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Ignoring, upholding, redirecting, provoking: Ways of enacting norms in a video-based professional development

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The enactment of norms is a key challenge for professional development (PD) facilitators, particularly in video-based programs where teachers tend to be judgmental. This study follows seven novice facilitators of a video-based PD program that aims to promote reflection on practice while downplaying criticism on the filmed teachers' actions. We describe how the novice facilitators enacted norms and responded to teachers' judgmental comments, in order to unpack this challenge. The findings show that although the facilitators underwent the same preparation, considerable variations were found in their decision-making concerning this issue. We describe possible reasons for the different decisions, and suggest implications.

Keywords: Novice facilitators, PD norms, video-based PD.

Background

All social interactions are built on certain norms, which constitute an implicit or explicit contract by which participants agree upon what is acceptable, what is less acceptable, and what is definitely unacceptable (Forsyth, 1995). In mathematics education, classroom norms have been thoroughly investigated (e.g., Yackel & Cobb, 1996), including teachers' instructional norms (e.g., Herbst & Chazan, 2011). By contrast, norms in the PD context have received less attention. PD courses for practicing mathematics teachers are based on social interactions, and as such, are also conducted according to norms that are meant to be accepted and shared by the PD facilitator and the participants. Facilitators are the dominant actors in introducing and maintaining these norms (Karsenty et al., under review), since they design the sessions, lead them, and have the authority to indicate what courses of action, comments, and directions to pursue are acceptable and valuable for the discussion. They often do so according to guidelines, and perhaps also tools or moves, provided by the PD program they facilitate. Since evaluative comments are prevalent in teachers' talk when watching other teachers' lessons (Coles 2013; Jaworski, 1990), the enactment of norms is a key challenge for facilitators in video-based PD programs (Karsenty et al., 2019). It follows that it is even more challenging for novice facilitators who need to make decisions during unfamiliar situations. When novices facilitate PDs to their colleagues, as often occurs in the upscaling process of a PD, the enactment of norms is also shaped by their sense of credibility and their multiple identities as teachers, colleagues, and facilitators (Knapp, 2017). In this paper, we focus on this challenge by exploring the following research questions:

How do novice facilitators of a video-based PD respond to teachers' judgmental comments? What underlies facilitators' decisions with respect to this issue?

Context

The above questions are investigated in the context of a PD project called VIDEO-LM (Viewing, Investigating, and Discussing Environments of Learning Mathematics), developed at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel. The program aims to enhance secondary mathematics teachers' reflective skills, along with their mathematical knowledge for teaching (MKT; Ball et al., 2008), via collective guided analysis and discussions of videotaped lessons (hereafter VLs) of unfamiliar teachers. A six-lens framework is used to focus participants' observations and analysis of VLs (Karsenty & Arcavi, 2017), including: *mathematical and meta-mathematical ideas* in the lesson; the filmed teacher's *goals*; the *tasks* used; the *interactions* in the lesson; the filmed teacher's *dilemmas and decision-making*; the filmed teacher's *beliefs*. To enhance reflections and decenter criticism, the project team determined several core norms for these discussions (adapted from Karsenty & Arcavi, 2017, p. 438-9): (1) Maintain a non-evaluative and respectful conversation about the filmed teachers, assuming that they are acting in the best interest of their students and that they have the knowledge needed for teaching the observed lessons; (2) Instead of criticizing the filmed teachers, practice "stepping into their shoes" in order to understand the goals and beliefs underlying their decisions; (3) Discuss alternative teaching decisions not as better or worse courses of action, but rather as a way to enrich the span of possible options while considering the *gains and losses* involved; (4) Under the assumption that there is no one best practice, observe lessons not as models to imitate but as rich artifacts that are aimed at stimulating discussions on issues of teaching; (5) Substantiate arguments raised in the video-based discussion, for example by using evidence from the VLs. To achieve the project goals as well as the local goals of the groups they work with, the facilitators of VIDEO-LM PDs choose which videos, lenses, and activities to use in each session. It follows that two central roles of the facilitators are *designing sessions* and *leading discussions* around VLs, and that the VIDEO-LM context is a rich setting to explore the research questions posed above: firstly, since discussion norms are central to the program design, and secondly, because facilitators have the latitude to choose how to maintain these norms, and to monitor the extent to which they allow them to be breached.

