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Abstract

This paper reports the use of video representations of first-year teachers’ experiences in teacher education workshops that focus on the transition to teaching. This use of video technology is a responsive act that draws on the notion of looking back, where graduates ‘speak to’ current students. Video footage of the performed research ‘The First Time’ shaped activities and discussions in the unit. Workshop/video themes included teacher identity discourses; epiphanic and revelatory moments of transition to becoming a teacher; and preparing for job applications and interviews. A range of data including semi-structured interviews with undergraduate students upon completion of the workshops were analysed within a phenomenographic paradigm, with the aim of describing variations of conception that people have of a particular phenomenon (Sin, 2010). The investigation of the use of video technology as a pedagogical approach to promote critical thinking about the transition to teaching revealed a range of conceptual meanings. These meanings were classified into categories according to their similarities and differences concerning the effectiveness of the technological tool in assisting undergraduates in their transition to teaching. Participants’ conceptions of the phenomenon are individual and relational, and as such results were quite varied. Emergent varied themes include: ‘I now know what it is that I need to learn’; ‘Is this theory or practice?’; and ‘I don’t do drama’. Similarities include: ‘Preparing for the unexpected’. The use of video technology was deemed effective in creating workshop content from the past, in order to teach for tomorrow.
This paper reports the use of video representations of first-year teachers’ experiences in teacher education workshops that focus on the transition to teaching. My work as a teacher educator in curriculum and pedagogy core units often entails preparing pre-service teachers for moments of transition such as developing a professional portfolio, job applications, and interviews. These highly visible moments where pre-service teachers put themselves and their views ‘out there’ are liminal moments signifying change and development. It can be a positive time of looking back and seeing how their teacher identity has transformed over time, and it can also be a period fraught with anxiety and resistance to new ideas, generally brought on by the notion that they are alone in these feelings.

The aim of this research was to expand my own pedagogical practices in order to assist pre-service teachers in transition to improve their practices, by investigating whether video representations of first-year teachers might help pre-service teachers primarily to understand identity-making as a fluid and ever-changing practice. This research project has its origin in my doctoral research, investigating the experiences of beginning teachers, and the transformation of their identity in their first year of teaching. My doctorate\(^1\) centred on the research participants’ *firsts* as epiphanic moments of identity transformation. A theatre-based research approach to representing the participants’ experiences was employed, culminating in a performance titled ‘The First Time’\(^2\). The success of ‘The First Time’ prompted the consideration of its use as a provocation in teacher education workshops. Pre-service teachers in the audience of the live performance raised notions of the sustainability of the work in video form. As such a program was developed and trialled from July to September 2013 to explore each of the themes raised in ‘The First Time’ and investigate how graduate teachers could ‘speak to’ current pre-service teachers in order to prepare them to ‘teach for tomorrow’. The notion of ‘teach for tomorrow’ in this instance was to collate lessons from the past to inform the present, and encourage pre-service teachers to take the knowledge they develop into the future. It draws on the idea of looking back in order to look forward.

I noticed that pre-service teachers in transition to in-service teaching often demonstrated signs of wash out, disengagement from seminars, and showed a heightened focus on self-sourced teaching related activities that were more ‘real’ and therefore perceived as more worthy. These pre-service teachers in transition often displayed resistance to new ideas such as ‘doing drama’, along with a heightened articulation of their perception of the theory-practice divide. Pre-service teachers also demonstrated early signs of transition shock and wash out, which were magnified in the experiences of the graduate teachers in my doctoral research.

Much has been written about the destabilising effect of shock so prevalent in the current context of teaching. Status and belonging remain central to beginning teachers’ identity work. The importance of induction, mentoring, and an understanding that teacher education takes place on a continuum from pre-service to in-service teaching now emerges in relation to survival and liminal discourses. Survival discourses concern wash out and transition shock. Wash-out (K. M. Zeichner & Tabachnik, 1981) describes how educational notions developed during pre-service teacher education are ‘washed out’ during professional experiences. Veenman (1984) points to the problems teachers experience once they have left teacher education. Similar indications of a lack of transfer from teacher education to practice continued to be discussed by Feiman-Nemser (1990), Wideen, Mayer-Smith, and Moon (1998), and Shoval, Erlich, and Fejgin (2010, p. 86) reiterate the long held belief that beginning teachers are expected to act as seasoned veterans and take full responsibility for


\(^2\) [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLB1ED0FDEF2AA8836](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLB1ED0FDEF2AA8836)
teaching, despite the limited resources they possess in terms of experience. Beginning teachers under stress may experience a wash-out effect of the principles and skills acquired during their teacher education (K. M. Zeichner & Tabachnik, 1981).

