**Watching Me, Watching You, Aha!**

**Developing reflection and practice through the use of video**

**Author:** Adrian Copping

Adrian Copping

University of Cumbria

Bowerham Road

Lancaster LA1 3JD

Adrian.Copping@cumbria.ac.uk

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**Abstract**

In Initial Teacher Education, the design of learning outcomes, modules and programmes have the potential to shape the philosophies and approaches of prospective teachers. Research into effective teaching has largely been subject-centred with strong subject knowledge emerging as central to effectiveness. However, subject knowledge has often been defined as predominantly curriculum content. In this paper I explore how student teachers develop their skills of reflection, criticality and enquiry: skills commensurate with being a teacher, with the aim of improving their practice in the primary classroom. Participants use video recordings of their lessons and engage in subsequent focus group discussion. Through this I contend that incidental learning can lead to a better quality of reflection and change of practice more so than using the video recording as a means of reinforcing their own thoughts or a school-based mentor's comments. I also contend that the process of reflecting on one's own teaching by seeing it through the eyes of the recipients helps realise the classroom reality with a greater depth of clarity. Finally I contend that throughout this process the resultant learning is fundamental to a student teacher's development.

**Key words**

Reflection, subject knowledge, incidental, reinforcement, teacher development



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## Introduction

### *The importance of reflection*

A reflective approach to teaching whereby practitioners 'think about their practice in order to improve' (Hatton and Smith 1995) has long been widely acknowledged as an approach commensurate with effective teaching. Pollard and Tann's 'Reflective Teaching in the Primary School' (1987) builds on Schön's (1983) 'reflection on action' and 'reflection in action' and is periodically updated to accommodate curriculum and assessment changes. They suggest that there is more to teaching than delivering the curriculum or getting the content across. Pollard and Tann argue that there is a close relationship between competence at teaching the curriculum and the reflection process that a teacher goes through in order to maintain and develop that competence. Whilst not explicitly exploring reflection as a tangible outcome for initial teacher education, Pollard and Tann do emphasise the significance of the reflective process in its contribution to effective teaching. Yet the increased prevalence of standardised attainment testing, their high stakes nature, outcomes-based assessment and the public reporting of results have arguably resulted in a preoccupation with student teachers' subject knowledge. Therefore an important question arises for initial teacher educators: How can the design of programmes and modules facilitate the development of reflection and provide a high level of subject knowledge to meet the demands of the primary curriculum? Kim and Hannafin (2008) suggest that learning in context, is where knowledge is best developed. They state that learning in a particular situation is not just about conceptual understanding but also about the beliefs and values of the community within which that knowledge is being learned. This allows the student to understand, for example, how the rhetoric of a behaviour management strategy needs to be applied to the reality of a situation. One of the underlying questions my research seeks to explore is: How can teacher educators best facilitate the complex process of helping students apply the rhetoric of a generic theory or de-contextualised idea to a real school context? I want to suggest that creating space for them to reflect, and helping them develop the skills of reflection can provide this opportunity. Watts and Lawson (2008) use a meta-

analysis evaluation activity to develop this process. They draw on the work of Ward and McCotter (2004) who state that 'in order for reflection to be evaluated, we must overtly connect the qualities of reflection to the process of teaching and learning' (2004, P.256).

Ward and McCotter (2004) go on to suggest that reflection should be a visible outcome for student teachers. Defining reflection, they draw on the work of Hatton and Smith (1995) who state that it is deliberate thinking about what you do in order to bring about improving it. Student teachers, grappling with planning, evaluating, teaching and assessing for the first time, as well as being observed in a class with whom they have barely built up a relationship, can mean that deliberate thinking about learning and teaching becomes less of a priority. Initial Teacher Education also has to demonstrate high standards: effectiveness is measured by a percentage of students achieving numerical grades, apportioned by the judgements of trained mentors. Ward and McCotter (2004) ask whether habits of reflection and questioning can survive under these conditions. Within the Reflection Rubric they have created, four levels of reflection are suggested, drawing on terms used in other reflection literature (Hatton and Smith 1995, Schön 1983). They begin with a routine level of reflection, where analysis of practice is done because it is expected, moving through to a technical level: where a problem is identified and addressed and then questions stop being asked. A dialogic level is next, where a synthesis of insights about learning and teaching are gathered and shared, leading to a transformative level of reflection, where the enquiry is more long term and leads to a change in perspective and fundamental change of practice.

