teacher made a point of speaking with her and telling her that she wanted to hear from her more often. In subsequent videos the girl was more involved, even walking around and speaking with other students at appropriate times. The lesson for the teacher: Do not assume that students know that their voices are always welcome. Sometimes, students must be explicitly invited to participate and reminded that their contributions are valued.

Several teachers became more sensitive to how often their voice dominated the classroom and their perspective took precedence. One social studies teacher observed during a video clip, "I make connections to the real world all the time, but are they my connections or are they adolescent connections? I started allowing kids to share their examples before I share mine. An adolescent perspective is different. Real world can mean so many different things to different people," she said.

3 When a teacher records a lesson, it makes public their interest in improving their practice and continuing to learn — and sends a powerful message to students.

Students knew immediately when teachers were recording the class — it was impossible to conceal the iPod and tripod in the classroom! Teachers explained to students what they were doing and why they were doing it. That explanation turned out to have unexpected benefits.

The visibility of recording the teacher at work sent a powerful message that not only do teachers continue to learn, but also they value learning how to improve their teaching because they care about their students. Some teachers also chose to share the video with students and invited student feedback about what they observed.

"Kids loved it. They would ask if we were taping today. They actually felt empowered," said one Michigan teacher.

A Kentucky teacher agreed: "It became a badge of honor for the kids to be recorded."

One of the teachers discovered an additional benefit when she encountered technical difficulties and one of her less-engaged students volunteered to record the lesson on his phone and send it to her, which gave her a new perspective on that student.

4 Focusing on teacher strengths shifted the entire conversation about how to improve teaching and challenged experienced coaches to re-learn or re-focus how they coached.

- The strengths-based focus created a greater sense of teacher efficacy. Because there were no "gotcha" moments, teachers built a sense of efficacy and developed a trusting relationship with coaches. Shifting the focus from fixing teachers to building on what teachers are already doing well provides a pathway for teacher growth.
- The focus on what teachers already are doing right helped overcome resistance to and skepticism about coaching among teachers.
- The strengths-based focus also benefited the coach. Coaches are not expected to be all-knowing experts. In the CLASS model they might be, but are not always, experts in the content they are observing. Rather than content, the coach focuses on effective teacher-student interactions that are applicable to all classrooms and subjects. Taking this approach frees coaches to become partners with teachers in building on their demonstrated strengths. Teachers and coaches develop trust, which in turn helps strengthen their relationship.

Many experienced coaches said they had long been focused on a teacher's assets. They acknowledged, however, that the overt emphasis on strengths forced them to change their thinking. "It was a mindset shift for us," said one veteran coach in Michigan. "We weren't there to fix something."

Another experienced Michigan coach said, "neither of us ever went in and ripped someone apart, but I don't think we ever deliberately focused on the strengths — just building totally on all of the assets to get all the way stronger." The focus on strengths surprised many teachers, according to that coach. "They'd jokingly say, 'That was the worst lesson I've ever taught. You're never going to find anything in there to use.' And then we'd find something. Everybody does something right," she said.

One principal said the focus on teacher strengths delivers a broader message to teachers. "If we [focus on strengths] with teachers, then they will do that with the kids. There's always something that's good and strong," she said.

The search for strengths often pushed teachers in a direction they did not expect. The search for strengths often revealed that teachers acted differently than they themselves expected. For example, one teacher expressed frustration that she had to repeat and repeat and repeat a direction for her students. … What the coach saw, however, was a teacher firmly and calmly going over something as long as she needed until all students understood. "You're not questioning your decision, and that's a positive," said the coach.

Another teacher had a well-developed routine that opened her class every day. The coach was able to point out this strength to her and encourage her to apply it to other aspects of her instruction. "It was so well done that students were doing it without being prompted," the coach explained. "That did not just happen overnight. At some point, she had to teach them that routine." The coach encouraged her to recognize such instruction as a strength and pushed her to identify where she could introduce a similar routine into another part of her instruction. "That was a very powerful moment of learning for her," said the coach.

The focus on strengths did frustrate some of the veteran teachers who said they had weathered enough battles during teaching to feel comfortable confronting needed improvements in their practice. "The only thing I didn't love about this is that it's always about the positives. I get what you're doing. You build yourself up and pull out your strengths, but I'm at a point where you could say, 'You could have done this differently.' That's not a negative, it's something that would challenge you. But maybe that's more appropriate for more experienced teachers," she mused.

Another veteran teacher who is a National Board-Certified Teacher said she is aware of deficits in her instruction and believed she needed a partner to help focus her on how to change and improve those practices. "I don't have time for you to tell me that I'm doing really well. I know that. But I'm very aware of where things go wrong and I'm always thinking of where things go wrong. Yet, growing in those areas without something to remind me, that's harder."

