In an earlier post I shared an article teacher and blogger Larry Ferlazzo wrote about a taping experience we conducted together.

That article has since been published in Teacher Magazine and the Washington Post .

I don't know that any educational piece can go "viral", but it certainly has enjoyed a great deal of attention. Many educational journalists have commented on it as the "right way" to use video tape versus the "Gates way."

They are referring to the Gates Foundation funding programs that use videotaping for evaluating teachers via external analysts.

This particular post is not to comment on the Gates way, but I would like to share the attributes I feel make our taping experience so beneficial for teachers.

- This is about teacher growth, not evaluation. The focus of this shared experience is conversation. We talk and discuss teaching. It would be a different experience entirely if the end result had little to no dialogue and an "effectiveness score". A score should not be the takeaway memory, but ideas.

- I am not their evaluator. To the teacher, I'm an expert on instructional strategies interested in helping them. I'm a coach and resource. My only investment is their teaching improving and their students' learning. We are then freed to talk teaching and have no power relationship or agenda, only a growth one.

- I have an existing relationship with them. I know the teachers, I have history with them, I care about them. Our focus is a searching conversation, with questions, brainstorming, idea sharing. I can't imagine this happening with people I don't know.

- I have trained them in the strategies they are using, thus know what they are working on. Credibility is part of what makes this experience work. Teachers know I have a deep understanding with the strategies they are using. Often, in fact, they are using lessons from a curriculum I have written, thus my “take” on how the lesson went is from a context of deep experience.

- I have context of their classroom. I taped the lesson and was in the room. I know how the class was reacting, when energy changed, what externals were factors. I also edited the tape, and thus have the benefit of analyzing the lesson yet again. The editing of the tape allows me to zero in on aspects of the lesson that impacted student learning most. I am not working off some preconceived rubric, but instead spotlighting when the most learning occurred and when it lulled. It makes for a much more targeted and focused conversation.

As a long time principal and school leader, I know the challenges of supervision and evaluation. I think tape has a great deal of value for both coaches and evaluators. In both cases however, I believe the exit outcome should be ideas for more powerful practice. Thus, whether coach or supervisor, it is the spirit and intent of the experience that matters most. Our experience indicate ratings scores feel judgmental and limit the opportunities taping and conversation make available, whereas taping and conversation for reflection and analysis generates ideas and fosters a willingness to apply new practices for greater student results.