### *Challenging definitions of reflection*

I want to suggest that reflection should be a social process. Encouraging student teachers to ask questions and seek others' perspectives through dialogue can connect if not embed reflection in the process of teaching and learning. Reflection has been defined and interpreted in a variety of ways. Loughran (2006) suggests that there must be a 'problem' to reflect about. His

use of the word ‘problem’ however is in the sense that knowledge, learning and teaching is essentially a very problematic business where there is complexity and uncertainty. He also suggests that in order to reflect, a situation needs to be able to be seen from different perspectives. As Schön (1983) states, the situation needs to be ‘framed and then reframed’. In so doing, teachers are able to become more rounded in their reflections in that they may in fact be able to see their teaching from the learner’s viewpoint. Eraut (1994) also takes up the theme of reflection being triggered by something problematic. He states that reflection must be a ‘deliberative process’ (1994, P.156) in order for reflection to be positive and a means by which knowledge and practice can be extended and developed. This arises from the work of Dewey (1933) who states that;

> ‘The function of reflective thought is, therefore, to transform a situation in which there is experienced obscurity... conflict… disturbance... into a situation that is clear, coherent, settled, harmonious’ (1933, p.100).

These definitions could suggest that reflection is a single act and that once the ‘problem’ or ‘problematic incident’ is once again harmonious, then it is either time to turn one’s attention to the next problem. I want to suggest that whilst the function of reflection clearly is as Dewey suggests, the level of engagement with reflection is more continuous and is engaged with on different levels. Twiselton (2006) developed a continuum of teacher effectiveness in relation to subject knowledge, identifying three stages that student teachers pass through: Task Manager, Curriculum Deliverer, Concept/skill builder. I want to suggest that teacher effectiveness in reflection has a similar process. Loughran (2006) does concede that there is a continuum of reflective practice. Eraut (1994) talks about a reflective process and the global ‘reflective thought’. Building on this conceptualisation, Ward and McCotter (2004), as outlined earlier, map out the continuous process of reflection. Rich and Hannafin (2008) equate enquiry with Hatton and Smith’s (1995) definition of reflection. They state that enquiry is a systematic research of one’s practice, which one could argue reflection does not need to be. Their

research begins with a trigger, perhaps a 'perplexity' (Dewey 1933, P.12) for them and then by giving students 'lenses', for example assessment, to analyse their video evidence of themselves teaching. This study is based on Dewey's (1933) premise that something must trigger off the thought process and therefore bring conscious thought to the process of your mind. Whilst I agree with this I want to challenge the idea that this must happen prior to the video evidence taking place and the inference that there needs to be a pre-determined focus for meaningful enquiry to occur.

**Methodology and Data Collection**

My research questions for the first iteration of data collection were: how did the participants used the video opportunity to aid reflection, what areas of practice did they focus on and did the video usage prompt a better quality of reflection? My question for iteration 2 emerged from this: does incidental learning or reinforcement of learning promote a better quality of reflection? The research is qualitative. My interest was reflection as a social practice and therefore data generated not just from individual reflections on their teaching but also on what they heard from others. The data collected then emanates from the focus group discussion in which the participants engaged, arising from sharing their reflections on their video evidence. It was anticipated that the dialogue the participants engaged in through sharing video evidence and discussion would enrich the quality of reflection taking it through routine and technical and into dialogic and transformative (Ward and McCotter, 2004), leading to new questions and enquiry into pedagogy and practice. This paper describes the mapping of the students discussion onto Ward and McCotter's rubric and exploring the bringing together of critical observation, questioning and sharing to develop reflection and therefore practice.

The participants were self-selected groups of 6 from 2008/9 and 5 2009/10 cohorts of 125 full time primary PGCE students undertaking their first blocked teaching practice. They were in different primary schools across Lancashire and Cumbria for the placement and teaching different year groups. Ethical considerations for this enquiry were considerable: the small size of sample

