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Video Recording as a Stimulus for Reflection in Pre-Service EFL Teacher Training

More than three decades ago, when I was a student teacher in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program, my evaluations came from either a mentor or a university supervisor. Feedback about my teaching was filtered through the lens of their perceptions and experiences, leaving little space for my own reflection. While this type of supervisory observation is common, the field of Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) has advanced and now includes many other evaluation methods, including self-reflection by teachers on aspects of their own classroom practice. According to Wallace (1991, 82), reflection is key to teacher development because "it is through reflection on professional action that professional expertise is developed."

Teachers have several options for self-inquiry; they can administer questionnaires, write in a journal as a response to a teaching event, compare their teaching against a checklist of good instructional techniques, or make and review an audio or video recording of their performance, to name a few (Richards and Lockhart 1996). Among these options, video recording is considered one of the most valuable tools for SLTE because it provides an objective and permanent source that can be viewed repeatedly to observe various aspects of classroom practice. After looking at the particular benefits of reflective teaching, this article will describe some specific steps that SLTE teachers can take to introduce video recording as a stimulus for self-reflection in a pre-service EFL program.

What is reflective teaching and why is it important?

Reflective teaching is the critical exploration of one's own teaching practice and is essential to life-long professional development (Wallace 1998), and it applies to all educational situations, including language teaching. The pioneer in the field of reflective thought about educational practice is John Dewey (Dewey 1933; Zeichner and Liston 1996), whose

ideas about systematic and persistent analysis were later expounded upon by Schön (1983). One of the earliest SLTE researchers to deal with the phenomenon of reflective teaching was Bartlett (1990), who advocated a broad form of self-reflection that involved not only matters of classroom practice but also the crucial effect of social context on teaching and learning.

Participants in SLTE programs evaluate a wide range of their teaching skills and techniques, such as implementing a lesson plan, giving useful feedback, managing a class, and introducing communicative activities. However, *critical* self-reflection goes beyond simply assessing these skills and requires students to thoughtfully analyze and determine how their own belief system and attitudes impact their decisions and actions in the classroom. Critical reflection encourages educators "to develop the skills of considering the teaching process thoughtfully, analytically, and objectively as a way of improving classroom practices" (Richards 2002, 23). As a result, critical reflection makes teaching more productive and satisfying, thereby freeing teachers "from impulse and routine behavior" (Farrell 2003, 20), and helping them "to avoid burnout" (Farrell 2004, 2).

When should critical reflection start?

Reflective teaching should begin at an early stage of teacher training. My experience has shown me that pre-service teachers with little to no experience should be instilled with the idea of reflection during their first classes in EFL methodology, when they are just being introduced to teaching and the door to the profession gradually begins to open. Critical reflection during these early classes prepares students for the actual teaching they will encounter later in the practicum, when they intern with a practiced instructor and eventually take over classes on their own.

When student teachers are first being introduced to varying approaches and methods, they need opportunities for safe experimentation. One way to accomplish this is through *microteaching*, where trainees take turns teaching a lesson in front of their peers. The four steps of microteaching traditionally include (1) the briefing or orientation, (2) teaching the lesson, (3) the critique or discussion, and (4) reteaching the lesson (Wallace 1991). When students reflect on microteaching, they apply and assess concepts they are learning, and they learn how to give and receive constructive criticism. This early experience increases their confidence and establishes observation and self-reflection as a standard practice that will continually develop their skills.

Video recording as a stimulus for critical reflection

Observing, analyzing, and discussing classroom performance is enhanced by the use of videotaping. Recording lessons for self-observation:

- allows students to distance themselves and be dispassionate about their teaching (van Lier 1988);
- helps trainees notice and respond to both strong and weak aspects of their teaching;
- allows trainees to view a DVD immediately and re-examine it many times; and
- has a well-known motivating effect (Wallace 1981; Murphey 2000; Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan 2001; Maclean and White 2007).

