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Bannink, A.

DOI

[10.1016/j.tate.2008.11.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2008.11.009)

Publication date

2009

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Teaching and Teacher Education

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Bannink, A. (2009). How to capture growth? Video narratives as an instrument for assessment in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(2), 244-250. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2008.11.009>

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How to capture growth? – Video narratives as an instrument for assessment in teacher education

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25 June 2008

Received in revised form

24 October 2008

Accepted 17 November 2008

Keywords:

Initial teacher education

Teacher assessment

Student teacher assessment

Digital portfolio

Teacher development

Action research

Video

Electronic learning environment

ABSTRACT

Portfolios are widely used as instruments for assessment in initial teacher education courses. They are claimed to present a comprehensive picture of student teachers' knowledge and performance. But what type of evidence is needed to safely say that an aspiring teacher has not only grasped essential notions and concepts from the teacher education course, but is also able to implement them in real world classroom situations? This paper reports on the design process of one portfolio assignment that has been developed specifically to capture students' classroom performance and development in their portfolio. Data from the portfolio entries of one student from a small-scale pilot conducted with the assignment are analyzed in detail followed by a discussion of the implications of the case study.

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1. Introduction

A few years ago the Graduate School of Teaching and Learning of the University of Amsterdam, as so many other institutions for higher education across the world, decided to implement the competence-based learning model for its initial teacher education courses and, simultaneously, to introduce digital portfolios for formative, summative and predictive assessment. The documents the student teachers enrolled in the course collect in these portfolios include written statements of theories of teaching, samples of lesson plans, observations, and reflections on lessons taught during their teaching practice. Although the documents cover a wide range, sometimes discrepancies surface between the 'quality' of the prospective teacher's behavior in actual classroom situations and the 'quality' of their portfolio. In other words, in some instances students come up with an excellent portfolio although their performance during their teacher practice has been evaluated by school and university supervisors as rather weak (cf. Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000), and vice versa (cf. Burroughs, 2001; Uhlenbeck, 2002).

These cases raise questions regarding the validity of portfolios as instruments for assessment in initial teacher education. For

assessors to confidently grant novice teachers their teaching license their portfolios should provide evidence that they are able to move "from intellectual understanding to enactment in practice" (Kennedy, 1999, cited in Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000: 525). The portfolio should convince the assessor that the student teacher involved does not only know and understand "the theory" but also acts accordingly, or, at the very least, is aware of discrepancies between what has been taught during the course and his or her actual "practice". To achieve this portfolios should not only allow student teachers to highlight particular competences they have acquired but also require them to show their grasp of these competences in real-life situations. This leads us to a crucial question: what type of evidence is needed to safely say that an aspiring teacher has not only grasped essential notions and concepts from the teacher education course, but is also able to implement them in real world classroom situations (cf. Delandshere & Arens, 2003)?

This paper presents an effort to answer this question. It will first briefly address some issues related to assessment in competence-based teacher education programs in general. This section will be followed by a report of the design process of one assignment in particular that was developed specifically to capture students' practice in their portfolio. Data from the portfolio entries of one student from a small-scale pilot conducted with the assignment will be analyzed in detail. Finally, implications of the investigation

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will be discussed and suggestions be made for improvement in the design of the task.

The theoretical framework of the paper is multi-disciplinary and uses (micro-)analyses of data (Bannink and Van Dam, 2006) as inputs in an attempt to bridge the proverbial gap between theory and practice in teacher education (cf. Korthagen & Kessels, 1999). It adopts an action research approach in the sense that it reports on attempts to solve a problem salient to a particular community of practice by the members of this community through the recursive cycle of planning, acting, reflecting and revising (cf. Phelps & Hase, 2002). Insights from narrative analysis theory will be used to interpret the data in the case study (Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Wortham, 2000).

2. Assessment in competence-based teacher education: aims and instruments

In this section I will briefly address the notion of competence-based learning in teacher education and subsequently focus on portfolios as assessment instruments.

