

# Using Flip Cameras To Activate Reflection And Collaboration On Initial Teacher Training Diploma In Teaching In The Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS) Courses

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## Abstract

This article seeks to address some of the problems Teacher Educators have in helping develop Initial Teacher Training (ITT) candidates' reflective practice. In tandem with investigating ways to develop reflection, the article considers how Information Learning Technology (ILT), and video in particular, can be used in ITT to help develop candidates' ILT abilities as well as helping to provide a practical focus for developmental reflection. We investigate how Flip cameras can be integrated into candidates' Learning Development Journals (LDJs) in the first year of a part-time, two-year Certificate in Education (Cert Ed), Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), or Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS) course as a basis for reflective development and to assist peer support and collaboration. With a focus on developing critical reflection, we go on to evaluate the effect of Flip cameras, as integrated into our Year 1 programme.

## Key words

Teacher Training; Flip Camera; Digital; Video; Reflection; Reflective Journals.

## Introduction

Like many involved in Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in the Lifelong Learning Sector (LLS), the DTLLS course team at Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College (EHWLC) constantly review the course in order to ensure we deliver the most effective, interesting and relevant course we can, based on the time and resources available. Through formal reviews within the college and with our accrediting body (the University of Westminster) and informal team discussions, we identified a need to encourage Course Participants (CPs) to engage more fully in reflective practice in relation to their teaching practice. Further to this, because the course is a generic DTLLS with CPs coming from a range of subjects as diverse as law and carpentry, there was also a need to help CPs gain an understanding of their peers' teaching contexts so that their comments made in input could be more easily related by peers to their particular teaching environments and situations; comments which we hoped would help inform CPs' own reflective practice.

In terms of technology, individuals working in colleges and universities utilise new technologies or opportunities according to their own degree of enthusiasm and ability. This is very often irrespective of the enthusiasm and investment shown at an institutional level (Cook et al, 2006: pp. 49-50). Nevertheless, a stage is reached with some key technologies where their use is almost unavoidable. For example, the internet as a research tool is an accepted part of the range of resources available to students and teachers. Similarly, Interactive Whiteboards (IWBs) were resisted in some institutions but are now ubiquitous in the compulsory sector, if not the post-compulsory sector (Kitchen et al, 2007: p. 6). The use of video portals such as YouTube and the availability of mobile digital video devices means that, whilst by no means ubiquitous, video technology is more accessible, easier to store, easier to access and much easier to edit.

Although the most common impediments to using ILT continue to be '*a lack of time, insufficient infrastructure and a lack of departmental and institutional support*' (NLN, 2002: p. 8), the ethos within this institution's Teacher Education team embraces the idea that we have a responsibility to model as many teaching and learning approaches as possible. We were also keen to use tools that had relatively low level 'entry points' for all trainees but which had the capacity to extend skills and their ability to apply these skills in their own curriculum areas. It should be noted that we were also aware of research suggesting that pre-service teachers must never become too distracted by new technologies as this would impede the reflective practice they were interested in developing (Schoffner, 2009).

As well as the desire for general integration of technology in our ITT courses there was also the belief in the importance of encouraging reflection, and exploiting improved digital media technology. Voice (podcast) and video (vodcast) recordings enable deeper, more naturalistic and fluent reflection which can then be shared and discussed (Chan and Lee, 2005). Student performances (such as microteaching sessions or when teaching) can be videoed and peer reviewed more systematically and by a wider audience (Teaching Expertise, 2007). Wright (cited in Spector et al, 2010: p. 177) points out that the use of video as anything more than an instructional tool is a recent phenomenon despite its existence for more than 50 years. He argues that, used properly, it can be an effective tool to promote reflective practice and significantly improve teacher performance. Heintz et al (2010) describe how the use of video and other interactive web technologies transformed their own and their trainees' practice in terms of critical engagement with practical teaching as well as peer review and discussion. They were surprised to discover that the technological emphases actually pushed trainees to seek more face to face discussion opportunities once the videos became available.

Vodcasts and podcasts can also be used to reinforce or supplement material delivered face to face and, in many ways, reflect the rationale behind Open University radio and television broadcasts of the 1970s and 1980s which have since been largely replaced with digital media. In other words, the pedagogy is much the same but the media are different. Current technologies allow for relatively easy editing, commentary, interactive opportunities and recording cues. All these mean that the benefits to trainee teachers described above are further enhanced if the teacher trainers are equipped with these skills (Brunvand, 2010).

Being aware of this, the importance of attending to the need for a better awareness of each other's teaching contexts and the desire to help develop a more active approach to reflective practice, we thought we could use more video footage of teachers' own classroom practice as part of the CPs' reflective journals. Whilst there was already one assignment in each year of the part-time, two-year course which required CPs to video, record and comment upon their lessons, this did not come until later in the course and we were keen to introduce the notion of reflective practice on CPs' teaching from the very start of the course. Added to this was the problem of equipment. Video cameras are expensive and our department only had four which, while workable, were cumbersome and impossible to edit without specialist software. What was needed was a collection of small, cheap yet robust, handheld video cameras that were easy to use and which produced videos in a way that could be easily edited.

### **Description of the tool**

Following a mobile technology grant, 15 Flip Ultra handheld video cameras were made available to our team. There was no brief with the issuing of the cameras, only that we should use them to promote mobile learning. As well as describing the cameras as being

able to record about 120 minutes of high quality video, the Flip website (2011) promoted easy handheld recording, and free downloadable software; software that would enable teachers to edit videos into manageable chunks for sharing and assignment submission. With the addition of a small tripod to stabilise the camera and the promise of being a 'powerhouse of memory' from the Flip website, we started to adjust our Year 1 DTLLS course tasks so that they incorporated the use of this new learning technology.

