

Cameras in the Classroom: Accelerating Teacher Growth



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61% of public schools already use one or more security cameras in halls.



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-Bill Gates

Introduction

What comes to mind when you hear “cameras in the classroom”? Most teachers feel like “Big Brother” is watching. IP mounted cameras, such as traditional security cameras, are often used in this way. Cameras have been increasingly present in our nation’s schools. In the 2009-10 school year, 61 percent of public schools reported using one or more security cameras in the halls to watch over the student body, which is an increase of 42 percent since 1999-2000 (NASP, “Research on School Security”). However, there are so many practical benefits to cameras in the classroom. Therefore, an open conversation between administrators and teachers is necessary to address privacy concerns and daily benefits.

There have been many arguments against cameras in the classroom. The right to privacy comes up almost every time. In general, the classroom is considered a shared public space. Christy Hickman, staff counsel on the Iowa State Education Association, referenced *Plock vs Board of Education*, wherein the court concluded that the teachers’ expectation of privacy was not reasonable. An “entire classroom in a public school building . . . is not reserved for the teacher’s exclusive, private use” (“Video surveillance in public schools”). However, when privacy is warranted, it can be ensured by giving teachers control of the camera in their classroom. Having a privacy lens on the camera, as seen on Audio Enhancement’s EduCam360™ allows the teacher to see with a glance that no outside observer is viewing the classroom. This, in conjunction with an open dialogue between teachers and administrators over the rights of access to the cameras, can help alleviate privacy concerns.

Teacher controlled cameras in action

Teachers in Newton County were ensured of their privacy. Melissa Jackson, Instructional Technology Coordinator from Newton County School System, stated that “we went to the teachers and made sure they understood they were in control of [the cameras in] their classrooms” (Newton County Video Testimonial). “The administrator has to go in and ask permission from that teacher, who then grants that administrator access... The teacher has the right to remove the administrator anytime they want as well. That has been a complete game changer for us because the teacher feels confident that they are in control.”



EduCam360®

76% of teachers polled said they are open to selecting and submitting a video for use in a formal evaluation.

- SmartBrief Education



In the past, teachers have set up a mobile camera in the back of the classroom. The presence of this “observer” changes teacher behavior, student behavior and student participation.

Teachers need to feel comfortable within the video recording environment. Bill Gates discussed this specific issue in his Ted Talk in May 2013. He said “I know some teachers aren’t immediately comfortable with the idea of a camera in the classroom. That’s understandable, but our experience with MET suggests that if teachers manage the process, if they collect video in their own classrooms, and they pick the lessons they want to submit [for evaluation], a lot of them will be eager to participate” (Gates, “Teachers_need_real_feedback”). Teachers need to own the process and the hardware.

At all times, the teacher is in control of classroom recordings. Privacy-enabled cameras, such as Audio Enhancement’s EduCam360, not only provide protection and security but also enable teachers’ full control of what is being recorded. The teacher can close the camera lens with a click of the mouse and enable “Privacy Mode”. In Privacy Mode no video or audio is transmitted from the camera. The lens mechanically rotates 180 degrees, hiding the lens and exposing the white cover. At a glance the teacher can see whether the camera is active or in Privacy Mode. The teacher can then decide if and when to share recordings with peers, coaches, and school administrators. This type of privacy-enabled classroom camera facilitates a secure and private system for teachers to use for improving their practice.

Privacy Mode Diagram



Ceiling cameras are unobtrusive

Observation plays a significant role in a teacher’s career. According to a report by the Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings, “the two largest contributors to teachers’ assessment scores are invariably classroom observations and test score gains” (Whitehurst et al 2). The effects that the observer has on the classroom have long been discussed. According to Amanda J. Howard, a researcher at the University of Warwick, “Much of the literature relating to observation suggests that it is often a negative experience.” The evaluator sitting in the back of the room immediately has an impact on the classroom. The presence of the observer changes

The camera in the ceiling becomes a part of the daily routine, and is quickly forgotten. It is more likely to capture an authentic view of interactions in a classroom.



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-James Peek
Principal of Veteran’s
Memorial Middle School, GA

student participation and behavior. It also affects teacher behavior and teaching methods. Howard noted “Teachers will behave more like their perceived ideal teacher when informed of an observation prior to its occurrence” (Teacher Appraisal: The Impact of Observation on Teachers’ Classroom Behaviour.” Thesis. University of Warwick, 2010).