2.1. Aims in competence-based teacher education: 'the standard'

The Graduate School of Teaching and Learning of the University of Amsterdam is not the only institution in The Netherlands that works with a competence-based curriculum. In response to the call for accountability and quality improvement in teacher education, both on a national and international level, the Dutch Ministry of Education in 2005 decided on a standard for all teachers in the fields of primary and secondary education. The standard adopted is formulated in terms of *competences*, which are defined as operationalizations of, often implicit, notions of what constitutes good teaching into skills, knowledge and attitudes. The standard addresses pedagogical, interpersonal, organizational, methodological, relational (colleagues, community), and reflective competences. A list of a dozen 'behavioral indicators' – operationalizations of the particular competence in observable teacher behavior – goes with each competence.

The competences selected for the standard and the concept of competence-based teacher education in general raise a number of issues that need to be addressed.

First, I would like to make a few comments on the nature of the specific competences selected. They relate to different aspects of the teaching profession. The pedagogical, interpersonal, organizational and methodological competences surface in and should be assessed through student teachers' performance in the classroom. Both relational competences do not directly refer to classroom behaviors and student teachers often gain only limited experience in these domains during their teaching practice. The reflective competence is of a different nature altogether: it is a meta-competence, which embraces all others. It cannot be assessed on its own – it needs content: one reflects on something. This content is supplied – and importantly – constrained by the other competences in the standard in the sense that they determine what will be reflected upon (cf. Delandshere & Arens, 2003).

The standard applies to experienced and new teachers alike, in the sense that the list of competences that both groups should have mastered remains constant. The difference between novices and experts lies in their *level* of mastery of the competences needed in the profession. When student teachers receive their teaching certificate they meet the standard at a basic level. They are deemed ready to begin their teaching career but are expected to continue to develop in their profession. The notion of competence-based learning is founded on the principles of life-long learning, which means that assessment in initial teacher education should not only be limited to performance here-and-now but also focus on growth and even potential for growth (development *during* the course as a predictive factor for growth *after*).

Critics of competence-based teacher education propose there is the risk that assessment in relation to standards based on lists of competences leads to reductionist views of the teaching profession (Delandshere & Petrovsky, 1998; Korthagen, 2004). Detailed specification of behavioral aspects of the competences selected, they argue, could easily result in 'ticking the boxes' methods of assessment, and consequently even of teaching and learning, which does not do justice to the complex nature of the act of teaching. Being a teacher requires the integration of multiple kinds of knowledge and skills and in order to truly measure the teaching capacities of a novice teacher, the assessment instrument employed should be holistic and performance-based. It is widely accepted that this requirement is met by teacher portfolios since they "allow a comprehensive and holistic examination of abilities" and "provide opportunities for robust documentation of practice" (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000: 536, 537).

2.2. Instruments for assessment in competence-based teacher education: the portfolio

Teacher portfolios were first introduced in teacher education in the USA in the late 1980s. They were presented as an alternative instrument for assessment and, it was argued, would provide "evidence of a teacher's knowledge and skills based on multiple sources of evidence collected over time and in authentic settings" (Wolf, 1991, cited in Delandshere & Arens, 2003: 58). The types of artifacts/evidence presented in portfolios typically range from tasks within the teacher education program to lesson observations and performance samples (e.g. video footage of actual classes taught). Generally, student ownership of the materials selected is considered to be important (cf. Wade & Yarbrough, 1996) although it is acknowledged that this may also cause problems, since there is the risk students weed out whatever they think might hinder a positive assessment. Therefore, a combination of prescribed and self-selected evidence is generally seen as the preferred format (Zeichner & Wray, 2001).