5 **The prescribed coaching cycle defined expectations for the process. Some coaches and teachers raised concerns about it, yet overall, participants applauded it for several reasons.**

- The coaching cycle provided predictability. Teachers and coaches knew exactly how they would spend their time during each segment of the cycle.
- Committing to a 30-minute meeting with the coach meant no teachers lost their entire planning period. Such time management is a huge benefit at every level of the system. A teacher in the MTP-S program completes a cycle every two weeks, each taking about two hours. In the AIR-led project, teachers completed six to 10 cycles a year, so the engagement required less than 20 hours total over the year.
- The transparency and structure of the coaching cycle gave participants the freedom of certainty. Teachers and coaches knew what would happen during each segment so they were able to relax about next steps. Removing confusion about the process helped develop trust between teacher and coach and enhanced their relationship.
- The coaching cycle made feedback relevant. When feedback occurs relatively close to the action of teaching, memory of the interaction is still fresh enough to be meaningful. Short turn-arounds between recording and conferencing mean coaching is more likely to meet teachers at their moment of need.
- Reflection time was built into the coaching cycle. The scripted cycle of meet/observe/reply/summarize provides a structure that gives teachers time to reflect and creates a "journal" that they can refer to later.

Although some might see the structure as confining, coaches and teachers said it was the opposite: The structure was freeing. "Under the former model, teachers dreaded it because it took so much preparation. This was faster because it was so much more focused," said one coach.

A Michigan teacher said the strict scheduling felt more productive. "You stick to it and you close it. You feel a sense of accomplishment. I grew almost as much as I would grow in a year because it was so focused," she said. A Virginia coach noted, "I love the framework of the cycles. Because it was so focused on them [the teachers] and what they needed in those two weeks, it was pretty perfect professional development. It's so structured. It's not free flowing. Teachers were steering the ship. They were talking about where they wanted to go next." A Michigan coach said, "We think the scripted cycle is kind of brilliant."

A coach in Wyoming said earlier experiences felt like "drive-by coaching," compared with the more structured MTP-S coaching model. "Somebody would stop by, do a little observation, give you a little sticky note feedback on whatever was happening in the classroom when they came by. The very structured [MTP-S] cycles take a lot of guesswork out of deciding where to go next, but there's still a lot of flexibility. The structure freed up teachers to focus on just what was happening."

6 Lessons from MTP-S implementation may apply to a wider set of conditions for coaching.

- Many cohort schools invited teachers to volunteer to participate in coaching.
- Working with volunteers improved the likelihood that participating teachers were ready to change.
- Encouraging volunteer participation opened doors to veteran teachers interested in being coached.
- Virtual coaching was efficient and respectful of teachers' and coaches' time without diluting their relationships.

Asking teachers to volunteer often contrasted with how teachers had been identified for coaching in the past. Working with volunteers improves the likelihood that teachers want to improve their practice. When the teachers were hungry to grow, they grew tremendously," explained a Texas coach. "If they were at a place to see how they really did things, they exceeded all expectations. Among those who weren't ready to be introspective, I didn't see a whole lot of change," she said. "We tend to assign coaching to people who have deficits, but if they're not ready, it's a treatment that won't work."

Encouraging volunteer participation not only increased chances that participating teachers were ready to respond to suggestions for improvement, but also benefited veteran teachers who were interested in being coached. Coaching programs tend to focus on younger, newer teachers or on teachers who are struggling. As a result, veteran or successful teachers may be overlooked. One teacher beginning her fifth year of teaching saw coaching as a way to ensure that she would retain her interest in teaching. "I want to make choices to be sure that I don't burn out. If I don't want to get so bummed out about education that I don't want to do it anymore, then I have to be proactive," she said. "The older, crustier teachers — nobody decided to be that way — but they also didn't take steps early on to avoid that." Seeking volunteers also reduces the stigma of coaching as a program only for struggling teachers, especially when older and respected teachers step up and volunteer to open their classrooms and be coached.

For the participants in this cohort, virtual coaching emerged as unexpected and positive aspect of the MTP-S program. Due to COVID shutdowns and subsequent changes in some districts, some MTP-S coaching was done virtually, thereby adding another element to the project.

Virtual coaching was efficient and respectful of teacher-coach time without diluting their relationships. It also enhanced confidentiality; no one sees a coach walking into another teacher's classroom. For teachers who fear that coaching might reflect poorly on the quality of their teaching, such privacy could encourage them to participate. In addition, several coaches said virtual coaching meant both parties were more likely to stick to a schedule. Participants also found it easier to schedule meetings when teachers were at home at the end of their workday and less likely to be distracted. Likewise, coaches said they avoided being drafted for other school chores when they were not physically present in a school.

