

Santa Clara County Race to the Top (RTT)

Year One Video Coaching Pilot Project

Summary Report

July 2015

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Race to the Top Year One Video Coaching Pilot Project

Year One Summary Report: January 2014 – March 2015

Background

The Race to the Top Video Coaching Pilot (VCP) is a professional development intervention designed to improve the quality of early educators' teaching practices in selected Race to the Top sites. Through the VCP, a coach engages the entire teaching team in a classroom in cycles of reflective dialogue based on video clips that teachers take in their classrooms and submit through an online platform. Beasmartercookie.com was the online platform used for most of the Year One of the VCP. Towards the end of the year, My Coaching Companion, an online platform offered through the University of Washington College of Education, was piloted. The coach uses the CLASSTM Dimensions tool as a basis for this reflective dialogue.

The VCP is offered as part of Santa Clara County's QRIS Pilot, funded by Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT). The Video Coaching Pilot is modeled after the My Teaching PartnerTM (MTPTM) video-coaching program that E3 offered to CARES Plus participants with great success. The E3 team designed the VCP with two key differences from MTPTM. First, the VCP involves the entire teaching team in the coaching cycles, instead of focusing on the lead teacher. Second, based on low scores in the Instructional Support domain of CLASSTM among QRIS participants, the VCP focuses coaching on dimensions and strategies within the Instructional Support domain. The VCP engaged 30 teachers and assistant teachers across 13 classrooms at RTT sites. Participants received \$450 stipends for completing the project. Teachers who served as technical leads for their sites received stipends of \$600.

This report summarizes project activities and examines the impact of the VCP on the participating teachers' practices. It builds on the Phase One Summary Report¹, completed in September of 2014, and more closely examines notable successes and lessons learned from the Phase Two of the project (August 2015 to March 2015). The report concludes by looking ahead to future years of the VCP.

Note: This report builds on the Phase One Summary Report completed in September 2014

Structure of the Video Coaching Pilot: Phases One and Two

The VCP was structured in two distinct phases that together spanned from January 2014 through March of 2015. Phase One, which spanned January through June of 2014, consisted of recruiting and selecting participants, meeting with teaching teams, training participants on the video recording equipment and the online platform, and guiding teaching teams through a few cycles of coaching. Phase Two spanned August of 2014 through March of 2015, and focused exclusively on completing coaching cycles. The table below illustrates the main activities of each Phase of the VCP.

¹ http://www.e3institute.org/cs/e3/download/fsfile/2317/VideoCoachingReport.pdf?x-r=pcfile_dpub

Phase One January 2014 – June 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project outreach and recruitment ▪ Initial meetings with coach and classroom teaching teams ▪ Practice video-taping and uploading ▪ Complete one to three cycles with coach
Phase Two August 2014 – March 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Kick-off event ▪ Complete seven coaching cycles

Summary of Phase Two Activities

Kickoff Meeting and Coaching Cycles

Phase Two began in August of 2014 with a kickoff meeting for participating teaching teams. At the meeting, participants engaged in discussion about the three dimensions of the CLASS™ domain of Instructional Support: Language Modeling, Quality of Feedback, and Concept Development. Classroom teams then completed two cycles of reflective coaching on each of the three dimensions, and one cycle on a dimension of their choosing within the domain of Instructional Support, for a total of seven cycles.

During this time, the VCP coach also attended meetings of the Coaching Collaborative. The December 1, 2014 meeting of the collaborative focused on Analysis and Reasoning, an indicator within the Concept Development dimension. The content presented at this meeting aligned with the VCP coach's work with teachers on strategies within the Analysis and Reasoning indicator. At this meeting, the coaches were placed in scenarios and asked to deepen the instruction through incorporating strategies designed to improve analysis and reasoning in young children. The VCP coach found the discussion of this dimension with other coaches very useful, and integrated some of the strategies she learned at this meeting into her coaching with VCP participants. As an example, she worked with a particular classroom team on changing some of the questions they asked children from questions that elicited a certain response, to “how” and “why” questions, that elicited more critical thought within the children.

Impact of the Video Coaching Pilot

The Video Coaching Pilot had a significant impact on the teaching practices of the participating teachers. Specifically, improvements were noted in teaching practices in the CLASS™ domain of Instructional Support, in the degree to which teachers within a classroom worked as a team, and in the degree to which teachers reflected about their own teaching practices.

Changes in Teaching Practice

CLASS™ assessments completed at roughly the beginning and the end of the VCP year were available for five of the 11 participating classrooms. All five of these classrooms showed significant improvement in their CLASS score for the Instructional Support domain. Of the two classrooms that showed gains across all domains of CLASS™, the gains in Instructional Support were the largest. Pre- and post --VCP CLASS™ scores are shown on the following table.

Pre- and Post-VCP CLASS™ Scores

School	Classroom	Pre-VCP			Post-VCP			Change in Scores				
		Date	Emotional Support	Classroom Organization	Instructional Support	Date	Emotional Support	Classroom Organization	Instructional Support	Emotional Support	Classroom Organization	Instructional Support
McKinley State Preschool	2	6/27/14	5.81	4.67	2.17	2/8/15	5.5	4.83	2.82	-0.31	0.16	0.65
Horace Mann State Preschool		4/1/14	5.63	4.67	2.92	4/30/15	5.88	5.08	3.5	0.25	0.41	0.58
Grant State Preschool	B-AM	4/24/14	5.81	4.42	2.75	4/20/15	5.25	4.83	3.83	-0.56	0.41	1.08
Grant State Preschool	C-PM	5/1/14	5.44	3.92	2.83	4/1/15	5.81	5.08	4	0.37	1.16	1.17
St. Elizabeth's Day Home	8-AM	4/22/14	5.63	3.75	2.08	4/13/15	5.31	4.92	3.25	-0.32	1.17	1.17

As described above, the content of the coaching in the VCP focused on the CLASS™ domain of Instructional Support. This has been the lowest scoring CLASS™ dimension among the VCP sites, and among RTT sites in general. The VCP coach worked with participants on all three dimensions within the Instructional Support Domain: Concept Development, Language Modeling, and Quality of Feedback. Specifically, the coach set a goal with a particular teacher or teaching team, and then reflected on progress towards that goal as evidenced through a video clip. The following are extracted from a follow up email to a teacher:

Our goal is to increase teachers' consistency using the strategy of encouragement and affirmation. This strategy recognizes children's efforts and encourages them to persist in thinking about something specific or completing a task. The teacher gives specific feedback and focuses on the child's by saying, "I know it is hard, but you almost got it.

Keep trying. I know you can do it. Wow you really put a lot of effort into your building. Tell me about it." In other words, we need to say more than "Good job!"

In the conference call we talked about how important it is to encourage the children's efforts by describing what you see them doing. Encouragement should be specific. Instead of saying, "Angela, your painting is beautiful," the teacher can make specific comments about the picture like, "Angela, I noticed you used a lot of blue," or "You worked a long time on that painting." Judgment about the quality of the painting is left to Angela.

By talking about what the child did in a positive and specific way, you are also teaching what is important. You are doing it in a way that does not make a child feel guilty or shameful. You are “catching them being good” and commenting on it in a respectful way. Often teachers do not do enough observing of children and only comment specifically on what they are doing. Our questions should not be interrupting their play but contributing to their play. A teacher is in the role of a facilitator not directing the children’s play.

The coach also helped teachers deepen their understanding of specific strategies within the dimensions of Instructional Support, by showing how the teachers applied these strategies in their work with students. From a follow up email to a teaching team working on strategies within the dimension of Quality of Feedback:

When teachers give children specific feedback to their comments or actions, then the children obtain a deeper understanding of a concept and are also encouraged to stay engaged so that they will get the most out of the activities. In your video clip there were great examples of the teacher helping the children with inquiry and asking them to explain their responses. “What do you think the lines mean? Why do you think the leaves change colors?” Looking closely at the leaves and helping children notice similarities and differences is a good open-ended activity, which lends itself to children’s thinking. Several of you reported that you were really impressed with the direction that the children took this activity. I especially like that there was no agenda when starting the activity but the children were very observant and took the activity to a deeper level comparing the veins in their body to the lines in the leaves and leaf blood. Comparing how animals hibernate to the trees going dormant in the winter was spontaneous and creative. All of these ideas gave children new information and encouraged them to think and be able to explain their new ideas or ask questions for clarification.

In addition, the coach provided suggestions for how teachers can incorporate strategies within the Instructional Support domain to improve their practice. From a follow up email to a teaching team:

In this video clip, you were sitting with a group of children who were talking about mail. I appreciated your comments about the value of getting feedback from your coworkers and how it is helping your teaching practice. In this video clip you asked questions such as: What is a mailbox used for? Who gets mail? Can mail go by car? Think about how these questions could be turned into open-ended questions such as “How does the mail get to your house?” “If you were going to send a letter, who would you send it to?”

You mentioned that you noticed a missed opportunity when two girls were talking about how one would make the mailbox and the other would make the mail. Taking notice of this the teacher could ask some questions like: Have you ever gotten mail? What did you get? Have you ever delivered a letter to someone?” Giving the children the opportunity to link some of their personal experiences about letters and mail helps to make the learning more real.

Changes in teaching practice as a result of participation in the VCP were also documented in a survey given to VCP participants at the conclusion of the project. Participants were asked two questions about the impact of the VCP on their teaching practices: “To what extent has your participation in the VCP affected your teaching practice?” and “To what extent has your participation in the VCP affected how you work with children?”. 80% of respondents (N=25) indicated that the VCP “significantly”

affected their teaching practices, and 84% of respondents indicated that participation in the VCP “significantly” affected how they work with children. When asked to comment on these questions, some participants said:

It helped me put more attention to the children’s interests.

I am more aware of children’s thinking. I am paying attention to their answers and how I can extend the conversation.

I ask open-ended questions to expand language, and maintain long quality conversations with the children.

I find myself more aware of how I am interacting, and will go that extra step with the children, whether that is in my language with them, or in extending an idea they have into a longer term project.

Improved scores in the CLASS™ domain of Instructional Support have been associated with gains in children’s development during the Pre-K year in receptive and expressive language, rhyming, letter naming, and math skills – all important elements in children’s cognitive development and school readiness.²

Changes in Relationships Within Teaching Teams

A unique aspect of the VCP is its emphasis on working with the entire teaching team in a classroom, as compared to other in-person and video coaching models that work with individual teachers. The VCP was intentionally designed to support teachers and teacher assistants in examining not only their own practices, but also how their work together impacts the children in their care. Video clips were taken of both teachers and teaching assistants, and entire teaching teams were engaged in answering the coach’s reflective questions, and in the follow up conference calls.

Participation in the VCP strengthened relationships within teaching teams.

In the survey given to VCP participants at the conclusion of the project, participants were asked: “To what extent has your participation in the VCP affected how you work with the other teacher in the classroom?”. 68% of respondents (N=25) indicated a significant impact in their work with their team member. Comments to this question included:

We now plan together and help each other reflect. While conducting a teaching activity we give feedback to each other.

We are now on the same page when working with children.

We communicate better because we plan and meet to coordinate.

We all support each other now since everyone has knowledge of the CLASS dimensions.

These comments were echoed at a May 28, 2015 celebration of teachers’ participation in the VCP. Some comments captured from a group reflection on this question included:

We observed other teachers in room and realized the strengths of one another.

We developed a more collaborative approach to curriculum planning, which brought the team closer.

² Justice, L., Mashburn, A. J., Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2008). Quality of language and literacy instruction in preschool classrooms serving at-risk pupils. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 23, 51-68.

The classroom staffing structure of at least one lead teacher and at least one assistant teacher is a great strength of early childhood programs. Participation in the VCP clearly demonstrates the importance of strong relationships within these teaching teams. Teachers need time to build these relationships, and also time to plan together and collaborate. Unfortunately, most early childhood teachers are allowed neither the time nor the support to form these relationships and do this collaborative work. In the 2015 SEQUAL (Supportive Environmental Quality Underlying Adult Learning) Study of early childhood educators at RTT sites in Santa Clara County, 60 percent of the study participants (n=100) indicated that they only had nap time or time on the playground to meet with other teachers and talk about work. Roughly half of study participants indicated that they do most of their planning on their own, unpaid time.³ The VCP highlights the importance of policies and practices that permit teachers to engage in planning collaboratively during their paid working hours.

Changes in the Degree to Which Teachers Reflect On Their Work

Results from the VCP Participant survey and from comments made at the May 28th participant celebration indicate that through their participation in the VCP, teachers became more reflective about their own practices. The survey did not ask specifically about the effect of the VCP on teachers' own reflective practices, but comments to other questions indicate that teachers did become more reflective as a result of their participation. Some comments indicating this increase in reflection are:

I have improved my teaching methods by watching myself in the videos and seeing how I performed as well as what I can do better next time.

We help each other to reflect and...give feedback to each other.

... Realizing things you are doing and things you are not doing.

The VCP highlights the importance of policies and practices that permit teachers to engage in planning collaboratively during their paid working hours.

Other video coaching models have found that teachers' skill in reflection increases as they progress through these programs. At the end of these programs, teachers often had a great deal more to say about their own practices and those of their peers than they did at the beginning. The E3 team found this to be the case with the VCP as well. In fact, at the May 28, 2015 celebration, one participant noted that an issue with the new video-sharing platform, My Coaching Companion, is that the platform limits feedback to videos at 1000 characters. She noted that at the beginning of the VCP, this character limit would not have been a problem, but as she progressed through the project, she and her colleagues learned how to view their own practices and those of their team members more critically, and her reflections became richer and longer.

Approximately half of the VCP participants who responded to the survey reported that they had received some form of coaching prior to their participation in the VCP. At the May 28, 2015 celebration, some commented that while it is extremely valuable to have an outsider observe teaching practices and offer feedback, watching your own teaching and learning how to think critically about it is a qualitatively different experience. Perhaps just as valuable as the teaching strategies they gained, VCP participants gained coaching and practice in reflecting on their own

³ Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. SEQUAL – Supportive Environmental Quality Underlying Adult Learning – Assessing What Teachers Need to Help Children Succeed. Santa Clara County, 2015 Profile.

teaching practices and those of their classrooms colleagues – a skill that will serve them throughout their teaching careers.

Phase Two Successes and Challenges

Successes

The VCP coach described three notable successes from Phase Two. First, virtually all of the teaching teams were engaged deeply in the project, and participated consistently. Second, discussion in the Coaching Collaborative showed that video coaching in classrooms was complementary to in-person coaching in classrooms that received both types of coaching supports. Other coaches noted that because teachers were focusing on elements of the CLASS through the VCP, they could focus their coaching on other areas. Finally, the VCP coach noted the impact the project is having on teachers' practices. She quotes a few teachers as saying:

I find that I am more intentional in the questions that I ask and I try to think of more “how and why” questions.

I didn't realize how I centered on just a few children and will be more thoughtful of how I place myself in the group.

The video coaching has been a powerful tool for us to reflect on our teaching practice and notice how we can improve as well as to notice what we are already doing well.

Challenges

The main challenge of the project in Phase Two was keeping the project on schedule amidst missed deadlines by teachers, holiday schedules, and occasional non-responsiveness to email by some teaching teams. In addition, a small amount of teacher turnover during Phase Two led to some difficulty with continuity in one of the teaching teams. Notably, there were no technological challenges reported during this phase, likely due to the technical training in Phase One. This allowed for the entire phase to focus on reflective feedback and improving teaching practice.

Recommendations for Year Two

Based on lessons learned during the first year of the VCP, the E3 team proposes the following recommendations to maximize the impact of the VCP in Year Two.

- 1. Target recruitment towards RTT sites with low scores in Instructional Support.** This continues to be the lowest scoring domain across RTT sites, and the VCP has proven to be effective in providing teachers strategies for improving their practice in this domain.
- 2. Continue the partnership with the University of Washington College of Education and utilize My Coaching Companion as the online platform for uploading and reflecting on videos.** During Phase One of the VCP, the online platform beasmartercookie.com was used for video sharing. As the project progressed, it became clear that beasmartercookie.com did not fit the project's needs because only the person who uploads the video clip can view the reflections and comments. E3 began working with the University of Washington College of Education to adapt their video coaching website, My Coaching Companion, for the VCP. My Coaching Companion allows teachers to upload their video clips directly to the platform for both the

coach and their teaching team to view. In addition, teachers and the coach can make and respond to comments directly on the site. Towards the end of Phase Two, My Coaching Companion was piloted in three VCP classrooms. The early stages of Year Two should focus on training technical leads and program participants on the use of this platform.

3. **Operate Year 2 continuously over the program year, instead of breaking it up into two phases.** Year One began in the spring, took a break for the summer, and then resumed in the fall. The E3 team and the VCP coach feel that participants will be more engaged throughout the entire project if no break occurs between coaching cycles. We recommend beginning the project in the late summer/early fall, and coaching continuously through the school year.
4. **Explore expanding the VCP to serve teachers who work with infants and toddlers.** As recruitment begins for Year Two, E3 will further explore the implications of this idea, including which CLASS instrument and dimension(s) to use for reflective coaching.

Expanding the VCP to work with teachers who care for infants and toddlers supports the approach of First 5 California IMPACT (Improve and Maximize Programs so All Children Thrive) Program in “forging partnerships between First 5 California and counties to achieve the goal of helping children ages 0 to 5 and their families thrive by increasing the number of high quality early learning settings...”⁴ During the project’s second year, the E3 team looks forward to further refining the project’s approach and continuing to enhance the skills and abilities of the early childhood workforce in Santa Clara County.

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⁴ IMPACT Request for Applications, First 5, California, July 2015, Sacramento.