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Video-based Peer  
Practice among  
language teachers



Erasmus+

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# 1. Introduction

**T**he aim of V-PAL – Video based Peer Practice among Language Teachers is to increase the quality of adult language teaching, strengthen the teachers' opportunities for continuing education, increase their job satisfaction and strengthen the individual teacher faced with greater demands on effectiveness.

V-PAL provides teachers the opportunity for professional development as an integrated part of their day to day teaching since it relates to their teaching practice. At the same time, it offers an online learning community for sharing teaching practices and co-developing these practices. Discussion in the learning community helps to strengthen the teachers' didactic decisions and reflections on their practices.

*“If you ever wished for more exchange with colleagues, aside the three minutes by the copy machine or that half-day training course offered at your educational institution, V-Pal offers a wealth of peers waiting to be discovered.”<sup>1</sup>*

*“The platform gives the opportunity for exchange, networking, and mutual learning. This is very inspiring.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Soundbite from the final evaluation among teachers participating in the project – all following quotes are from the same evaluation

## 1.1 Peer Practice

Peer Practice is the result of a collaborative effort of hundreds of teachers facilitated and led by Nicolai Seest, &LEARNING. It is a video ethnographic method, based on: Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger: Communities of practice ("Communities of Practice – a brief introduction", Etienne Wenger, 2012: <http://wenger-trayner.com>, 2012). It represents action learning, where teachers learn by recording, reflecting and interacting with peers. This takes place in a continuous spiral of identifying a teaching practice, documenting it, sharing it by video, interacting with peers and thereby further developing their practice.

The videos are 2 – 5 minutes long and made on tablets or smartphones – a device almost everyone has ready at hand. They are created based on a clipboard (see below) and inspired by Dogme 95 (i.e: shooting must be on location, the camera must be hand-held, optical work and filters are forbidden etc.)<sup>2</sup>

Research in the use of video to study practice within the classroom has shown the following positive effects on learning:

- ➔ Bridges theory and practice
- ➔ Develops the teachers' pedagogical knowledge and practice
- ➔ Strengthens the ability to reflect on practice.

### Videos:

- Convey what is difficult to communicate through words alone – didactic methods, tools, routines and teaching situations, gestures, voice movement
- Can be watched again
- Can be shared widely
- Support an open source learning culture (community of practice).

<sup>2</sup> Trier, Vinterberg, Levring and Kragh-Jacobsen

*"The medium of video has great potential for developing one's teaching methods as it offers the chance to see teaching in real life. To see other teachers' teaching just adds to the overall positive effect."*

Peer Practice works with authentic teaching situations without beautifying reality. It focuses on documenting the smallest didactic bricks of teaching. The teacher zooms in on a small part of their teaching practice. Not a full lesson/course.

Peer Practice has been developed to counter the fact that:

- Teachers often feel isolated
- Rarely see each other teach
- Rarely receive supervision
- Co-teaching is uncommon
- Finding new methods, ideas and inspiration in a useful format can be difficult
- Possibilities to transfer knowledge and dissemination are limited.

*"[I enjoyed] exchanging ideas, advice, inspiration, experiences of language teaching in a very transparent way: by video."*

## 1.2 The Didactic Diamond

In V-PAL the Peer Practice method has been further developed by introducing the Didactic Diamond, created by Lucas Lundbye Cone, PhD Fellow, Danish School of Education. The Didactic Diamond serves both as a way to structure the information given in the Peer Practice videos and as a tool for reflection and feedback. Research has proven over and over again that teachers who share and reflect collectively on their work improve their well-being and results. The Didactic Diamond can be used to support personal reflection and provide useful feedback for other teachers' videos.