Method

Participants. This study is part of a broader research project, consisting of a multiple case-study investigating seven novice facilitators, who are also mathematics teachers, in their first year of practice. During the VIDEO-LM project's upscaling, new facilitators who previously participated in the PD as teachers were recruited. They were prepared in a one-year course and were supported by a personal mentor and by facilitators' group meetings during their first year of facilitation. All the facilitators led school-based yearly VIDEO-LM courses in 2016-17 that lasted 21-30 hours, spread over 6-11 sessions. From the seven novice facilitators (named hereafter FacA, FacB, etc.), five facilitated the PD in their school (FacA-FacE) and two were external facilitators (FacF and FacG).

Data collection. To examine facilitators' decisions as well as their own view of them, the following data was used for this paper: (1) journals written by facilitators before and after each PD session, where they responded to guiding questions regarding goals, decisions, challenges, and more; (2) videos of two PD sessions per facilitator, one early in the year and another towards the end of the PD; (3) videos of stimulated-recall interviews (SRIs) held with every facilitator a few days after each of

the filmed PD sessions. In these SRIs, the facilitator and the first author jointly watched the PD videos, and the facilitator was asked to stop the video whenever s/he noticed a decision to reflect on.

Data analysis. All the research project's data was coded according to five macro-categories which we named *issues of facilitation*, one of them is “enacting norms”, namely, how facilitators introduced norms and responded to judgmental comments. The data presented in this paper are those that were coded under this issue, namely, transcripts of (a) PD discussions where facilitators initiated the enactment of norms and/or responded to their breach, (b) facilitators' reflections on these episodes in SRIs, and (c) reflections in journal entries. The PD sessions were further segmented according to decisions, using the methods presented by Schoenfeld (2010). The criterion for coding a sequence as a “decision” was that it refers to *something the facilitator initiated* that consists of several turns that allow for capturing the context and meaning. To analyze facilitators' decisions we used the ROGI framework (Karsenty, et al., 2021) comprising *Resources, Orientations, Goals*, (ROG, Schoenfeld, 2010), and *Identity*, as defined by Gee (2000): “Being recognized as a certain ‘kind of person’, in a given context” (p. 99). By employing these four constructs and pointing to their interplay, we constructed interpretations of the facilitators' decisions. We found four different ways in which facilitators responded to judgmental comments, and possible reasons underlying these decisions. Although facilitators may perform different decisions during one session, we assigned each PD session to one of the four decisions according to the most common decision identified in the session.

Findings: ways to respond to judgmental comments, and their possible reasons

Despite the centrality of discussion norms in VIDEO-LM and the fact that all the facilitators were highly familiar with them (first as PD participants themselves and then in the VIDEO-LM facilitation course they took), considerable variations were found when addressing this issue. Four different decisions were identified: (1) The facilitator **leaves judgmental comments unaddressed**; (2) The facilitator **strictly upholds** the norms; (3) The facilitator **redirects** judgmental comments; (4) The facilitator **deliberately provokes** criticism to stimulate the discussion. In the presentation of each decision we mention which cases were assigned to it: the numbers “1” and “2” refer to early and later sessions, respectively. For example, the notation FacB2 refers to FacB in her later PD session. Three sessions out of 14 analyzed (FacE1, FacC1, FacF2) were omitted since no judgmental comments were raised by the PD participants. Below, each decision is described using examples from different cases, (yet, due to space limitations, we do not represent all of the identified instances in each decision). The notation “I1-4” refers to the facilitator's 1st SRI (interview), line 4. “T2” refers to Teacher 2.

