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van der Zwaard, R.; Bannink, A.

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Coaching Novice Inservice University Lecturers:
From Face-To-Face Supervision to Online Video Tagging

ROSE VAN DER ZWAARD AND ANNE BANNINK
University of Amsterdam, Netherlands
R.vanderZwaard@uva.nl

This study reports on the switch from face-to-face coaching sessions - with novice university lecturers on video footage of one of their regular seminars (recorded pre-Covid) - to an online interactive video-enhanced observation (VEO) program. We show how we have used this program and what we have learned from its applications. We conclude that VEO is a suitable and challenging tool for teacher reflection (of both online and offline classes), and we recommend a number of essential observation points.

Keywords: inservice teacher education, teacher reflection, video-enhanced observation, VEO, video tagging, peer review, cross-institutional collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that novice teachers benefit from reflecting on aspects of their teaching behaviors as part of their teacher education and professional development (e.g. O'Leary, 2014; Hockly, 2018). Shortly before the Covid-19 shutdown, seminars of six inservice novice lecturers at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Amsterdam had been recorded for video reflection as part of their University Teaching Qualification (UTQ) trajectory. After the shutdown we, as UTQ teacher trainers, had to find an online alternative to the coaching sessions of the classes that were recorded. Since it has been proposed that watching recordings of their own teaching practice with an online annotation tool may help novice teachers to create an online community of practice and encourage self- and peer reflection (Batlle & Miller 2017; Körkkö et al, 2019), we uploaded the footage to an online portal with a video enhanced observation tool (VEO). In this portal, participants could view, reflect and peer review video footage by tagging features of their own and each other's teaching practice, and supervisors could monitor and comment on tags that were created. Because video tagging as reflection tool is relatively new, we will report on what we experienced and what we learned, and we will make recommendations as to how video annotation can best be implemented in teacher training contexts.

INNOVATION

Video is regarded as a powerful tool to promote reflection, since it addresses issues of cognitive dissonance, i.e. the gap between what novice teachers remember from their classes and what they notice when viewing the video footage (Baecher & Kung, 2011). As such, it is assumed that improvement of observation skills prompts improvement of teaching skills (for overviews of reports on video in teacher education, see Gaudin & Chalies, 2015; Körkkö et al, 2018)

Novice inservice teachers at Dutch universities with permanent or temporary contracts are required to obtain a UTQ. They take a teaching skills course and compile a portfolio, which includes student evaluations and reflections on their teaching practice. As part of their portfolio, one regular (pre-Covid) seminar of each of the six UTQ candidates was video recorded for reflection purposes. When the face-to-face (F2F) feedback sessions (based on these recordings) could no longer take place, the video footage was uploaded to the VEO[1] portal that was developed by the University of Nottingham (cf. Batlle & Miller 2017) after we had taken out licenses[2] for the participants and supervisors. There are similar free video tagging programs, e.g. VideoAnt, but these do not offer the host users the possibility to customize tag sets.

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[1] https://veo.co.uk/
[2] 300 GBP organization fee + 15 GBP per candidate. Videoant (https://ant.umn.edu/) is a free, open access alternative.

As opposed to the open access tagging programs, VEO not only offers existing tag sets but also allows the host user to create their own tag set to suit the learning objectives. The tag set that we created was:

- Tag at least 2 episodes that you are satisfied with.
- Tag at least 2 episodes that need improving.
- Tag anything that you think stands out for whatever reason.
- For each tag, write your observations and reflections in the notes feature.

When we had uploaded the video footage to the portal, the candidates could access their videos with their individual passwords, watch the footage of their own and each other's teaching, and click on the tags to timestamp the episodes they had selected[3].

We as supervisors could easily access and provide feedback on the tags and notes, since the tool allows the viewer to jump from one selected tag in the video footage to the next. As a peer observation exercise, the candidates were also asked to view each other's videos and tag sets, and comment on the tags their peers had created.

RESULTS

The candidates reported that they experienced the timestamping, tagging and note taking of their own and each other's teaching performance as a very useful pedagogical activity (cf. Batlle & Miller, 2017) and valued the applications of the tool as an alternative to F2F supervision (see also Körkkö et al., 2019). In their tags, however, the candidates mostly commented on general features of their teaching (e.g. the lack of interaction or student participation) but failed to identify the more complex underlying causes (cf. Baecher & Kung, 2011). Our tag set was to blame because our tags were too unspecific; they prompted unspecific reflection. We concluded that viewing the video excerpts with general guidelines does not necessarily result in critical, in-depth observations: novice teachers need supervision and guidance in order to develop critical reflection skills, as will be explained below.

IMPLICATIONS

What we experienced is that a major advantage of digital video tagging tools is that they are time and place independent. Supervisor feedback can be given whenever their busy schedules allow. The clear structure of the tagging procedure makes the activity highly motivating for the student-participants. Also, footage can be shared with peers so as to replace F2F collaborative learning and to create online communities of practice. More importantly, since most teaching is currently taking place online, footage of synchronous digital classes with a recording option (e.g. Zoom) can also be uploaded and tagged in the same way[4].