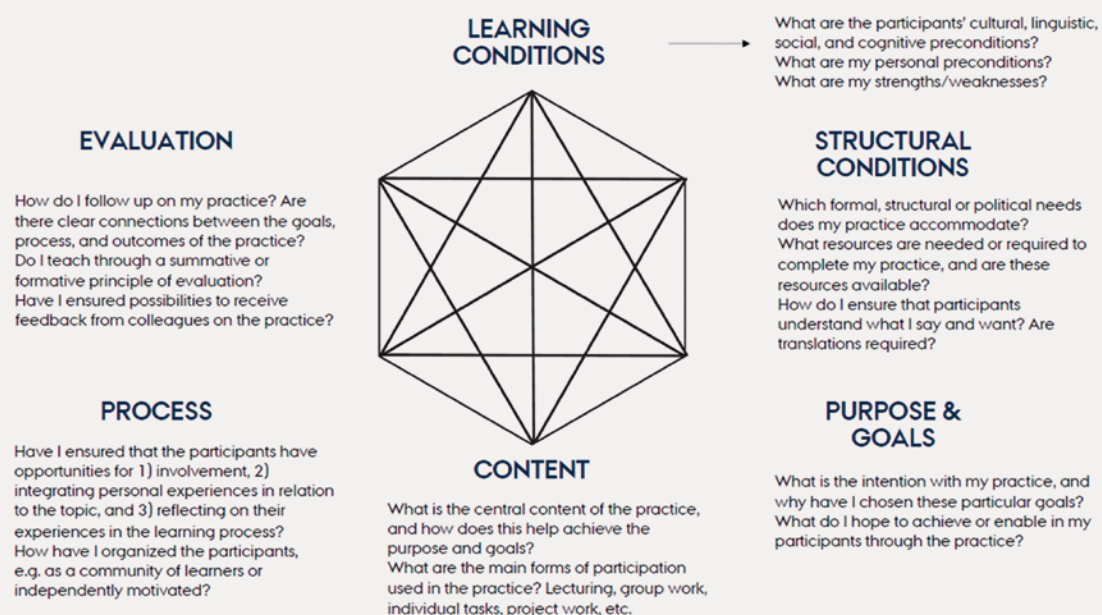


Figure 1: The Didactic Diamond

Thus, V-PAL is not only about sharing practices – it is also a unique opportunity to reflect on why teachers do what they do, unpacking assumptions, and thereby grow and help others grow too, developing their teaching competences/skills.

*“We can learn from others, we can help our fellow teachers by giving tips and feedback, it is a really good way for self-improvement.”*

## 2. The infrastructure

V-PAL is Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union and developed in collaboration between six European partners (VIFIN (Denmark), &LEARNING (Denmark), AEWB (Germany), SPEKTRUM (Romania), SYNTHESIS (Cyprus) and IPF (Spain) and with the participation of 35 languages teachers (and their students) from different language schools in Germany, Cyprus, Romania and Denmark. The partnership created the V-PAL Platform and Community (<https://app.v-pal.eu>, launched 27<sup>th</sup> May 2020). All adult language teachers are invited to join the community free of charge. The system is maintained by VIFIN and the Municipality of Vejle.

### 2.1 V-PAL Platform and Community

The V-PAL Platform and Community is divided into two parts: V-PAL – Video sharing platform and Online Manual and Tutorials.

V-PAL – Video sharing platform forms the community. It contains (an ever-growing) base of 100 Peer Practice videos in the following categories: Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking, Vocabulary, Grammar, and Other.



### Other videos in the platform are:

- Peer Practice Tutorials (produced by the V-PAL consortium)
- Tips and Tricks (produced by the 35 teachers participating in the project)
- Presentation (uploaded by users joining the V-PAL community)
- #VPALwednesday (motivating videos by the V-PAL consortium).

### Participants are emailed and notified on the platform when there are:

- new videos
- comments on their videos
- replies to their comments.

### Online Manual and Tutorials is the online version of the V-PAL Handbook.

#### It consists of:

1. Introduction
2. The Peer Practice Method
3. Benefits of the Peer Practice Method
4. Get ready to produce your Peer Practice video
5. Produce your Peer Practice video
6. The V-PAL Community
7. Inspirational Peer Practice videos.

Parts 1 to 3 give the background information and reasoning for using the Peer Practice method and joining the V-PAL Community.

