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The Use of Videopapers from Modern Foreign Language Student Teachers as a Tool to Support Reflection on Practice

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ABSTRACT

Reflecting on one's practice is one of the most crucial components that should characterise an accomplished teacher. ICT has arisen important by providing teachers with tools that enable them to reflect on their practice more effectively and innovatively. This paper draws on a study investigating how the use of a multimedia tool, e.g. VideoPaper, from Modern Foreign Language student teachers may support reflection on practice. The outcomes of this study support that the processes of reading and creating a VideoPaper stimulated reflection through in-depth analysis of the teaching practices.

KEYWORDS: *Teacher education, Reflection on practice, Technology, Video-Papers*

INTRODUCTION

Reflecting on one's practice is one of the most crucial components that should characterise an accomplished teacher (Shulman and Shulman, 2004). Many teacher preparation programs have shifted their interest towards the key concept of reflection and they expect student teachers to achieve those standards that will make them capable of reflecting meaningfully upon their teaching (Hatton and Smith, 1994; Griffin, 2003; Mansvelder-Longayroux et al., 2007). However, defining, accessing and promoting reflection is not an easy accomplishment (Hatton and Smith, 1995).

Research has shown that ICT tools can enable teachers to reflect on their practice more effectively and innovatively (Carraher et al., 2000). A powerful tool that has supported teachers to develop a more clear understanding and interpretation of their practice is digital video (Sherin and Han, 2004). Technology has been advancing innovatively and has led to the integration of digital video into multimedia environments, such as VideoPapers (Nemirovsky et al., 2005). VideoPapers integrate and synchronise video, text, slides and hyperlinks in one cohesive document (Beardsley et al., 2007).

This paper draws on a study¹ investigating how the use of VideoPapers from Modern Foreign Language (MFL) student teachers can support reflection on prac-

1. This study was carried out as a part of Maria Daniil's Master dissertation.

tice. The first part provides a review of the literature on reflection, its role and how it can be fostered in teacher education. Also the importance of the implementation of video in teacher education in terms of reflection is addressed, as well as a brief overview of the potentials of VideoPapers. After outlining the methodology of the study, the main findings related to how the processes of reading and creating a VideoPaper can influence student teachers' reflection on practice are discussed.

REFLECTION, VIDEO AND TEACHER EDUCATION

Reflection is considered to be a crucial component in many teacher preparation programs (Calderhead, 1989; Korthagen, 1992; Hatton and Smith, 1995; Griffin, 2003). Dewey (1903; 1933) and Schön (1983; 1987) constituted important inspiration for the widespread interest towards the promotion of reflection in teacher education and in the teaching profession. Dewey (1933:3) defined reflection as '*turning a subject over in the mind and giving it a consecutive consideration*'. He saw reflection as an active and deliberative cognitive process, involving sequences of interrelated ideas which take account of underlying beliefs and knowledge. He also added that reflective thinking generally involves practical problems, allowing for doubt and perplexity before possible solutions are reached (Dewey, 1933).

Reflection is the component that can help teachers to gain those abilities that will define them as accomplished practitioners and that will help them to steer their own professional development (Larrivee, 2000; Shulman and Shulman, 2004; Mansvelder-Longayroux et al., 2007). Many studies have applied a variety of techniques to promote and encourage student teachers to reflect on their teaching practices and to develop reflective thinking such as: writing portfolios (Mansvelder-Longayroux et al., 2007), writing accounts about their teaching (Hatton and Smith, 1995), using critical incidents for the promotion and assessment of critical thinking (Griffin, 2003), using technology (e.g. video-recorded lessons, VideoPapers, online discussions) to elicit and encourage reflection (Romano and Schwartz, 2003; Nemirovsky et al., 2005; Beardsley et al., 2007).