Leaving judgmental comments unaddressed (FacA2, FacD1, FacB1)

This decision, which was identified in three cases, relates to facilitators' non-enforcement of norms and avoidance of dealing with judgmental comments. When such comments appeared, the facilitators either ignored them or tried to move on to a different topic. This decision stemmed from one of the following reasons: (1) limited resources to handle such comments, coupled with ambiguous orientations on how and when to enforce norms (“When I heard these comments, I felt really bad, and I didn't know how to relate to them, how to react”, FacD, I1-158); (2) an orientation that the norms should be introduced gradually (“This is only the second session, I want to let them get things out”, FacD, I1-178); (3) For a facilitator with a strong *colleague identity*, an aspired goal of

maintaining good relationships with the teachers (“I constantly remember that not all teachers participate in the PD with the highest desire and motivation. Since I am their colleague, I want to acknowledge their position”, FacB, 2nd Post-session journal); (4) a goal of letting teachers express themselves, in order to ensure their cooperation later on (“I think it was a good decision to let him say whatever he wanted [...] afterwards there were some parts where he contributed enormously to the discussion”, FacB, I1-59,61); (5) fear of reacting to judgment raised by the teachers by using further judgment towards the teachers themselves, which might lead to an unpleasant atmosphere (“I don’t want to be involved in confrontations [...] I’d rather avoid such frictions”, FacA, I2-6).

Strictly upholding the norms (FacA1)

Interestingly, although norms are essential in the VIDEO-LM design, this decision – in which the facilitator does not allow the violation of norms – was assigned only to one session out of 14. The decision was expressed as follows: a) mentioning the norms explicitly before screening a VL; b) reacting *immediately* when a norm was breached. Both these sub-decisions can be seen in the following illustrative examples from FacA’s early PD session:

- 48 FacA: Last time I said we have norms of discussion, I said that what guides us is respecting those who stand in front of us [the filmed teachers], but I did not define what "respect" is. When I say "respect" [...] it's the state of mind I want you to get into every time we watch a lesson: assume that whoever is standing in front of us, especially since they knew they are going to be filmed, and they prepared the lesson – assume that they always act in the best interest of their students. And we are not supervisors, we are not instructors, we are not here to evaluate them, we only want to see things that happened in their classes and learn from them.
- 495 FacA: [Context: the facilitator responds to a PD teacher that criticized the filmed teacher for only writing the positive solution $x = 13$ for the equation $x^2 = 13^2$] Why do you think, why didn't he [the filmed teacher] correct it? Obviously, he knows that it's [supposed to be] \pm .

The main reason underlying this decision appeared to be FacA’s goals “to make the teachers assimilate the VIDEO-LM language of gains and losses” (I1-182) and “to have a non-judgmental discussion” (2nd Pre-session journal). These goals, together with Josh's strong adherence to the VIDEO-LM resources and values (“my definition of what a good [PD session] is [...] it’s whether during the discussion the issues from the Observer’s Guide¹ appear”, I1-273), have probably caused him to respond immediately to every violation of norms. This decision resonates with the approach that norms should be clear from the outset (Coles, 2013; Jaworsky, 1990) to determine the direction the discussion will take.

Redirecting judgmental comments (FacC2, FacD2, FacE2)

Whereas the previous decision relates to an immediate reaction to non-compliance with the norms, *redirection* is subtler; here the facilitator gradually steers the conversation into ascribing goals to the filmed teacher’s actions, using open-ended questions that are directed to the entire group.

¹ The Observer’s Guide (OG) is a document linked to each VL in the VIDEO-LM website, that includes a suggestion of how the VL may be analyzed using the six lenses.

