From apprentice to performer: using vodcasts to bring English teaching into the tertiary classroom

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This showcase and paper is part of a wider ‘work integrated learning’ project, conducted within the QUT Faculty of Education. The project focuses on two complementary approaches. The first involves apprenticeship. As apprentices, student learners gradually gain access to a community of practice and take on roles around the performances of experts, participating ever more fully, to the point where they exhibit mature practice. During this apprenticeship, learners are involved in “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991): observing and absorbing the performance of experts. The streamed video resources and associated materials are designed precisely to capture such expert knowledge in action (Schon, 1983, 1987; Ethell & McMeniman, 2000). QUT students are therefore enabled to participate peripherally in a virtual community with professionals and experts in the field. The form which such peripheral participation takes in the project is problem-based learning (Savery & Duffy, 2001) – the second complementary approach on which the project is founded. Here students will be defining...
their own particular cognitive problematics, investigating the issues, and engaging in technologically enhanced, work-integrated learning within the complex social worlds of classrooms. Thus, as apprentices engaged in a form of problem-based learning which utilizes online resources, the students will therefore be projecting themselves into the identities and performances of the experts they observe (Gee, 2003). This will have a direct impact on the students’ own learning. Observing and interacting with experienced teachers as reflective practitioners will contribute development of their own pedagogy by demonstrating a culture of reflective scholarship of teaching in the workplace, to which those ‘experts’ contribute.

Keywords: Work integrated learning; teaching with vodcasting; Secondary English teaching

Project context
Since undergraduate students lack experience of authentic contexts of teaching until they engage in Field Experience, the wider multifaceted project within which the ‘apprentice to performer’ project sits, combines several distinct attempts to develop work integrated learning experiences, through virtual and digital means. The project is developing and evaluating online and offline resources, assessment and confidence building for QUT pre-service teachers across early childhood, primary and secondary domains. Teams from each of the Education Faculty’s four Schools produced teaching and learning resources which variously address pre-service anxiety and uncertainty about teaching, ICT integrated learning and teacher professionalism at work, by bringing flexibly delivered and accessible, digital examples of work-integrated, authentic experiences from schools to students’ undergraduate classrooms. These resources are designed to enhance the quality of student learning within the teaching and learning and assessment contexts of both large and small undergraduate cohorts. The key teaching and learning priorities addressed by the project were: developing online web-based platforms to support dynamic communication and learning communities across a range of teaching units enhancing students’ awareness and practice of pedagogy by demonstrating a culture of reflective scholarship of teaching.

Fig 1: The ‘apprentice to performers’ project’s wider Education Faculty project context

Rationale:
This showcase and paper was one arm of a QUT Education Faculty wide ‘work integrated learning’ project, coordinated by the author. This project was designed to provide reflective engagement with real examples of English teaching and classroom practice before going on Field Experience and internships- to define, extend and refine the students’ knowledge about the pedagogy of English.

The secondary team, Dr Anita Jetnikoff and Dr Wendy Morgan, focused on two complementary approaches which underpin the ‘work- integrated learning project’. The first involves apprenticeship. As apprentices, student learners gradually gain access to a community of practice and take on roles around the performances of experts, participating ever more fully, to the point where they exhibit mature practice. During this apprenticeship, learners are involved in “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991): observing and absorbing the performance of experts. The streamed video resources and associated materials are designed precisely to capture such expert knowledge in action (Schon, 1983, 1987; Ethell & McMeniman, 2000). QUT students are
therefore enabled to participate peripherally in a virtual community with professionals and experts in the field.

The form which such peripheral participation takes in the project is problem-based learning (Savery & Duffy, 2001) – the second complementary approach on which the project is founded. Here students will be defining their own particular cognitive problematics, investigating the issues, and engaging in technologically enhanced, work-integrated learning within the complex social worlds of classrooms. Thus, as apprentices engaged in a form of problem-based learning which utilizes online resources, the students will therefore be projecting themselves into the identities and performances of the experts they observe (Gee,

The method and process:

The method and process: The apprentice to performers’ ‘arm’ of the project is about streaming video samples (vodcasting) of exemplary teachers classrooms at work, in action, (performers) which initially have been integrated into undergraduate English Curriculum units for our pre-service students (apprentices). The project entailed conducting videotaped interviews with 2 exemplary Secondary English teachers at the beginning and end of a teaching unit and then filming units of work taught in their classrooms. In addition the teachers were interviewed on video about their teaching philosophy and approaches. Both teachers were invited to view and comment on the final edited video clips and reflect back on their own teaching and learning. In one case this teacher reflection was recorded immediately after the lessons were taught: In both cases, the teachers watched all the edited videos at the end and then reflected on the whole unit. Some requested copies were supplied to them for their own teaching. This data gathering of 26 hours of videotape was conducted over two separate semesters. Selected segments of two units were filmed as they were being taught and assessed in a state senior (yr 12) and a private junior secondary (yr 10) English classroom.

