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Written artefacts in post-conference feedback sessions: the running commentary as a support for teacher learning

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Written artefacts often form a significant part of teacher education activities and play a crucial role in the dialogue between tutor and student teacher in a post-observation feedback session. However, although the dialogue of feedback sessions has been extensively researched, the role of the artefact has been less explored. This research examines how the written artefact of a running commentary guides or constrains the pedagogical conversation between tutor and student teachers, as well as how it represents the power and authority of the tutor and the teacher education establishment. The article concludes with implications for pre-service teacher education practice.

Keywords: pre-service teacher education; artefacts; running commentary; post-observation feedback

Introduction

The goal of teacher education programmes is to guide pre-service teacher–student teachers to become expert professionals (Johnson and Dellagnelo 2013). Typical teacher preparation activities included in most programmes involve input, classroom observations, feedback and self-evaluation (Ellis 1990). What is common to all these activities is the inclusion of some types of written artefact, such as running commentaries, self-evaluation forms, observation checklists and lesson plans. While the teacher preparation activities above have been extensively researched, the role of the written artefact has been less so (McDonald et al. 2005; Soares and Lock 2007). There is evidence that the written artefact can have a significant impact on the dialogue between tutor and student teacher (Katić, Hmelo-Silver, and Weber 2009) and thus the student teacher’s learning (Singh and Richards 2006). There is consensus that reflection is a crucial part of learning in second language teacher education contexts (Mann 2005), and numerous studies focus on various processes of reflective practices such as post-observation feedback (Akcan and Tatar 2010; Copland 2010, 2012; Wang and Seth 1998), written feedback (Soares and Lock 2007; Spear, Lock, and McCulloch 1997) and video observation (Eroz-Tuga 2013). These reflective practices also often include a written framework or document. Bearing in mind that most teacher education contexts include an element of teaching practice and feedback, it is therefore relevant to examine the written artefacts involved in this process.

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In a pre-service context, the post-observation conference is considered a vital part of the student teacher's learning (Bailey 2006). These post-observation feedback sessions are often structured (Copland 2010), with tutor and student teacher having access to various written documents such as the running commentary and the lesson plan. Although there has been considerable research into the dialogue and talk in these conferences (Copland 2010, 2012; Engin 2013; Farr 2011), there has been little examination of the role these written documents play in the dialogue. The tendency in the literature on learning has been to *refer* to the artefact in the interaction and learning environment, rather than *examine* and *describe* its use and role in learning (McDonald et al. 2005). This paper critically examines the role of the running commentary in a post-observation feedback session in terms of its affordances, constraints, and the implicit power and authority which designates how it is to be used (Wertsch 1998). Although the context of this study is second language teacher education in Turkey, the nature of the teaching practice and observation feedback processes is common to most teacher education contexts worldwide. Various aspects of the feedback discourse have been researched to date, such as assumptions and shared expectations of the training discourse (Copland 2010) and the impact of this discourse on teaching and learning (Kurtoğlu-Hooton 2010). Both these studies were set in the UK teacher education context, and written artefacts played a central role in the observation and feedback activities. Thus, any study which focuses specifically on the role of the written artefact will resonate with teacher educators working with pre-service teachers whose first language may or may not be English.

Written artefacts: affordances, constraints and power

A written artefact may be described as 'a thinking device' (Wertsch 2000, p.24) in that it mediates the thinking and discussion that takes place. In an educational context, 'affordance' refers to the enabling potential of an artefact in the thinking and development of the learner (Wertsch 1998). The artefact may guide and structure the conversation, enabling the tutor and student teacher to discuss the lesson by bringing it into the 'physical environment' (Katić, Hmelo-Silver, and Weber 2009, 13). The artefact can also be a catalyst for reflection, encouraging justifications and reasoning of decisions made during the lesson (Bartlett 1990). Carroll (2005) found that the artefacts of lesson plans and videos scaffolded teacher learning 'by fostering interactive talk around artefacts of mentoring practice' (472). Santagata and Angelici (2010) report that with the guide of a written framework, student teachers acquired a vocabulary to discuss teaching which supported their transition from automatic thinking to reflective and critical thinking. The written artefact therefore creates many affordances for teacher learning.