Nonetheless, these decisions often go together: the facilitator may reassert the norms and then try to redirect the discussion. The decision to redirect allows for other participants' opinions to be heard, including those which contradict the criticism that was voiced. However, this entails the risk that the non-enforcement of norms may lead to an increasingly judgmental discourse. The following discussion from FacD's later session is an example of a successful redirection:

[Context: The teachers had just observed a teaching episode from an 8th-grade probability lesson that consisted of games. When analyzing the mathematical ideas in one of the games, the filmed teacher asked the students to share their strategies and wrote their answers in a table. In the following PD discussion, Teacher 2 and Teacher 6 criticize this move].

- 366 T2: Filling out this table was just a waste of time.
367 FacD: Filling out this table was a waste of time, what do you think?
369 T1: No.
370 FacD: Not a waste of time, why?
371 T1: Kids love to give their answers. If you were to ask me what my strategy for the game was, I would want to share it very much.
372 FacD: That was his [the filmed teacher's] consideration, letting all the students share their strategies?
373 T6: [...] [in a criticizing tone] I think that if he had used technology here, he could have gotten faster and clearer results.
374 FacD: Why do you think so?
375 T6: If everyone were sharing their data in a common document [...] he would have seen it [the table of strategies] right away.
376 FacD: Still, what... what's the gain in what he did?
378 FacD: What does this allow?
379 T1: That everyone can share.

The judgmental comments in Turns 366 and 373 were followed by the facilitator's open-ended questions (Turns 367, 370, 374, 376, 378), which encouraged the voicing of a different opinion (Turns 369, 371, 379), even if expressed by only one teacher. The facilitator herself was pleased with the course of the discussion when observing it during SRI-2:

- I2-148 FacD: [Refers to T2's comment in Turn 366] She prepared the groundwork for me [laughs]. Because many teachers think that filling out the table or discussing multiple strategies is a waste of time, and I think that's one of the nicest things in this VL.
I2-149 GS: This teacher said something that you objected to, so why did it make you happy?
I2-150 FacD: Because it was an opportunity to see how others feel and let the others think about it too. Also, she herself [T2] could have tried to answer [my question], I don't know if she thought about it that way.

FacD's articulations indicate that she views judgmental comments as a resource for the discussion that enables her to put out feelers about the issue at hand and encourage multiple opinions. Therefore, according to her orientation, such comments should not be immediately rebutted, as the ensuing discussion may provide an opportunity for the critical teacher to change her mind, in light of the other teachers' comments and the open-ended questions posed by the facilitator.

Deliberately provoking judgment (FacB2, FacF1, FacG1, FacG2)

This decision relates to elicitation of judgmental comments, for example by deliberately choosing a controversial VL, by asking judgmental questions, or by probing a teacher who seems dissatisfied with a VL. Here are two examples from FacF's early session:

- 88 FacF: [Turns to a teacher who made gestures of dissatisfaction while the group re-watched a 20-minute segment from a VL] Before we talk about the lenses, I want to start with you, Teacher 1. To hear about your experience of watching the same segment for the second time.
- 92 FacF: I'm just terribly curious about this question, Teacher 2, I'm looking at you [...] you seem to be a little opposed.

While these excerpts may have different interpretations than the one suggested above, FacF's reflection on his PD video shows that his goal was to stimulate the discussion:

- I1-76 FacF: I was ready for criticism on the VL because my mentor had prepared me. I wanted the teachers to be evaluative, because criticism elicits conversation, and that was needed. Here, I saw Teacher 1 sitting uncomfortably [while watching the VL], and I wanted to get him agitated, I wanted them all to get angry, to get upset, to talk.

A similar stance was expressed by FacG in her final session. In SRI-2 she reflected on a PD episode where the group was 'sleepy' and she used provocative questions (such as "are you sure the students understood what the filmed teacher did there?") to enliven the discussion:

- I2-44 FacG: It was very important to me that they would not just give me the answer that they thought I wanted to hear. I wanted critical thinking. [I asked them if all the students understood] and they answered "yes, they all understood", and I thought, '*are you sure* all these 30 students understood?' That's what's important to me, to constantly elicit their thinking.