arose from participants' option to withdraw at any point. The enquiry began with 20 from each cohort and 6 from one and five from the other carried it through. Agreement to participation was secured from placement schools, subject to agreed arrangements for storage of video data and agreement of parents of children in the classes. As a result of this, it was agreed that the video camera would be set in one position in each classroom and not moved around so that the focus would be on the participant. Children whose parents were unwilling to take part could be seated out of shot. The first stage of the enquiry was to present the participants with digital video equipment and invite them to video themselves teach. I decided to remove any parameters to the enquiry as I was particularly interested in how they chose to use the equipment and therefore what the effect was on their process of reflection. One of the precise aims of this piece of research was to explore whether my participants imposed any structures on themselves or defined any 'lenses' (Rich and Hannafin, 2008) through which to observe their own teaching. After the placement had been completed, the participants came together in a focus group having watched their teaching and shared their reflections and thoughts. The focus group discussion was framed around two prompts: what did you notice about your teaching and how did you use the video equipment to support those reflections? I was not part of this discussion as I did not want to influence any discussion with my own views and thoughts on both the use of the video equipment and on their teaching. I felt it was important, ethically, to remove any conscious or even subconscious notion that I was making judgements about their practice. Punch (2009) identifies the issue of honesty and trust and the relationship that a researcher has with their participants. As cohort leader of the primary PGCE course and so in a perceived position of authority I did not want this to become an issue that would bias the research in any way. These discussions within which each participant shared what for them were significant sections of video and shared their reflections were audio taped. Data from these discussions was analysed using Wellington's 'General Stages in making sense of Qualitative data' (2000, p.141) and was then mapped using Ward and McCotter's (2004) Reflection rubric. An open coding system was used to select and categorise data from focus group transcripts

and then a process of placing and replacing these data extracts upon the rubric took place**.** This data was collected in November 2008 and the same process was followed with a group of the following year's PGCE students in November 2009. A theme emerging from the data in 2008 was that those students who chose to use the video opportunity for incidental learning appeared to travel further along Ward and McCotter's rubric, certainly engaging in 'dialogic' reflection. Those who used the video opportunity as a means of supporting comments made by their school-based mentors appeared to stop reflecting on the issues raised when the evidence was corroborated. My participants in 2009 were charged with using the video opportunity to reflect on their practice without any prior considerations as to what they would be looking for and in so doing to learn incidentally when reviewing the lesson. The aim for this was to consider whether incidental learning can lead to 'transformative' reflection or just creates a superficial thought process that lacks clarity.

**Findings and Discussion**

In the first section below the findings from the participants in 2008-9 will be discussed using the categories and definitions of reflection from Ward and McCotter's reflection rubric (2004) as a framework. In the second section, I will share how an emerging theme, the notion of 'incidental learning' against 'reinforcement of learning' was taken forward with the 2009-10 participants.

**The use of video as a reinforcement of previous learning**

Some of the participants chose to use the video to support the comments of their school-based mentors, so they could see the feedback for themselves and internalise it. Although at this early stage in development the thought was more to anxiety levels whilst being observed, this use of the video provided the lens of the mentor's feedback with which to view the lesson.

> *4: 'having a video recording going on now puts you under a certain amount of pressure…'*
>
> *1: 'I made a conscious effort to do my videoing whilst I was being*

*Observed' (Participants 1 and 4 from 1st iteration of data collection).*

This idea of a lens was then explored later on by a participant who had used it in a different context;

1: *'It's always been as a reinforcement of a point, spot an area you're weak on, video that specific area…. I'm really concerned about this point in my lesson, can you video it… so you know what you're looking for?' (Participant 1from 1st iteration of data collection).*

Schön (1983) suggests that a situation needs to be framed and reframed in order for successful reflection to take place. The classroom situations shared by the participants were framed in terms of mentor comments. Arguably they were then reframed by the participants as often they recognised the reality of what had actually gone on in the classroom. This reframing did not always occur through a feedback trigger or lens but through seeing their teaching as the pupils saw it or as an observer would see it. Often, as befits their early stage of teacher development, behaviour and noise level were their main concern.

2: *'…the general dynamic of the room. It was very different to how I perceived it...'*

4: *'what did you think it was?'*

2: *'…I thought there was a lot more noise, a lot more pushing. Watching it back, I mean, they're not that bad' (Participants 2 and 4 from 1st iteration of data collection).*

Later on in the discussion;

5: *'Was that something you were aware of yourself, keeping them all on the carpet?'*

2: *'Not at the time'*

5: *'If so, then that would be a learning point from the video'*

2: *'I wasn't aware just how long I'd kept them on the carpet…'*

*(Participants 2 and 5 from 1st iteration of data collection).*

**The use of video to realise the reality of the teaching experience**

This realisation of reality was an important learning point for a number of the participants. However, whilst containing elements of what Ward and McCotter (2004) define as 'Dialogic reflection', namely discussion and consideration of the views of others, there is no real focus on the process of learning, but a lot of focus on the product such as keeping children quiet. There are also a lot of concerns about themselves and their own identity as teachers. At this early stage in development this is perhaps no surprise.