Pre-service teachers experience an aspect of transition shock in reaction to the overwhelming complexity of applying for jobs. An individual upon encountering the unfamiliar can experience culture/practice/reality/transition shock. In more recent literature (Shoval et al., 2010; Stokking, Leenders, de Jong, & van Tartwijk, 2003) shock is described as an abrupt transition that hinders the beginner’s ability to find the mental strength to deal with a new situation. This intense period of reflection and adjustment can feel like an aside to the main issue of teaching for the beginning teacher. However, this period of reflection and adjustment is recognised as an important aspect of socialisation and acceptance. Praxis, practice and transition shock refer to teachers’ confrontation of the realities and responsibilities of being a teacher that puts their beliefs and ideas about teaching to the test. Shock challenges some beliefs, and confirms others in relation to induction into the profession (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002, p. 105), positioning the beginning teacher in a liminal space.

Liminal discourses surround beginning teachers in transition. Often where theory and practice would ideally come together, such understandings are often washed out, contributing to the notion of a theory-practice divide. Such periods of uncertainty are highlighted as both beneficial and challenging. For example, Sinner (2012) highlights how uncertainty can define experiences in order to use these to reconsider the scope of lived experiences that can occur in teacher education. While uncertainty can define teachers’ perceptions of learning and their evolving professional identity, shifts in protocols and practices between field experiences and studying about teacher education may inform why pre-service teachers can perceive field assignments as ‘other and out of context, rather than as connective, cohesive and part of their continuous movement within their programme of study’ (Sinner, 2012, p. 601). In such liminal spaces the unexpected reality shock during the first year of teaching in particular has been identified as key to hindering the development of effective coping mechanisms. Kim and Cho (2014) have investigated the relations among pre-service teachers’ motivation, their sense of teaching efficacy, and their expectation of reality shock. In order to reduce reality shock among pre-service teachers and to prepare more resilient and efficacious teachers Kim and Cho (2014, p. 78) suggest teacher education programmes can include a number of methods to develop coping mechanisms. These include directing pre-service teachers to build supportive teaching networks, encouraging the sharing of experiences with colleagues, and informing pre-service teachers that, to some degree, reality shock is common. Their suggestions are made in the hope that the development of interpersonal skills will enhance motivation and preserve a sense of teaching efficacy even when faced with reality shock.

It has been one of my aims working with pre-service teachers in transition to assist them in developing both an understanding of, and methods for coping with, transition shock. My use of the video of ‘The First Time’, where previous graduates ‘speak to’ current pre-service teachers, uses epiphanic and revelatory moments of transition to becoming a teacher as prompts for discussion about identity, motivation, efficacy and the probability of experiencing transition shock. In this way I aim to assist pre-service teachers to expect some form of transition shock, while aiding them to develop efficacious practices in order to sustain them through their moments of transition, through viewing and discussing others’ experiences.

The use of video technology as pedagogy in this instance is a responsive act that draws on the notion of looking back, where graduates ‘speak to’ current students. Viewers can slow down their thinking, distancing them from the action. Video as pedagogy is a form of pedagogical amplification (Danielowich, 2014). Viewers can tap into their own epiphanic
moments of transition/transformation in order to ‘break down’ and ‘build up’ alternatives, practices, strategies, and pedagogy (Chung & van Es, 2014). The benefit of this approach lies in the viewing of real stories portrayed in a non-naturalistic style. This differs significantly from self-video analysis, which does not allow for as much critical distance. Hennessy and Deaney (2009) note that collaborative analysis of videos can be used to engage pre-service teachers in deeper reflection; assist them to postulate alternatives; adopt and modify practices presented in the video; and allow for changes in both pedagogical thinking and practice, along with increased metacognitive awareness.

‘The First Time’ was employed as a starting point for critical, reflective discourse founded in multiple perspectives, providing a metaphoric, aesthetic and ideological framework where the method of storying honours the complex and sometimes conflicting experience of becoming a teacher (Sinner, 2012, p. 611). ‘The First Time’ complements previous studies that have focused on the role of emotion in learning, referring to films as part of a repertoire of teaching tools, and the use of film in teaching referring to the resultant emotions as an aspect of student learning (Smith, 2013). The opportunities video as pedagogy affords for engagement in professional dialogue and scholarly analysis have been highly valued by practitioners (Hennessy & Deaney, 2009, p. 364). This method offers the opportunity to actively test hypotheses, and provide immediate, precise feedback on intuitive decision-making skills (Hewson, 2007a, p. 3).