The vodcasts serve to capture ‘expert knowledge’ in action (Schon, 1983, 1987; Etell & McMeniman, 2000). Teacher one, Ms P. was teaching a year 12, semester long unit on Hamlet, which involved working towards two items of negotiated assessment; one spoken and one written. The play was thoroughly read (for meaning) as a dramatic, poetic text, interspersed with various filmed versions which brought professional actors’ interpretations; Ethan Hawke, Mel Gibson and Kenneth Branagh into the classroom. The teacher used a variety of different teaching methods and styles to bring the Shakespearean text to life, including reading aloud with props; very abridged, comical versions of the play to establish plot and narrative, bringing in a live actor and poet to act out sections of the play and discuss this with the class. Students drew pictures to arrive at discussion of character and discusses; and wrote brief responses which were checked as they progressed in their understanding of the play. The interesting aspect of this process was watching the teacher use two different approaches for two very different classes; one a serious, academic class, the other a class of ‘excellence in dance’ students, who were clearly more kinesthetic as learners. Ms P’s teaching style clearly demonstrated an understanding of the needs of these different learners, which became a basis for discussion in our English classes. In this observation of the vodcasts and engagement in the performance of experts, the students extend their knowledge of teaching practice by “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This acts as a vicarious rehearsal for the real events to come in the classrooms of their supervising teachers on field experience and ultimately in their own teaching.

In the junior class, the students were studying a unit based around two adolescent fiction novels, Fireshadow, (Eaton, 2004) and Strange Objects (Crew, 1998). The units was about character transformations, and they worked towards two assessment items, a written, multimodal task responding to Fireshadow and a spoken task responding to Strange Objects.

This teacher also used a wide variety of teaching strategies and talked about her planning, which was clearly demonstrated in her classes, captured on video. It is expected that this will be very useful in demonstrating the processing of a lengthy literary work, which is not always possible to teach within the time limits of curriculum units. Some of these vodcasts will be showcased at the conference.

These 26 hours of video tape were edited into “digestible” vodcasts, between 5 and 20 minutes long. The videos were streamed into existing OLT (Open Learning and Teaching) sites as streams and discussion forums across all the undergraduate and postgraduate equivalents of English curriculum Units, of which there are six, taken at second, third and fourth year levels. Each of these is one semester long, so the vodcasts were integrated into each to match the curriculum studies unit content and the pedagogical developmental stages of the pre-service ‘apprentices’.

The materials were designed to give open access to internal students whilst off campus, as well as external students studying remotely. The vodcasts were streamed in formats accessible to 56K modems, 112K modems (for broadband, QUT lab access format) and as progressive downloads. These of course varied in quality. The DVD versions of the streams have also been integrated into face-to-face lectures and tutorial activities for on-campus students in 2007.

Part of the integration of these materials involve using the streams and digital vignettes strategically to pose problems for our students concerning the “translation” of theories and syllabi into classroom activities, units and work programs and to use the materials to examine the “solution” (Savery & Duffy, 2001) that an expert teacher chooses, and her reasons for so doing. For external students this had been invited by discussion forums. It is hoped that this will build a bridge between internal and external students, as the internal ones can also access the discussion forum, although the externals don’t have access to the face to face discussion in tutorials. This integration has been and will continue to be carried out in lectures, tutorials, and in materials for students. This pedagogical planning and development was carried out progressively from semester 2, 2006 onwards. The project’s completion date was June 2007. Formal evaluation of the project is still in process.

The final curriculum unit undertaken by fourth year students has six vodcasts, which reflect the progression across the unit of teaching ‘Hamlet’. They begin with the teacher discussing her philosophy of teaching and how she approaches her own pedagogy. In this...
Ms P. candidly elucidates her reasons, pleasures and challenges in teaching English. She raises some of the problematic issues currently under debate in the popular press as well as amongst English teachers as a body of professionals. The pre service students about to go on their final practicum and internship before becoming members of the professional body themselves, are keen to debate these ideas. Face to face the discussion is lively and animated. The discussion forum tends to be engaged with so far by external students only. The excerpts below show examples of 'projected identity (Gee, 2003), as the students position themselves in relation to the professional teacher presenting her identity on the screen.

**Questions for stream 1 - 'What does English teaching mean to you?'**

1. What key points about language does Chris make? 2. Chris is very honest about her own attitudes, values and beliefs concerning her pedagogy.

Are there any points of similarity or difference with your own ideas as prospective English teachers? 3. What points does Chris make about learners here? 4. Why do you think Chris talks about pleasure and displeasure in relation to texts? 5. Any other comments???

