

Interview

An interview with Paul Seedhouse on Video Enhanced Observation (VEO): A New Tool for Teacher Training, Professional Development and Classroom Research

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Dr. Paul Seedhouse is Professor of Educational and Applied Linguistics at Newcastle University, UK. His 2004 monograph *The Interactional Architecture of Language Classroom*, published by Blackwell, won the Modern Language Association of America Mildenerger Price. He also co-edited the collections *Applying Conversation Analysis* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2005) and *Language Teaching and Learning as Social Interaction* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2007) and is co-author of *Research Methods for Applied Language Studies* (Routledge, 2012). His main research is about how people communicate in professional settings, specifically, uncovering how the organization of interaction in an institutional setting is related to institutional goals. In this area of research, Dr. Seedhouse has published many articles, papers and book chapters. He is currently PI on the project Video Enhanced Observation, an Erasmus Plus KA2 Partnership for School Education Grant.

Interview

Interviewer: Dr. Seedhouse, what is Video Enhanced Observation?

Paul Seedhouse: It is a project based on an App, originally designed in order to improve teachers' professional development. The idea that we are developing is to allow teachers to take their iPad –in a few months the App will be available for tablet and Android as well– and video their own class or to work with a colleague to video each other's classes. So, it is an App which has advantages. So, one advantage is that you video a class and, when you press the button, it is uploaded onto the cloud very quickly. You can share it on the cloud, you can look at the video on your PC and you can edit it if you like. The second advantage is that you have a tagging system. At the moment, one common problem with current recording systems, such as recording with a video camera, is you make a video and you think "there is something interesting, but I can't remember where it is after twenty minutes or after thirty minutes". So, you spend a lot of time trying to find the interesting thing you noticed. In the VEO App you simply tag that point and, after the recording, you go straight back to it and you, actually, go back to the point five seconds before that, so you can see the build up to that point as well.

This App helps you to get to the right point in the video, but it does more than that, because you have a series of tags as well. For example, there is a sliding tag for motivation which you can use when you want to measure the students' high or low level of motivation in classroom. As a result, you can see the progress of the lesson, what the lesson is about, why the students get more motivated here and less motivated there.

You can also, with respect to classroom interaction, focus on the amount of teacher talk or student talk, which is very important. You can do that with the App with a simple tag, marking the points when the teacher is talking, when a student is talking, etc. The program produces statistical graphs afterwards, so you can compare across lessons. For example, you observe a colleague's lesson and you say "look, you're talking 80 per cent of the time, let's try reduce it" and you see the next lesson will come down to 50 per cent. So you get statistics. Personally, I'm not particularly interested in statistics, but it is useful to have that information. At the moment, there are tags that you can use that are based on general teaching. However, the next stage in the development of the App is that everybody will be able to produce their own tags for whatever they are interested in.

About 3 weeks ago we had a colleague from Turkey, Olcay Sert, and also a colleague from Germany, Goetz Schwab, who came over and we did a workshop and we worked out tags which are useful for language teaching classrooms. So, there are not specific tags for language classrooms available in the App, but they will be available soon. So the App is based on the idea that everybody will be able to tag whatever he or she is interested in. Let's say, you're doing a PhD on a particular thing, for example, questions, and you want to look at, for example, what type of questions a teacher is asking or you want to know how a teacher gives feedback, do they produce a confirmation check, do they produce a recast, do they ask closed questions... You might decide how the tags are used, so you're able to see how many different types of teachers' questions are asked or what happens after them. Maybe you're interested in group work or pair work, in that kind of thing. Again, with the tags you can mark when it's a whole class, when it's pair work or when it's group work. So, if you get a collection of lessons you can go straight to whatever you're looking at in the lessons.

Interviewer: Therefore, it's a tool to make the collection of data easier. For example, if you want to research a specific issue of classroom discourse, you can prepare the App to focus on this issue. It seems like a very good tool for two main uses: to do research and also for teacher training.

Paul Seedhouse: Exactly. In the VEO European project what we are doing is working with partners from Finland, Germany, Bulgaria and Turkey. Our partners are going to be using the App with teachers and seeing how it's related with professional development, if it helps to improve professional development. Apart from that, of course, we are trying out the App, we are trying to improve the App. We are trying to see how people use it and how we can improve the App. So, that's the basic purpose of the VEO European project. Apart from that, there's a separate company, which is called VEO, founded by my two colleagues Jon Haines and Paul Miller. They started the App, which is not only useful for teachers; it's useful for a lot of professionals. For example, in marketing, you can use it if you want to know what a group marketing talk or presentation looks like, or, in another area, you can use it to know how doctors interact with patients... So, it's good because it can do recording nice and easily. You can tag, so you've got information on what you're looking for, you can process it, you can produce statistics... Now you probably noticed that doing this tagging and coding is not Conversation Analysis.

