

VIDEO RECORDING AND PEER OBSERVATION: SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS IN PRE-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING

Dr. Monique Cordova

Assistant Professor IV, Cebu Normal University, Philippines
cordovam@cnu.edu.ph

***Abstract:** This study sought to investigate the benefits and challenges of using video recording and peer observation in pre-service teacher training at the Integrated Laboratory School of Cebu Normal University. The qualitative research design was utilized and a questionnaire and reflection reports were used to gather data. Results of the study showed that video recording was a beneficial tool in critical self-analysis, lesson design critiquing, and communication skills enhancement. Peer observation on the other hand, was beneficial to the student teachers because it promoted a collaborative and supportive learning atmosphere. Both observers and teacher-demonstrators were able to see the strengths and weaknesses in their teaching beliefs and practices, but the most common among the challenges met by the peer-observer is the apprehension that the teacher-demonstrator would be offended by the comments he/she would make while the ones being observed felt that they were being observed by someone who has not had sufficient experience in teacher training. In video recording, the most common challenge met was the on the video recording devices. Nevertheless, both strategies are considered as beneficial supplementary tools by pre-service teachers.*

Keywords: Peer observation, video recording, pre-service teaching, teacher training

Introduction

Students in teacher training institutions in the Philippines undergo internship during their final semester in the teacher education program at laboratory schools, or at private and public schools to apply all the knowledge and skills gained in the previous years. Their teaching demonstrations are observed and evaluated by a mentor or a cooperating teacher in the school where they are assigned. Feedback about the student teacher's performance is filtered through the lens of the mentor's experiences and perceptions, leaving little space for the student teacher's own reflection.

During teaching demonstrations, student teachers feel nervous and uncomfortable knowing that every move that they make is scrutinized. Often, this results to artificiality since the student teachers know that their performance is being evaluated and that they are graded. Aside from this, there are times when mentors are not in the classroom to observe teaching demonstrations because of faculty meetings, attendance to seminars and trainings, sickness, etc. The student teachers often feel disappointed after having prepared the lesson plan, the activities and the materials and after having studied the subject matter to be delivered.

One of the things that can be done about these situations is video recording the teaching demonstration as a tool for the student teacher for self-reflection, and for the mentor to see in case of absence from the class. According to Orlova (2009), 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 Second Language Teacher Education because it provides an objective and permanent source that can be viewed repeatedly to observe various aspects of classroom practice.

Aside from video recording, another supplementary tool in pre-service teaching is peer observation. Fellow student teachers can give constructive criticism to the teacher demonstrator after the orientation period and after a series of pre-teaching and post teaching conferences with the mentor.

In order to validate the effect of these strategies among pre-service teachers, a qualitative research was conducted at the Integrated Laboratory School of Cebu Normal University. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the benefits of video recording and peer observation as supplementary tools in pre-service teaching?
2. What are the challenges in implementing these strategies?

Educators, continuously strive to better teaching practices in order to hasten learning among students. When teachers seek to work collaboratively, reflect and self-assess to develop skills and capacities, it is not only the students who benefit in the end, but also the teachers who feel a sense of fulfillment for a job done well.

Literature Review

Wallace (1998) states that reflective teaching is the critical exploration of one's own teaching practice and is essential to life-long professional development (as cited in Orlova, 2009). Participants in Second Language Teacher Education 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 as cited in Orlova, 2009). As a result, critical reflection makes teaching more productive and satisfying, thereby freeing teachers "from impulse and routine behavior", and helping them "to avoid burnout" (Farrell in Orlova, 2009).

Learners are powerful allies in the assessment process. If adequately trained and guided, learners can add beneficial and relevant information about their learning to support the findings of teachers. Self-reflection on the learning process, or metacognitive skills, gives learners a chance to identify their own strengths and weaknesses as they learn (The American English Website). In the same manner, student teachers can assess their own performance by viewing themselves through a video recording of their teaching demonstration to support or disprove the findings of their mentors and peers. It gives them a chance to see their own strong characteristics as well as things that they need to improve on.

Verlaan and Verlaan (2015) states that enhancing the reflective intelligence of pre-service teachers is foundational in aiding them to develop their pedagogical knowledge, for in learning to see and describe their own experiences, the teachers form the basis for the practical point of reference they need to field the varied methodologies of effective practice. Furthermore, they suggest that developing the ability to slow down one's thinking to view a teaching event more distinctly is likely to improve the teacher's confidence level in and capacity for observing the students in the classroom. Guiding pre-service teachers' search for evidence of student learning in videos of their lessons may also help them develop the disposition to view students' behavior as consequences of specific personal or pedagogical teacher decisions.