*6: 'When I watched it back I saw lots of idiosyncrasies that I would want to…ease out…'*

*2: 'What did you get out of it?'*

*1: 'This is me describing where my lesson fell down… I didn't describe exactly what I wanted them to do…' (Participants 1, 2 and 6 from 1st iteration of data collection).*

These concerns categorised using Ward and McCotter's rubric (2004) would fit into a routine or technical level of reflection, where the response to a situation is self-centred or concerning specific tasks. Nowhere in the discussion did any of the participants make links between areas of their teaching either through discussion or through observing others' teaching. Whilst they were clearly keen to improve their practice, which is an important outcome, it has to be argued at what level that improvement would take place.

**The use of video as a tool for incidental learning**

A more effective reframing of situations began when two of the participants used the video equipment differently; rather than consolidating mentor comments, they chose to use it to learn incidentally from their video recordings. Although initially, the incident is concerned with a fairly routine, technical issue, there is not the sense of fixing the problem but more of a sense of offering a reflection for discussion;

4: *'…when I watched it back I was so shocked at the speed I was going, the amount I was clicking my pen and the amount I cut across what the kids said'.*

5: *'…that's why I think it can be very valuable, you can always find something when watching yourself.'*

4: *'It's that incidental learning for m' (Participants 4 and 5 from 1st iteration of data collection).*

This more dialogic enquiry was further exemplified as one of the participants used firstly an incidental learning approach with the equipment but then offered their own very negative reflections on the lesson for discussion, inviting fellow participants to challenge and debate her views. This participant was keen to continue asking questions about her practice after it seemed the initial problem was dealt with

5: *'... that was the bit I absolutely hated... Getting them quiet at the beginning... a lot of noise in the corridor. The giving out of whiteboard and pens I will never do it like that again…'*

2: *'Are there any reasons for that?'*

5: *'because it was chaos. It took far too long… I can't be doing with it basically'.*

3: *'Could you be in amongst the children handing them out?*

5: *designated two people….*

3: *'That's interesting, that approach worked for me'*

5: *'But did it take far too long?' (Participants 2, 3 and 5 from 1st iteration of data collection).*

This discussion continued, sharing experiences of a very routine piece of classroom management, but the interesting point is the process of enquiry. The original question around the use of whiteboards, led not to a solution of the perfect way to manage this resource but to further questions around timings and general management of resources and how this links to maximising or minimising disruption to the lesson. So the initial very routine question led to something much more thought provoking and ongoing. Ward

and McCotter (2004) comment that 'another's perspective was the driving force behind consideration of ideas…. The situated nature of Inquiry often motivates ongoing questions' (2004, P.253).

**Incidental learning facilitating 'dialogic' reflection**

Therefore the main question that emerged from this first iteration of data collection was whether 'incidental learning' leads to a better quality of reflection than 'reinforcement of learning'. The process of enquiry however showed significant signs of developing beyond a routine level of reflection. Therefore for the second iteration of data, the participants were asked to video themselves teaching a lesson other than one they were being observed in and were asked as far as possible to have no preconceptions of what they wanted to look for or consolidate from other feedback.

Interestingly, the concerns the participants had were commensurate with their level of development. Their concerns were clearly routine and technical: themselves as teacher, how they looked and carried themselves in the role, behaviour and resource management and whether the children were too noisy. However, very differently to the first iteration, many of the participants offered more open points for discussion and less direct questions to their peers in the focus group discussion. For example, one participant didn't offer her own views on the issue of noise level until others had commented;

*1: 'These two tables really struggled with the concept of writing it all themselves'*

*4: 'They're all on task though, they're all motivated'*

*1: 'There's the class teacher and two TAs… [teaching assistants]*

*4: "The children seem engaged don't they?'*

*1: 'It's interesting you say that, because that's one of the things I thought fell apart' (Participants 1and 4 from 2nd iteration of data collection).*

This prompted further questioning and led to a discussion about whether classroom noise was appropriate and the many contexts where it could be beneficial. Again, there was no thought of a quick fix answer and reflection

here was clearly not about turning a problem into something harmonious, but was clearly a situation that prompted further exploration. In fact for this participant (2) the dialogue arising from the video changed his perspective of his own classroom presence. Similarly to participant 1 he did not offer his own views until others had commented;

> *4: 'You look very confident'.*
>
> *3: 'Yeah, I thought good presence. Like you're meant to be there'.*
>
> *2: 'That's weird because one of the things I got picked up for in the last week was not looking like I'm in control' (Participants 2, 3 and 4 from 2nd iteration of data collection).*

This reframing of the situation had a powerful effect on him and the rest of the group as this proved to be a big turning point in the discussion. This prompted a lot of further questions around expectations placed on student teachers and began to support the linking of issues and experiences.