Interviewer: Not exactly, but...

Paul Seedhouse: However, when you get the data, you can transcribe the data.

Interviewer: Exactly.

Paul Seedhouse: So, we are working with two partners specialized in CA [Conversation Analysis]– Olcay Sert in Turkey and Goetz Schwab in Germany– and we will be doing the transcription. It will be CA analysis of the interaction and we will be seeing what the interaction is between coding and the CA.

Interviewer: In this way it's a good tool because it's easier to first approach the data. Normally, in CA, you record with a video camera or with another kind of tool, but with this App you can prepare for collecting video in a better way to focus on the issues you want to research. Therefore, it's easier to try to understand the data and to work with it.

Paul Seedhouse: Yes, and not only that. The App is a good tool also for professional development. When you put the video on the cloud, you can give access to the cloud to any of your colleagues and you can build up your own collection of video data to be used by your school or maybe by teachers in Barcelona. There is no limit to that really. The App can be downloaded for free, but if you want to use the cloud you have to pay quite a small amount of money. Yes, so that actually makes it much easier for video to be shared. Of course, you can edit the video from your computer when it is uploaded on the cloud.

Interviewer: Are you collecting data, nowadays?

Paul Seedhouse: Not just yet. It is a two-year project, so the first thing we're doing is we're working out which tags to use for the project. So, for example, we've got tags for language teaching now. But we need other tags for different countries and also they've got to be translated into four languages. So, there is some building up work to do. We need to change the App to be easily translated so anybody can put in whatever tags they want, and then translate it into the languages, and then we will be doing the data collection in about a year's time. But the App is all ready. It can now be used with the tags for general education but not specifically for language teaching. That will change shortly, so people will be able to develop their own tags however they want.

Interviewer: So, you are now preparing to collect this data. What are you expecting? What kind of data analysis you are expecting to do afterwards?

Paul Seedhouse: Ok. Well, there are two separate things. First of all, we have got to focus on the project, whose main research question is: "does using VEO contribute to teachers' professional development?" We set a baseline: "what are they doing in terms of professional development?" The answer is that in a number of European countries there is not much continuing professional development. Teachers do their teacher training and then stop. In some countries it's not like in England; here, we have a certain number of days each year on which teachers must do continuing professional development. So, we want to find out what the teachers do now for continuing professional development. We want to know how VEO is used in different countries. Also, we would like to know if the App contributes to professional development and, if so, how. So, those are the questions we are going to answer for the project, but apart from that we will also be gathering data which I and my colleagues will be using for Conversation Analysis, so we will be looking at classroom interaction in the way you know about.

Interviewer: So, for teachers, it could be a good tool for lifelong learning and development. For example, they can record themselves and try to focus on a specific point and try to improve in that area.

Paul Seedhouse: And they can see improvement over time. We will be recording each teacher three times. They will be looking at the first video. If there is something that went wrong they might be able to improve, such as their teacher talk time, that is, talking too much.

After that, the aim will be try to reduce it in the second or the third video. That's the idea; it's about longitudinal development.

Interviewer: So, in this way, there are a lot of contexts to apply this App in. For example, I am thinking of these intensive teacher training courses over one month. The trainers could use this App to show the future teachers how they are improving or how they are failing in different areas.

Paul Seedhouse: Exactly. It can be done very quickly. You see, basically, as it is on the cloud, when you take the video on the iPad, it takes usually about five to ten seconds to be uploaded onto the cloud and it takes about two minutes on the cloud to process it. Then, the teacher trainer can take the video of the teacher trainee and, about five minutes later, he or she can put it on the PC and can go through the training. So, it will be very useful for teacher training as well.

Interviewer: And also you can tag the video to show specifically one part...

Paul Seedhouse: Yes, that's it. You can go straight to it on the video.

Interviewer: This is amazing! There are a lot of opportunities with this App.

Paul Seedhouse: Yes, exactly. My colleagues Jon and Paul are looking at all different uses. Specifically, in the VEO European project we are focusing on teaching development, continuing professional development and lifelong learning for teaching.

