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Utilising tablets and one-to-one coaching to create classroom videos for teacher development in India

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Utilising tablets and one-to-one coaching to create classroom videos for teacher development in India

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Abstract

This paper describes an initiative that was employed in preparing for the professional filming of the video element of TESS-India, an Open University-led, OER-based teacher development programme in India.

In the absence of teachers who were familiar with the text-based resources that the videos were intended to complement, an intensive one-to-one coaching relationship was established between paired Indian teacher educators and teachers within four government schools over the two-week period before the filming took place. Rather than specifying in advance the content of the lessons to be filmed, the expectation was that this should reflect the natural point reached in the school syllabus, enhanced by the pedagogic principles underpinning the TESS-India programme as a whole.

The coaching process included a joint review of the teacher's evolving classroom practice, as captured by the teacher educator on a tablet during regular lesson observations. These tablet-based reflective sessions, which informed the teacher's planning of the subsequent day's lessons, continued until the day of filming.

The resulting commentary-enhanced videos, which show English language and other subject teachers genuinely exploring the integration of new practices in their lessons, have proved both useful and inspiring to the many practitioners who have since viewed them.

TESS-India is a UKAid-funded, large-scale, Open University-led teacher education programme co-developed by UK and Indian academics. Its aim is to support national educational policy and curriculum priorities in India (NCERT, 2005) through the collaborative production and dissemination of a repository of freely available, adaptable Open Educational Resources (OER) designed to enhance the classroom practice of teachers of English and other subjects in primary and secondary schools.

The OER are accessible in a variety of forms – in print, online, on DVD and on SD cards for mobile phones and tablets. While they may be used for self-study, the expectation is that they will be mediated by teacher educators in a range of initial

and continuing teacher development contexts, in line with participating state structures and needs.

The resources combine text and video components, the former comprising a theoretical introduction, practical classroom activities, case studies, reflective tasks, further reading and additional resources; the latter, commentary-enhanced classroom videos featuring teachers moving towards the more learner-centred, participatory pedagogic principles underpinning the professional development programme as a whole.

This paper describes the production of the video element of the TESS-India OER.

The intention was that the videos would complement the text-based resources by showing Indian teachers exemplifying some of the practices they featured. This was problematic, however, in that, as the text-based materials had not yet been released, no teachers were available who had experience of their use. Two approaches were adopted in an attempt to overcome this obstacle in making the videos.

The first approach and the resulting videos proved unsuccessful. In this case, the videos were conceived as illustrating some of the classroom activities and case studies featured in the text-based materials. These in turn would include pointers and questions relating directly to aspects of each clip. As such, the videos were envisaged as being an integral, indispensable element of the TESS-India OER.

These 'version 1' videos were produced by approaching a number of schools and providing selected teachers with a brief as to which of the TESS-India activities and case studies they should exemplify and how they should do so in their classrooms. With the support of UK and Indian project staff, each clip was rehearsed immediately before being filmed. Several retakes were sometimes necessary in order to demonstrate the behaviours required.

The resulting videos were clearly staged on the part of both teachers and students, and thus of questionable value. Moreover, the rehearsal and filming process represented a time-consuming disruption to the participants' normal lessons and left them with no positive longer-term legacy.

The second approach to making the TESS-India videos acknowledged these failings. In addition, it recognised that, where suitable technology (website access, DVD players or mobile phone and tablets loaded with the TESS-India SD cards) was not available, end-users would be relying solely on print-based versions of the OER, and would be unable to view any embedded video elements. The new videos thus needed to be complementary rather than integral to the text-based OER.

Instead of connecting to individual activities and case studies, it was proposed that, as stand-alone elements, the 'version 2' videos should illustrate one or more of the ten pedagogic principles underpinning TESS-India in general, as applied to all its subject areas, namely:

- Involving all
- Talk for learning
- Using questioning to promote thinking
- Using pair work
- Using group work
- Using local resources
- Storytelling, songs, role play and drama
- Planning lessons
- Monitoring and giving feedback
- Assessing progress and performance.

(A description of each of these pedagogic principles may be found on the TESS-India website under the heading 'Key Resources'.)

A first step in the production process involved inviting a small number of government teacher educators and teachers to a two-day workshop facilitated by UK and Indian academics.

After an introduction to the TESS-India programme, the participants received a handout describing each of the ten pedagogic principles underpinning the text-based OER to read and discuss.

