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Title: Video-enhanced observation: a case study of lesson feedback in a PGCE school placement

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What if lesson observations were no longer isolated 'snapshot' activities carried out behind closed doors? What if feedback was no longer 'given' to a trainee, but developed 'with' a trainee, acknowledging good practice and agreeing developmental priorities based on video evidence and shared reflection? These were some of the questions driving a recent video-enhanced lesson observation research project led by Newcastle University that focused on trainee teachers and teacher educators across five countries (<https://veoeuropa.com>).

Many schools are involved in initial teacher education (ITE). They may also be considering whether video-enhanced observation is suitable for their context. This case study is based on a lesson observation feedback session carried out by an ITE mentor in the UK: a secondary-school assistant principal with overall responsibility for monitoring trainee teachers in the school. The school had introduced a secure system as part of their involvement in the project. The case study focuses on this particular episode because it highlights the use of the feedback process as a learning episode for the whole group and is something that could be carried out in any school.

Following training on the use of the video observation app, the mentor carried out some initial lesson observations with a group of trainees on their second teaching placement. She did this by taking her usual approach to lesson observation, seated at the back of the classroom, but with the additional feature of recording the lesson using the app on an iPad. Still quite new to the process, she used the software to annotate moments of interest with a 'quick tag', identifying features of the lesson she could return to for discussion with the trainee.

The mentor had negotiated with one of the trainees to have an interactive feedback session about his lesson at the bi-weekly group meeting. The trainee and his mentor could jointly reflect on his lesson and the group would benefit from observing and engaging in the process.

Session vignette

The group was seated in a classroom facing the whiteboard, with the mentor and trainee at the front. The mentor had uploaded the video of the lesson to the online portal provided by the observation software, allowing the video to be viewed on the whiteboard. Starting with the pupils' entry into the classroom, the mentor commended the trainee on the way that he welcomed his pupils individually (in this case, into a drama studio) and directed them to their places. The mentor stopped the video at a moment of interest and questioned the trainee about seating arrangements. Having discussed it with him she turned to the group of trainees and used it as a teaching point for them to consider in their own practice. The mentor went through several more episodes in a similar way, engaging in dialogue with the trainee and then with the group. The mentor and trainee ended the feedback session by jointly agreeing some points for him to develop in his next sequence of lessons.

Professional vision

One of the benefits of using video in this way with trainee teachers is the potential for the development of their professional vision: their ability to 'observe what is happening in a classroom and to make sense of it from a professional perspective' (Blomberg et al 2011, p. 1131). The example

extracts show that the trainee was able to think about what he noticed in the selected video episodes, and then to evaluate and suggest alternatives. According to Calandra and Rich (2014), making evaluative comments is the most common way observers interpret teaching actions in video excerpts, which is then often extended to offering alternatives. An experienced mentor is able to guide the trainee to help them make sense of their own actions.

Extract A

Mentor: Now that you're watching it in real time, what would you say?

Trainee: That there are too many instructions. I talked too much.

Mentor: Did it feel like that at the time?

Trainee: No, but I can see it now.

Extract B

Mentor: What do you think you could do to improve ... what do you reckon?

Trainee: My questioning could be a bit more planned. At the minute I'm still trying to gauge how much they know about the topics so I can plan the question but now I have a better idea for next time. I'll ask more detailed questions to get more detailed answers, really.

Mentor: Yes, and if possible, when you're questioning, use children's names.

Using video in the lesson observation process arguably redefines the way that this crucial developmental task is carried out. Inevitably, there is a learning curve in terms of software and skills. The software used for the project allowed for key moments of the lesson to be 'tagged': time-stamped with an on-screen annotation from a range of pre-selected criteria. The ability to move instantly to an episode where a specific tag was used is something which could not have been done before the advent of such technology. The benefit of this approach can be seen through the increasing sophistication of the trainees' reflective skills as they review their practice.

Lesson observation and feedback are key to the way that we train new entrants to the profession. Across the research project we found multiple examples that showed, as in this case study, that feedback sessions in the hands of experienced mentors became more dialogic when enhanced by this kind of technology.

Practical advice for introducing video-enhanced observation

- Video-enhanced observation should be planned at a strategic level and explicitly incorporated into relevant policies, providing clear guidelines for staff observing, being observed, and engaging in feedback.
- With regards to data protection, safeguarding and ethics, a secure system must underpin the handling of video material within the school. Only approved devices should be used to collect video data, and not staff personal devices.

References

- Blomberg G., Stürmer K and Seidel T (2011) How pre-service teachers observe teaching on video: Effects of viewers' teaching subjects and the subject of the video. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 27(7): 1131-1140.
- Calandra B and Rich PJ (2014) *Digital video for teacher education: Research and practice*. London: Routledge.