Interviewer: It's a very project for implementing in a lot of contexts, but specifically, in our context it's a good tool for a lot of different things. It could be a good way of making our work as teachers and teacher trainers easier.

Paul Seedhouse: Yes, exactly, so I think your colleagues who read the journal will be interested to know that we have tags coming out specifically for observing language teaching classrooms in the near future.

Interviewer: What kind of tags are you focusing on now? For example, general tags about issues related with teachers' actions in classroom... You talked about motivation, about teachers' talk, students' talk...

Paul Seedhouse: Basically, on the iPad screen you've got tags going down on the right side, on the left side and across. You can tag, for example, what the setting of the classroom is or what kind of questions the teacher is asking. This is what we are producing for language teaching specifically, but it's not part of the App yet. With the tags we are developing, for

example, you can choose teacher monologue, whole class, individual student work, pair work, group work, etc. On the other hand, we will propose tags to focus on whether the teacher is speaking the first language or the second language, an issue that teachers all over the world are very interested in. It is something we tag specifically. We also will tag teacher's open questions, closed questions, explaining or building rapport, if teacher feedback is explicit or implicit... We will also look at the teacher's focus: is the teacher's focus on form or on meaning, or on management of the classroom or materials?

On the other hand, we have got the student. So, the teacher is on one side and student is on the other side of the screen. Is the student speaking in the first language or the second language? Is the student speaking on task or off task? Is the student initiating something? Are they changing the topic? Are they asking a question? Is there some kind of communication trouble? Is there some kind of knowledge gap? There will be also an open tag, because sometimes you notice that there is something interesting and you just want to go to that point. So, that's what the language teaching set will look like.

Interviewer: So it's very complete in focusing on classroom discourse and teachers' classroom discourse...

Paul Seedhouse: I wouldn't say it's complete at all. I don't think any tagging system can be complete because, basically, you've got to make a decision. If you want, you can have a hundred tags on the screen, but then it's not user friendly. So, you have to think what are the most important things to look at. But the point about the system is that you can put your own tags in, which you will be able to do in a few months. Therefore, you can decide for yourself that these are the things I want to focus on. So, I don't think any tagging system can actually be complete as such.

Interviewer: Anyway, it's very interesting. On the other hand, the App can help to make a portfolio as a practical resource. It could be possible, in teacher training, to make a portfolio for teachers' development. And also, another good point is this community of practice, which is made on the cloud. We can share our classrooms, we can see others' classrooms and we can also comment on it on the platform.

Paul Seedhouse: Yes, it's useful for that point. You were talking about a portfolio. Well, we will be trying out getting the teachers to do video diaries and, actually, to use the App, because they are going to have an iPad and use it in the lesson. Then, after the lesson they

will make a video reflecting on how the class went. So, we are going to try out the idea of the video diary.

Interviewer: Therefore, this App and this project are very interesting for the readers given the different uses implied.

Paul Seedhouse: I think some of the readers might find it more interesting not only for teaching but also for researching language use. It is easy to use and carry your iPad around, but you can also change the tags to make more them suitable for researching language use in the real world.

Interviewer: Exactly.

Paul Seedhouse: For example, if you want to research idiomatic expressions or you want to focus on non-standard grammar, you can put those in this coding category. So, the App can be useful as a tool for language research or collecting data on language as well, and it enables you to produce instant statistics and you go back to whatever you want to check in the data.

Interviewer: Yes because it is a video recording App and it is easier to prepare the data collection. For example, I am thinking about multimodal communication. It is possible also to prepare tags for gestures or the teacher's facial expressions and focus on those specifically.

Paul Seedhouse: And also the audio and the video quality on the iPad are really very good.

Interviewer: And nowadays it's easier to record with an iPad or a Smartphone than with a video camera because most people have an iPad or a Smartphone but it's not common to have a video camera. It could be a key point in classroom interaction research and classroom discourse research in general. As you said, for example, we can focus on the discourse markers the teachers are using or a lot of different issues because it is real data. It could be a very good App for classroom research, because it could make our work as researchers easier.

Paul Seedhouse: Oh, I think I forgot: we are intending to produce a Spanish translated version as well, because my research assistant is from Chile and she is going produce the tags in Spanish.

Interviewer: Great! It will be very useful for the Spanish as Foreign Language teaching community as well.

Paul Seedhouse: Yes, so that will be in a few months time.

Interviewer: So, thank you very much for this interview!

Paul Seedhouse: Thank you.

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