

Video stimulated recall, reflection and dialogue: introduction to the method

Hello I'm Melanie Nind and I'm from the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) at the University of Southampton and this is an introductory video to a method I've been using within the centre i.e. Video Stimulated Recall Reflection and Dialogue.

You can find in lots of text books about video stimulated recall and much less around the reflection and the dialogue that I'll be talking about today. And in terms of the introduction, I'm going to introduce you to what the method involves when and why that method might be useful to you, some of the key decisions and challenges within the method, some of the ethical issues, how we're using it within the centre and some of the questions that you might need to ask yourself if you're considering using this method.

So what kind of method is this? This is a kind of interview technique. It's more advanced. It's a think-aloud technique but you're not asking your interviewee to think aloud something that's happening there and then. You're asking them to think aloud and recall and reflect about something that's happened previously sometimes immediately previously sometimes within the last day or week or a couple of weeks. And so it's this retrospective technique but video stimulated. There is a stimulus there to help stimulate that reflection and that thinking about what happened. And within this technique that the stimulus is the video, it's there in a way to bring back the original situation for the interviewee to bring it back with a kind of vividness and accuracy that wouldn't be there if we're just trying to recall what was I just did, what happened, why did I do it. The video brings the whole thing much more to the forefather participant, the interview. And just by showing it yes it reminds them and so they recall but it also prompts for them this reflection why did I do that, that's interesting, I didn't know I talked with my hands in the way that I do very good today. I can get some dialogue going as a researcher when I use this method so you know what was that about, what was going on, can we talk about. And what's really important with the method and sometimes people forget although you might capture a lot of video, the sole purpose of that video is then to stimulate the discussion. You don't go away and analyze that video in and of itself. The purpose of the video is to become a kind of stimulus material, a resource to deepen the interview experience.

So as a new user of the method you need to think about what is it that you want your participants to relive, why do you want them to relive it, what you want them to recall and reflect on. In terms of when and why you use this method; it's usually about probing what's going on what's happened you use it at times when you want to know what an interviewee is feeling thinking why they made the decisions that they made. So in our instance using it with understanding teaching and learning and the decision making, the interactions, what's going on within classrooms, it is a great method for that because often what we want to know isn't readily knowable we need to really kind of drill down. We need to help to make something explicit that wasn't readily explicit. And we use the method when we want to combine thinking about behaviour with thinking about what was behind that behaviour and sometimes that thinking is quite complex. It can be automated you know we do it so many times, teachers do what they do so many times they've stopped necessarily knowing why it is that they use that humour or that resource or paste things as they do. So this is a method that can help you to access things you wouldn't normally access. So think about whether that's of benefit to you. I want to illustrate for you the way that video can stimulate dialogue so researchers and participants can discuss together. We had an excerpt where one of the researchers in who'd been making the video said you know Melanie the other researcher me,

can say more about this but we're interested in this particular piece of video because it was one of the moments in the events when you the learners were quite engaged. And then I come in and create a conversation and say yes. For the audio tape now because we're recording the focus group, it wasn't very long ago that we were carrying out this piece of video, this real event was happening do you remember it and one of the participants, one of the learners in in the teaching session says "actually I disagreed very strongly with what was being said then perhaps I don't know if that came across that I did disagree I didn't say I didn't say I strongly disagree . And you can see here" that just the little piece of video and a couple of researchers talking about it has started off a whole episode of dialogue about what was going on and why the participants disagreed, why the teacher said what she said and so on.

Ok so some key decisions that you're going to make if you're using this method is firstly what kind of stimulus will work best? If it's just about language maybe audio. If you just want to stimulate reflection on what you could see, photo might suffice. But using video as the stimulus has the advantage that you've got this sequential temporal element, this happened and then that happened, you did this and then your learners in my case laughed or became engaged or ask questions. So you've got that live kind of follow through moment with video. It's also very multimodal so you can see things you can hear things and the cues are very engaging with video. So there are lots of reasons why that stimulus works well but you also need to think about for yourself what the disadvantages of video are. Certainly we found that sometimes people can't focus on the thing you want them to focus on because they're focused on the fact that their shoes didn't go with their outfit all the hair was sticking up and all these peripheral things that video picks up that sometimes you have to work with and work through before people can focus.

Another huge decision for you is about what the camera needs to see, the angle of the camera, whether it needs to zoom right in, weather actually needs to have a soundscape with this piece of video. When we've used this in NCRM, we've had one camera looking at the teacher, one camera looking at the learners, and so we've got multiple angles that may be far more complex than you would need. Another huge decision is when and how you're going to share that stimulus of the piece of video. If your emphasis is on video stimulated recall, the memory, then the sooner after the real event happened that you replay it for the recall the better so immediate can be really good. If you really want deep reflection on something, it's sometimes better to leave the video with your participants overnight or for a couple of days and then come together and use that stimulus for that kind of reflection.

Sometimes it can be good to use the video just with one interviewee ok this happened, what was going on, what you were thinking. But sometimes an additional stimulus can be other people in the discussion so I tend to use this method with a focus group so if i say what's going on and other people chip in and together we can reconstruct and re-understand and interpret something that's just been happening.

And lastly I think in terms of key decisions it's about who choose which excerpts, which video clips are going to be probed. Our automatic thing is it's the researcher of course you know you know your research question you know what you want to examine but even a more kind of participatory, emancipatory use of this technique, it would be the participant who says you know this was an interesting moment for me or this is an interesting part of the video that I'd like to explore. So some challenges next this isn't a straightforward method and I'm just going to have focus in really on to main challenges. The first one is around capturing the video so the art of using this method is making your video recording very unobtrusive. First

of all and secondly of sufficient quality that it stimulates the kind of thinking you want it to stimulate. A rough old piece of video might do the job but a better piece of video is going to do a better job. The video where the camera is actually interfering with all the natural interactions you're hoping to explore, it is a very limited used to you. So the first challenge is really around that capturing the video. I've had a research student using this method where they've had cameras on tripods in busy primary school classrooms and it hasn't worked at all because they simply get in the way. We've used cameras that just stick to a window with a suction cup and it's just tiny and just doesn't bother anybody at all.

