

## Book Review

# Video Study Groups for Education, Professional Development, and Change

By François Victor Tochon

Reviewed by François Desjardins  
University of Ottawa

## Using Video to Construct Knowledge Rather Than to Apply Theory

The past few years have seen education undergo tremendous changes. Teachers in particular have been submitted to great pressure to review both curriculum and practices in the classroom. François Victor Tochon's new book is directed at pedagogical practice and, more specifically, is concerned with positive change in education and with empowering teachers who are facing change. Not only does it clearly place the responsibility for change in the hands of teachers, but, first and foremost, it offers them the means to effect change. The author does this by describing methods to foster the development of a new global view of very local and personal practices or, as Richardson and Fenstermacher state in the Foreword of the book, "a new way to think about change and reform in education." This book is aimed directly at the locus of control of real change in education: the teachers themselves.

In order to effect change in any system, the object of change must be observed and analyzed before proposals can be made, implemented, and evaluated. In this case, as both the object of change and the agent of change are within the same person, the teacher, a tool is chosen to allow a simulated separation of the two entities for the purpose of study. The proposed tool is, of course, video recording. Video is used as a powerful reflective tool, a mirror with a memory. It allows the participants to look at themselves as others might see them. This experience is then enhanced by the discussions with others about one's performance. The key steps developed in this book are the reinvestment of the experiences in the development of new knowledge and of new pedagogical practices.

The use of video to record specific teaching practices followed by review for critical analysis is not new in and of itself. However, using this tool to allow educational practitioners to construct new knowledge is not commonly stated as an objective. This is where Tochon wishes to take the

reader in his book. In fact, it could be suggested that the very heart of his text is found on page 64, where he states: "With a view to harmonize theory and practice, meetings of a video study group take *practice* rather than *theory* as their point of departure." The text centers on using video recording of one's experiences as a starting point for building new knowledge or theory about educational interaction. I would add to this that Tochon takes video as a learning tool out of the traditional rigid structures of microteaching and gives the controls back to the real agent of change, in this case the teacher. In other words, his book offers a fresh look at an almost abused educational tool.

The author bases his book on the realization that all theory is a constructed formalization of many experiences. In the first chapter, with this constructivist approach, an inductive reasoning process is set in motion for *Situating the Interaction* with four types of *Video Study Groups* described as potential ways of developing knowledge. The second chapter identifies the basic steps involved in *Organizing the Interactions* that are part of the video study process. In the following chapter, six *Frames for Discussion* are described to help the reader select the one that would be appropriate for his or her specific video study group. The final chapter offers some guidelines for *Supporting the Interactions* within the study groups.

## Types of Video Study Groups

Without attempting to summarize the entire book, I will highlight some important parts in order to give potential readers a taste of what can be found in this excellent book. For example, in the first chapter, the classification of video study groups into four basic types offers new ways of considering this medium as a tool for reflection.

The *Studio Video Study Group* is described as beginning with a preparatory seminar, followed by a simulated or real presentation by one of the participants and concluding with the group engaging in a review of the action. Both the presentation and the following interaction can be recorded and can "lead to joint action taken on joint action" (p. 30). This concept of recording all aspects of the work in progress is very powerful as, traditionally, only the simulated teaching practice was recorded. This new way of looking at what to record brings about the possibility of a more global view of the analysis. The participants are then put in a meta-analytic mode, as they can now look at the method of analysis as well as the actual subject. Since any change means looking at things in a new light, this simple concept also changes the comfortable known point of view and forces the participants to look at all aspects of the exercise, not just the simulated practice.

The *Individualized Video Study Group* relies on self-viewing. This technique is presented as an individualized approach to video feedback. In one example given, a participant records a twenty-minute segment of a key lesson presentation in a real-life setting and then requests a mentor to evaluate the performance at one's discretion. The entire strategy is scaled to the individual. The individual participant who decides to record his own performance is always in control of the pace and scheduling of any subsequent

intervention by the mentor or the group. Tochon offers good examples that will help the reader understand the strategy.