On the other hand, mentors and student teachers sometimes hesitate to fully implement peer assessments. Some mentors feel as if they are the only ones qualified to assess a student teacher's performance and give feedback. Many student teachers agree. They often feel unable or unwilling to give comments that are relevant or useful. As a consequence, both mentors and student teachers shy away from peer observations and assessments. There is a need to remember that peer feedback and assessment engage student teachers in two learning strategies that are vital in the classroom: collaborative and cooperative learning. In these two strategies, student teachers work together to navigate tasks, complete activities, and negotiate meaning. By emphasizing collaborative and cooperative learning activities, the mentor gives student teachers a stake in their own learning.

Kalebic (2017) in his study on the use of peer observation in pre-service foreign language teacher education, reports that the student teachers who participated had a very positive attitude towards peer observation in teacher preparation. The highest percentage of students reported that peer observation promotes a constructive dialogue between peers in pre-service preparation. They also stated that it is equally beneficial to their self-reflection when they were observers and when they were the ones observed. The most frequently stated benefit was the opportunity to learn new teaching strategies while the most important benefit from being observed was claimed to be the possibility to learn more about one's own behavior in the classroom. Student teachers reported that providing feedback to a peer presented a major difficulty in peer observation activity.

While there have been a growing body of researches on video recording and peer observation in pre-service teaching, studies on the use of both strategies are quite limited. Furthermore, the pre-service teachers used them in micro teaching instead of actual students.

This research was designed to fill this gap and assess the use of video recording and peer observation in pre-service teacher training in a laboratory school.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative research design. Data were collected using a questionnaire and self-reflection reports. It involved 24 Bachelor of Science in Education major in English student teachers having their practicum at the Integrated Laboratory School. At first, they were given the opportunity to have a pre-teaching conference, teaching demonstration and post teaching conference experiences with their mentor. Afterwards, they were asked to have their teaching demonstration video recorded, viewed with the mentor, then viewed alone by the student teacher. Finally, the student teachers are made to answer self-reflection questions regarding their experience. It must be noted that the participants in this study willingly volunteered to have video recording and peer observation while in their practicum.

Moreover, in order to incorporate peer observation, the student teachers were given the chance to have a pre-teaching conference, teaching demonstration, and post teaching conference, this time with a fellow student teacher who collaboratively discussed the lesson plan, observed the class, and assessed the teaching performance and gave feedback to the teacher demonstrator. Both the observers and teacher demonstrators answered questionnaires regarding the benefits of the strategies as well as challenges that they have encountered during the process.

Findings

Video Recording as Tool for Critical Self-Analysis

Student teachers find the value of the use of video recording in their practicum experience. It allows them to see the commendable aspects of their teaching demonstration including areas needing improvement. Since the first viewing involved the mentor who thereafter discusses the teaching demonstration, the student teacher is given feedback regarding his/her performance. One student teacher wrote, *“I was able to confirm what my mentor said about my facilitation skills. I actually have a low self-confidence, but when I viewed my teaching demonstration in the video, it made me realize that I can indeed handle myself well and facilitate activities efficiently. She was also correct to point out that there were students who did not participate actively in the activities...”*

Aside from analyzing one's skills in facilitating activities or classroom management, viewing a recording of the teaching demonstration of the student teachers allows them to look into the success or failure of teaching strategies and methodologies that they have employed as well as their style of student-teacher interaction. Another student teacher indicated *“The games I used in my class were fun and effective; however, the discussion that followed it became boring*

for my students. I think I should have rephrased my questions because apparently, they did not understand the words that I used.”

The student teachers acknowledged the use of video recording in their training. They reported that it allowed them to do a self-assessment and self-correction. It confirmed the mentor’s observations, but there were a few instances that student teachers notice their own shortcomings which were not mentioned by the mentor. This strategy gives the student teachers the opportunity to build a stronger self-confidence and the skills to be better educators.

Lesson Design Critique

Seeing their teaching demonstration on video allowed the student teachers to see whether they have accomplished the desired learning outcomes that they have written in their lesson design. It allows them to evaluate whether the planned activities were appropriate or effective based on the responses of their learners.

A student teacher wrote, *“I spent so much time in planning and revising my lesson design, but it was all worth it! I can see from the way the students participated in the activities that they have clearly understood the lesson.”*

Furthermore, the lesson design required of these student teachers include a list of instructional materials that they would use in their teaching demonstrations. Whether the use of multimedia, visual and audio materials, or realia indicated in their lesson design has been effective or not was seen in the video recordings of their teaching demonstration.