#### Get ready to produce your Peer Practice video provides:

- Advice on how teachers can identify the practice they want to work on and share
- A Clipboard, for preparing the recording
- The Didactic Diamond, used for reflection on the recorded practice and for feedback.

*Produce your Peer Practice videos* guides you to record and edit your video.

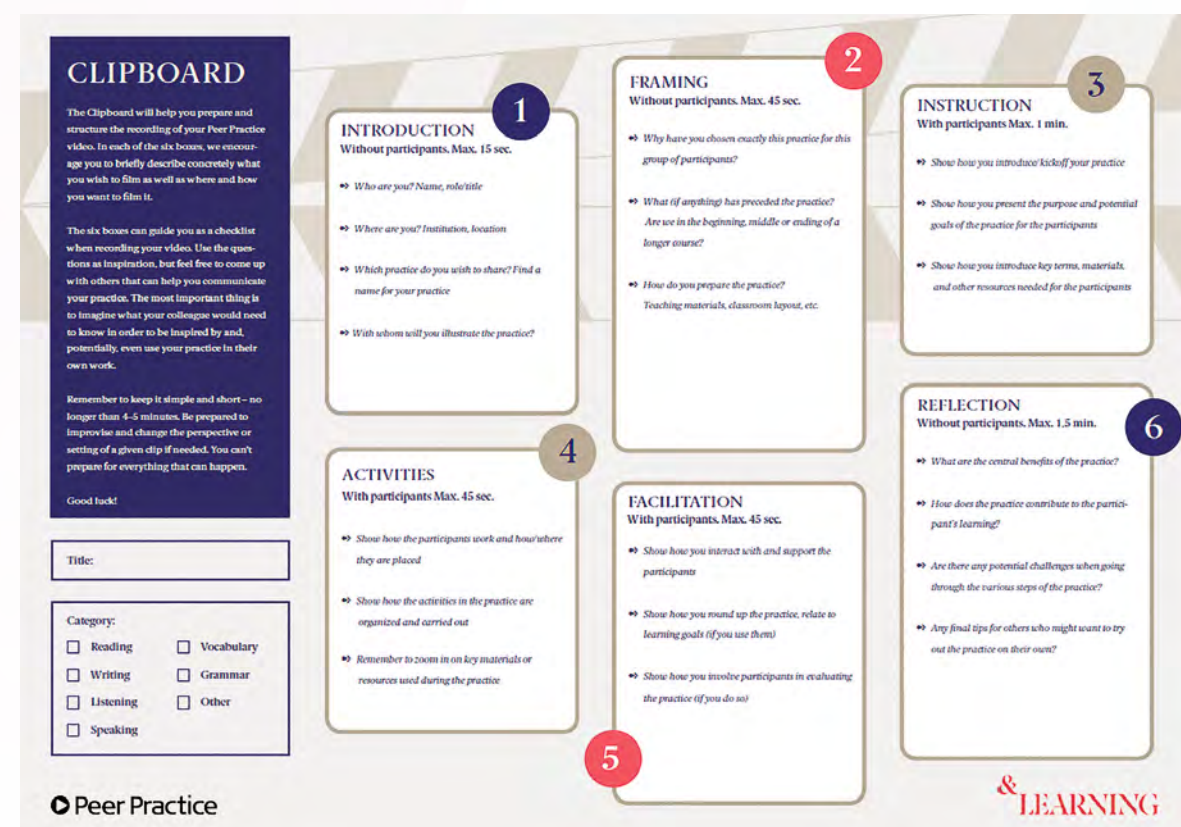
### The V-PAL Community provides:

- Advice on how to navigate and use the platform
- Advice on giving constructive feedback
- Guides on sharing a Peer Practice video.

*Inspirational Peer Practice videos* is a collection of some videos from the community.

“Hand-outs” for choosing a practice to work on, the clipboard and The Didactic Diamond with guidelines and a blank one are available to download. Teachers learn how to use the tools both by text and short videos. All sections have relevant information gathered from the final teacher survey and tips & tricks given by the participating teachers.

Thus, the Online Manual and Tutorials provide everything teachers need to join the V-PAL Community and get inspired, discuss, and share their Peer Practice videos.



