

# Phone - Camera - Action

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Challenged by the intimidating presence of phones in the classroom, some teachers choose to ban them while others, myself included, face the reality of their importance to our learners, and embrace them. I think it is fair to say that the pervasive nature of smart phones in society and our daily lives today means their presence is too good an opportunity not to exploit for teaching and learning purposes, and by incorporating new technologies into the classroom new learning opportunities can be opened up.

The advances in smartphone technology and proliferation of other portable devices, such as tablets, have resulted in the integration of video as a part of daily life. Videos are now created and shared using mobile devices as quickly and easily as sending a text message. All this demonstrates the transition of moving image being exclusive to television and film production, to a ubiquitous form of standard communication. This transition is also reflected in our teaching practice because teachers and students feel more comfortable using and responding to video. In a world permeated with digital imagery in society, video has become an integrative part of our daily lives.

Ask your students how many of them own a smartphone and they will all raise their hands. Ask them how many times a day they check their phones and they won't be able to put a finger on the number. This very reason is why I decided to talk about using video in the classroom at the Innovate ELT conference in Barcelona, but specifically the creation of video using mobile devices, primarily smart phones. I spoke about using the video function of mobile devices; tablets, smartphones or an iPod touch, for students to create video content by recording themselves speaking. The content is used by the learners to reflect on their performance with the objective of becoming reflective practitioners. My teaching contexts vary from business and ESP to EAP, and I have used video creation for self-reflection in all of them.

Here's what I do:

- I first elicit from the students what aspects they think are important when we talk to somebody face to face.
- The ideas are boarded and I separate the linguistic features from the physical features and again elicit what the headings should be of the two columns.
- I ask the students to think about which of the features in the lists they think they do when speaking and note them down.
- The students record themselves using their phones. Once the content has been created, they look at the list of features again during playback and mark what they actually do. This is a discovery activity but also highlights the areas for improvement by analysing the footage and evaluating performance.

For the reflection stage of the lesson I encourage learners to think about the following points:

- How do I think I come across?
- How do I really come across?
- Do I like what I see?
- Do I want to change something? What?

Once learners have detected what they want and or need to change they can work on changing it by using the steps below in what I have named the reflective cycle:

**PLAN – RECORD – VIEW – ANALYSE – REFLECT – CORRECT**



The value of learners seeing and hearing how they come across when they communicate in English is unprecedented. They adopt a heightened self-awareness of their oral communication aptitudes and discover features they would like to improve on or change. Students become mindful of how they think they come across and compare it to how they really come across.

Much has been written about action research for teachers, but surely it is equally as important for our learners to engage in their own action research, and become self-aware of their performance. I introduce my students to the reflective cycle by using the four steps below to attain their goal.

#### Four steps to become a reflective practitioner

1. Focus on one aspect
2. Observe the footage repeatedly
3. Reflect to become aware of aspects to correct
4. Plan how to change them

#### So what did I learn from all this?

The learning has not been exclusive to my students, I too have learnt a great deal from implementing self-reflection through video. By recording myself giving my talk about using video in the classroom at InnovateELT I have been able to reflect on my own practice as a presenter and how I deliver my content as a teacher. My action research is ongoing, but it wasn't until I started to record my learners and watch their videos that I realised for myself the significance of becoming a reflective practitioner through video. I was requesting my students to record themselves which was not something they had done before and many were nervous, they were also reluctant because they feared who would view the content. To avoid any privacy issues, the students' own personal devices were used, which meant they owned the content. It also meant they had a recording that would serve as a barometer of their performance, which could additionally be used to compare against future performances. The most beneficial point to note was that the students would be able to replay the content an unlimited amount of

times, which I hoped would also include outside the classroom viewing.

To help my students feel more comfortable with being recorded, I allowed them to record me teaching using my phone. We played the recording back on the classroom projector so I was able to cringe, and the students felt more comfortable with the prospect of recording each other and viewing the content with their partners. All this gave me an insight as to the tangibility of the activity I was expecting my learners to partake in. I sometimes wonder if we ask too much of our students as we try and test new methodologies, activities, and technologies. I now feel I have a deeper appreciation for what it really feels like to be on the receiving end of the pedagogical decisions I make in order to best meet my learner needs.

I have already seen a noticeable difference in my students; peer correction is commonplace, and they are definitely more aware of the features of connected speech and body language because of watching themselves on video. In order to maintain this I ensure that the reflective cycle activity is carried out on a regular basis, and I also encourage learners to watch the footage in their own time outside the classroom. Previous segments of monotone discourse have transformed into chunked discourse with intonation and stress. Slouching over the table with crossed arms staring at a book or the desk whilst talking has been replaced with full eye contact interaction, hand gestures and nodding. The outcome of this activity is proof enough that this is a valuable learning experience for the learners and for me.



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