It is also important to remember that an artefact is an institutional document which is used by all tutors working with the student teachers. It is an "explicit" mediational means' (Wertsch 2007, 188), which is managed by a teacher and therefore carries a specific educational purpose (Edwards 2010, 8). Thus, not only can an artefact create affordances and provide insights, it can also constrain through the language, prompts, format and the nature of its restrictive guidance (Wertsch 1998). Moreover, since the artefact is designed with an institutional purpose, it is therefore not neutral; it carries cultural and educational meaning (Katić, Hmelo-Silver, and Weber 2009, 13). A running commentary is not only designed as a note-taking guide for the tutor, but also as a means for giving written feedback to the student teacher.

Thus, it is the tutor who decides what to write, how to write it and where to write it. This power and authority embedded in the running commentary through the language, layout, format and use may not always be explicit to the student teacher.

The theoretical framework for the analysis of the running commentary in this study is based on Wertsch's (1998) conceptual terms of affordances, constraints and power. Table 1 summarises some possible questions to ask in the examination of the running commentary.

A running commentary is a well-established instrument commonly used in observing teaching, and has been extensively used in second language teacher education (Wajnryb 1992). Day (1990) refers to the running commentary as written ethnography, in that it is a qualitative approach to observing which focuses on events and actions, as well as social contexts. He also points out that there is considerable activity to note down, resulting in possible inaccuracies and biases of the observer. The running commentary used in this study is designed to elicit information on the aims of the lesson, number of students, stages of the lesson, the time, and tutor comments and questions (see Appendix 1). Soares and Lock (2007) found that pre-service student teachers found comments on timing useful, and wanted to see comments, notes and details in the written evaluation of teaching.

The post-lesson feedback sessions in this study were conducted by the author. The running commentaries used in the feedback sessions were completed by the author also. Aspects of the lesson focused on in the running commentary will vary according to the tutor, but also according to previous observations of the student teacher and previous feedback sessions. It is important to bear in mind that the feedback sessions and running commentaries represent a long conversation (Mercer 2000), which lasted an academic year. The excerpts below should be examined with this in mind.

The context

The study took place in a faculty of Education in an English-medium university in a large city in Turkey. The participants were a cohort of 28 pre-service English

Table 1. Conceptual terms in the analysis of a running commentary.

Concept	Questions
Affordances	What opportunities does the running commentary create for mutual understanding of events? What opportunities does the running commentary create for dialogue? In what ways does the running commentary guide the thinking and dialogue? In what ways does the running commentary support the student teacher's understanding of the lesson and teaching?
Constraints	In what ways does the running commentary restrict the dialogue? In what ways does the running commentary restrict the articulation of teaching?
Power and authority	Who fills in the running commentary? Who has access to the running commentary? Does the student teacher have an opportunity to respond to the running commentary? Who chooses what to focus on in the running commentary? Who controls the discourse around the running commentary?

teachers. They were all Turkish; English was their second language. They were studying a combined 3.5 years English Literature degree, with a 1.5 years teacher education component. Upon graduation, they received qualified teacher status. The study took place in their final year. All student teachers planned to work as English teachers in secondary or high schools in Turkey, either in Ankara or Istanbul. Since most of these students had chosen to be an English teacher, they had a very positive attitude to learning English and teaching English. They also had a very positive attitude towards English literature.

Method

The approach taken in this research was a qualitative one in that it explored and described naturally occurring data, and was interested in the perspectives of participants (Dornyei 2007; Flick 2007). The study also included features of practitioner research, as well as taking an emic perspective (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2000; Freeman 1996). The author was both tutor to the research cohort and researcher, so as a result was very much immersed in studying their own practices and work as well as those of the student teachers. This position required the author to be reflexive about their status, power, prejudices and pre-conceived ideas. In order to be truly reflexive, status, positions and relevant past had to be questioned (Canagarajah 1999). The author recognised their very subjective role in the research, whilst acknowledging their privilege in terms of access to participants. The reality of the work required that the author was a 'grade-giver' as well as the researcher. It was clear therefore that the researcher was not 'neutral' and that this would have been an unrealistic goal (Wellington 2000). It was also 'undesirable' (Holliday 2002) that the researcher behaves in a distanced, objective manner which would undermine the work with the trainees, and would detract from their experience. However, the researcher also acknowledged that the emic nature of the research and the overlap of researcher and teacher provided certain 'resources' (ibid.) in terms of experience and perspective. To account for possible prejudices and 'closed-mindedness', participants were asked for respondent validation from the transcripts. The author also shared the data with colleagues who worked in the same department, and a colleague who was not involved in second language teacher education. These colleagues acted as 'critical friends' (Sowa 2009, 1028). The aim of these steps was maximise the strengths of the emic perspective, and minimise any weaknesses of such an approach.

Considering the author's closely entwined role of researcher and observer, ethical issues were paramount. The British Educational Research Association guidelines (BERA 2004) were observed in the following ways. First, voluntary informed consent was sought before the research started, clarifying that the participants could withdraw at any time. Second, the author made their role of both tutor and researcher clear at all times and this was specifically explained in the consent form. The consent form also outlined how the student teachers would be involved in the research. Third, student teachers were assured of anonymity and confidentiality through reference only to initials in the transcription of the data. In fact, this was clarified further when they received their transcripts and saw that there were initials only on the document. Finally, participants were provided with copies of the transcripts and an audio copy of the feedback sessions.

A total of 23 feedback sessions from 15 different student teachers were recorded and transcribed by the author over a period of an academic year (September–May). The transcriptions were made ‘verbatim’ (Rapley 2007). In terms of transcription conventions, non-linguistic behaviour was occasionally noted, but overlapping turns, time lapses and other discourse features were not transcribed in order to keep the transcriptions clean for analysis (Farr 2011).

The data analysis was iterative (Richards 2003), with continual focusing and refocusing on major themes (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). As the author read the data, themes emerged which, with further analysis and rereading, formed concepts (Neuman 2006). These concepts formed a basis of an understanding of how the artefact scaffolded the pre-service student teacher’s learning and how it supported their development, as well as how it constrained the student teachers’ participation. Evidence of the power and authority of the tutor and how it was used were also noted. All data were stored and organised using an open source qualitative data package (WEFT QDA 2007).

Results

In order to discuss the affordances, constraints and authority of the running commentary, the vignettes below have been chosen. These short excerpts demonstrate the different ways that the written artefact can impact on the feedback conversation. The vignettes demonstrate the very central role of the document (Hammond and Gibbons 2005), and how within one short extract the document can guide, constrain, and represent power and authority.

Excerpt 1

In the following excerpt, the student teacher had taught a grammar lesson. During the lesson, the tutor took notes on the running commentary. In the feedback session, the tutor is trying to highlight a grammar mistake which the student teacher had written on a transparency and projected to the students. The student teacher (A) had not seen the running commentary.

- A: For example the sentences were boring. I think.
 T: Which sentences?
 A: For example I showed the direct speech and indirect speech, it was long.
 T: *This one* you mean? (refers to running commentary)
 A: And I explained it and students only just listened to me and I think after this I showed the time expressions and its changing. It was useful and thought that students could tell me the changing so it was interesting I think because they participated in the lesson.
 T: What about *here*? (refers to running commentary)
 A: mm.
 T: And *what’s this*? (There was a grammar mistake on OHT, the tutor had written down the grammar mistake in the running commentary)
 A: Yes, I had realised.
 T: You noticed *this* later?
 A: Yes.
 T: OK, right and then you had the worksheet with the information, that was quite useful, this, that was good. We couldn’t get on to *this* (refers to plan).
 A: I couldn’t do *it*.

- T: OK, let's have a look at some of the things I wrote *here*, then. (refers to running commentary)
 A: At the very beginning I was a bit excited, I don't know why.

As can be seen by the embolden words, there are many spatial deictic expressions, often referred to as verbal pointing. The tutor uses the terms in this discussion to focus the attention of the student teacher. These terms are used because the tutor and student teacher share the context. The discussion takes place in a room in the school with the tutor and teacher sitting next to each other. As they sit next to each other, they can both easily see the documents, creating a 'mutual space' (Cairns 2009, 21).

In terms of affordances, the written artefact of running commentary allows the student teacher and the tutor to agree on the main events of the lesson. In turns 1 and 3 above, the student teacher mentions that her examples were boring, so the tutor clarifies this by referring to the running commentary in turn 4. In turn 8, the tutor points out a mistake that the student teacher had made. The reference to a documents means that the student teacher also recalls the same experience in turn 9. The tutor then opens up the reflective discussion in turn 14.

However, a few constraints are noted in this conversation as a direct result of the document. First, the shared context and direct reference to the documents result in less articulation of ideas than could have taken place. In turn 4, the reference to the document means that there is no further discussion on why the student teacher thought the sentences were boring. In turn 8, 9 and 10, there is no explicit discussion of the actual grammar mistake and the correct version. Similarly, the tutor starts the dialogue by referring to her comments in the running commentary, but without specifying them. As a result, the student teacher takes the initiative and opens up with a concern she had.