This decision lets facilitators control (to some extent) the volume of judgmental comments in the discussion, in the sense that: (1) they will not be caught by surprise when criticism emerges; and (2) the very fact that the facilitators themselves bring up the controversy may reduce teachers' antagonism ("I decided to tell them in advance before watching, 'you are going to squirm in your chairs', because otherwise, [...] they would have been even more judgmental and the discussion would not have been productive", FacB, I2-48). Regardless of this sense of control, facilitators may have little idea as to what to do with such comments when they appear. Thus, a further decision is to prepare for the kind of comments that may emerge, including thinking about possible responses to use in real-time, as FacB described in SRI-2:

- I2-62 FacB: This VL makes people uneasy [...]. I wrote in my session plan that the teachers would probably ask "what is she [the filmed teacher] doing this for?". [...] My role as a facilitator is thinking about what criticism could come up, and thinking what answers I can give.

All the above excerpts suggest that as in the previous decision, the facilitators hold the orientation that judgmental comments are a useful resource that provides the spark to kindle a lively and engaging discussion. What distinguishes this decision is that the facilitators are those who initiate or elicit judgment, with the aid of prompts they purposefully chose.

Synthesis and implications

This study set out with the aim of shedding light on how novice facilitators enact norms within a specific video-based PD, in particular how they respond to criticism, which is known to be an inhibitor of teachers' learning and reflection (Coles, 2013; Karsenty & Arcavi, 2017). The four decisions presented above show different responses to judgmental comments that were identified within seven novice facilitators' practices. There are several similarities and differences between the decisions, that can illustrate the complexity of deciding on a course of action: The last three decisions are similar in the sense that they all show how facilitators steer evaluative talk into a discussion about gains and losses which can lead to teachers' reflections. However, they differ in terms of the facilitators' capacity to withstand judgmental discussions, or, the extent to which facilitators see these comments as fruitful. The first decision, i.e., facilitators allow for judgmental comments but do nothing about them, may look on the surface very similar to the decision to redirect judgmental comments: in both cases, criticism towards the filmed teacher is enabled. However, in the *redirection* decision, judgmental comments are used by the facilitators as a resource, thus the liability to the program's norms and the filmed teacher is preserved. In the first decision, in contrast, the criticism is never addressed. Overall, the findings contribute a delineation of different ways to execute the PD's main goal, suggesting that there are multiple "best-practices" to do so, which are shaped by the different contexts. The ROGI analysis assisted to show the complexity of decision-making during facilitation, especially for newcomers who do not have well-established scripts to work by. For each decision, we described various underlying reasons, which are related to the goals of facilitators (e.g., to teach the VIDEO-LM language), their orientations (e.g., criticism can advance the discussion), their resources or lack thereof (e.g., inability to respond immediately to judgment), and their multiple identities (e.g., a facilitator who is also a colleague who prefers to maintain a pleasant atmosphere rather than get into confrontations while enforcing norms). Identifying the complex considerations underlying facilitators' decisions contributes to a better understanding of novice facilitators' practices. Accordingly, this work suggests immediate implications for facilitator educators: (a) to acknowledge that facilitators' practices are shaped by multiple elements. Thus, alongside supplying them with adequate resources for the enactment of norms, it is worthwhile to ponder on their orientations and goals with respect to this issue and to understand what challenges and affordances are generated by their identities as teachers and colleagues; (b) to discuss the idea that there are various ways to accomplish the PD goals, each carries its own gains and losses; (c) to delve on how teachers' criticism can enhance the discussion and turn into a resource for facilitators; (d) to discuss the possible consequences of a non-enactment of norms. In general, it could be of benefit for the field to understand more on how norms may influence mathematics teachers' learning, and on the facilitators' role in this process.

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