**CLIPBOARD**

The Clipboard will help you prepare and structure the recording of your Peer Practice video. In each of the six boxes, we encourage you to briefly describe concretely what you wish to film as well as where and how you want to film it.

The six boxes can guide you as a checklist when recording your video. Use the questions as inspiration, but feel free to come up with others that can help you communicate your practice. The most important thing is to imagine what your colleague would need to know in order to be inspired by and, potentially, even use your practice in their own work.

Remember to keep it simple and short – no longer than 4-5 minutes. Be prepared to improvise and change the perspective or setting of a given clip if needed. You can't prepare for everything that can happen.

Good luck!

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Category:

<input type="checkbox"/> Reading	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary
<input type="checkbox"/> Writing	<input type="checkbox"/> Grammar
<input type="checkbox"/> Listening	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaking	

**1 INTRODUCTION**  
Without participants. Max. 15 sec.

- Who are you? Name, role/title
- Where are you? Institution, location
- Which practice do you wish to share? Find a name for your practice
- With whom will you illustrate the practice?

**2 FRAMING**  
Without participants. Max. 45 sec.

- Why have you chosen exactly this practice for this group of participants?
- What (if anything) has preceded the practice? Are we in the beginning, middle or ending of a longer course?
- How do you prepare the practice? Teaching materials, classroom layout, etc.

**3 INSTRUCTION**  
With participants. Max. 1 min.

- Show how you introduce/kickoff your practice
- Show how you present the purpose and potential goals of the practice for the participants
- Show how you introduce key terms, materials, and other resources needed for the participants

**4 ACTIVITIES**  
With participants. Max. 45 sec.

- Show how the participants work and how/where they are placed
- Show how the activities in the practice are organized and carried out
- Remember to zoom in on key materials or resources used during the practice

**5 FACILITATION**  
With participants. Max. 45 sec.

- Show how you interact with and support the participants
- Show how you round up the practice, relate to learning goals (if you use them)
- Show how you involve participants in evaluating the practice (if you do so)

**6 REFLECTION**  
Without participants. Max. 1.5 min.

- What are the central benefits of the practice?
- How does the practice contribute to the participant's learning?
- Are there any potential challenges when going through the various steps of the practice?
- Any final tips for others who might want to try out the practice on their own?

Peer Practice

& LEARNING

Figure 2: The Clipboard

## 3. The challenges

Two kinds of challenges were met during the project.

### 3.1: Recruiting teachers - and empowering them to share their practices

This was seen as a possible challenge since teaching is normally a private matter – one teacher, one class. Even as part of a team, one normally teaches alone. Teachers often feel uncomfortable sharing their practice – to do so on video would be even more challenging. Another aspect was how comfortable teachers were to work with video.

Initiatives to encounter challenges in recruiting:

- ➔ Documents were written to answer all the questions possible participants might have – on their didactic and technical skills, their teaching, the support along the way etc. emphasizing how new and experienced teachers could join (we can always learn from each other's different perspectives) no matter how technologically savvy
- ➔ Documents focusing on the benefits of participating in the project
- ➔ Being very aware to highlight the term: *useful* practice and not *best* practice when talking about which practices to share, and, that *the practice* – not *the teacher* – is the focus of the videos.

Initiatives in relation to sharing teaching practice:

- ➔ Inspired by videos from the V-PAL consortium all participants started sharing simple video presentations of themselves and received appreciative and accommodating feedback from the V-PAL consortium. The same happened with the first Peer Practice video they shared
- ➔ The Face-to-face teacher training started by sharing personal stories using a personal item. This acknowledged how challenging it is to share something as personal as teaching
- ➔ A buddy-system matching face-to-face participants with online participants – to create a feeling of community despite the type of participation
- ➔ Encouraging teachers from the Face-to-face event to create Tips & Tricks videos for the online participants - creating a feeling of togetherness
- ➔ Having an everyday practice instead of a teaching practice being the focus of the first Peer Practice video produced.

