Summary of article titled ‘Lights, Camera, Reflection: Using Peer Video to Promote Reflective Dialogue among Student Teachers’ sent to international peer reviewed journal on 19 March 2009.

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of peer-videoing in the classroom as a means of promoting reflection among student teachers. Ten pre-service teachers participating in a teacher education programme in a university in the Republic of Ireland and ten pre-service teachers participating in a teacher education programme in a university in the North of Ireland participated in the study. Locating the discussion within the theoretical literature on reflective practice, the study examined the capacity for peer-video analysis to facilitate student teachers to move from focussing on the technical aspects of their practice to an examination of the theoretical constructs underpinning their practice.

Key words

Peer videoing; reflective practice; student teachers; self-evaluation

Introduction

There is widespread agreement that teaching is today more complex and demanding than ever before. Teachers are expected to work effectively with students from diverse backgrounds, promote tolerance and social cohesion, manage students from disadvantaged backgrounds, deal effectively with students with learning or behavioural problems, incorporate new technology into their teaching and keep abreast of best practice in student assessment (OECD, 2005). In the context of rapid and radically changing teaching and learning contexts, student teachers are increasingly required to become ‘adaptive experts’ who can adapt speedily and effectively to diverse classroom contexts (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 3). At the same time, student teachers are being told that they must ‘engage in
disciplined experimentation, incisive interpretation of complex events, and rigorous reflection to adjust their teaching based on student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 11). For many student teachers, the range of complex issues they typically meet in classrooms and the demands placed upon them both by their teaching placement school and by their academic programme is often overwhelming. As a result, many retreat to the more technical and immediate aspects of their practice, failing to see the connections between the theoretical and practical elements of teacher education programmes (Barone et al, 1996; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; MacRuaire & Harford, 2008). Reflective practice, the bedrock of most teacher education programmes, is one area which often falls victim to the theory-practice divide. While reflective practice is widely positioned at the centre of teacher education programmes, student teachers often find it difficult to see its application to their real life teaching experience (Craig, 1994; Cruickshank, 1987). Furthermore, student teachers differ markedly in their capacity to engage in reflection, many lacking the requisite propensity for ‘open-mindedness, wholeheartedness and responsibility’ (Dewey, 1933, p. 107). Cognisant of these complexities and of the realisation that many key pedagogical principles are ‘washed out’ (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981) in the practicum, this study set out to examine ways in which student teachers can be supported in the development of their reflective capacities not only for the duration of their teacher education programme, but for their long-term professional growth. Specifically, the study examined how peer video analysis facilitated student teachers to move from a focus on the technical aspects of their practice towards a closer examination of their theoretical constructs underpinning their practice.
Framework for Evaluating Student Teachers’ Teaching in the North and South of Ireland

There is a proliferation of competency based models, and increasingly the technical rational approach to teacher education is establishing a hegemonic status in many jurisdictions. Despite the difficulties with this approach, there is some merit in delineating the different components of effective teaching, particularly in an effort to allow for some form of appraisal and evaluation of classroom practice. This process should be managed so as not to exclude the recognition and reward of emerging practices and creative and innovative approaches (MacRuairc et al, forthcoming). The work around competencies is being led in many countries by the respective teaching council whose remit it is to put a professional shape on the work of teachers. These competencies are increasingly impacting on the assessment of student teaching practice in the university departments within their respective jurisdictions. Different teaching councils are at different stages with respect to their response to the development of a competency framework. The teaching council in Northern Ireland has developed a comprehensive set of developmental competencies to frame teaching in four stages from initial teacher education, induction to early professional development and finally continuing professional development. The Teaching Council in the Republic of Ireland has yet to articulate a framework to be used for teachers in the Republic of Ireland. The dual site focus of this research positions both groups at different stages with respect to a competency model which may impact on the experiential base that both groups of students bring to the discussions of their practice.

The Power of Peer Video Analysis to Promote Reflection
Reflective practice has been widely espoused as the key component in education circles for decades. Dewey in ‘How We Think’ defined reflection as ‘the active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it leads’ (Dewey, 1933, p. 118). For Dewey, open-mindedness, a sense of responsibility and wholeheartedness or dedication were central to the potential development of a reflective practitioner. Schon further emphasised the relationships between reflection and experience, differentiating between reflection in and on action. The former refers to the importance of teachers being aware of their decisions as they work, while the latter emphasises the importance of reflecting back on and critiquing one’s practice. Both emphasise the importance of experiential learning and both foreground practitioner knowledge (Schon, 1983; 1987; 1991).

The power of digital video as a means of facilitating critical reflection and furthering self-evaluation has been widely documented (Newhouse, Lane & Brown, 2007; Harford & MacRaurice, 2008; Rich & Hannafin, 2009; Rosaen et al, 2009). Video allows for the complexities of the classroom to be brought into sharp focus, facilitating student teachers in bridging the perennial theory practice divide (Perry & Talley, 2001). It captures the immediacy of the classroom, offering detailed and rich data on the teaching and learning process, allowing students to view examples of authentic learning experiences (Newhouse, Lane & Brown, 2007).