Additionally, video recording has special value for non-native English speaking trainees because it enables them to focus not only on the nonverbal aspects of their teaching but also to reflect on their communicative competence, including their language proficiency, knowledge of essential language functions, and their style of teacher-student interaction.

When being videotaped each student teacher wears a clip-on microphone to record his or her speech. Although it is normal for individuals to be self-conscious when being recorded, if the equipment is placed in a non-obtrusive location, the subjects will soon consider it a normal part of the classroom and it will cease to have a noticeable effect. For example, placing the video camera on a tripod in a corner of the classroom affords a wide perspective of the action while permitting freedom of movement.

Steps for video recording and self-viewing

I strongly believe that video recording of microteaching lessons should be done on a voluntary basis so trainees will regard it not as a means of punishment or criticism but as

a useful tool for their successful professional development. The following video recording and self-viewing steps for pre-service teachers are carefully designed to reduce anxiety and encourage student teachers to make the process a regular part of their future reflective practice. (Figure 1 illustrates how the five steps for recording and viewing are initiated and repeated.)

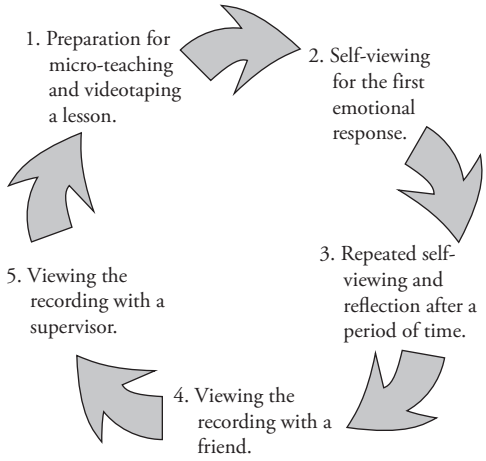

Figure 1: Five Steps for Recording and Viewing a Microteaching Lesson

Step 1: Preparation for microteaching and videotaping a lesson

Preparation for microteaching entails linking each trainee's lesson to the material the trainees have been studying. Assigned topics for microteaching should be related to a specific topic, such as "Teaching reading to young learners" or "Developing the speaking skills of low intermediate students." The trainee can use this information to orient the lesson to a specific and familiar objective, which will impart more confidence and result in a better microteaching performance.

Step 2: Self-viewing for the first emotional response

After the video-recorded lesson is burned onto a CD or DVD, the trainee views it alone either at home or some other convenient location. In order to discover the student teachers' primary concerns while self-viewing, I ask the following question: "What aspects of your teaching are you mostly interested in?" Three of the most common responses to this question are (1) grammatical and phonological accuracy, (2) the use of gestures and facial expressions, and (3) the appearance or non-appearance of nervousness.

Predictably, a primary focus of trainees concerns their ego, or what I would call the "actor's syndrome," because at first trainees often focus on how *they* are acting instead of on their interaction with the students. However, if the recording process is done with care, this type of self-consciousness ceases to be an issue.

Step 3: Repeated self-viewing and reflection after a period of time

It is important to put some time between self-viewings, from several days to a week. As their nervousness and excitement fade away, student teachers are able to view themselves with a certain degree of detachment. My students report that they started critically reflecting about their microteaching only after the second self-viewing. For example, after a second viewing one student wrote: "Now I feel more detached; it is not personal any more to watch myself. I feel more confident and professional in reflecting on the lesson."

After the second self-viewing, the student teachers answer some written questions to provide them with some relevant data to reflect on and to raise their self-awareness. These questions help the trainees identify problem areas and serve as starting points for reflection. Farrell (2004, 27) identifies the following fundamental questions that a teacher should reflect on:

1. What am I doing in the classroom?
2. Why am I doing this?
3. What is the result?
4. Will I change anything based on the information gathered from answering the first three questions?

I expand on these questions and ask my student teachers to use them for self-reflection after viewing a recorded lesson. Though the majority are yes/no questions, they still direct trainees' attention towards their classroom behavior and make them focus on and review particular moments of the microteaching. Student teachers can also develop their own questions to reflect on while self-viewing. One of the most important questions for students to answer is: "How will problems identified in your microteaching affect your teaching of

real pupils?" (See the Appendix for two sets of self-reflection questions, one for pre-service microteaching and the other for later teaching during the practicum.)