The second challenge really is when and how you're going to share that video you know whether you're going to use little parts, big parts whether you're going to have two images, two angles played picture in picture or alongside split screen whether you're going to use raw material, whether you going to edit something out. And the quality of the playback equipment is too very important for sharing that video. Again we've had a lovely quality video in the past with this method and the playback equipment has let down really the quality of what we're looking at.

A quick whiz really through some of the ethical issues I wouldn't encourage you to whiz through them quickly you need to spend time on them but just to highlight some of the things today. Whenever you have a video camera involved in a research method even one like this, you need to ask yourself whether it's okay to position people, participants, and interviewees as the subjects of your professional or research gaze. Is that comfortable for them, is that acceptable, can you defend put in this gaze on them. Does it have to be like that, does it have to be the researchers' gaze on the participant? With this kind of method all sorts of opportunities that are offered for you to be kind of putting that gaze on together to reflect together to avoid that kind of evaluative judgment that comes with ordinary video work e.g. I've taken this video, I'm taking away as research or I'm analyzing it, thank you very much you've been the subject of my gaze - Let's sit together and look at what I've just captured you know what sense can we make of this together. So there are some ethical kind of opportunities here to behave in a way that is much more respectful of our research participants. They can share in the process of deciding what's going to be filmed, what they're going to look at on the film, who select you know who selects which bits of the video to focus on. Participants might even come up with some of the questions to ask and probe in terms of looking at that piece of video stimulus. So there are some ethical things around the feelings of ownership that you could produce with this method or the feelings of vulnerability that you could generate really wouldn't want to generate. So some ethical things definitely for us all to think about.

I've already mentioned some of the ways in which we're using this method in the National Centre for Research Methods. We have a whole package of research where we're looking at the teaching and learning of research methods and you know you can't just ask a teacher of research methods to say what it is they do and how. Sometimes they need that piece of video of what they've just done to help them think that through. So we're using the method to help us get the complexity, to help us make some of the implicit things in that teaching and learning just a bit more explicit for the teachers and learners. And we are very definitely not just using video stimulated recall. We're using this with focus groups of teachers and learners together because we want to facilitate kind of dialogue. We want to create a community in which together we're in this process of working out the best ways of teaching and learning research methods. So if not the best ways, ways that work for us, ways that work for learners, things that people like and dislike and thinking about the decision making going on. And in

that kind of use of the method what's interesting is that it can serve two purposes. It's got this distinctive purpose for the researchers but also our shared purposes with other teachers and learners that we've all kind of invested in this project. And I think the advantage that I want to flag up to you just as one extra thing in this introduction is that the method is really quite good at flagging up the discrepancies between what we think we've been seeing and the participants' explanations of what we've been seeing.

I recall video in one session where people were being taught really advanced quantitative methods and there was a room full of learners who looked absolutely impassive in their body language their faces just weren't changing and as a research as we couldn't tell whether they were concentrating learning or just planning what they were having for dinner tonight. You could not read on their faces but using the video stimulated recall we showed that piece of video and said to the learners what was going on at that moment you know we can't read your expressions. And they were saying oh we were concentrating so hard you can't you know you can't lose your focus for a second when you're learning quantitative methods because they knew you can't follow it through. And so just this piece of video that the participants' explanations and our explanations for what we were seeing were different and the video really helps to clear some of that out and we had quite a really interesting discussion about that. So I think this method has real potential.

In terms of reflecting, I can remember teachers selecting pieces of video for us and it's quite hard to get your participants to select video. They're often just happy for you to select bits. But participants teachers in this case selecting a piece of video and saying you know I was relaxed at this point, this was interesting but the learners were asking questions, I've selected this is a as a really nice piece of the teaching episode. So you know that reflection can be quite nice to prompt with this method.

And I'm just going to leave the introduction today with some things for you to reflect on if you're going to take this forward.

First of all one of our lessons from using the method is that recall and reflection doesn't always need to be stimulated by piece of video. We've had focus groups where the video has almost felt redundant because everybody remembers it. It was very LIVE, it was very engaging and provocative for them the session itself so they didn't need the extra stimulation. So sometimes you have collected and invested in a whole lot of data generation or stimulus generation that you didn't need.

Another thing we found with this method is that it can be quite hard to find the most provocative moments. If you've got hours and hours of video which is the moment that's going to gets that person thinking reflecting having a discussion with you. It's not always easy to isolate those moments. It's also not always that easy to translate something that's happening in real life into a video. We sat in sessions and thought that was fabulous that was a brilliant bit of teaching and learning I can't wait to show that to the teachers and learners later in the focus group and then we've sat down together and showed the video with kind of thought hmmm! that doesn't really do it, doesn't bring it alive again, there was something about that moment, the humour, where it was that it was just after tea break or something that meant that it had that meaning which is just lost in the video later. So be prepared I think for some disappointments as well as some excitements with this method.

And the last thing i would say I think is that this method is best not just using the video as a stimulus but also using it as a response so it becomes part of the interaction between the

researcher and the research participants. So you might use a piece of video, get some discussion going and then follow up on something in the discussion with a fresh bit of video so that the video becomes part of the conversation. And i think really that's when the method has it its greatest potential. So lots to think about and an interesting method I think.