Among diverse techniques used to promote reflection, it has been shown that the use of video in the form of video-recorded lessons is particularly useful (see e.g. Sherin, 2004; Sherin and Han, 2004; Romano and Schwartz, 2003). Video portrays the reality of the classroom, something that cannot be illustrated so vividly and realistically through isolated written descriptions. It has generated new opportunities for teachers, since it enables them to video-record their lessons and view their teaching after it has taken place. Therefore, they can observe their practice closer and develop better their understandings and interpretations of it. Also, considering that classroom is constantly a moving place the video gives the teacher the potential to isolate and capture puzzling and important moments that can occur in the class but might slip teacher's attention.

Even though video reveals great potential for practitioners' reflection, the thinking around a video-recorded lesson can potentially remain only verbal or in the teacher's mind. Moreover, several viewings of a video at different times can pro-

duce diverse types of reflective thinking, which teachers might not be able to remember when not keeping a written account of their thoughts. The advance of technology has enabled the integration of video into multimedia documents, such as VideoPapers (Nemirovsky et al., 2005) thus providing further potentials for reflection, by overcoming the limitations of just having an isolated video-recording.

VideoPapers

VideoPaper is a new genre of multimodal text which integrates and synchronizes text, video and images in one cohesive document (Nemirovsky et al., 2005). Published VideoPapers can be seen with a web browser (see figure 1), and thus are readily accessible by a wide audience.

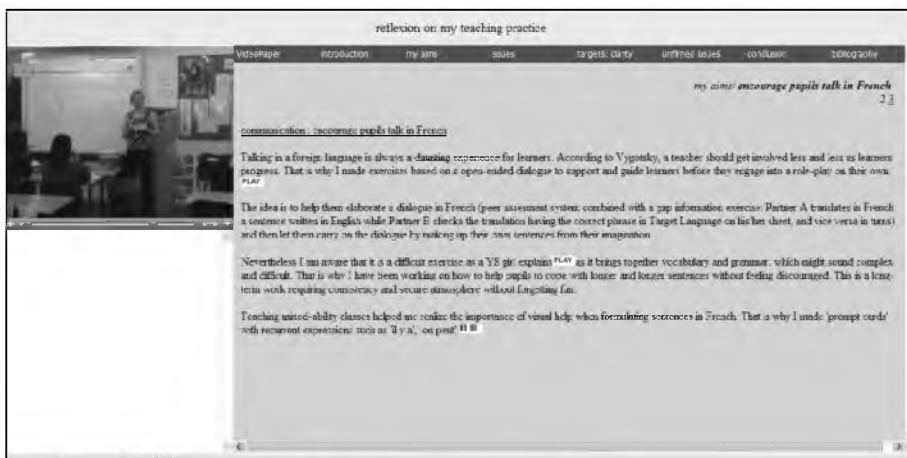


Figure 1: Example of VideoPaper

VideoPapers are created using the free software VideoPaper Builder 3.0 (<http://vpb.concord.org>). The process involves two phases. The first phase is the editing where the video footage of an event must be captured and edited into a clip that is subsequently inserted in the VideoPaper. The second phase is the actual creation, where the author writes the text and inserts the Play buttons that act as a link between text and video. Images, slides and hyperlinks can also be added.

The technology skills required to use VPB3 are simple and easy to learn, thus the particular software is user friendly and can be easily accessible from a wide audience such as teachers or student teachers.

Research around VideoPapers is still limited however it addresses the potential of the tool in supporting teachers to reflect meaningfully upon their practice (e.g. Nemirovsky et al., 2005; Beardsley et al., 2007). Nemirovsky et al., (2005) investigated the types of talk teachers can engage with when reading VideoPapers, reporting self-reflective talk as one of those types. Beardsley et al., (2007) address that developing a VideoPaper can be a valuable method for teachers to reflect on

their practice, by helping them to reconsider moments in their teaching that might otherwise escape investigation.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative small-scale case study was carried out aiming to investigate how the use of VideoPapers supports MFL student teachers to reflect on their practice, through the processes of reading and creating.