**Methodology**

In order to foster collaboration between universities in the North and South of Ireland, the Standing Conference of Teacher Educators North and South (SCoTENS) offered to fund this research project which examined how peer-video analysis could promote reflective skills among student teachers. The centrality of reflective practice to teacher
education programmes in both jurisdictions is paramount, however, recent research carried out in the Republic of Ireland (Harford & MacRuairc, 2008; MacRuairc & Harford, 2008) suggested that there remains a disconnect between the theory surrounding reflective practice and student teachers’ actual real-life teaching experience. A qualitative research project based on the peer-video model was chosen as the most suitable means for conducting the research. As Jacobs, Kawanaka & Stigler (1999, p. 718) note ‘a major advantage of the qualitative approach is that it more easily allows for the discovery of new ideas and unanticipated occurrences. Such research helps focus novel questions, formulate hypotheses, develop useful measures, and produce grounded theory.’

Twenty students in total participated in the research (ten in the Republic of Ireland and ten in Northern Ireland) which was managed by three academics, one from the North and two from the South of the country. The support of SCoTENS allowed numerous cross-border visits at which the project facilitators were afforded opportunities to see the work of their colleagues in a separate jurisdiction and meet students from that jurisdiction to discuss their involvement and development over the course of the year. While it was hoped at an early stage of the research that the funding could also be used to allow for students from the North and South of the country to engage in dialogue and visit each other’s classrooms, this proved too problematic to realise. However, discussions are currently underway examining how such a strategy could be executed.

Students in each university were allocated into tutorial groups, ten students in each group. Students were then randomly divided into pairs. Students were asked to engage in peer videoing of class teaching in real time and participate in the subsequent analysis of their teaching in a tutorial structure. They were also asked to
keep a reflective diary in which they would record their thoughts and ideas as they
got through the peer video and subsequent tutorial analysis process. It was decided
from the outset that an agreed model should be used which would facilitate the
systematic and developmental critique of the student teachers’ classes. The existing
evaluative models used by each of university were analysed in the first instance. This
process was important in allowing the researchers to become aware of the different
contexts and evaluative frameworks used in their respective university departments.
Follow up discussions with students with respect to the model was a key component
of the research process. An agreed model emerged from these discussions which
would be used as a framework for examining video footage of classroom contexts and
for informing the reflective journal aspect of the study. The following model was
agreed in consultation with the students as a result of a needs analysis of students’
own perceptions of priorities which they identified.

1. Planning and Preparation for Differentiation

2. Teaching and Learning

3. Classroom Management

Working in pairs, students selected teaching opportunities to record, using the video-
recorded teaching episodes in a self and peer reflective manner. They were also asked
to assist each other in further planning activities using action points agreed during the
viewing and feedback sessions. For purposes of familiarisation with the system and to
dispense with the understandable initial self-deprecation that appearing on video can
cause, students were asked to spend some time using the video camera before
recording the actual teaching episodes to be used. They were encouraged to use the
video camera as often as they wished but were only asked to “save” two sessions,
each of which they had already recorded and reviewed in a self and peer evaluative
manner. When all the necessary taught sessions had been recorded, reviewed and evaluated, the final piece of work to be undertaken by the students was to select a video “clip” lasting no more than ten minutes to bring to a tutorial which included all ten student teacher and the facilitator. This plenary group meeting was designed to give students the opportunity to view and discuss a wider selection of teaching episodes selected by their peers, to explain the reflective process as it impacted on them individually and to compare and contrast ideas across their relative range of experiences. The fact that students were simultaneously maintaining a reflective journal based on all of these activities added another important evaluative tool to the study. Again important ideas, thought processes and feelings were captured through the use of these journals. In addition students were able to track their own processes and routes of development and competence achievement through these detailed reflections, committing thoughts to paper while fresh in the mind and before disappearing into the ether.

**Summary Findings**

The views of the respondents fall into three broad areas: Planning and preparation for differentiation; teaching and learning; and classroom management. Overall, the findings suggest that students’ engagement with the peer-video process had a significant impact on the development of their reflective skills and in turn a direct impact on their classroom practice.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this small-scale qualitative study clearly indicate the power of peer video analysis as a tool for scaffolding and promoting reflective practice among student teachers. Research has indicated the gap between what teachers say they do
and what they actually do, hence other forms of self-evaluation which have a distance between practice and the evaluative activity are not always fully representative (Charlsworth et al, 1993; Hook & Rosenchein, 1979). This medium and the critical process underpinning it unequivocally captured the reality of the full gambit of the classroom context. As well holding up a mirror from which student teachers could actually see the reality of their practice, it also enabled them to deconstruct and theorise the complexity of their practice. The synergy of perspectives between the students often contributed to this theorising and provided a range of safe lenses through which their practice was critiqued. It also afforded the opportunity for students to see a wider range of classroom contexts than they would ordinarily experience. The analysis sessions were structured in such a way that they facilitated the development of a culture of collaboration and co-operation, based on a democratic and inclusive discussion which greatly added to the quality of the reflective dialogue. This fostered the construct of self-education and located the ownership of the process firmly within the student teacher group.

List of references included in full journal article


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