Lastly, several of the participating schools piloted the MTP-S coaching program only during Spring 2023 to see if the model would be right for future use. Starting a coaching project at the beginning of the year may seem ideal, but starting later than the beginning of the school year was beneficial. A spring pilot gave teachers something new to work with when their energy flagged at the end of the school year. In a school that started coaching during the last quarter of the school year, a coach described a benefit, "The energy of learning was inspiring people to finish the school year strong. It counteracted the narrative of grinding toward the end of the year," she said.

Implications for professional learning systems

Findings from implementation of the MTP-S model during the supplemental cohort highlight components that other districts may add to their professional learning portfolio.

1. Requiring teachers to record a lesson and reflect on a video clip focuses the one-on-one coaching conversation so it can move along. Teachstone offers a secure platform that enables teachers and coaches to post and retrieve the video clips, which some teachers and coaches valued. Every teacher and coach in the supplemental cohort talked about the power of using the videos to reveal interactions that teachers might easily overlook in a busy classroom. The videos enable teachers both to observe their instruction and, importantly, learn how to analyze the moments they are observing. From their own observations and analyses, teachers are able to identify what they did and how they might move that same practice forward. In this process, the coach is a guide, not an expert, a role which enhances the trust and the relationship between teacher and coach.

2. MTP-S is intentionally focused on identifying a teacher's strengths in the video clips. As one coach noted, "everybody does something right." This expectation to look for the strengths builds a teacher's sense of efficacy and offers each teacher a path for taking the next step in improvement. In spreading the word about the MTP-S model, the focus on teachers' strengths also helps overcome traditional beliefs that coaching is only about fixing teachers' problems. Several experienced coaches noted that the focus on strengths was a major shift in mindset that could work with any coaching model.

3. Finally, each component of the MTP-S model provides reliable and valid processes and measures. The structure of the CLASS dimensions, a reliable coaching cycle, and alignment with the Standards for Professional Learning all benefit schools and districts that operate on strict schedules and address competing demands. Providing a structure allows teachers to embed coaching more quickly into their routines. The reliability of the MTP-S coaching cycle seemed to help everyone be accountable. Teachers knew when they had to record the lesson. Coaches knew when they had to provide feedback. The teacher and the coach both knew when they were sitting down for the coaching conversation and how long it would last. The CLASS dimensions gave teachers and coaches a guide to follow which ensured that they weren't grasping at irrelevant content to fill their conversation. The MTP-S model, moreover, supports the Standards for Professional Learning in many ways. Three of the 11 standards are particularly relevant:

- Culture of Collaborative Inquiry, which expects that educators in every role, grade level, and content area will collaborate for continuous improvement and support their colleagues' ongoing learning and development.

- Equity Foundations, which makes explicit that ensuring equity and improving student learning requires a culture of support for all staff. Promoting the growth of all educators lays a foundation for promoting the growth of all students.

- Implementation, which values a culture that regularly engages in meaningful, constructive feedback and aids educators to apply new learning to improve their practice and sustain those changes over time.

As one coach said during the final interviews: "The bigger the professional development, the less effective it is. The smaller you can make your group, the more effective it will be. It doesn't get smaller than one-on-one coaching."

Resources

For more information about the MTP coaching program:

Foster, E. (2021, January). *Seeing teaching through a different lens.* Learning Forward.

learningforward.org/report/myteachingpartner-secondary- coaching-model/

This paper highlights three strengths of MTP coaching: the use of short video clips so teachers can 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.

Flowers, J.A. (2019, December). Accentuate the positive: Video can motivate teachers to improve their skills. *The Learning Professional, 40*(6), 36–39.

learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/accentuate-the- positive.pdf

An experienced coach's firsthand perspective on the power of the MTP coaching cycle.

Foster, E. (2019, December). A window into teaching: With evidence- based coaching, teachers observe and reflect on student interactions. *The Learning Professional, 40*(6), 33–35, 40.

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Excerpts from an interview with Robert Pianta who developed the evidence-based MyTeachingPartner 1:1 Video Coaching program (MTP). 51(2), 143–163.
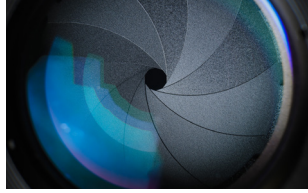
Learning Forward thanks the teachers and coaches who contributed to this paper,
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Forthcoming papers will be available at AIR and Teachstone.

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