Scenario-based work can give pre-service teachers a chance to explore how they might prepare for in-service teaching situations. Vicarious embodiment of the scenes makes it possible to consciously access and use tacit knowledge. A vocabulary of educational habits are a kind of ‘situated knowledge’, that is inscribed in and on the body as the subject lives through certain experiences (Hewson, 2007a, pp. 3-4). This embodied knowledge is just one subset of our cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986); ways of talking, acting, and socialising, as well as language practices, values, and styles of dress and behaviour. Boal (1985) too recognized that we have physical habits based on our social and work experiences, which may limit responses to concrete situations. The attraction of scenario-based work in teacher education workshops is that the pre-service teachers can benefit from observation. ‘Acting in the mind’ (Jansma & Others, 1997) as a tool has its roots in metacognitive and reflective approaches to learning and can be described as a neural activity that is very similar to the activity accompanying the actual behaviour. Acting in the mind moves the viewer’s level of participation towards a more interactive or proactive stance of participatory behaviour, encouraging the viewer’s imagination to flesh out the suggestions presented (Pelias & VanOosting, 1987, p. 226). The use of video can also encourage empathic reflection and perspective-taking (Bhukhanwala & Allexsaht-Snider, 2012) as pre-service teachers engage in viewing and group discussion.

It is important to note that the use of video as pedagogy in these teacher education workshops was not part of the pre-service teachers’ assessment. Chung and van Es (2014) contend that when completed tasks are not reliant on receiving a teaching credential they provide more insight into approaches for analysing teaching. More loosely guided scaffolds for responding to video can help diminish the ‘mimicking’ effect in more tightly guided video-based studies by encouraging pre-service teachers to articulate and explore the conceptual frameworks they use to make everyday decisions and develop change-directed thinking they will more likely enact in practice (Danielowich, 2014).

The status quo, unfortunately for teacher educators, is that graduates still report that their teacher education was not very useful (Louden, 2008, p. 365). Many may agree with Aubusson and Schuck (2013, p. 322) that teacher learning needs to be seen as lifelong and continuing, self-managed, involve others, and that development over a career needs to be differentiated according to individual need. It has also been recognised as important that
teachers of the twenty-first century are able to use a range of pedagogical skills that fit their purposes – not only to acquire these skills, but more importantly, to exercise pedagogical judgement (Day, 2000, p. 108). The formation of teachers is a complex and long term process (Louden, 2008) and developing a professional identity is recognised as one of the central tasks of learning to teach (Kane & Francis, 2013). A shift towards more clinically based teacher education and more focus on the specific contexts for which teachers are being prepared (K. Zeichner, 2014) is proposed as key to the development of efficacious beginning teachers.

Yet for many teachers, the preceding decades have been years of survival, rather than development (Day, 2000). Effective mentoring and induction have been shown to counter the anxiety, stress and crises of confidence facing new teachers and also to address beginning teacher attrition (Kane & Francis, 2013, p. 365). Yet these issues are difficult to address prior to entering the profession, as pre-service teacher education ‘cannot fully create or sustain an environment that genuinely equates with the reality of full time teaching’ (Loughran, Brown, & Doecke, 2001, p. 7) when little has changed in that ‘challenges facing new teachers are both complex and stable over time’ (Schuck et al. 2012, p. 82 in Kane & Francis, 2013). There is clearly a need for more highly educated motivated teachers who are able to use more autonomy (Day, 2000, p. 102) in order to cope with the demands of twenty-first century teaching. So how do we, as teacher educators, achieve this? Loughran (2009) proposes the consideration of teacher education as a discipline, that teacher education is ‘teaching teaching’; and that teacher education scholars must therefore be expert pedagogues with sophisticated knowledge and skills of ‘teaching teaching’, (p. 199). The use of video as pedagogy as outlined in this paper might be viewed by Loughran as both beneficial and flawed. While I contend that my approach encourages greater integration of subject matter and pedagogical knowledge (Day, 2000, p. 110), this needs to be presented in an interactive and highly engaging manner in order for the benefits to be achieved.