Power and authority are clearly vested in the tutor as being the one who took notes in the lesson. There is almost a sense of trying to catch the student teacher out. It is only the tutor who uses spatial deictic phrases in this excerpt; the student teacher does not refer to the running commentary or her lesson plan at all. Perhaps this is related to the ownership of the running commentary, even though it is between them on the desk. The student teacher has not had a chance to read it before the feedback session, thus giving even more power to the tutor. Although the use of spatial deictic expressions does root the tutor and student teacher to a specific point in time, it could be argued that the tutor confirms her locus of control by using an egocentric space, in that she is operating from her own position and perspective of the event (Cairns 2009).

Excerpt 2

In this excerpt, the student teacher (F) had just finished her teaching practice lesson. The tutor and the student teacher are sitting in a room together with their notes on the table in front of them. Again, the student teacher has not yet seen the running commentary, but it is visible to her during the feedback session. This section of the feedback session takes place after an initial talk where the student teacher has the opportunity to offer her reflection on the lesson. The tutor now takes over the conversation by turning to the running commentary.

- T: Yea, he was gross, he really was, anything else you want to say?
 F: I think that's it.
 T: I've got my running commentary *here*, and similar to D (another tutor), I won't go through each and every thing, because there are a lot of notes *here*, I'll try and do a summary, OK so strong points and points to think about so *let's have a look*. You introduced nicely, name cards, great. You said needle the card to your jumper, do you mean pin the card to your jumper?
 F: Yea.

There are several issues to discuss here. In terms of affordances, the running commentary again does bring the lesson into the present by representing actual events, even though they are the events chosen by the tutor. Again the tutor uses spatial deictic expressions to refer to the past and bring the lesson into the physical environment. The tutor also attempts to draw the student teacher in and suggests that the running commentary belongs to them both by the phrase 'let's have a look'. However, the running commentary is also creating some constraints. For example, the student teacher does not have an opportunity to respond to a barrage of comments from the tutor (turn 3). The tutor is reading a list of points from the running commentary. The student teacher only responds when asked a clarification question (turn 4). The tutor is starting to list strong points, points to think about and a summary without a clear task for the student teacher at this point. Her role is now marginalised and passive to the conversation. There is no co-creation of meaning of the lesson.

In terms of power and authority, it is very clear that the running commentary not only embodies the tutor's perception of the lesson, but also determines the content of the running commentary, thus the feedback session. The running commentary as a physical object also provides the opportunity for the tutor to take over the conversation and demarcates the transition from the student teacher-led reflection part of the feedback session, to the now tutor-led evaluation part of the feedback session (turn 3). It almost seems as if what the student teacher has highlighted in the reflection is no longer relevant because the running commentary contains the truth, thus overriding the student teacher's perception of the lesson.

Excerpt 3

In this excerpt, the student teacher (M) had made progress in teaching techniques, but had made many language errors both in her spoken and written English. Errors in the student teacher's English are an issue as this is the very subject she is learning to teach. The tutor starts with a positive overview of her progress, but specifically wants to spend time discussing the language errors and uses her notes, where she has written down all errors she noticed, from the lesson as evidence.

- T: I was very happy to see that you were calm, but you had a good presence in the classroom. You were definitely the teacher there. You used the board a lot for your answers and all your activities fitted together so in technical terms, actually you are quite ahead. You already know a lot of things, OK. But, (pointing to running commentary).
 M: Language I know.
 T: Really, there were some *terrible* mistakes in that lesson, particularly you know.
 M: For example?

- T: For example you wrote on the board 'artitech' instead of architect.
 M: Oh, yes.
 T: Artitech.
 M: I know, the correct version of this word but ...
 T: But that goes on the board. If you said it, it wouldn't be such a problem. It's gone. They forget.
 M: They forget.
 T: But you wrote it on the board. The children write it in their books, the parents check their books, what are the parents going to say? Artitech. This employer/employee business was a problem because you drilled it, OK? You said things like 'focus upon the unit 4'. 'In this lesson we're going to focus upon the Unit 4' instead of 'focus on Unit 4'. Have you got a pencil? (for T to make some corrections in the lesson plan). You don't need 'upon', you don't need *this*.
 M: Focus? (looking at the running commentary where the tutor has written both what the student teacher said, and the correct version). Ah, focus on.
 T: Focus on Unit 4. Also, you said your writing on the board wasn't very clear, OK. You said 'imagine this person studies hard'.

