

Reflective video 2: Benefits

Kat Robb explains the procedure and process of getting students to reflect on their own recordings.

Challenged by the intimidating presence of phones in the classroom, some educators 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 smartphones in our daily lives today means their existence is too good an opportunity *not* to exploit for teaching and learning purposes: by incorporating new technologies into the classroom, new learning opportunities can be opened up.

Smartphones have, therefore, been a vital ingredient in my implementation of reflective video in all my teaching contexts. In Issue 108 of *ETp*, I explained the motivation behind my decision to use reflective video to help my students to improve their presentation skills. I have found the benefits to be multifaceted.

The procedure

This is the procedure I use when asking my students to practise making presentations, do exam-style speaking tasks, etc:

- The students are asked to say what aspects they deem important when talking with somebody face to face. (Each class tends to produce different

ideas, but general common linguistic features include: grammar, speed, intonation, pauses, volume, fluency, pronunciation and hesitation. Paralinguistic features include: facial expressions, engaging the audience, smiling, body language and eye contact.)

- All their ideas are written on the board, separated into two columns: linguistic features and paralinguistic features. The headings for both columns are elicited from the students, to make them aware of the two main features when speaking to somebody in person. (Interestingly, no class or student has ever mentioned *content* as an important factor.)
- The students are then asked to copy the lists into their notebooks and reflect on which of the features listed they believe *they* display when they are speaking face to face or giving a presentation; they place a mark beside them.
- When the students are ready to do their presentations, exam speaking tasks, etc, they record themselves using their phones.
- They then watch the videos they have produced, looking at the list of features again and marking what they see and hear themselves do in their

recordings. By doing this, they can then compare what they *think* they do with what they *really* do. This is essentially a discovery activity, but it also highlights areas for improvement by getting the students to analyse the footage and evaluate their own performance. For this reflection stage of the lesson, I encourage the students to consider the following points:

- How do I *think* I come across?
- How do I *really* come across?
- Do I like what I see?
- What, if anything, do I want to change?

- Once the students have identified what they want and or need to change, they can work on effecting that change, in what I have named the reflective cycle:

**PLAN - RECORD - VIEW -
REFLECT - CORRECT**



The process

The value of enabling the students to see and hear how they come across when they communicate in English is inestimable. They adopt a heightened self-awareness of their oral communication aptitudes, and discover features they would like to improve on or change. The students become mindful of how they *believe* they come across and compare it to the reality. This fosters conscious learning and learner empowerment, because they are being prompted to take ownership of their learning. In addition, it adds a more active element to the process, and steers the students away from complacency.

Students can often slip into the habit of attending lessons as passive participants, believing that mere attendance will result in them learning. By using strategies like this to keep my students engaged and to nurture active involvement in the learning process, I encourage them to make the transition from *passive* to *active*, as they start making their own personal decisions regarding their learning objectives. As a result, they are able to take greater responsibility for their learning and make

it a more meaningful and worthwhile experience. Action research has been widely written about, in the context of *teachers*. However, I feel that it is equally as important for *students* to engage in their own action research, and to become self-aware of their performance.

I introduce my students to the reflective cycle by using these four steps:

- 1** Focus on one aspect of your performance.
- 2** Watch the video footage repeatedly.
- 3** Reflect to become aware of aspects that you need to correct.
- 4** Plan how to change them.

Student feedback

In order to make sure that my students are happy about using this method for improving their speaking skills, I give each class an anonymous questionnaire to complete. I have found this to be the most effective way to see the activity from the students' perspective. Feedback from students is important, as it helps teachers to understand what their students like and how useful they find different activities. My questionnaires serve as guides, helping me to adapt the activities I use, in order to meet my students' needs better. The fact that they are completed anonymously means that the students are more comfortable about expressing how they feel. It also means that they are free to say whatever they like.

Here is a summary of the feedback from an EAP class in response to the question 'What did you find useful about using video to help you develop your oral skills?':

'We were able to check our mistakes by ourselves.'

'I realised I need more practice with presentations and speaking in front of others.'

'We could see how to make changes.'

'We talked and compared our videos with our classmates.'

I also asked the same group of students what they noticed in their videos. Here is a summary of their responses:

'Bad facial expressions and no eye contact.'

'Poor pronunciation.'

'I am not confident when I speak.'

'I hesitate and repeat myself because I am nervous.'

'I need to be more structured.'

I also prompt my students to reflect on reflecting, and ask them why they think it is important. Responses from some of my classes include:

'To learn more.'

'To know how to make improvements.'

'To think about what I do.'


'To make plans for my learning.'

Student benefits

I find the benefits of reflective practice using video include its versatility and value in developing oral skills. (I have also used reflective practice for writing, which works equally well.) Here are some of the main merits I have discovered from reflective video:

- Stimulated recall is prompted by the video analysis (proven to be more effective than post-presentation feedback).
- It promotes a heightened self-awareness and mindfulness of performance.
- Students are able to set personalised learning goals which meet their individual needs better.
- Learning is extended as the students are guided on a path of reflective practice.
- There is a positive shift of motivation because of the use of personal digital devices and the setting of learning goals.
- The procedure is one of self-discovery, so it is student-centred and process-led rather than product-led.
- It harbours independent learning skills by promoting learner autonomy.



Establishing a routine of reflective practice within the classroom takes time and perseverance on behalf of the teacher and the students. However, the benefits and the learning outcomes make this effort worthwhile. 



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