For the past several years, teachers have been setting up a mobile camera in the back of the classroom. The introduction of this mobile equipment often has similar negative impact as an on-site observer. On top of the effect of introducing new equipment to the room, mobile cameras in the classroom require set up and operation for every evaluation. This takes a teacher with a specific skill set, and time to prepare, which a majority of teachers do not have. Alternatively, IP network cameras set in the ceiling such as the EduCam360 offer the most unobtrusive view of the classroom. With its size being similar to that of a smoke detector, it blends in to the ceiling. The camera in the ceiling becomes a part of the daily routine, and is quickly forgotten. Therefore, it is more likely to capture an authentic view of interactions in a classroom.

Union and school acceptance

Teachers unions are becoming more accepting of cameras in the classroom. Many districts are taking the stance that the camera is in place to protect the teacher and provide professional development. The United Federation of Teachers in New York City have included the use of videotaping in their 2014 contract. Teachers and evaluators can consent to using videotaping as a source for their observation (“United Federation of Teachers 2014 Contract Memorandum of Agreement”).

The value of video recordings comes in the post observation conference, providing new confidence in the feedback the teacher receives. “We’ve been able to use the camera system for professional development,” says James Peek, Principal of Veteran’s Memorial Middle School, GA. “One of our biggest goals is to enhance instruction in our building so it is an excellent way to start getting teachers talking about [how they can] make lessons better... But also critique some of their colleagues in a safe environment for the teacher” (Newton County Video Testimonial).

1,390

Classroom Cameras
at Newton County Schools

“I piloted [classroom cameras] for Newton County and I’ve enjoyed it, I can’t really imagine teaching without it.”

-Jackie Scott

English Language teacher
Newton County Schools, GA

Newton County School System (NCSS) has installed 1,390 classroom cameras. Thanks to NCSS’s successful camera pilot, using videotape as evidence for demonstrating competencies is becoming more common in evaluations. Samantha Fuhrey, Superintendent from Newton County School Systems (NCSS) in Georgia said at their January technology tour, “It’s not what I saw, it’s what we see together.” The Georgia Department of Education has given approval for teachers to submit recorded lessons for evaluation from a specific time period, and other states are sure to follow suit.

After Newton placed the cameras in classrooms and teachers had a chance to get used to them, they liked the cameras. Jackie Scott, an English Language teacher in Newton County, has been using the system for 2 years. “I piloted it for Newton County and I’ve enjoyed it, I can’t really imagine teaching without it,” she said. “Over the 2 years I have seen improvement with behavior, classroom instruction specifically monitoring myself and my habits as well as instruction for the students and their learning needs.” Additionally, Scott’s students began to see it as “positive reinforcement and they started forgetting the classroom cameras were even there.” Scott has been able to use it to improve academic practices as well. “I’ve used it in a lot of different ways; I had a student who was hospital/home bound so I was able to record my instructions, cut it down to the important part...and that student who was out for over a month was able to stay up to date in class. They were able to focus on the learning and they came back to school completely caught up.”

Privacy modes transform cameras into professional development tools

The teacher is the most influential factor of a student’s education when it comes to achievement. Jake Cornet and Jim Knight’s report, *Research on Coaching*, found that “research suggests that teacher quality is one of the most important variables (if not the most important variable) affecting student achievement” (210). If the teacher’s growth can be accelerated through effective feedback, there will be an immediate positive influence on student achievement. By using Audio Enhancement’s EduCam360 solution, a more authentic observation of the classroom is possible. Teachers tend to view the camera as a self-improvement tool rather than worrying about “Big Brother,” because they can activate the privacy lens cover at any time. Since teachers can take control of the ceiling camera, they hold the key to their own performance and to ultimately increasing student achievement.

Author: Tony SanFilippo is a Training and Professional Development Specialist. His experience as a classroom teacher, instructional coach, consultant, and member of the administrative team have given him the opportunities in education that make him a leader in the area of cameras in the classroom.

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For over three decades, Audio Enhancement, Inc. has created and delivered research-driven solutions to complex education problems in classrooms around the world. Starting with the simple premise that “learning begins with hearing”, the company started in 1978 with a mission to equip every classroom and every student with quality sound technology.

Inspired by the success of Audio Enhancement’s mission and achievements in sound technology, the company continued to innovate new solutions reaching all students and learning styles. Listening to customer requests and feedback, Audio Enhancement developed video, audio and instructional tools to help facilitate success for schools, teachers and students.

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