Step 4: Viewing the recording with a friend

Watching the microteaching video with a friend and engaging in follow-up discussions promotes students' self-esteem and helps them either accept or reject the suggestions made during the analyses. A positive affective environment is created when individuals receive constructive criticism from people they respect and with whom they have a good rapport.

Step 5: Viewing the recording with a supervisor

At this stage, the trainees are encouraged to sum up the positive aspects of their microteaching and to suggest concrete steps toward making their teaching techniques more efficient. Reflecting critically on the recorded microteaching and asking themselves "What can I improve?" leads trainees to repeat the cycle of preparing, teaching, recording, and reflecting.

Since the trainees' microteaching is recorded at least twice, it is useful for them to review their responses to questions from their first microteaching session. This enables the trainees to determine whether they have remedied errors or undesirable aspects of their teaching.

Outcomes of recording and reflecting for pre-service teachers

During their pre-service, trainees who engage in recording and reflecting on their microteaching typically show an increased self-awareness, an improved ability to shift roles from actor to director, and a sense of continuity regarding reflective practice for professional development.

- *Self-awareness*. Trainees realize that teaching is a complicated process and that there are many aspects they have to learn and improve. Each trainee finds something specific that explains his or her teaching profile and belief system.
- *Role-shift*. From an actor to a stage director. While video recording my students and helping them with self-viewing, I noticed something interesting about their classroom behavior. Their initial concerns about their actions and egos—revealed in questions like "Do I look as nervous as I felt? Did I make any mistakes?"—gradually changed, and their attention was redirected towards the learners' behavior and interaction. Thus the "actor's syndrome" was replaced by the "stage director's attitude" as the teachers realized that it is not they who need to practice English in the classroom but rather their students.
- *Continuity*. Trainees realize that it is important to continue self-reflection throughout their teaching careers. Most student teachers want to continue recording themselves during their practicum and develop their own self-evaluating techniques. They internalize the idea that reflection on their classroom behavior is a key factor in their professional development.

Conclusion

The field of SLTE depends on reflective teaching that successfully sharpens the skills of future English teachers by making them aware of not only how they implement the methods they learn in class but also of why they make critical decisions about all aspects of their performance. Among the many options for self-reflection, video recording has a large number of advantages. When the procedures for using videotaped lessons as a stimulus for reflection are introduced to teacher trainees during pre-service, there is a good chance that self-reflection will become a natural and enduring component of their teaching that will positively affect them and their students.

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Appendix Self-Reflection Questions for Videotaped Lessons

1. Self-reflection questions for microteaching

View your microteaching and consider the following questions:

- Were your instructions clear and simple?
- Did you rephrase your instructions if your students were at a loss, or did you translate them?
- Did you confirm the right answers?
- How did you correct wrong answers?
- Did you praise the students?
- Was your use of gestures sufficient?
- Were you monotonous? Were you emotional?
- How will problems identified in your microteaching affect your teaching of real pupils?
- What questions would you like to add to this list?

2. Self-reflection questions for a practicum lesson

View your lesson and consider the following questions:

- Did you try to involve the whole class?
- What modes of interaction were used? (whole class, individual work, pair work, group work, etc.)
- Was there a pupil in the classroom who was not involved?
- Was the pacing too fast or too slow for the majority of students?

Self-Reflection Questions for Videotaped Lessons *(continued)*

- How many questions were asked of each student?
- Can you specify the proportion of teacher talk vs. student talk?
- How effective was your use of multimedia technology?
- Were your instructions clear and simple?
- Did you rephrase your instructions if your students were at a loss?
- Did you explain assignments, or did you also show the pupils what to do?
- Did you notice any serious errors in your speech?
- Can you reflect on cases when students failed to speak English and shifted to their native language?
- Did you implement the objectives you had planned?