

Training teachers for deaf children gets a robotic helping hand

May 13 2015, by Jamie Brown



A trainee using the technology

Deaf education lecturers at The University of Manchester are using the Swivl robot in school classrooms in a UK first for teacher training.

[Swivl](#)

[is a robotic turntable onto which is placed an iPad or other tablet. It is positioned in the classroom and turns to follow people talking. It then uploads video to a secure cloud for streaming or later viewing.](#)

[The University of Manchester team has been using Swivl to help assess classroom placement training for](#)

[students](#) on its [deaf education](#) course. This programme requires the trainees to be assessed in the classroom, but the wide geographical spread of students on placement, led the team to consider whether [technology](#) could help ensure high quality supervision irrespective of a student's location.

Professor Wendy McCracken is the only professor of the education of the deaf in the UK and leads the course. She said: "There is a chronic shortage of teachers qualified to teach deaf children, but our teaching requires students to be monitored while giving classes on placement. This can raise challenges as some of these placements are in locations where it's difficult for a qualified assessor to get to them and give them the time they need."

The Swivl technology has been trialled in three locations with five students – England (Middlesbrough, Yorkshire, Sheffield), Ireland and Cyprus. The footage is then uploaded to the cloud and forms part of the external, independent assessment process.

One of the students taking part, Ginny Parker from Middlesbrough, said: "For me, the most interesting part of using Swivl technology was being given the chance to observe my own teaching and reflect on the process after the event, at home and relaxed.

"Once you get over watching yourself and the sound of your own voice it is actually a really worthwhile thing to do. I noticed elements of my teaching style, both things that I thought I should work on but also positive aspects, that I think I would never have been aware of without having that opportunity to take a step back and watch myself teach.

"Obviously, another positive is being observed without the pressure of another person sitting, watching and scribbling notes at the back of the room – I think it probably leads to a more natural lesson observation

both in terms of the teacher and the children."

The lecturers believe that this method hasn't been used before in the UK on [teacher training](#) programmes and could have applications beyond [deaf](#) education. Professor McCracken said: "Whether in the UK or for teachers training abroad, this technology provides a realistic alternative to having a dedicated assessor in the classroom."

The students are also able to use the recordings to review their own work in the classroom and reflect on their learning – something which they can't do on traditional placements.

The team is currently evaluating the experiences of both the students and supervisors in order to understand how they can improve and extend the use of this technology.

Professor McCracken added: "Despite Manchester running the longest standing university Teacher of the Deaf course in the country (since 1919), we are still keen to be at the forefront of pedagogical practice and welcome the opportunity that this technology offers."

Provided by University of Manchester

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