The sample of the particular case study was four volunteer MFL student teachers, two males and two females, attending the PGCE² in secondary Education program for the year 2006-2007 at the University of Bristol. Their engagement with VideoPapers was placed within the requirements of an assignment that the students had to accomplish for the PGCE course. Instead of writing a text based traditional essay, the students agreed to develop and submit a VideoPaper. The assignment asked them to reflect upon their practice in relation to their progress in subject development. The title given for the assignment was: *'Evaluate your progress in subject-knowledge over the PGCE year in both your first and second (or further) MFL. What specific actions have you taken to further your learning? By what criteria can you measure your progress? Do you think that your progress in subject knowledge has been reflected in your practice in the classroom? Can you exemplify this? What are your future targets?'*

During their placement in schools the teachers video-recorded one lesson that they wanted to edit and import in their VideoPaper. Two whole day workshops were carried out in which the students were engaged with three different tasks: a) reading VideoPapers³ created by previous MFL students b) editing the video-recorded of their own lesson and c) creating the VideoPapers, where the students used the edited clip of their own lesson and other material (slides, links) to develop their VideoPaper.

The data collected for the study were:

- interview transcripts from group and individual interviews about the processes of reading and creating a VideoPaper.
- four VideoPapers created by the students.

REFLECTING THROUGH READING AND CREATING A VIDEOPAPER: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

The analysis of the data aimed to identify elements of reflection in the different data collected. The framework for analysis was based on literature mainly drawing on Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983; 1987) and included the following elements: (a) *Self-awareness/understanding of one self's practice*, (b) *evaluation on practice* (c) *Identification of problematic issues* and (d) *Proposed solutions to*

2. The PGCE is a one year student teacher preparation program.

3. The VideoPapers the students read had been created by previous MFL teachers in response to a similar task including reflection upon their practice.

problematic issues, concerning student teacher's practice. All the interview transcripts were analysed according to the framework of reflection. The same framework was used for the analysis of the students' VideoPapers so that the findings from different sources to be cross-checked.

The outcomes of this study supported that the processes of reading and creating a VideoPaper were influential for the students' reflection. The reading phase helped the students to become stimulated and start thinking about their own teaching and the problems they face, while the creating phase helped them to observe their teaching closely and provide an analysis of it, revealing issues of reflection. All the students showed features of reflection, however one of the four students did not reveal characteristic (d) which was about proposing solutions concerning problems associated to practice. As it came up from the interviews and the VideoPapers the students could more easily identify and describe problematic issues that they were facing in their teaching, instead of explaining why those problems occurred and try giving potential solutions.

Reading a VideoPaper

The students engaged with the reading of the VideoPapers in a way that was different from interacting with text-based papers or stand alone videos. They were moving back and forth from the text to the video-clip and vice versa, using the play buttons. The students addressed that this potential of VideoPaper helped them to better understand what was illustrated in the VideoPaper by the authors (previous student teachers). This motivated them to start thinking about their own practice, by identifying the problems that the other teachers were facing and by relating them with their own practice. Apart from identifying problems associated to teaching, Dewey (1933) and Schon (1987) argue that being critical and being able to evaluate teaching is important in terms of reflection. The students were really critical about what they saw in other people's VideoPapers and they tended to evaluate the teacher's practice, so revealing their perspectives about some problematic issues and that they had already started thinking about how they would handle them. For example:

Nick: *The only target language I actually heard (in the VideoPaper's clip) was from a French native speaker (the teacher that created the VideoPaper was French), who was teaching the class. I was going back to, in terms that it was nothing there from the actual pupils*

The reading of VideoPapers helped the students to reach all the elements (a, b c and d) of reflection. However, the reading was only the beginning of the students' reflection, as the actual creation of their VideoPaper which included the editing of the film and then its incorporation into the VideoPaper, in relation to the writing of the commentary and the import of other elements, was the phase in which most of the students' reflection occurred.