The *Other-Viewing Video Study Group* involves the viewing of others in action on, for example, the Internet or videotape. Using these as an illustration, the group can engage in the analysis of professional practices and look for examples to use as models. With these performances on tape, the viewing and reviewing becomes a powerful tool for objectification and analysis.

Perhaps the most interesting type, and most likely the easiest to set up, is the *Integrated Video Study Group*. This approach takes the best elements offered by the other types of groups and allows the participants to consider all competencies in videos recorded in real-life settings, such as classes, meetings, or other settings outside the studio, with simple equipment. New lightweight equipment allows these study groups to be set up anytime and anywhere as needed. Technological limitations are no longer a barrier to this kind of study. This approach is highly transparent, and when the video is analyzed with other real professionals from the field the full power of the discussion group can be used for positive change.

The following two chapters, *Organizing Interaction* and *Choosing a Frame for Discussion*, provide the details for effectively managing the discussion group toward a positive constructive analysis of the recorded performances. The six “frames for discussion” that are identified provide great flexibility in the design of follow-up interactions for the group that suit the needs and beliefs of all individual situations. Again, the author provides an excellent series of structured explanations and examples for each frame of reference.

The *Functional Video Study Group* centers its activity on effectiveness and performance. The text clearly describes the relevant objectives and gives an excellent example of implementing this frame of reference with detailed planning elements for the operations and practice of this type of study group. When education is centered on competency, the *Strategic Video Study Group* can be used to develop the competency that performance will manifest. Attention is paid to understanding the problem and mapping out possible solutions using the IF/THEN scenarios. Both the *Sociocritical* and *Constructivist* video study groups are designed to take advantage of all interactions within the discussion group to build collective knowledge about the practice. The examples given emphasize the social dimensions of both the process and the resulting performances. The *Personal Video Study Group* is described as a personal growth workshop approach since the focus is on individual choices and experiences. Finally, the *Pragmatic Frame* makes use of recorded segments from all participants to foster analysis and discussion on the act of communication of knowledge. The questions here center on motives and on process.

In all of the cases described, the value of the exercises is placed on re-investing practical professional knowledge while using theory to describe concepts and processes. These models are very practical in nature and will be well received by educators or any professional group looking for ways to improve interactions within their teaching contexts.

## Concluding Remarks

Overall, the author clearly identifies what should be important in developing competencies as an educator. The emphasis is always on reflective practice, a thinking-learning community with a social constructivist approach, and the development of a global view rather than a minimalist, disconnected view of the teaching-learning process. Today, in Canada, these values are constantly being reiterated as important by various businesses and organizations. For example, The Conference Board of Canada (1998)<sup>1</sup> has stated that today's economy requires graduates to have developed communication and thinking skills, lifelong learning skills, teamwork abilities, a sense of personal responsibility, and positive attitudes toward change. This is a clear suggestion to education to look at the relevance of today's pedagogy in this changing world. For Tochon, the ideas of contextualizing pedagogy and of objectification to ensure relevance are constantly present in the proposed strategies for constructing knowledge about the practice of teaching.

My only regret about this book is that the conclusion is somewhat insufficient in that it did not allow me to pull back and get an overall view of the whole book. Here, the author could have helped the reader leave the text with a global idea of the implications of the proposed practices.

On the other hand, the book provides an excellent list of recent references, which could serve as a list of suggested readings to anyone wanting to gain a better understanding of some of the principles described in the text. I think Tochon's book is a worthwhile addition to this list. I happily recommend this book to anyone looking to use video in a new way that is relevant to today's needs and well anchored in modern theory and practice.

## Reference

Tochon, F.V. (1999). *Video study groups for education, professional development, and change*. Madison, WI: Atwood Publishing.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> <http://www2.conferenceboard.ca/nbec/eprof-e.htm>

## Correspondence

François Desjardins, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6N5 Canada. E-mail: [fdesjard@uottawa.ca](mailto:fdesjard@uottawa.ca) .