Although the 'version 1' video clips lacked authenticity, some nevertheless included examples of the pedagogic principles in practice. One or two of the videos were thus shown, with the workshop participants noting all the principles they were able to identify, before sharing their views with their colleagues.

The teacher educators were then each provided with a tablet on which the TESS-India text-based OER and pedagogic principles had been loaded for reference. A brief familiarisation session followed, during which the teacher educators were encouraged to explore functions of the tablet, such as the video camera.

It was explained that teacher educator–teacher pairs would be assigned two or three pedagogic principles to focus on over a two-week period, drawing on the text-based OER for ideas. The teacher educators would observe their allocated teacher's lessons each day over a two-week period, capturing selected elements on video with their tablets and making written notes of their observations on a copy of the template supplied (see Appendix 1).

The content of the recordings and the observation notes would together form the basis of a daily meeting. This involved reviewing the day's lessons, recognising areas of strength and improvement, and identifying elements to focus on the subsequent day. Appendix 2 illustrates the review and forward-planning sheet provided for this purpose.

The workshop then focused on the skill of giving teachers constructive feedback in respect of their application of the pedagogic principles in their lessons. This exchange was modelled by two workshop facilitators, with one of them role playing a teacher featured in one of the 'version 1' videos shown earlier, and the other the teacher educator providing them with feedback. The participants then paired up to undertake a similar exercise based on another classroom video.

The remainder of the workshop was dedicated to the teacher educators and teacher pairs discussing the pedagogic principles that they had been allocated to focus on, examining the TESS-India OER and considering how to integrate new practices into their English language or other subject teaching syllabus over the next two weeks.

To finish, the teacher educator and teacher participants were introduced to the Indian academic who had been tasked with providing locally based support over the two-week coaching period, during school visits, meetings and phone calls, drawing on the observation notes, daily summary feedback forms, tablet-based clips and lesson plans where helpful, while communicating with the UK on a daily basis.

At the end of the two-week period, the teachers were filmed as they integrated their assigned pedagogic principles into their lessons. Some teachers were filmed reflecting on those lessons immediately afterwards.

The resulting edited videos are not intended to be model lessons. Rather, they are a true reflection of the participating teachers' developmental trajectory and their students' authentic response to more participatory classroom practices. As such, they are intended to inspire and motivate other Indian teachers to explore the use of similar practices in their own classrooms.

The nature of the learning partnerships forged between the teacher educators and teachers involved in the intensive coaching process described in this paper has been captured in the form of questionnaires, interviews, lesson observation notes, completed daily review sheets and tablet-based recordings, which are currently undergoing detailed analysis.

A questionnaire at the start of the preparatory workshop indicated that over a third of the 14 teachers attending considered lack of skills and experience to be their main challenge in the classroom.

None of the 23 teacher educators and teachers involved had prior experience of using video to prompt reflection after lesson observations. After the coaching process, the teacher educators nevertheless commented on the notable gains in confidence evidenced among their assigned teachers in analysing the tablet-based clips of their classroom practice and in suggesting ways of modifying this in subsequent lessons.

In all cases, the teacher educators described small but significant shifts in the participating teachers' progression towards more learner-centred classroom pedagogy over the two-week coaching period. Of interest too were the teacher educators' reports of positive changes to their own practice since being involved in this novel initiative.

The complete set of 55 videos was filmed in two Hindi-speaking states. In addition to this set, which has been enhanced with Hindi audio commentaries focusing on the learning key points, versions are available with English, Assamese, Kannada, Odia and Bengali audio commentaries and descriptions.

The text and video elements of the TESS-India English language OER – along with those developed for maths, science, and language and literacy teaching – may be found at: www.tess-india.edu.in/ and the video element alone on YouTube.

In the few months since the videos have been made available, they have been viewed almost 18,000 times.

References

NCERT (2005). *National Curriculum Framework.* National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi.

Appendix 1: Teacher educator reflection

Name of teacher observed:

Date:

Class(es) observed:

- What went well in the lesson(s) you observed?
- How is the teacher progressing?
- What have you learnt from the lesson observation and follow-up discussion?

Appendix 2: Lesson observation summary feedback form

Teacher educator – teacher discussion

- What we agreed went well *(refer back to previous observation summaries as appropriate)*:
- Agreed areas to improve:
- Specific development goals for the next observed lesson:

Teacher educator   Teacher

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

Date................................   Date.................................