The tutor starts off in turn 1 with positive comments. However, at the end of turn 1, she wants to turn the conversation to the topic of language errors. She does this by pointing to her note in her running commentary which says 'language errors'. At this point, the student teacher acknowledges that this is an issue, although does not explicitly state that she realises she made mistakes. In turn 4, the student teacher asks for an example of her language errors, so perhaps by pointing to the term earlier has not opened up the conversation in the way the tutor hoped. In turn 5, the tutor gives an example of an error that the student teacher wrote on the board. In turn 6, the student teacher seems to acknowledge this, and justifies herself in turn 8 by saying she knows the correct version. Neither tutor nor student teacher, however, explicitly spells out the correct version. The tutor then explains why it is a problem for the teacher to write something incorrectly on the board. In turn 11, the tutor then brings up more oral errors that the student teacher made in her lesson. These are written down in the running commentary. In turn 12, the student teacher sees the error and the correct version, she does not offer the correction herself. In turn 13, the tutor repeats the correct version of focus and its preposition.

In terms of affordances, the fact that the tutor has written down the student teacher's errors makes it possible for the student teacher to recall the lesson in more detail, and the written version means there is a shared document of events to work from. Since the student teachers are operating in a second language, feedback on their English is a significant part of the post-observation conversation. A running commentary can allow the tutor then to write specific examples of problematic language areas. The tutor can justify her comments with evidence from the lesson. This allows the student teacher to understand what happened and gives a common ground for discussion. Again, a past event is made physically real through the written documentation of it.

However, this affordance is not used to the extent it could be. There is doubt as to whether the student teacher really did remember the event and the errors, or even recognise the severity of making language errors in an English lesson. Neither tutor nor student teacher took the opportunity of working with the errors and correcting them. Such an activity would have helped the student teacher develop her language. There was no opportunity for discussion of the language errors or the student

teacher's perspective of her language in the lesson. In a way, the discussion was constrained by the examples written on the running commentary.

The tutor is controlling the discourse by choosing which errors to focus on, and also how to discuss them. In turn 8, the student teacher starts to explain her understanding of the error, but the tutor does not give her a chance to finish. Similarly, in turn 11, only the tutor talks about the severity of written errors, with no acknowledgement of understanding from the student teacher.

Excerpt 4

The last excerpt demonstrates how a student teacher can take the initiative with the running commentary to guide the discussion in the way they want. This is taken from the middle of the feedback session where the tutor is talking through her notes. The running commentary is between the tutor and student teacher (L) on the table so in full view of both participants. The student teacher had not seen the document before the feedback session.

- T: Well, you can stop everybody with 'please stop', 'look at me a minute here are the questions, I want to see the answers written on your paper' or 'I want you to underline where you found the information'. You can stop the activity
OK, you nominated, you're encouraging very nicely.
- L: What word is that? (points to running commentary)
- T: Ah yes, the pronunciation.
- L: Yes, I was not sure. I checked the online dictionary.
- T: Yes, you said?
- L: Tarpaulin. (pronounced tarpaylin)
- T: Yes, like trampoline. *Tarpaulin*.
- L: *Tarpaulin*. OK.

In this conversation, the student teacher takes advantage of the written document to guide the conversation to an aspect she is interested in. In turn 1, the tutor is giving a monologue of what went well and what she needed to improve, based on her written notes. In turn 2, the student teacher has noticed a note that the tutor may have missed, or may have chosen not to bring up in the feedback. In turn 4, it is clear that the pronunciation of the word had been a concern for her, so the note affords her the opportunity to discuss this in the feedback session. Turns 5–8 are focused on the correct pronunciation of the word 'tarpaulin', with the student teacher ensuring she can pronounce it by the end of the discussion in turn 8. This excerpt is an example of how the running commentary can be briefly taken out from the tutor's authority. Although the tutor has chosen what to write, the tutor also chooses what to discuss from her notes. However, the student teacher in this excerpt takes the initiative to ask questions, and a more constructive dialogue is the result, with the student teacher learning the pronunciation.

Discussion

These excerpts reveal the very central role that written documents can play in a post-observation feedback session. The aim of this study was to build on previous work on documents in feedback sessions by exploring, examining and describing these artefacts with reference to a framework based on Wertsch's (1998) concepts of affordances, constraints and power. A second aim was to draw implications for how

written documents may be used in the feedback session so as to maximise the learning and co-construction of meaning between tutor and student teacher. The implications from an examination of the running commentary in a post-observation feedback session are highly relevant to the context of teacher education.