### **Teaching and Learning Strategy employed**

The Flip video cameras were used with Year 1 CPs on the part-time two-year generic DTLLS programme run as a franchise agreement at EHWLC through the University of Westminster. The Flip cameras provided the foundation for CPs' Learner Development Journals (LDJs), which themselves were linked to candidates' Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), ensuring use at the very beginning of the course. The LDJs record CPs' teaching practice self-evaluations throughout the year and show the journey they have travelled on, taking them from the beginning to the end of the academic year. They comprise five stages, each stage reviewed with the CP's personal tutor. Stage 0 is a preparatory meeting with the tutor to focus on actions for the first observation. Stages 1 to 4 focus on the four teaching observations throughout the year. By conflating the ILP document and self-evaluations, it was hoped that the journey of developing practice could be charted in one relatively simple document which would also provide a structure for developing candidates' reflective practice through prompts in the different stages.

To provide a focus for the first meeting (Stage 0), in the first two weeks of the course candidates had to record 15 to 20 minutes of their teaching practice and identify strengths and weaknesses from the video. Students practised using the cameras when they were issued to them during the course induction. The videos were linked to initial Planning and Enabling Learning (PEL) input sessions on introductory methods of reflection (Kolb and Fry, 1975; Gibbs, 1989), enabling CPs to apply theories of reflection to actual practice by sharing the short videos with each other as part of input. This enabled CPs to see the different teaching contexts their peers work in, helping raise awareness of different learning situations and helping put peers' comments, during input, in context.

### **Outcome and impact on learning and learners**

Through structured one-to-ones, whole-group plenary discussions and informal observation by the course team, the following outcomes relating to the use of Flip video cameras to help with reflection were recorded:

- A direct link was made between input (PEL sessions on reflective practice), teaching practice and CPs' LDJs, helping embed theory in teaching and practice with course assignments.
- There was a practical focus for the first meeting with the course tutors (LDJ Stage 0) which also led to a focus on the first observation, giving CPs an area to concentrate on and tutors an area to lead off from in verbal feedback for the first observation.
- CPs were put at ease more in their first assessed observation as, in addition to input guidance, it gave them an indication of the things tutors would look for in their first observation.
- It created collaborative bonds within the cohort as sharing videos from the outset of the course drew CPs together, helping them acknowledge each other's skills and different teaching contexts.
- The videos created an easy-access basis for reflection that CPs could refer back to when reviewing theory on reflective practice.

## Evaluation and recommendations

As indicated in the outcomes section above, based on a qualitative evaluation derived from the trainers' extensive experience working with ITT trainees rather than evaluation based on fixed and/or quantitative criteria, the use of Flip cameras was considered successful in terms of ease of use and in prompting reflection and collaboration. An unexpected benefit was that CPs seemed quite willing to share their videos beyond their groups, giving the cohort a sense of belonging to each other and respect for each other's working environments, something that has been difficult to achieve with previous cohorts owing to the diverse nature of the subjects being taught by the CPs and something which suggests opportunities for raising learners' awareness of wider professional practice in the sector. Having devised new self-evaluation documents which incorporate such cameras, we will repeat the process of using them to link input, teaching and assignments (the LDJ) next year. The main problems encountered with the use of the cameras were as follows:

- The cameras deplete AA batteries quite quickly and if the cameras remain on for a sustained period of time, the batteries need to be replaced. Guidance should be given on only having the camera switched on for recording and immediate playback in order to conserve batteries, or we should investigate the possibility of issuing the cameras with rechargeable batteries and a charger to mitigate the power supply problem.
- The cameras by themselves are unstable without a tripod. Cameras should be issued with small 'pocket' tripods to ensure stability during recording.
- We advised CPs that they should focus the camera on themselves during their 15 to 20 minutes of teaching. However, learners will inevitably get in shot and it is important that procedures need to be agreed with learners and the host institution about recording video images of learners for educational purposes.
- The LDJs were Microsoft Word documents which were emailed to and from tutors. Because of edits, re-writes and alternative evaluations submitted by candidates, several versions of the same document came into existence, leading to confusion between both tutor and candidate about which document had been completed and marked. By adapting the Word document into a candidate blog that the tutor could comment in, it is hoped that the blog-journal would be a better reflection of the candidates' journeys and avoid the problem of there being multiple electronic versions of the same document. There would also be the potential of making the journals public, with candidate consent, enabling a greater audience than simply their tutor to see their reflections (Chan and Ridgway, 2005), possibly helping focus the candidates' comments, raising their level of developmental reflection.
- More focused guidance linked to specific models of reflection being introduced to the CPs should be included in the LDJ guidance and in input. This would help candidates prepare in advance and allow for greater dialogic development (Frijters et al, 2006) in the session when the videos were being shared.
- The collegial aspect within the cohort could be extended in the second year by drawing direct links with the activity to CPD and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), helping candidates create a framework for their own professional development as well as helping them explore different models of CPD, one of the requirements in the Year 2 programme.

Overall, both the course team and the CPs were impressed with the ease of use and robust nature of the cameras and also pleased with the way they helped facilitate a blended approach to input and course assignments. Additionally, the integration with the LDJs helped provide CPs with an initial focus for reflection; reflection that could be built

upon for the rest of the year in LDJs, further videos of their teaching practice and observations of experienced teachers.

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