One student’s candid response to the interview was provocative:

> I know I'm going to get pounded for this... but I want to be an English teacher to attempt to make Senior English more understandable for students by trying to cut through some of the empty rhetoric. I tutor students part time in a few different subjects and no subject frustrates them more than Senior English. I'd like to see students learn to read and write and enjoy it, rather than the present system of regurgitating the teacher's political view in an assignment with the word "discourse" written as many times as possible. Many students simply don't understand it, and what's worse is most don't want to. Simply put, the difference I see in interest between Senior English and, for example, Maths is astounding. Maths is supposed to be a boring subject but most of my students can't wait to get English out of the way and start working on something they can grasp like calculus. I just want students to enjoy English at school as much as I did.

I responded with:

> Hi S, Have a look at Chris Poulsen's interview on the media stream and see what she says about pleasure and displeasure, the critical and the aesthetic. Certainly the idea of enjoyment in the classroom is highly important- and if the students are merely regurgitating, as you suggest, then it's probably not being well taught. Anyone else have any ideas? cheers, Anita

Another student’s response was very different:

> I really like the way that Chris approached Shakespeare. I have been working with grade 12's in the last few weeks on The Merchant of Venice and I wish I had seen it earlier! I think that the contextualising into modern life is really important and for some kids they really are very resistant to the whole idea of studying Shakespeare in the first place.

> I liked how she made the reading interactive and fun by using props, super idea. We had a lot of fun when I got males to read female parts too, being that women were not allowed to act in Shakespeare's time. They thought this was interesting.
I loved how Chris used Kayne West's lyrics also, this was the most important part for me to see in practice. It is difficult to know what, how, when and why to introduce other texts, and Chris showed how she never used them unless they served an important juxtaposition to the parent text and assisted students to understand discourse, or representation or whatever the language focus might be.

I think she approached the textual features well too, plenty of scaffolding and contextualising all the way through. Everything seemed to have a genuine and worthwhile purpose and was based on the needs of her particular class.

It is really great to watch a teacher in action, as I am teaching all my lessons on prac now and am not getting the advantage of observing!

I hope everyone's assignments are going well! Good luck!

M F.

The showcase presentation will demonstrate further these streams and discussion at work with tertiary students. The other streams included on the fourth year site cover the secondary teacher’s, unit planning; processing assessment; focussed learning episode (close reading of Shakespearean text); the year 12 student’s final assessment presentations and outtakes. The vodcasts were accompanied by printed materials the teacher distributed to the class, in the form of books of readings and resources for the curriculum unit.

The vodcasts as a site for reflective teaching

The teachers who allowed us to enter their classrooms both commented on the benefits of being able to have an extra set of eyes in the classroom as the cameras were moved to catch group discussions and pair work conversations. One said, “it’s interesting to see your own idiosyncrasies”. The teachers were asked, “Do these videos represent you fairly, or is there anything you’d like to see added or removed?” one teacher replied, “it’s all a bit clean and beautiful; there don’t seem to be any bad or awkward moments.”

The classroom teacher’s comment, pointed to one of the limitations of the project, which was that as standard ethical clearance dictates, students and guardians had to give permission to appear in the videos, and some of less well behaved members of the students cohort did not sign release forms. To conform to research ethics, these students obviously had to be edited out of the video. It was also explained that the purpose of the vodcasts was to model exemplary classroom practice in English teaching, since the streams would be situated within a curriculum context, rather than broader teaching and learning units of their complete course of study.

Ms P’s suggestion, which was taken up was to include some of the less savoury classroom moments, however fleeting, as ‘out-takes’, which was done and included as a stream to discuss classroom behaviour and teaching strategies in the English classroom. The teachers’ own reflections contribute to the pre service teachers’ understanding that teaching is also always about learning, and reflecting upon and modifying practice. This potentially brings the world of the professional community into the classrooms of the pre service teachers and helps them to understand to importance of reflexivity in effective teaching. The fact that the experienced teachers also have ‘bad’ days and that not every
lesson is perfect is somewhat encouraging for young, pre service teachers. This realisation, along with the vicarious learning through peripheral engagement, are amongst the benefits of integrating the world of work, in this case secondary classroom teaching, into the world of the apprentices.

**Future directions for the project**

The resources as well as being integrated into the existing OLT sites will be transferred at the end of this semester, to a new data management system, Blackboard, which may then be open to a wider viewing audience. It would be interesting to invite other English teachers from other countries perhaps to join the site and create a dialogue around various forms of pedagogy as they relate to theories of English teaching, language, cultural studies and literature. The plan is to use Blackboard to develop a comprehensive web site for purposes of Faculty and University dissemination- which will depend on the new data management system capabilities and transferability protocols. The project has been successful so far in engaging students in a community of learning practice, where they reflect on their own identities as future teachers, in the non threatening environment of the tertiary classroom and online. Further evaluation will be undertaken as the vodcasts are introduced into the large cohorts of second and third year units, later in 2007.

**References**


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