Darling-Hammond and Snyder (2000) point at the very real danger that portfolios become a mere collection of largely unrelated, anecdotal, written assignments bound together in folders. Other authors suggest that the *digital* portfolio, which provides more options for recording and presenting a wider range of artefacts that demonstrate achievements and growth, could present a solution to this problem. A digital portfolio does not only differ from the traditional written portfolio in the medium of storage, digitalization could also offer new learning potential (Dysthe & Engelsen, 2004). Using modern technology in a multi-media approach allows a variety of data sources, which could provide a richer picture of the learning of the author (Kimeldorf, 1997, cited in Woodward & Nanholy, 2004a). A prerequisite is of course that the students involved have mastered the specific technical skills to successfully work with the technology (Woodward & Nanholy, 2004a, 2004b).

Portfolios are not only considered suitable tools for assessment but also for learning. Zeichner and Wray (2001) present four claims about the benefits of portfolios for learning in teacher education, that have been made over the years. Portfolios are said to encourage student teachers to think more deeply about their practice (see also Tillema & Smith, 2007) and to promote confidence about this practice. Constructing a portfolio has a direct impact on teaching and working with portfolios fosters 'good habits of mind': they "support the teacher as a *continuous learner* who reflects on practice" (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000: 529; italics mine). Woodward and Nanholy (2004a, 2004b), moreover, claim the use of portfolios promotes learning among both students *and* teachers.

In view of these claims it is surprising that to date very few systematic, empirical studies have been conducted on the subject of

the *validity* of portfolios for learning and assessment in teacher education (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000; Korthagen, 2004; Zeichner & Wray, 2001). Nevertheless, portfolios seem to be here to stay and whether or not they are the best instruments for the job they are designed for goes well beyond the scope of this paper. Instead I will focus on our attempts to optimize their potential as instruments for assessment in initial teacher education.

3. A closer look at the type of evidence presented in portfolios

In one of the few empirical studies that have been conducted on the quality of the evidence in pre-service teacher portfolios, Delandshere and Arens (2003: 62) analyze portfolios from three teacher education programs in the USA. They found that all portfolios consist of “a collection of declarative written statements..., written descriptions..., and graphic and other artefacts, [which remain] for the most part unexplained.”. These findings highlight one of the problems with the evidence in portfolio assessment: most of the data portfolios consist of (e.g. statements of beliefs, lesson plans, mentor observations, reflections on teaching experiences, etc) are *meta-data* that are once removed from the *primary data*: from the act of teaching in actual classroom situations. They give information about student teachers’ views on classroom events, about their beliefs, but in order to fulfill the criterium that the assessment is performance-based, they should also contain *primary data*: direct evidence of a student teacher’s work in the classroom as a check on the adequacy of their reflection base.

4. Towards an adequate reflection and assessment base: the video portfolio

The most obvious way to represent observable classroom behavior in a digital portfolios seems to be through the use of video recordings of student teachers’ classes. Video is able to capture classroom performance and ‘freeze’ it for inspection. According to Rosenstein (2000: 384) “video enables the viewer to confront his interpretation of reality” and therefore stimulates reflection on the action or reality involved.

4.1. Previous experiences with video: the reflection assignment

Working with video is not new for the teacher educators at the University of Amsterdam it has been a staple food on the diet of their student teachers for many years. The so-called video-reflection assignment has been part of the program for over 15 years. When the standard-based learning model was introduced, this assignment was included in the digital portfolio.

I will briefly explain the design of this task. In the pre-ict era the student teachers were invited to videotape two of the lessons they taught during their teaching practice (one at the beginning and one at the end of the course), select three short episodes from the tapes that contained some problem or ‘perplexity’ that they wished to reflect upon, to motivate their choice and discuss the problem in a face-to-face viewing session with their supervisor and/or peers on the basis of an explicit question for feedback. To round off the assignment they were asked to hand in a written report in which they described and evaluated what they had learnt.

With the introduction of the digital portfolio a small project group was formed to design a web-based version of the original assignment¹. The assumption was that the use of a website would have distinct advantages over the conventional format: as it

facilitates revisiting the data as well as online scaffolding of reflection processes it would provide a rich feedback environment and – in principle – allow intensive triangulation. The design of the pilot closely mirrored existing procedures for the face-to-face reflection task since the results had to be comparable. The project group got the site started, evaluated the pilot and refined and enriched the program on the basis of the findings. After several pilots and design adjustments the School is now reasonably happy with the assignment as it stands (for a detailed report, see Bannink and Van Dam, 2007).

The project group identified two strong points in the design of the task that they wished to reduplicate in the new assignment: student teachers’ *classroom behaviors are seen in context* and the assignment allows a high degree of *learner agency*, since the student teachers themselves select the footage they show. The selection process itself thus, ideally, creates multiple layers of reflection (cf. Maclean & White, 2007).

5. New objectives: how to capture growth?²

With the video reflection assignment the students are invited to show that they are able to reflect fruitfully on three episodes from *one* lesson they have taught. In this sense, it could be argued, this task presents us with a snapshot of a student teacher’s classroom performance: it captures a particular stage in the professional growth of the student at a particular point in time. What the design group wished to add, is the evidence of *growth across time and multiple teaching events*. The document resulting from the assignment to be developed needed to show change and therefore, by definition, had to include two or more events. To meet this requirement experiences from the past needed to be related to the present and, if possible, to the future. To achieve this they should be presented and ordered in a meaningful way and result in a *point* the student teacher has constructed over particular classroom events. The multiple frames would constitute a video *narrative*. According to Ochs and Capps (1996: 19) “narrative activity provides tellers with an opportunity to impose order on otherwise disconnected events, and to create continuity between past, present, and imagined worlds”. It provides tellers with an opportunity to bridge the gap between a past self that felt and acted in a particular way, a self that feels and acts in the present, and “an anticipated or hypothetical self that is projected to feel and act in some as yet unrealized moment” and discourse world (Ochs & Capps, 1996: 29).

The task, it was proposed, would give students the opportunity to explicitly address the four core competences, with perhaps a specific focus on one of them. To add the extra layer of reflection they would be asked to comment on the separate video episodes through text frames.

The resulting assignment is a blend of written and video portfolio, of images and words, of footage and text. It resembles a documentary with a voice-over, where the commentator verbally comments on what can be seen or fills in what is lacking in the video footage. In this way the written text provides continuity between the separate visual frames.

6. Designing the video narrative task

Below I will list the design principles for the assignment that follow from what has been argued up to this point.

¹ The project group consisted of Judith Jansen (project manager), Anne Bannink, Gee van Duin, Anne-Martine Gielis, Peter Klencke and Anjo Roos.

² By now Anjo Roos, Peter Klencke and Anne Bannink had left the group. The credit for the idea of the video narrative and the original design of the task goes to Judith Jansen, Gee van Duin, Lidy Wesker and Anne-Martine Gielis.

- The digital portfolio is the main instrument for assessment so the assignment should be suitable to be incorporated in the portfolio student teachers need to compile.
- The assignment should be designed so as to allow assessment with respect to competences from the nationally adopted standard.
- The assignment should relate to the four core classroom competences from the national standard.
- The format of the assignment should afford a holistic, integrated approach to the assessment of these competences.
- The assignment should provide evidence of student teachers' observable behaviors in classroom situations. This requires a representation of the reality involved. The medium selected is video.
- Since assessment in teacher education does not only concern present performance but also growth and even predictions of growth, the evidence the assignment yields should be suitable to measure development (change) across time and teaching events.
- The resulting document should meet the following requirements: video and text (primary data and meta-data) should be presented in tandem. The text frames should give evidence of the student's reflective competence.

7. The pilot: background information

In The Netherlands aspiring teachers at graduate level follow a one year teacher education program which qualifies them for teaching in one subject at all levels of secondary education. They are placed as interns in schools while simultaneously completing coursework in methodology, pedagogy, curriculum development and assessment. At the University of Amsterdam student teachers

are required to present a digital portfolio halfway and at the end of the course. The evidence presented in the first portfolio determines whether or not the student teacher involved is allowed to continue with the second half of the program. The contents of the portfolio at the end of the program is used to decide if the student is ready to receive an initial teaching license. All portfolios are stored in his or her electronic learning environment that has been developed by a conglomerate of Dutch universities in collaboration with the Digital University (DiViDU; see Fig. 1). It contains a fixed set of assignments, designed by the university-based teacher educators. These assignments comprise written documents (lesson plans, personal development plans, feedback from peers and supervisors, etc.) and video documents (reflection assignments, the narrative task, etc.) The documents are assessed with reference to the national standard: the prospective teacher needs to provide evidence of mastery (at least at a basic level) with respect to every competence on the list.

A pilot was conducted with six students, all science graduates. They were advised to videotape as many of their classes as possible (camcorders were available on demand). All students received instructions on how to work within the digital learning environment.

8. The case study

Below an in-depth analysis will be presented of one of the narratives that seemed to meet the criteria set for the assignment. When I first set eyes on this narrative I intuitively recognized it as a successful attempt to provide evidence of growth and potential for further growth. Labov's & Waletzky's ideas on story telling and narrative self-construction in autobiographical stories will be used to analyze and interpret the story in detail and verify the validity of these intuitions.

Fig. 1. The electronic learning environment: DiViDU.

8.1. Theoretical framework

In a seminal paper, Labov and Waletzky (1967) presented a framework for the analysis of narratives of personal experience. They distinguished six elements that are potentially identifiable in each story: an abstract, or plot summary; an orientation (introduction of contextual elements); a complicating action (the focus of the story); an evaluation; a resolution (the result of the events in the story); and a coda (the ending that returns narrator and listener to the present). The element of evaluation, which conveys the meaning or the interpretation of the story by the teller and indicates the point of the story, distinguishes narratives from a mere report of a sequence of past events. Evaluation, Labov found at a later stage in his research, however, is not just another sequential slot in the narrative structure, but is distributed throughout the narrative and forms a secondary structure, involving the positioning of the storyteller in the story telling event (Labov, 1972; Wortham, 2000).

The video assignment represents a particular type of narrative. It is told with a specific goal and the point of the story is clear: development or growth as a teacher during the teacher education program. The text frames act as evaluations of the events in the videos and convey the students teachers' perspective on their experiences.

8.2. Laura's narrative

I will analyze the story of Laura, a biology teacher, in detail.

These are the instructions she received:

How do you assess yourself and your development at the moment? Tell us your story. Use your video recordings and other (text) documents. Give your story a title.

Name, on the basis of your narrative, one essential element that logically fits in to a personal development plan; indicate how you could work on this.

These are her entries:

8.3. A closer look at Laura's narrative

The title of Laura's narrative tells us that she aims to show her growth with respect to the interpersonal and pedagogical competences. Her experiences during her teaching practice have taught her that the two are closely linked and that teaching teenagers not only requires expert knowledge in terms of content (subject matter) but also the ability to socially engage the learners in the lesson. She has also reached the conclusion that in order to achieve this it is not enough to have a good personal relation with the learners. The classroom situation presupposes asymmetrical roles: the teacher should be in control of the lesson agenda. She struggles with this aspect of her teacher role, sometimes finds it frustrating and indicates that she is not always successful in balancing her needs as a person with the demands of her profession. She sees this as a process: it will take time and effort.

But what is to be seen in the video footage?

In the first video episode we see her trying to control a large group of learners in order to give them instructions for a specific classroom activity. She is not successful: they do not listen, continue their private conversations and do not remain in their seats. She asks them to be quiet ("Come on, please be quiet"), but her voice is not loud enough to reach the students at the back of the classroom. She leans backwards onto the teacher's desk and does not directly look the students in the eye. The second episode shows her in a markedly different situation with the same group of learners: she succeeds in getting their attention and in giving them clear behavioral instructions for the lesson to come. Her voice is louder and more authoritative, her gaze direct, she has positioned herself close to the front row of students and her posture projects confidence. In the third video she is equally assertive: she gives clear instructions and calls upon two individual students to listen when they are distracted. Laura clearly includes these three episodes because they show important changes in her performance as a teacher, but she does not go into possible structural differences in her verbal and non-verbal behavior that could explain why she

Story title		Work in progress
Introduction: story preface and plot summary	text frame 1	I'm going to focus on the pedagogical and interpersonal competences. They are closely linked, as I have experienced. Being in touch with your students is what makes teaching enjoyable. I consciously try to relate to them and enjoy doing this very much. But I need to balance being nice and being in control, being me and setting boundaries, communicating and directing at the same time, that's my challenge. And this is closely linked to the pedagogical competence. Some of the groups I teach are quite noisy and with them being nice and having personal contact with the students do not suffice. These groups force me to develop this competence. And although I find this frustrating I see these lessons foremost as an opportunity to learn. And I appreciate the lessons that run smoothly even more. I'm still playing with this. The footage I've selected is a clear demonstration that sometimes, with some groups I'm successful, but not always and not with all groups. As the title of this story shows: it is a process, which isn't completed by far. Getting and keeping a good working climate is something that will always continue to be an issue. I'm certain it will take me at least a couple of years before I am fully proficient in this field.
Event 1 and evaluation	video 1; text frame 2	The first episode "Nightmare" dates from the beginning of my teaching practice. A good starting-point, since these are the situations that force you to take action. Sometimes by acting upon what is happening, sometimes by trying to create a good atmosphere by way of prevention.
Event 2 and evaluation	video 2 and 3; text frame 3	In this episode I'm much more successful in getting through to the students of class 2B. We come to an arrangement: "We'll do this but it means you'll be really careful with the stuff." This is a very difficult group and I had been warned against working with skulls.
Event 3 and evaluation	video 4; text frame 4	My confrontation with Julia left me with mixed feelings. The girl is a problem student. She is often mean and violent towards her fellow students. I catch her in the act and react immediately. Watching the video I feel my behavior is rather severe and confrontational. Is it okay to do this? But... she behaves much better in my classes these days.
Event 4 and evaluation	video 5; text frame 5	One of the students refuses to play the lego game. An awkward situation. I thought she was acting silly and didn't understand. I showed how I felt and only later did I realize what had happened. I come back to the incident, we laugh about it and we're back to normal.
Event 5 and evaluation	video 6; text frame 6	I use the 'waterweed' episode because my behavior towards Mike, the boy who broke the slide, is respectful and understanding. I also understand how the group reacts and I go along with this and this renewed the students' confidence. At the same time I purposely make a big thing of it. I want them to realize that they should be careful when they use the equipment. And it worked.
Story evaluation and coda	text frame 7	I need to devote more of my lesson time to work on a safe and productive classroom climate. Teaching is not only about content. Sometimes I go back to (my teaching) business too quickly and in this way reduce the effectiveness of my behavior.

succeeds in the second and later lessons where she failed in the first.

The fourth video shows Laura confronting a notoriously difficult student. Again, her verbal behavior and body language show confidence: she is clearly in control of the situation. In the text frame, however, she writes that the way she handled this incident left her with “mixed feelings”, a manifestation of her ambivalence towards her teacher role. In the fifth video Laura shares a joke with her students about an incident from a previous lesson. According to the text that goes with the final video, Laura has included this episode in her story, because she is very happy with the way she responded to Mike, but we also see her disciplining the difficult student from video four. Again she is clear and confident (“You are disturbing my lesson and that really bothers me. I want you to stop.”). The text accompanying the final videos tells us that Laura is very happy with the way she interacted with her students in these episodes: friendly, respectful, inspiring confidence.

Laura summarizes her findings in the coda: she has become aware of the fact that her relation with her students is a crucial factor in the success or failure of her classes. She intends to continue to work on creating a good classroom atmosphere and will even devote more time to this aspect of her teaching in the future.

8.4. An analysis of Laura's narrative

Laura's entries meet the requirements that had been set for the assignment. The video footage shows her development across multiple teaching events, and her reflections in the text frames are consistent with what can be seen in the videos she selected. There is clear evidence of *change* in her classroom performance: she has made the transition from someone who is a passive ‘victim’ (connotations of the word ‘nightmare’; first event, video 1) of the other participants in the situation (the students) into an active, assertive person who is in control of the event who is also able to do this with a difficult group (second event, video 2). Videos four and six even show that she is capable of disciplining a student if necessary in a (her own words) “strict and confrontational” manner. She has clearly extended her behavioral repertoire and is able to adapt her behavior to ‘local’ needs.

Laura's story gives us information about her emerging teaching philosophy:

- Teaching involves balancing being nice and being in control (cf. Weinstein 1998).
- Teaching is not only about content, but also about involving students; it requires a repertoire of skills that differ across situations.
- Difficulties present opportunities for learning.
- Becoming an expert teacher requires time and continuous effort.

The story evaluation is a projection of her future self (cf. McVee, 2004) and is promising in terms of *predictions* of growth since she proves to be aware of the context-sensitive nature of classroom behaviors. Her narrative shows proof of *interactional* interpretations of classroom events as *co-constructed, emergent in the situation*³.

9. Practical implications of the results of the pilot

The results of the pilot were mixed. Three out of six students succeeded in meeting the criteria we had set for the assignment;

two students came up with only one video episode with two text frames; one student did not hand in anything. It would be dangerous to maintain that the students who were not successful provided evidence that they were not ready to receive their teaching license. They did not succeed in completing one of their portfolio assignments, but that does not warrant the conclusion that their classroom performance was not up to standard (cf. Burroughs, 2001). It could be that they simply were less competent in doing the portfolio assignment (cf. ‘competent student’; Mehan, 1980). On the other hand: narratives need a ‘point’ and the point of the particular narrative under investigation is ‘growth during the teacher education course’. This means that there can be no story if there has been no growth.

What is noticeably absent in Laura's story (as well as in the others') is reference to the role of non-verbal communication in classroom situations. There is no evidence in any of the stories of analytical awareness of the importance of this behavioral dimension.

On the basis of the pilot we proposed the following changes in and adjustments of the design of the task:

- Students should be provided with models of good narratives to give them a clear idea of what is expected (a data base of successful narratives).
- An opportunity should be built in for peers and/or supervisors to scaffold the task by giving feedback on a draft version of the narrative.
- Although video is eminently suited for the scrutiny and analysis of non-verbal behavior, observations in this domain were notably absent in all narratives. The reason for this could be that teaching is seen primarily – and mistakenly in my view – as a verbal event. If we feel our students should include reflection on these dimensions in their narrative, it is necessary to explicitly draw their attention in this direction.

10. Concluding remarks

The outcome of the pilot shows that the video narrative task could be a valuable, valid component of the digital portfolio in initial teacher education. The task meets the criteria of “thick authenticity” (Schaffer & Resnick, 1999): it is meaningful for the author of the document, it relates to real (classroom)life and it demands disciplinary thinking and reflection (Dysthe & Engelsen, 2004). Telling an autobiographical story can be a transformative event: watching their own classroom performance, selecting the footage for their narrative and telling the story invites students to reflect on their teaching and make sense of their experiences. Moreover, it allows them to highlight certain actions and represent themselves as a certain kind of teacher.

Assessment in teacher education is a complex issue. There is probably not one instrument that meets all demands. As Darling-Hammond & Snyder (2000: 543) propose: future research needs to find answers to the question “...what mix of assessment methods, instruments, and sources of evidence... provide[s] the greatest leverage on teacher development, on the one hand, and valid assessment, on the other”. Small scale, empirical studies that present fine-grained, in-depth analyses of individual student portfolios such as this paper could contribute to the answer to this question.

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³ To check my interpretation of her story I would have liked to discuss my analysis with Laura herself, but by the time I got involved she had finished the program. I am aware of the fact that it would have strengthened my argument if I had had the chance to talk to her.

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