Investigating teachers’ perceptions of the IRIS Connect video observation system as a tool for their professional development

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Background:
Having introduced a programme of ‘learning walks’ and lesson observations into the school to focus on specific elements of learning and teaching, I found that the greatest obstacle to gathering data concerning improvement was teachers’ own fear of lesson observation. Having questioned staff at the school, I found that 40% of those questioned either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, ‘I find it stressful having an observer in the classroom’. When looking further into this, it was also discovered that 63% believed that the presence of an observer changed the behaviour of the students. The discovery of the IRIS Connect video observation system looked to address these two aspects and the aim of my study, therefore, was to see if there was a different method of observation that could be used that could help teachers improve but do so in a manner more conducive to individual needs.

What is IRIS Connect?
IRIS Connect is a 360°, fully remotely operated camera that can be placed at the back of a classroom in order to keep a permanent record of a lesson. It records to a remote server and lessons can be watched either live or after the lesson from any computer on the school network.

Research Questions
1. What are the challenges of using Iris Connect video observation with teacher colleagues?
2. What are teachers’ perceptions of the impact their involvement in the study has had on their classroom practice, including their lesson planning and approach to analysis and evaluation?
3. What are teachers’ perceptions about the effect of Iris Connect video observation on their professional practice in comparison with more traditional models of observation and feedback?

Data Gathering
A number of methods were used, not least of which was the Iris software itself.
- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Email records
- Journal entries

Ethics
The study made use of ‘informed consent’ whereby each class was told that the recording was taking place. The school contract includes phrasing that permits the use of video recording of lessons for the use of professional development.

Preliminary Findings
My two research partners have had differing views of the system. One has found the experience to be very positive, whilst the other feels that she has gained little from the experience. Both agree that this should not be a permanent feature, nor should it become the norm. Instead they feel that it would be useful when a teacher wishes to examine a particular aspect of their teaching which they want to improve. The presence of the camera was found to bring its own problems for both the observed and the observer.

The main advantage is that comments can be made alongside the video, with each comment relevant to the moment when it was made in the lesson.

The camera stands 12 inches high and cannot be seen moving. The wireless microphone is hung around the teacher’s neck.

The teacher can then watch their own lesson back, see themselves teaching, read the comments made by the observer, and add their own comments alongside. The software is web-based and therefore accessible from anywhere.

Action Research Model
The design of the study was based on a constructivist approach, looking at discovering a teacher’s areas for development through an open conversation and allowing them to design the study for themselves. The research would then be conducted through an Action Research Cycle involving two or three interventions, based on Bubb’s ‘Professional Development Cycle’.

The Literature Review
Although there is little literature concerning the use of video observation, there has been much research into the use of observation as a professional development tool. This study draws upon the work of Bubb, Simpson and Tuson, and King. Others, who have looked at the common pitfalls of lesson observation and how it can be used effectively to support CPD. Where video observation is discussed, the writers can only refer to the traditional use of a fixed camera or one operated by the observer, and add their own comments alongside. The literature review suggests that 63% of those questioned either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, ‘I find it stressful having an observer in the classroom’.

References