Elements from above have been implemented in the finalization of the project. In the V-PAL Handbook:

- The terms *useful* and *inspirational practice* are used
- Teachers from the project gave their tips & tricks. This is both helpful to start and promotes a feeling of community.

The initiatives mentioned above meant the foreseen challenges were overcome. The consortium chose to implement some of the same elements in the V-PAL Platform and plans to develop this further (see below).

### 3.2: Time - and a steep learning curve

V-PAL and Peer Practice is new in more ways:

- Produce a video: form and follow a clipboard to be efficient, recording and editing
- Didactic reflection which all relate to.

The learning curve can be quite steep, and it probably will take some time to produce the videos the first two or three times.

Instruction, advice etc. is not enough, experience is needed – one must make their own mistakes and find their own working flow.

To ease the work and motivate, the consortium:

- Scheduled when to produce, comment on and reply to comments
- Put all deadlines on Wednesdays (easy to remember)
- Sent a private reminder of the deadlines to all participants a week before
- Sent an understanding e-mail if deadlines were not met – asking if the participant needed any help
- Encouraged the teachers to contact the consortium if they met any challenges
- Commented quickly on Peer Practice videos to let the participants feel validated and appreciated while allowing reflection
- Uploaded #VPALWednesday-videos –asking how they went on, showing bits and pieces of what the consortium was doing, recommending videos etc.

All was very well received by the participants – who did give positive feedback on these initiatives and always informed the consortium if they were unable to fulfill their tasks. Most participants uploaded three videos between November 2019 and March 2020.

## 4. How the initiative was received

The V-PAL project involved a group of 35 teachers who tested the approach and platform during its lifetime by:

- ➔ Learning how to plan, film and edit Peer Practice videos
- ➔ Uploading their videos on the V-PAL Platform
- ➔ Giving each other feedback on their videos and exchanging ideas in the comment section.

Their satisfaction with the experience, evaluated at three stages over two years was highly positive. Even though a couple of participants initially struggled with the technology, their final evaluation reflected it was a very gratifying experience to challenge themselves and succeed because: *“It [planning, filming and editing the videos] can be time consuming but it’s worth it.”* Teachers especially valued the following aspects of the experience:

- The community spirit and the option to work together across borders to create better teaching and help one another
- Watching other teachers’ practices gave them inspiration for their own classrooms and encouraged more creativity and fun
- The process of creating the videos encouraged them to think more explicitly about the purpose and execution of the practices they choose for their classes because they were planning them out as short condensed statement pieces and had to explain them to their ‘audience’ in a very succinct fashion
- Seeing themselves on video gave them the chance to reflect on their own classroom comportment
- They had fun trying out this new approach and being creative with their videos.



*“The whole process was enjoyable: we learn how to make good use of video as a learning tool, as well as giving and receiving constructive feedback.”*

Broadly speaking, teachers' comments and feedback reflect the two main intended opportunities for working with the platform:

- getting inspiration for their own classrooms from others' videos
- improving their own teaching by reflecting more on what they do and why as well as by giving each other feedback.

*“I have improved my teaching and I focus more on why I do as I do when I teach.”*

Many described a steep learning curve in planning and executing their filming activities, ranging from technology to self-confidence in front of the camera.

*“[I particularly enjoyed] 1. That after a while I wasn't scared of [seeing] myself in the videos. Scared meaning: “Do I really say things like that?” “Do I really walk like that?”, etc..... 2. That I managed to learn how to put so much info in a 4-5 min video. SO it really made me think and express the essence (of my methods) in a compact way instead of just being woolly.”*

#### **Evaluation also revealed that...**

- 93.8% of teachers feel they benefitted from participating in the V-PAL project
- 84% have improved their teaching
- 90% reflect more on their teaching
- 94% had tried exercises they found in a video
- 87% want to work more with Peer Practice in the future
- 100% will encourage colleagues to participate in the Platform

*“[I enjoyed] that I could learn new practices, share my knowledge with others, and encourage my peers.”*

*“[I enjoyed] the higher reflection on my own practice as well as the possibility to share and discuss with colleagues and peers.”*

*“[I particularly enjoyed] That the learners were so pleased with their success in the sessions and tickled pink to see themselves on film. We'll do more.”*

## 5. The learning outcomes

### 5.1 Learning outcomes for participating teachers

The learning development and outcomes were tracked through a series of three main surveys at pertinent points in the course of the project, each charting the developments since the last.