To achieve maximum benefit from the use of video as pedagogy the first stage of my approach was to develop a series of workshops around scenes from ‘The First Time’ as provocations. These workshops included a combination of viewing and discussing, and sometimes re-enacting and re-working, the scenes from ‘The First Time’ based on a Forum Theatre workshop format (Boal, 1992; Dwyer, 2004; Hewson, 2007b), where viewers voice their opinions with the aim to enact change. The second stage involved reflecting on the success of the ‘pilot’ workshops. This reflection drew on data from experiences of delivering the workshops, and data from the participants on how the workshops encouraged active participation in their decision-making with regards to their transition to teaching. The third stage enabled the generation of data from workshop participants when in their first year of teaching; asking them to consider the effectiveness of the workshops in preparing them for the specific contexts they encountered. Data was generated within a phenomenographic paradigm, with the aim of describing variations of conception that people have of a particular phenomenon (Aubusson & Schuck, 2013). The phenomena being investigated included video representations of first-year teachers, identity making, ordering/organising content, critical reflection, engagement, and connecting practice to broader knowledge. Data was generated through questions/prompts in semi-structured interviews, anonymous student evaluation of teaching and unit (SETU) data and comments, and my own journal and observations that included notes on attendance and engagement, questions asked and comments made in the workshops.

An analysis of my findings in the form of post-workshop reflections showed that students immensely enjoyed the use of video technology as a pedagogical approach to promote critical thinking about the transition to teaching. There were in-depth and thought-provoking discussions after watching each video, with many students bursting to share their
thoughts and perceptions. High attendance rates were maintained throughout the unit and were above those in previous years. Substantial effectiveness in relation to ordering/organising content, stimulating interest and discussion, preparing for the transition to in-service teaching, and enhancing engagement in seminar/workshops was noted. Some effectiveness in stimulating critical reflection was found. I perceived limited effectiveness in students making the connection between practice and broader knowledge.

The interviews revealed a range of conceptual meanings, which were classified into categories of similarities and differences concerning the effectiveness of the video tool. Participants’ conceptions of the phenomenon are individual and relational, and as such results were quite varied. Emergent varied themes include: ‘I now know what it is that I need to learn’; ‘Is this theory or practice?’; and ‘I don’t do drama’. Similarities include: ‘Preparing for the unexpected’. Similarities of scenes deemed effective included ‘Lachy’, ‘Janet’, ‘Amelia’ and ‘Maggie’. Interview participants reported they could relate more to these scenes and the shock the characters experienced. Shock is often viewed as a rite of passage can involve the suspension, and even temporary loss, of professional identity (Pierce, 2007). The perpetuation of the myth of shock as a rite of passage continues to be regarded by beginning teachers as an essential aspect of their practice, possibly because moments of shock are more visible than other events that mark the transition to becoming a teacher.

I have noticed how pre-service teachers develop their own culturally formed vernacular language to describe their status in relation to becoming a teacher. For pre-service teachers during their degree the word ‘real’ is used in relation to their practicum experiences, denoting a distinction between these and the theoretical understandings developed in lectures and workshops. In their responses participants mentioned ‘real and relevant’, suggesting they value practical experiences over theoretical ones. While the theory-practice divide is an ongoing issue in regards to teacher education, the term ‘real’ can also indicate how these teachers see themselves as being a pre-service teacher rather than becoming a teacher. This indicates that at some point they believe they will be a teacher.

The development and use of the term ‘real’ in particular demonstrates the way some pre- and in-service teachers describe the formation and transformation of their identity. Liminal discourses such as feeling like a real teacher emerged in the workshops and were also used throughout the transitional period between completing their degree and beginning in-service teaching. During this period they began to consider what a real teacher was, and how they felt about becoming a real teacher. The liminal period of transitioning from student to teacher was often emphasised during the process of job applications and interviews. The confidence reported by many pre-service teachers on ‘surviving’ the interview contributes to their sense of autonomy despite feeling as though they had developed their knowledge to respond on their own. Sadly, survival, shock and wash out prevailed upon in-service teaching, despite the effectiveness of the use of video as pedagogy in engaging pre-service teachers in the workshops. Though, as one participant reported, the ‘Janet’ interview scene and workshop discussion was foremost in her mind in her first job interview, where she reminded herself to avoid responding like ‘just a grad’.

The use of video technology was deemed effective in creating workshop content from the past, in order to teach for tomorrow. In order to teach for the future it was effective to backward map the impact of the workshops on the beginning teacher’s early in-service practice. ‘The First Time’ was reported as more relevant than other teaching-related movies and documentaries the pre-service teachers had viewed as part of their teacher education. Responses highlighted the relevance of the ‘reality’ of the content, despite the way the material was shaped in a non-naturalistic theatrical style. In fact most reported that the non-naturalistic representation assisted them to see both the ‘past’ and the ‘present’ of each teacher’s experiences. The responses, while varied, all concluded with the acknowledgement
that the video as a pedagogical tool assisted them in ‘preparing for tomorrow’ by encouraging them to ‘know what it is that I need to learn’.
References:


