Promises and perils of video-based teacher professional development

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Description

Teachers are increasingly encouraged to participate in facilitated group reflection on video-recorded examples of their own classroom practice. Recent studies have shown that such collaborative sharing of teaching practice can be an important and effective method of work-based teacher professional learning. However, the complex social processes through which teachers are thought to learn in this environment have not been fully examined. This project will address this gap by investigating the following questions:

- What strategies do teachers adopt when they view and discuss video-recordings of their own practice?

- What role do facilitators play, and how does this impact upon teacher learning?

- What processes and conditions facilitate and/or hinder teacher learning?

The study will provide detailed analysis of audio-recordings of video-based professional development workshops collected as part of an ESRC-funded and WLE Centre-supported project studying classroom interaction and change.

Problem and aims

Educational researchers and teacher educators have become increasingly enthusiastic about using teacher group reflection on video-recordings of their own teaching practice as a tool for work-based professional learning (e.g. Goldman, 2007; Hiebert et al., 2003). This approach integrates key elements of effective teacher professional development: exploring theory in relation to concrete problems of practice; cultivating collaborative teacher professional learning communities; and making classroom practice public (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Pickering et al., 2007; Stoll & Louis, 2007; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Recent studies have demonstrated the potential of video-based discussions to enhance teacher learning in mathematics and science education (Borko et al., 2008; Rosaen et al., 2008; Santagata, 2009; Seidel et al., 2007; Sherin & van Es, 2009).

Many of these studies are outcomes-focused and thus gloss over the social dimensions of teacher learning in video-based discussions. The conditions which make these learning processes more or less effective and the contributions of those who facilitate these encounters are therefore not fully explored. This gap is particularly glaring given the sensitive nature of these discussions, which can expose teachers' perceived weaknesses to their peers, often take place in situations of complex power relations (among participating teachers, and between them, school management and university researchers and/or facilitators), and may open up for discussion sensitive professional and political issues. By treating teacher collaboration and professional community as entirely functional and harmonious, in effect overlooking or obscuring sociality's "dark side" (Gurevitch, 2000), such research ill-serves those who attempt to institute similar activities in their own settings. This project seeks to address this lacuna by examining and documenting:

- micro-interactional processes of teacher participation in video-based reflection workshops;

- facilitation strategies and their

impact upon the interaction; and

- social processes and related conditions that promote and/or hinder learning.

Context

The proposed study grows out of the ESRC-funded and WLE Centre-supported "Towards Dialogue: A Linguistic Ethnographic Study of Classroom Interaction and Change" project. The primary aim of this project was to study continuity and change in classroom interaction, and the relationship between teacher interactional sensitivity and classroom practice. As part of the project a series of ten workshops were conducted in one primary school, in which the eight participating teachers reflected on video or audio-recorded excerpts of interaction from their own classrooms. One interesting (and unexpected) aspect of these workshops was the frequent occurrence of 'interactional trouble' that impeded social learning processes. For example, potentially productive issues were often closed down by participants, invitations to the group to take greater control over the direction of discussions were largely declined, and some participants maintained a position at the periphery of the group for the duration of the programme, contributing only minimally. Experimentation with different facilitation models and strategies yielded only minor improvements. These difficulties raise a host of important issues: both theoretical – about the relationship between work-based social dynamics and teacher learning – and practical – about how best to design and facilitate video-based teacher reflection workshops. These issues fall outside the scope of the "Towards

Dialogue" project, which lacks the resources to pursue them.

By investigating the interaction of social and discursive processes on the one hand and teacher learning on the other, this project will contribute to understanding the ways in which the school workplace affords and constrains professional learning, and will offer new insights and guidance for those involved in video-based teacher professional development.

Methodology

The project involves analysis of previously collected data:

Core data: audio recordings, fieldnotes and artefacts from ten teacher reflection workshops, each lasting 75 minutes. Detailed summaries of key events and themes have already been prepared for each workshop. Supporting data: video-recordings and fieldnotes from approximately 80 literacy lessons, 2-3 interviews with each of the participating teachers, and recordings and fieldnotes from eight teacher planning meetings.

Analysis will include:

Sampling: We will review recordings of the workshops to identify events in which opportunities for teacher learning were especially pronounced. In particular, we will focus on instances of potentially productive socio-cognitive tension, e.g. when conflicting interpretations of the lesson were voiced, or when more than one course of action was promoted.

Categorisation: Events will be coded in terms of topic, initiation, conclusion, participants, facilitation strategies and mode of resolution. Recurring clusters of codes will be examined to identify distinct categories of

events. We will examine the distribution over time and across participation frameworks of event categories in order to explore how, if at all, group learning processes evolved over the course of the ten workshops.

Micro-analysis: Five events will be selected for detailed micro-analysis: at least one for each of the three most common categories of events, and two outliers in which social tensions are particularly high. Such tense moments are potential sites of "metapragmatic commentary" (Kroskrity, 2004), in which aspects of social interaction which are normally tacit are made explicit. These events will be transcribed in detail and analysed using linguistic ethnographic concepts and methods (e.g. Rampton, 2006). This process moves beyond 'vignette analysis' (Borko et al. 2008), offering deeper understandings of the events outlined above by providing insight into the inter-relationships between participants' concerns and strategies, social dynamics, facilitation moves and teacher learning.