

Teaching practice and mentoring: using video in ESOL teaching practice

Resource description:

- A report on using video to support feedback sessions on Cambridge ESOL CELTA programmes.
- A Powerpoint presentation with video 'stills' and a description of the project with a list of pros, cons and recommendations.

Background to the project

City College, Birmingham is an FE college that offers two part-time CELTA courses (a Cambridge initial teacher training course in ESOL/EFL) each one day a week. In the mornings, two or three trainees do their teaching practice with an ESOL class for an hour and a half, with their colleagues and a trainer sitting at the back of the classroom. The trainer makes a running record of the lesson and the observing trainees make notes of examples of good practice and areas for development. Immediately afterwards, we meet up and all the trainees and the trainer become involved in an evaluation of the lessons. The trainees receive a full written report of the lesson soon after.

The CELTA teacher training team decided they would like to try filming all the teaching practice sessions to help enrich the group feedback to see if this would improve the trainees' observations and self-evaluations. Self-reflection is very much part of the developmental aims of this course and we felt it might help trainees to reflect with greater understanding on events using a video prompt and providing opportunities to revisit aspects of a lesson with a fresh perspective. We wanted a way of revisiting these events that wasn't going to be seen by trainees as just imposing the trainer's own view of events.

Filming teaching practice

From September 2009 we began to record every teaching practice with one CELTA group, using a hand-held camcorder. Trainees who were observing took turns (about 20 minutes each) holding the camera. The trainer continued to make notes. After the lesson, the camera was connected to a television and the trainer would lead the feedback using the films as well as her own and the trainees' notes. The second CELTA group started doing the same from December but were able to play the films on a smartboard, which was considerably easier.

Caroline's September group were initially very careful not to include ESOL students on the film and focused on the trainee teachers, not wishing to offend or embarrass the class. However, over the weeks this was clearly not an issue, and trainees began to include students in the filming.

Feedback

Trainees would write up on the board a summary of their notes (under positive and negative headings); Caroline led a discussion, inviting the trainee teachers to add to or elaborate on their notes and self-evaluations. The film was shown and used selectively when Caroline wanted to remind trainees of a significant event. A trainee would help to find and play very short clips, often just sufficient to jog everyone's memories; sometimes she would play a longer clip where she wanted to invite comment on a successful or unsuccessful procedure. Over time it became easier to find clips out of sequence so the feedback became a little more flexible. On the occasions when the technology failed, the trainees (who had used video from the start of the course) found it more difficult to contribute to discussions.

Evaluation

Caroline kept a diary of how she had used the film in feedback and the trainees completed questionnaires. At the outset of the course, trainees had expressed a wish for the film to be deleted after it had been used in the feedback session, which meant it could not be returned to later in the course.

Christine's December group, benefiting from the experiences of the first group, focused much more on filming the ESOL students from an earlier stage and made use of the zoom feature for this. They experienced similar ups and downs with the technology, much of this due to inexperience, but they had the advantage of being able to use a smartboard for play-back. This meant it was considerably easier to find clips and use them out of sequence. However, knowing how and when to use the film, especially as a note-based procedure was already well established with this group, felt very much a matter of trial and error. Sometimes, especially earlier on, its use seemed relatively ineffectual, taking up a lot of time without seeming to stimulate much discussion. However, as the trainer began to be a lot more selective, using only very short clips triggered by asterisks in her running record and by the trainees' lists of pros and cons put up on the board, it began to produce more insightful comment. Sometimes these comments were elicited by the trainer's viewing instructions – e.g. to watch the involvement of particular groups of students or to notice what the trainee is doing during a listening activity. The films were saved on the CELTA Moodle site, but the size of the files made it impractical to download them at home.

Summary of eleven trainee questionnaires

How distracting was it in the classroom?

No trainees seem to find it distracting beyond an initial settling in period:

- *'I found it disturbing at the beginning of the lesson practices (1st and 2nd lessons) but was fine after that.'*
- *'Not really, at first it was strange being recorded but eventually it became something that I didn't even notice.'*

Quantity of film used in feedback and desire to view more of it in their own time:

Most trainees seemed to feel that the quantity viewed during feedback was sufficient, and the comments that differed from this probably accurately reflected particular, less satisfactory

experiences. Most thought they would want to see more in their own time, though this isn't reflected in actual take-up of the opportunity.

- *'About the right amount though it may not be such a good idea to focus the whole of the feedback session on the video.'*
- *'May need to see a little more. There have been some problems with finding relevant bits of the recordings.'*

What trainees noticed or felt about themselves when watching the video:

These comments were rarely the main focus of the discussion, but not surprisingly featured in their first response to watching themselves.