**'Dialogic reflection' needs additional support for students to operate effectively**

However one of the challenges for some of these participants proved to be the open consideration of others' perspectives. When there was a challenge, it was often met with some defensiveness, which discouraged any meaningful dialogue;

> *3: '…I wonder if you realise how much you question them…Quite often when you pose that question, they don't respond or they might respond jokingly. I wonder if you realised'.*
>
> *1: 'My style of teaching is not to be certain of anything…' (Participants 1and 3 from 2nd iteration of data collection).*

This quite dogmatic response was the beginning of a lengthy and emphatic justification of this approach, no consideration was given to the challenge and neither did it lead to any further discussion of what could have been a very interesting area to discuss. As a result participant 3 reverted to praise. Hatton and Smith (1995) state that support needs to be given to those engaging in reflective dialogue; 'Responses on the part of the students might include feelings of vulnerability which follow from exposing one's beliefs to others'

(1995, P.37).They do go on to suggest this could be mitigated against by collaborative approaches, but the example from my participants show that when one's approaches are challenged, work needs to be done to support a dialogic response and developing the relationship required to facilitate it.

**Conclusion and implications**

The work reported above does begin to suggest that a more incidental approach to using video for reflection on practice can lead to a more dialogic process of reflection. A variety of definitions of reflection have been drawn on to support this, including Dewey's (1933) notion of turning the problematic into the harmonious and Ward and McCotter's (2004) Reflection rubric. It is apparent that the concerns of the students were commensurate with their level of development as primary teachers. All participants took part in the video recording during their first school placement on a one year primary PGCE course. It was therefore interesting to note that data collected from both first and second iterations was concerned with behaviour management, noise level and their identity as teachers. Whilst concerns about practice did not depend on whether an incidental or reinforcement approach to the videoing was used, the process of enquiry did contain some significant differences. Analysing the data showed that the participants who used a more incidental approach, particularly in the second iteration of data moved into what Ward and McCotter (2004) would term dialogic reflection. They were able to continue to ask questions beyond the original issue and continue reflecting after the original issue was discussed and were not so much looking for a problem to be solved but were keen to extend the dialogue beyond the original point for discussion.

However, there were also some significant themes that emerged from the second iteration that did impact on the participant's ability to fully engage in the reflective process. The first was the participant's lack of confidence. Throughout the discussion some of the participants were asking for reassurance about their practice and discussion would centre around praising them for their performance in the video where it may not have been helpful in

terms of learning to do that. This lack of confidence, it could be argued, stems from a lack of experience and knowledge, therefore the subsequent discussion was informed only by the participant's own limited experience rather than reading and tacit knowledge that comes from significant experience of primary teaching. Another important emerging theme was that of trust and relationship. The incident promoting the defensive response certainly suggests a lack of security in themselves, the other participants, the situation, or any combination of all three. Hatton and Smith (1995) state that in order to foster effective reflection 'what is needed is time and opportunity for development, so that the required essential ...metacognitive skills can be acquired' (1995, p.37). I would argue that whilst time is needed for the skills to be developed, time is also needed for a shared ethos and understanding to be created and evolve, a community of improving practice to be created and within that safety to share, discuss and challenge because the over-riding aim is to improve practice not to demean and compare. Therefore in order for this to develop and for reflection on practice through the framing and reframing of situations to be valued, a change to the structure, philosophy and emphasis of our teacher education programmes needs to take place. Hatton and Smith (1995) summarise teacher education in terms of modelling best practice for the students. Whilst this is clearly highly important, there is also the need to spend time developing a community of reflective enquiry. The findings of this study suggest that the process the participants went through - videoing their practice, watching it back and then sharing and discussing their reflections with others - did impact significantly on their practice and therefore time to establish a community of reflective enquiry would be time well spent even on a time-limited one year PGCE course.

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