Creating a VideoPaper

The process of the creation of the VideoPaper was found to be the most impor-

tant and beneficial in terms of students' reflection upon their practice. Through the editing phase, the students were exposed to the video, against their own selves and they closely observed their practice. They had to edit their original video and reduce it to a 5-7 minutes clip to be imported in the VideoPaper, something that forced them to think deeply about which moments were more significant and why. By watching themselves in action and editing their clips, they became more capable of identifying problematic issues about their own practice (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1987), worthy of deeper analysis. It was a chance for them to realise issues which had never crossed their minds even though they became so obvious in the video. Consequently, for all the students the editing phase was revealing as well as enriching in terms of their self-reflection. As a part of the development of the VideoPaper it helped them to reconsider moments in their teaching that could otherwise escape investigation (Beardsley et al., 2007). As some of them commented:

Nick: *...we have habits, particularly develop habits which you are not conscious of when you are in the classroom...And it was very useful to actually video my self because I've realised that there were certain things, certain words, I've used over and over again and there were certain habitual pieces of body language which I already use...and again I am not conscious of..I wasn't conscious of it before but I am conscious of it now and I will change my habit within the classroom*

John: *...you can equally just watch it (meaning the video-recorded lesson) and not really reflect very much....when you're doing the editing process it does force you to, particularly when you are thinking what I am going to say about this bit of video...how is it going to tie to what I am...it does force you to be more analytical perhaps*

The creation phase helped the students to engage themselves with an analytical process. They tried to combine the elements of their VideoPaper in a meaningful way aimed to provide an illustration of their practice and their problematic matters, while at the same time they provided a deeper analysis of these issues by evaluating their practice and coming up with thoughtful discussion and solutions. During the creation phase reflection was cultivated even further since more honest thinking and deliberate choices about how to analyse their practice took place. The students also addressed the importance of the interrelation between the elements of the VideoPaper, as something that stimulated more thinking and reflection during the creation. For example:

Olivia: *...writing a text, according to...in relation to the video, to do that you have to think more I think, analyse more emm... or just a video, ok you choose what you want to show but it's different and...The VideoPaper is one step further*

John: *... just the combination of having to edit your thoughts into a text and put that to the video...that does create an analytical process...It*

allows the chance to think as well and come up with some ideas perhaps emm...whereas if you just watch the video and scribble some stuff down... you might not, I don't know...

The combination of the different elements and their interrelation helped the students to give their text a life. All the discussion they built around their practice was more explicit and realistic, in terms of developing awareness of their practice, identifying their problems, evaluating them and coming up with possible solutions. The students' thoughts were clearly corroborated by the VideoPapers themselves, which contained analytical elements in the commentary to the clip. Therefore, during the creation of their VideoPapers they managed to reach all the elements (a), (b), (c) and (d) of reflection.

FINAL REMARKS

Reflection on practice is something that should always concern either professional teachers or neophytes that are trying to gain through a teachers' preparation program those qualities that will enable them to enter the arena of teaching and be accomplished professionals. However, fostering and promoting reflection it is not about providing teachers with theory about reflection, expecting them to then apply it. Hatton and Smith (1995) made an interesting remark about the complexity of reflection as far as concerns its definition and its promotion, by pointing out that its definition and how it can be fostered are problematic issues.

As derived from this study 'reflection is there', students do know about its importance and are concerned about how to implement it. What VideoPapers did was to foster reflection and make it more concrete. The VideoPaper brings in the reality of the classroom, in relation to other techniques the teachers were traditionally used to (e.g. writing an essay) and this is a step further in terms of reflection. Even if it is always difficult for every practitioner to come face to face with the reality of their own practice, this is probably the best way to observe yourself closely and reveal your strengths and weaknesses sincerely. This potential arises through the creation of the VideoPaper due to the powerful existence of the video, which however does not operate in isolation but is related and synchronised with other elements. In contrast, if a teacher keeps a video-recording isolated just for himself even if with some thinking around it, the reflection occurring would not be crystallized into permanent record as it is in the VideoPaper.

Research literature around VideoPapers is still limited in order to give us the confidence to talk about a tool that secures ideal outcomes in terms of reflection on practice, however its potential seems really promising. An asset concerning this tool is that it is easily accessible from practitioners, and therefore it could possibly constitute a tool around which teachers can collaborate and share important teaching moments and thoughts concerning their practice. We intend to carry out further research exploring those aspects and investigating in particular how the multi-modal aspects of VideoPapers afford teachers' reflection.

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