What we learned is that, with a general tag set, novice teachers tend to reflect on *what* happens as they are observing their teaching practice, but do not have the reflection skills (yet) to determine *why* it happens. In our case, most teachers noticed the lack of interaction with and between the students, but in their comments tended to focus solely on the student roles (e.g. 'the students do not respond to my questions') rather than their own roles. In other words, they did not take the co-construction of interactions in the classrooms into account (e.g. teacher turns leading up to the lack of student response). Although our tag set was not specific enough to alert the teachers to this feature, the timestamps and comments the teachers created did serve as an initial diagnosis of issues and problems that we could draw on to improve our tag set. As such, we learned that, in order to ensure that novice teachers become more critical observers and to achieve alignment between tag sets, critical reflection and learning objectives, novice teachers need more guidance (Blomberg et al, 2014), as will be explained below.

What we recommend, based on our experience as described above, is to carefully scaffold the reflection process for novice teachers. Ideally, the participants do two rounds of tagging of the same footage. The first could serve as a diagnostic round by using a general tag set (see under Innovations above). Then, based on the episodes the teachers have time stamped and on the comments they have added in the notes feature, a second, more specific tag set can be created that will send the participants back to the same footage with a different, more specific focus. Needless to say, based on their

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[3]   See Appendix A for the assignment and specific instructions.

[4]   See Appendix A.

particular contexts and objectives, teacher educators may also decide to do one round of tagging only and create a specific tag set from the onset.

In our case, since our participants mostly commented on the interactional dimensions of their teaching (or rather, the lack thereof), we have designed a tag set consisting of the following eight tags that zero in on the role of teacher turns and decisions in the discursive construction of classroom discourse:

- Feedback and correction[5]
- Questions
- Calling on students
- Instructions
- Non-verbal/paralinguistic communication
- Contextualization cues
- Work forms
- Opening and closing

Although we have not had a chance to work with this improved tag set, we hypothesize that a specified tag set like the above will invite a more focused and specified response; we expect these tags to serve as a scaffolding tool and viewer's guide (cf. Baecher & Kung, 2011; Blomberg et al, 2014) that will direct the participants to reflect on episodes of their teaching from a more complex and detailed perspective, which will ultimately make them more analytical observers and better teachers.

FUTURE RESEARCH

To test our hypothesis, as a follow-up assignment[6] we will ask the same group of participants to go back to their (and each other's) footage with the adjusted and modified tag set we designed, to encourage better observation skills and enhanced learning outcomes. It would also be worthwhile to explore the options of projects where video footage and tag sets can be shared, explored and analysed in cross-institutional and cross-national collaboration.

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[5]   See Appendix B for the parameters of each of the tags (as part of the follow-up assignment).

[6]   See Appendix B

APPENDIX A

ASSIGNMENT

Assignment
1. Reflect on and tag your own video (this video could also be a recording of a class that was taught online):

Watch the footage of your seminar on VEO. Use the tags to timestamp and comment on a specific episode. Create a minimum of 6 tags:
- at least 2 episodes that you are satisfied with.
- at least 2 episodes that need improving.
- at least 2 episodes that stand out for whatever reason.

For each tag, write your observations and reflections in the notes feature.
2. Peer review:

Watch the footage of the peer that has been assigned to you by your supervisor. View the tags they have created (you can jump from one tag to the next), and write your comments in the notes section of each tag.

Instructions:
- Go to https://veo-group.com/ and log on.
- Go to the UTQ group that has been created and click on the video with your name.
- Click on the *tagset* in the right column. Click on the *dropdown menu* and select UTC. Click *OK*.
- Skip *pre-tagging* (by clicking on *continue*).
- Start the video. Click on the + or – tag: in the right column a notes window will pop up where you can add your comments.
- At the end of your session, click *submit tags*.

FOLLOW-UP ASSIGNMENT

Assignment
1. Self-reflection: Go back to the footage of your teaching and focus on the episodes you selected for the first tag session. Start a new tag session (see the 8 different tags below). Create a minimum of 16 tags (if applicable, try to use all the tags at least twice).

Parameters of the tag set:
*   Feedback and correction:
    o   Reflect on your reaction to student answers that are correct.
    o   Reflect on your reaction to student answers that are incorrect.
*   Questions
    o   Reflect on the types(s) of questions you ask (e.g. display questions, discussion questions, etc.).
*   Calling on students
    o   Reflect on if and how you call on students (e.g. calling on individual students, self-selecting, etc).
*   Instructions
    o   Reflect on how you give instructions.
*   Non-verbal/paralinguistic communication
    o   Reflect on your non-verbal communication, e.g. body language, position in the classroom; mimicry, gestures, etc.
    o   Reflect on your paralinguistic communication, e.g. using fillers (*uhmmm*), prosody, etc.
*   Contextualization cues
    o   Reflect on whether and how you indicate transitions (e.g. from frontal teaching to working in pairs; from one topic on the agenda to the next) during your seminar.
*   Work forms
    o   Reflect on your teaching methods, e.g. frontal, teacher-led, working in pairs/groups, student presentations, etc.
*   Opening and closing
    o   Reflect on how you start and wrap up your class.

2. Peer review:

Watch the footage of the peer that has been assigned to you by your supervisor. View the tags they have created (you can jump from one tag to the next), and write your comments in the notes section of each tag.

Instructions:
*   Go to https://veo-group.com/ and log on.
*   Go to the UTQ group that has been created and click on the video with your name.
*   Click on the *tagset* in the right column. Click on the *dropdown menu* and select UTC2. Click *OK*.
*   Skip *pre-tagging* (by clicking on *continue*).
*   Start the video. Click on the + or – tag: in the right column a notes window will pop up where you can add your comments.
*   At the end of your session, click *submit tags*.