Guidelines for learning from video

The following approach to viewing videos is recommended to make the most of the experience.

Discuss videos respectfully and use evidence to support your judgements

Respect the teachers and children shown in videos. All teaching is complex and being filmed for an unknown audience is daunting. These videos represent an invitation into real classrooms. Respect your hosts. In practical terms, when discussing these clips, imagine that the teachers and children or parents are present with you. Use evidence to support your judgements about a teacher's actions or a child's learning. Be as specific as you can with this. Refer to actual words used or samples of children's work.

Focus on children's thinking

Look past trivial or superficial elements. A window into an unknown classroom offers opportunities to do more than simply compare classroom displays or the resources on offer. It is more helpful to focus on children's thinking rather than critiquing the teacher. Aim to consider how children's thinking is developing as they interact with the teacher and each other.

Consider alternative explanations and teaching strategies

Aim to move past your initial reactions and interrogate your judgements. Try to ask questions about what you see and consider alternative explanations. A sample of this cycle is given below:

Initial Judgement: That was poor. She never told them if they were right or not.

Question: I wonder did she have a reason for not telling them if they were correct?

Alternative Explanation 1: Maybe her purpose at this stage of the activity was simply to gather ideas, to assess their understanding or to help them see alternative approaches.

Alternative Explanation 2: Maybe she is hoping that they will find and justify the right answer themselves. She might be trying to give them some ownership of the task.

Watch more than once

Learning from video of classrooms requires more than passive viewing. It requires some attempts at analysis and understanding. This means that it will be necessary to view videos more than once, to consider alternative interpretations and explanations. Doing this may help you unpick how children's thinking and teacher instructional practices are intertwined. The prompts we provide to help guide your viewing of videos have questions about both teacher and children's actions. It may be helpful to view videos with a particular focus on the teacher or children alternately before watching again to get a more holistic view.

Avoid the 'this won't work in my classroom' trap

It is unlikely that you will see classrooms or children that mirror exactly your own teaching environment. However, there are elements of good mathematics teaching that are universal. Interaction between teacher and children and amongst children is key. These videos provide opportunities to observe how other teachers work with children's ideas. This website also offers opportunities for you to look across preschool and primary settings and consider what is common to good practice in both contexts.

These guidelines for learning from video are adapted from those used in the 'Tools for Ambitious Science Teaching Project'.

Conversations around videos of classroom practice

Should groups of teachers be interested in viewing and discussing classroom videos collaboratively, the research- based Teaching for Robust Understanding (TRU) framework and associated documents may support productive collaboration. The TRU Math Conversation guide provides a structure and language for conversations about observations of mathematics teaching.