1. At the start of the project. Touched (among other things) on previous experiences with video learning, feedback and Peer Practice as well as expectations for professional development in the project (creating a base line).
2. Conducted after the first successful user experience. Inquired about what the process had been like for them and about opportunities they saw for themselves (charting progress and suggestions for improvement)
3. Towards the end of the project. What value they found in the experience, their new skills, and how they could apply it to their work (their lessons-learned and future perspective). Additionally, the surveys evaluated the learning experience itself.

For many participants the experience included a steep learning curve in terms of technology as well as reflecting on their teaching from a film script point of view. In addition to the main learning outcomes, as envisioned by the project, there were also some side outcomes, that were either not targeted or could not be foreseen when planning the initiative.

### Main goals were to enable:

- teachers to improve their professional skills and teaching styles
- active participation in a feedback-community on the V-PAL platform.

Along the way, learning how to script, film, edit, and upload clips was a prerequisite, though not the intended final learning outcome.

*"I have learned different practices, which are useful; I have learned how to be more effective during the lessons; how to teach a subject using different games; how to put the students to work more efficiently; how to have fun during the teaching hours and still learn a lot."*

One side-effect of the filming process was a lessening of initial scepticism towards technology. Teaching participants how to use the technology and software were part of the project, but a necessary step rather than a learning outcome in itself. Thus, teachers learned a lot about filming 'along the way'; a learning experience anticipated by the project partners but not itself in focus. In a second 'happy' addition, teachers had already taken their first steps in front of the camera before COVID-19 hit; they reported having been more comfortable with venturing into online teaching than they would have been previously.

Generally, because participants had very different starting points, their learning experiences differed slightly, and they co-created their own learning experience. Because the target group consisted of teachers in adult education, this was intentional, and the project's focus was extraordinarily strong on empowering participants to drive their own. Some focused more strongly on their own presence, some on their practices, some on the teacher-student experience, etc. The take-away lessons, as gained through the final survey, are thus varied.

### Skills and perspectives participants gained according to survey:

- Increase in reflection of practices used
- Confidence to try new things
- Learned new methods
- Tackling technology
- Being more creative in their lessons
- The value of community support among teachers
- Challenging themselves to step out of their comfort zones
- Improving teaching style and classroom presence

*"Now I am a better teacher because I learned new methods while I supervised my own teaching practice."*

*"It gives one a chance to work with one's own teaching in a different way, also we got to know and meet different teachers from different countries and exchange experiences and be inspired by each other."*

## 5.2 Learning outcomes for the V-PAL Consortium

The final evaluation among the teachers gave the V-PAL Consortium valuable knowledge on the V-PAL Platform and – Community. Among other questions teachers were asked:

- If they saw any difficulties in using Peer Practice in a day-to-day basis
- If they do not find it easy to have a discussion in the Platform, and if not, what could then be improved to facilitate discussions
- to name three things that could be improved about the V-PAL Platform.

### 5.2.1 Difficulties in using Peer Practice in day to day work life.

28 persons responded about the difficulties of using Peer practice in their work life. 10 people found it to be rather difficult and their main point overall was a general lack of time. Another point mentioned, which the V-PAL consortium also heard a lot from other sites is: Data protection policy within the workplace.

Participants in the project indicated, that they have used everything between 1 hour to three days in the production of the video. It is not obvious how much of the process the teachers take into account. Some might include planning and thinking about the method, while others just the editing part. Currently, participants of the V-PAL consortium are considering and working on the possibility of having an app, which will help teachers in structuring and editing Peer Practice

videos. Oftentimes, one of the challenges is that teachers record too long of a clip or take too many shots.

During the project, we have provided consent forms that can be changed to the local context.

At the same time teachers were told that they might just film students from behind and just show how they interact with the material or the exercise, if getting consents from the students is found to be a problem.