A student teacher elaborated, *“...I thought that I have creatively made my visual aids because my drawings and pictures were varied and colorful, but when I saw the video, I realized that the words in the descriptions were too small for my students to see or read.”*

The success of a teaching-learning process depends on many factors, one of which is careful planning, and whether a teacher has a well thought-out lesson design or not is reflected in the learning experiences in the classroom as seen in the video recording of this process.

Enhancing Communication Skills

Among the benefits mentioned by the student teachers, enhancing their communication skills is one of the most common in the responses of the student teachers. It allows them not only to listen to the way they said words, uttered sentences, gave instructions or asked questions, but also saw their non-verbal communication strategies such as smiling to affirm a student’s answer, nodding to agree what is being said, or making use of gestures to emphasize a point.

Watching a recording of their teaching demonstration gave them the opportunity to focus not only on the verbal and nonverbal aspects of their teaching but also to evaluate their communicative competence, including their language proficiency, knowledge of essential functions, and their style of teacher-student interactions.

One of the student teachers who cited that her communication skills was enhanced, pointed out, *“On my first teaching demonstration, I was wondering during my class why only those seated in front were responding to my questions. When I watched the video, I found out that my voice was not audible enough for everyone in the class to hear. I also noticed that I was always frowning. This time, my teaching demonstration was a huge success! I made an effort to project my voice and be approachable by smiling every now and then (on appropriate occasions of course!)”*

As Coffey (2014) pointed out, one of the benefits of the experience is that these student teachers can view first-hand how their own students see them in a real classroom situation. Having an early opportunity to identify areas of weakness and identify strategies to address these weaknesses is particularly important in graduate-entry teacher education programs. Underpinning this capability is the capacity of students to quickly develop their skills in critical reflection. By having key areas upon which to focus when viewing the video footage enables the students to direct their attention to the more complex skills that they need to acquire.

Peer Observation, a Learning Opportunity

Aside from video recording the teaching demonstrations of student teachers, they were also observed by a fellow student teacher who discussed the lesson design with him/her prior to the actual teaching. Afterwards, the peer-observer gave feedback on the teaching performance of the students based on the teaching strategies employed, classroom management, lesson design, and communication skills.

Most student teachers reported that peer observation was beneficial to them because on the part of the observers, they have learned strategies and techniques that were effective in teaching a particular lesson including those that were not too successful in its implementation. It also gives them to reflect on their own teaching practices. The one being observed received feedback from his/her fellow student teacher on how to further improve what he has done in his class. The student teacher-observer evaluates whether the objectives or desired learning outcomes as stipulated in the learning design have been met or accomplished. He/she gives constructive criticism by pointing out first the strengths of the demonstrator followed by the aspects which he or she needs to work on.

Collaborative and Supportive Atmosphere

Unlike observations done by the mentor, peer observations as described by student teachers, are “non-threatening”. Because they are not being assessed and graded by their peer, they feel more comfortable during the teaching-learning activities in the classroom. One student teacher wrote, *“...unlike being observed by my mentor when I feel like I’m under the magnifying glass where every move I make is being scrutinized, peer observation makes me feel more*

relaxed and at ease". They think that when a comment about the teaching performance is inaccurate, they can also reason out and contradict the observations of their peer.

The observer on the other hand, knowing and feeling what it is like to be in the shoes of the teacher-demonstrator feels that he/she can empathize more with the one teaching and offer support. After observations were given to the teacher demonstrator, suggestions from the peer-observer were offered to make the next teaching assignments better. Collaborative and supportive learning atmosphere between and among student teachers were fostered by the strategy in the pre-service teacher training.

Challenges Encountered

In video recording the teaching demonstrations of student teachers, one of the most common challenges encountered by student teachers was on the video recording device itself. Most often problems with the battery running out, insufficiency of memory storage, and the time consumption in setting up the device in the classroom. During the first two weeks of the implementation of the use of video recording of the teaching demonstrations, most student teachers felt self-conscious and awkward; however, in the succeeding weeks the video recording device became a normal part of the classroom.

On the other hand, in the implementation of the peer-observation strategy in the pre-service teacher training, the number one challenge met by the peer-observer is the apprehension that the teacher-demonstrator would be offended by the comments he/she would make while the ones being observed felt that they were being observed by someone who has not had sufficient experience in teacher training.

Conclusion

Video recording and peer observation are supplementary tools that can help pre-service teachers successfully sharpen their skills by making them aware of their strengths and weaknesses, their beliefs and practices as teachers. It must be emphasized that learning with a qualified, and experienced mentor is still indispensable in the training of pre-service teachers. Video recording for self-reflection and collaborative learning through peer observation are designed as supplementary tools that are beneficial for the teacher trainees that will positively affect them and their students.

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