- *'I realise just how loud my voice is and also my positioning.'*
- *'I didn't see anything too unexpected. On one occasion, viewing myself helped me understand how I could carry out drilling more effectively.'*
- *'it can be very intimidating and maybe a bit humiliating when watching where you went wrong in your lesson.'*
- *'Giving out lengthy instructions and increasing TT unnecessarily.'*
- *'I saw that I use my hands a lot. This I felt may be a slight distraction to students. Also that I need to project my voice more.'*
- *'Personally I don't like the attention on me so I did have a bit of a cringe factor watching myself.'*
- *'I noticed my accent... I also notice... I have grown more confident at getting students' attention... I do use the more able students...'*
- *'I noticed my body language was sometimes not appropriate and that I am too quiet on occasions.'*

What trainees noticed about students when watching the video:

This question produced a lot more comment than most, and most trainees had something quite specific to relate.

- *'It showed me that when I had set up an activity for pair work or table group work... some students around the room were either chatting or sitting looking confused realise just how loud my voice is and also my positioning.'*
- *'I can get a better idea about the reluctant and disruptive students.'*
- *'We could see how students interact or sometimes seem to be completely disinterested in the lesson (once, we could see... a student was playing with her mobile phone).'*
- *'It is interesting to have a more leisurely look at how they react to the teaching. You can gain more of an insight about what works and what doesn't.'*
- *'It is easier to see the whole class with the video.'*
- *'Some were less interested in some activities and couldn't be bothered to do anything. For example Duyeng with the listening activity. The students who are less confident with their speaking may not say anything or give up quickly.'*
- *'Not really, just that some students need more encouragement.'*
- *'It's been more useful to see what the students are doing and how much they are on task.'*
- *'I saw what was really going on when I was teaching – how much the students were engaged. It gave an opportunity to notice individual students rather than the whole class en masse. I was pleased to see two students were speaking together and were more involved in an activity than I had realised.'*

The impact of the films on feedback and teaching:

Almost all comments were very positive and specific about the effect of filming. A good number referred to its impact on their awareness of learners. Some valued its role in helping them to recall events not noticed or remembered.

- *'I was more aware about my class management and more alert to their body language.'*
- *'It makes it easier because by seeing it again you notice things that you miss in the actual lesson.'*
- *'By viewing and analysing others' mistakes, we learn a lot.'*
- *'When time is very limited, you do not realise that you have (made) mistakes.'*
- *'It makes it easier because everyone can see which part of the session I am referring to.'*
- *'The film is a means for me to remember what I may have forgotten to note.'*
- *'I (would) consider monitoring more.'*
- *'I will try to monitor their (students') reactions more...'*
- *'Since the video records everything – comments are less open to interpretation.'*
- *'To monitor more and encourage all students to participate..'*
- *'I find it really helpful. I think ... people who have this resource from the beginning of the course may find it easier to notice what they need to work on.'*
- *'It is so immediate that if the teaching has not gone to plan you can feel rather raw and vulnerable... it is good that things that went right are also the focus.'*
- *'Learning points for us can be looked at in more detail on film rather than just what can be noticed while the lesson is in progress.'*
- *'It is easier as less needs to be said when what happened can be replayed on the screen. It can be hard to voice (positive) criticism of colleagues on the course.'*
- *'I will try to be aware of all the students and what they are really doing...'*
- *'It allows us to give more detailed feedback, it allows the tutor to point out for us physically the points she may wish to make.'*

End-of-project recorded discussion

The September group was generally positive. Overall, particularly with the trainees who had experienced feedback without filming, there was a view that a mixture of film and non-film feedback was preferred. It was mostly valued for memory prompting, for getting a view of their teaching style and for its objectivity. At least one trainee valued the insight that actually holding the camera gave her into student behaviour. On the other hand, trainees no longer using the video were missing it as a regular part of feedback. They were used to having it to prompt discussion more spontaneously. Some trainees were very keen to take a copy home for private viewing.

In the recorded discussions of the December group, trainees expressed some considerable interest in seeing the films again, and this is being investigated through loading the film on to disc for trainees. The discussion indicated a generally positive view of the use of films in feedback. Trainees were asked if they would prefer to just take the film away for private viewing but in all cases they felt there was more value in films being part of a guided discussion. Filming was valued for the insight it gave into student behaviour and the opportunity to re-evaluate an event and see it from a different perspective. The negative views of this group centred on the amount of time taken to find different places in the films and also a sense that at times there was a focus on detail at the expense of a broader view of the lesson. The discussion reached a view that trainees would prefer to use it on an occasional rather than continuous basis. An unexpected spin-off were the positive comments that trainees made about doing the filming: several

commented positively on how it gave them an opportunity to see how students responded and were involved in the lesson.

Next steps

Films of teacher training classes provide a rich source of material for discussion in feedback. The main problem seems to be that they are over-rich and to make effective use of them in the limited time we have for feedback is a real challenge.

We have to make decisions in the immediate future about how we can most usefully focus our use of them. We see continued value in using the films in feedback, at least until the end of the current courses and possibly beyond, to:

- prompt memories of events in the lesson
- continue to foster awareness of the learner at the centre of the teaching
- explore events that were successful or not.

How we will do this while maintaining a balanced feedback within the time we have, we are still exploring.

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