Using mobile device video to improve oral presentation skills

Kat Robb describes how she uses reflective video in an EAP context.

Challenged by the intimidating presence of smartphones in the classroom, many educators choose to ban them. Others, myself included, face the reality of their importance to our learners, and embrace them. This wasn't always the case for me, however, and it was precisely the challenge of their presence and their disruption in class, that led me to find ways to incorporate phones into my teaching practice to motivate learners, and exploit the ubiquitous device that many of us would feel utterly lost without in our daily lives.

This summer I carried out some research at a UK university while teaching a pre-sessional course to multilingual post-graduate learners. These students are formatively assessed in academic reading, writing, speaking, listening, and study skills. In addition, they are also required to submit a 2,500-word study project and give a 10–15 minute presentation at the end of the course.

The thing the students find most daunting is undoubtedly the presentation. All have experience of giving presentations in English during their undergraduate studies, but these have been to a monolingual audience and in their home countries. They were now faced with the task of giving a presentation to a multilingual audience in the UK, which was a totally alien context to them.

The presentation is assessed in three areas: research, presentation technique and delivery and language. So, in effect, two thirds of the overall grade is attributed to the performance of the presentation and only one third to the research and visual aids. I'm sure you'll agree that, generally, nobody enjoys being the centre of attention and in the limelight in front of an audience, and even less so if you know you are being assessed on your performance. My aim was therefore to help students improve their presentation technique, so that by week ten of the course they felt more comfortable and confident about the prospect of giving a 10–15 minute presentation, in English, to a multilingual audience. The procedure I used is as follows.

At the beginning of the first week, students are set the task of giving a two-minute presentation about anything related to their field of study. This encourages them to engage with their postgraduate degree and ensures the learning experience is meaningful. In class, students are asked to brainstorm what they consider important features of giving a good presentation. These ideas are boarded, and separated into linguistic and paralinguistic features. Students are asked why they have been separated and to think of headings for each column. When I did this, interestingly none of the students mentioned content as being important. The table opposite shows what they did come up with:

Using the features as a checklist, all students copy down the same list and mark the things they think they do when giving a presentation and what they think they don't do. This provides focus and direction during the playback stage, and a point of reference to consult.

Speaking = language features	Body = physical features
Err, umm = hesitation	Eye contact
Clearly = pronunciation	Body language
Emphasis = stress	Facial expressions
Grammar	Use your hands = gestures
Speed	Engage
Intonation	Smile
Stopping = pauses	Calmness
Volume	
Fluency	

Students give their presentations in open class one by one, and give their own mobile device to a classmate to record their presentation, which avoids any content privacy issues and of course means the students own the content. This also enables students to replay their recording an unlimited number of times and encourages them to engage with English and their presentation outside

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the classroom. I strongly believe that this is one of the tenets of using mobile devices for teaching and learning: taking the learning outside the classroom and bringing the real world into the classroom. Furthermore, the recording serves as a video journal of student performance that can always be referred back to and will serve as a barometer to compare future performances against.

In a situation when all learners are presenting simultaneously, they can be separated into groups and sit in each corner of the room with a couple of groups in the corridor. By holding the mic on the headphone jack of any mobile device close to the person speaking, background interference noise is eliminated.

Once the recording has been made, students watch it and observe and listen for the features on the checklist and compare what they marked on their list. This is where they begin to engage in reflective practice. Reflective practice is grounded on the idea of thinking about what we do and why we do it. In this particular instance, students are considering four things:

1. How do I think I come across?
2. How do I really come across?
3. Do I like what I see?
4. What do I want to change?

Once they have evaluated their performance they can start to think about how to make improvements or changes. The strategies I suggest for improvement are:

- Focus on one aspect
- View footage
- Identify feature to correct
- Decide how to change

I asked the students what they had noticed about their performance while watching their videos. There is a tendency for humans to be extremely self-critical, so I was not surprised to hear the aspects below. However, I will highlight the fact that many students were pleasantly surprised with their performance, and this served to reinforce their confidence for future presentations.

- Bad facial expressions
- Eye contact
- Fluency – don't repeat yourself
- To be more structured
- Confidence
- Pronunciation

The reflective practice the learners carry out is ongoing if they use a model of the reflective cycle below, which enables them to focus and not lose direction, much like referring to points on a compass to reach a final destination. The objectives are to heighten student awareness of their performance, promote reflection and to decide how to improve.

Plan
Record
View
Analyse
Reflect
Correct

This can be repeated as many times as necessary, until the desired results are achieved. During a 10-week course it is recommended to build up the presentations in length. In this instance, learners gave two two-minute presentations, one three-minute, one five-minute and one seven-minute, until the final week of the extended presentation of 10–15 minutes. You can also limit the number of slides each time moving from three to five to seven. This encourages them to talk with the slide as a reference, not just simply repeat what is on it.

The emphasis on reflective practice is important, in order to be able to identify

objectives to work on, and think about how best to achieve this. The next stage is the doing, or the action research. Action research is synonymous with educators embarking on professional development, but I feel it is equally as important for students to partake in their own action research. The reflective cycle is the thinking that precedes the action, but action research puts the reflection into practice and activates the students to carry their identified points forward.

Peer correction works extremely well in these situations, with the teacher supervising and monitoring for common weaknesses that can be discussed open class to find strategies for improvement. The teacher also ensures there is some lesson time dedicated to pronunciation, and signposting and chunking, to help with the overall structure of the presentation.

I am a strong believer in getting students to provide feedback on the activities they are doing in class. This serves to increase their awareness and to get feedback on the pedagogical decisions I make. I endeavour to foster a comfortable learning environment so if the students had felt uncomfortable with recording and viewing themselves on

video after the first class, I would have abandoned the research. The feedback I received when I asked them how they found this activity useful was:

- To check our mistakes by ourselves

- To realise we need more practice with presentations

- We see how to make improvements.

- It's a good way to apply practice to our presentations.

My aim is to create learning experiences that are both engaging and memorable, because I believe this is the key to successful learning. By incorporating the use of new technologies into my teaching practice I feel this objective is being met because new opportunities are opened up. I think that the fact that smartphones feature regularly in our daily lives today, means their presence is too good an opportunity not to exploit for teaching and learning purposes. The standard video function on mobile devices has resulted in the creation of a society of moviemakers. Today we create and send video clips via social networking apps and email in the same way that we write and send a text message. There are no specialist skills required, it is quick, easy and free. This is the rationale behind my decision to exploit the creation of

student made videos on mobile devices in the classroom, to improve students' oral presentation skills.

I'd like to finish by quoting a member of the audience from a recent talk I gave at the IATEFL BESIG annual conference: 'You never get a second chance to make a first impression, but you get a first chance to make a second impression.' That is what engaging in reflective practice and action research allows us to do: to keep challenging ourselves and reflecting, until we are happy with the results we have achieved, and we can move on to the next action point.

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