*"It can be time consuming but it's worth it."*

### 5.2.2 Discussions in the V-PAL Platform

In the survey, some of the respondents found it difficult to engage in the written discussion on the platform. Suggestions for improvement include:

- ➔ Structure it like a forum or thread (like Slack); option to answer to comments
- ➔ Live discussion (video conference, where a group watches the same video and then there is a discussion on it)
- ➔ Video hangouts (similar to the webinar) at particular dates and times
- ➔ Integrating the platform with social media

This meant that the consortium had to further develop the platform. Now, comments are structured in threads. In the future the consortium hopes to be able to offer live discussion as part of the V-PAL Community. And if possible, to offer comments in the form of videos.

*"My experience has been that giving a comment which contains at least 1 question requires the teacher who uploaded the practice to answer so discussion can happen. However, if the feedback contains only affirmative sentences like ".....was really good in your video" the other teacher is less likely to comment back (even if the feedback is thorough and not just superficial)."*

The above comment motivated the consortium to include in the manual a section on how to give usable and constructive feedback, which would invite feedback

from the recipient and, at the same time, further develop the Didactic Diamond. Today the Didactic Diamond has a special section for Feedback giving ideas like what to look for and how to comment while offering feedback.

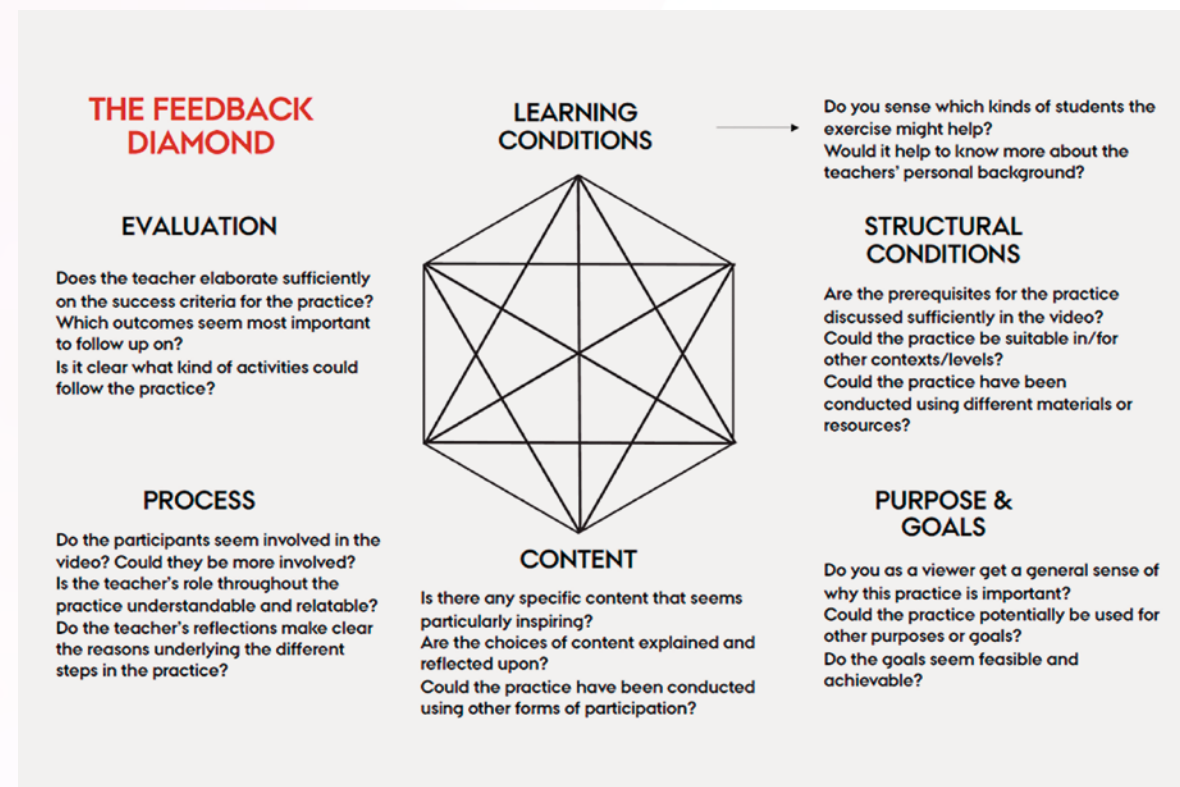


Figure 3: The Feedback Diamond

### 5.2.3 Elements which could improve the V-PAL Platform

The participants' ideas on how to improve the V-PAL Platform both circled around the technical functioning and the use of the platform. The participants suggested that everyone who signs on should also have to make videos, that more countries should be involved and that it should be possible to produce videos as a team. Everyone is invited to spread the message!



*[I particularly enjoyed] “being inspired and inspiring others. Also, realising that even though we work with different languages, we are still all teachers and we all have the same challenges.”*

**On the technical side, some ideas for improvements were:**

- Up-/download materials used in the videos
- Set rules for how the videos should be made (subtitles, volume, etc.); template for videos
- Different feedback options (email, chat, experience notes)
- Visual changes (e.g. main points should be written in bold)
- Allow teachers to create profiles with contact info if they wish
- Option to edit comments after posting
- A featured video every week (editor's pick)
- Tag for language levels
- Categories in the left-hand side menu in addition to the drop-down menu up top

All of which have been implemented to varying degrees. Today, as part of one's private profile, there is the possibility of adding a personal e-mail and allowing it to be seen by other participants and thereby being able to send and receive private messages. This means that participants are able to ask for materials connected to a certain practice. The text editor used to describe Peer Practice videos has been improved, adding bold, italics etc. and thereby it is made easier to read and at the same time highlight certain elements in the description. It is possible to edit comments – just as it is possible to give a thumbs-up to comments, showing appreciation of the input. This results in a community that can stay more alive and relevant for participants. Categories can be found both as a drop-down menu and in the left-hand side menu.