A significant limitation of this study is that it was small scale. One group of participants were involved in the research, and the author's role was both one of university lecturer and of researcher. Thus, it must be acknowledged that there is room for subjectivity and bias. Nevertheless, the value of this research is not undermined by these limitations. Tutors working with pre-service teacher trainees in teaching practice will find resonance with this study and it is hoped that this analysis will encourage teaching practice tutors to be mindful of the role and power of the running commentary in the feedback sessions, as well as its impact on pre-service student teachers' learning.

Running commentaries do clearly have affordances. One is that they offer a written, tangible and permanent account of the lesson. This aspect of artefacts has been referred to as visual representation in that the written document clarifies and reinforces past events (Katić, Hmelo-Silver, and Weber 2009). The commentary acts as a record of what happened. Richards and Farrell (2005) point to the need for recall in reflection, the making visible what might be invisible. A written record is crucial in the discussion as it allows the tutor and student teacher to share an understanding of the event, and gives the student teacher the opportunity better to recall the lesson, thus establishing a basis for educational dialogue (Engin 2011). It can be seen from the above that this is particularly important when the student teacher is a second language learner, and the subject to be taught is English.

Another affordance offered by the running commentary is that the notes can act as a catalyst for discussion and reflection. The student teacher can reflect on the lesson based on evidence and thus make 'deliberate analysis' of the lesson in order to make justifications and decisions about teaching (Brown and Coles 2012, 217). Katić, Hmelo-Silver, and Weber (2009) refer to this catalyst function of written documents as visual manipulatives in that they guide, structure and focus the discussion. The notes that the tutor has made, and the questions she has raised during the observation provide a platform on which the pedagogic conversation can take place. The artefact has in fact created a disturbance in the student teacher's automatic teaching behaviour (Vygotsky 1986).

However, the written document can also act as a constraint on the pedagogic discourse. Although the use of spatial deictic phrases creates a shared understanding of the context, it also limits the discussion. Batstone (1994) suggests that the more shared knowledge that exists, the less language is produced because of redundancy and economy. This can be seen in the excerpts above where neither the tutor nor the student teacher fully articulates the points written down in the running commentary. However, for the student teacher to be able to reflect fully on their teaching, there needs to be discussion which involves justification and elaboration (Marcos, Sánchez, and Tillema 2008). This is not seen when the shared knowledge provides no opportunity for reflection.

Considerable power and authority are vested in the running commentary. A wide range of activities takes place during a lesson. The tutor fills in the running commentary, thus the events noted down are chosen by the tutor, not the student teacher. It is the tutor who is guiding and structuring the conversation through his/her choice of events. Although pre-service teachers expect the tutor to give feedback on the

lesson (Bailey 2006), it could be argued that there should be more opportunity for the student teacher to have a voice in the recalling of events. The feedback session is based on the tutor's perception of certain events, and therefore is biased (Day 1990). The student teacher may not have access to the running commentary before the feedback session, creating another aspect of power vested in the tutor. Since the tutor has filled in the artefact, and has sole access to it, then the discourse will inevitably be controlled by the tutor in terms of what to discuss, in what order and through which questions.

An examination of the role of written documents in a post-observation feedback session has pointed to the need for tutors to re-evaluate how they use them. One significant implication is that the student teacher should have a copy of the running commentary before the feedback session, and an opportunity to read through and highlight questions they have. This would ensure explicit discussion of all points, would give the student teacher some opportunity to guide the discussion, and would enable a fuller reflection of the lesson. It would also give the student teacher entry into the space which the tutor usually inhabits. The student teacher would also be able to incorporate their own recall of events of the lesson. The authority of the written word still lies with the tutor, but there would be more sharing of the power of the discourse event.

Second, student teachers should be encouraged to write down their own recall of the lesson before the feedback session, and their own reflection based on specific guiding questions such as 'Did you achieve your aims? How do you know?' This would prompt the student teacher to find evidence for certain events in the lesson. Finally, the tutor needs to further exploit the questions and notes in the running commentary. Instead of relating them as a monologue, the tutor could ask more questions, and engage the student teacher in discussion on certain points.

In conclusion, the pedagogic conversations above present the power of the running commentary in the pedagogic conversation between tutor and student teacher. It is clearly a tool for thinking (Fors 2003) with both affordances and constraints. Tutors need to recognise the role of the running commentary in the feedback session so as to make full use of these affordances. The aim of the running commentary should be to guide the reflection and talk in a feedback session so that tutor and student teacher are collectively making sense of the teaching event (Mercer 1995).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Appendix 1: Running commentary

Date: Lesson:
 Number of students: Class:
 Teacher: Aims of lesson:

Stage/Activities	Time	Notes/Comments