The manual has been updated with an instruction on how to describe the Peer Practice video one uploads. Part of the description should be an indication of the language level in focus using the European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR-levels). If users do so, it will be possible to search for videos concerning a certain language level.

The consortium hopes to turn #VPALWednesday into an editors' pick of a featured video of the week during Autumn 2020.

Even though most of these are technical improvements, their purpose is to strengthen the social and learning part of the community, which is what the participants really have appreciated and is the main purpose of the project.

## 6. Plans to further develop the initiative

We find, that it will be essential to work further on the personal feel of belonging and being seen in the V-PAL Community.

Thus we would like to find ways to support the interaction between those, who join the community. Some ideas are:

- ➔ Mentors for new teachers who join the community. We will find a way to indicate their status in the platform, or a way to direct new teachers who sign up to contact a mentor directly
- ➔ Group teachers into smaller groups of peers, who support each other – for instance by agreeing to give comments on videos consistently
- ➔ Nudge teachers to produce a video presenting themselves as a teacher when they sign up and create a spirit so all mentors and other members welcome the new teacher
- ➔ Make it possible to sign up for news from the consortium.

To put even more focus on the teacher activities and strengthen the possibility to develop as teachers, we would like to create new categories. Ideas are:

- This I tried – telling which videos have inspired one, how the practice has been used, revised for own context and results. By uploading a video with the information all will get notified



- Please help – videos on practices which do not really work and would like input on how to develop the practice.

#### Other ideas are:

- Special subjects focusing on a period of time. Right now could be distance learning (in the light of COVID-19)
- Contact headmasters of language schools. Inform them how their school and teachers can use and develop by joining the V-PAL Community
- Develop a way to work consciously with the videos within the schools
- Webinars with training and feedback on videos.

*“We never stop learning on teaching, but sometimes we need a push in an unexpected direction to challenge our assumptions of what’s possible with learners. In-service training for Adult Education freelancers is scarce, often beyond our limited budget and takes up time when we’re running hard to make a living – this is an effective, creative, low-budget, enjoyable way to get together and learn together.”*

## 7. Literature

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Video-based Peer  
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language teachers

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