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Document Version

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Soni, A, Moss, A, Townsend, H, Webb, F, James, K & Davis, A 2022, 'Creative uses of video – bringing family and school staff together to problem solve and celebrate', *Attuned Interactions*, vol. 9, pp. 1-5.
<<https://attunedinteraction.wixsite.com/mysite/copy-of-small-things-make-a-big-dif>>

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Creative uses of video – bringing family and school staff together to problem solve and celebrate

(Cassie Ned and Connor) Anita Soni, Anna Moss, Helen Townsend, Fleur Webb, Katie James and Abbie Davis

This short article describes a creative, partnership approach to using video to support a deeper understanding and inclusion of **Connor (pseudonym)**, a young person with complex needs, in his primary school and family life. It starts with a description of the origins of the work, how it developed over time, followed by an evaluation of approach used and concludes implications for practice. It is intended to exemplify how similar approaches could be developed.

This article is written by me, Anita, the first author, from my perspective as **both an Educational Psychologist and VIG practitioner**. The other authors who played key roles; **Anna, Headteacher, Helen, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo), Fleur, Katie and Abbie (Connor's current and previous teachers), Cassie and Ned (Connor's parents - pseudonyms)**, have contributed their ideas through emails and have read and modified all drafts prior to submission. **This evaluation was collected by email as chosen by the group as it allowed everyone, particularly Cassie,** contribute at a time and place that suited them.

The origins

I work as an Educational Psychologist in a nursery for children with significant and complex needs. I was asked by the teacher to meet with a parent, Cassie, to discuss the potential use of Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) with their child aged 3, Connor, in their family home. VIG is an intervention through which a practitioner seeks to enhance communication within relationships through reflection on extracts of video (Kennedy, 2011). This was funded through post-adoption funding that was available to the family. I visited Connor, Cassie and Ned at home, and tried to film Connor. Whilst I was a relatively new VIG practitioner, I had filmed before, however Connor reacted in a way that was new to me. He repeatedly played in places where I was unable to see him and therefore film him. I managed to capture some short extracts and Cassie, Ned and I agreed to meet and review the film. However when reflecting on the filming process, I felt Connor was giving me a clear message that either he was uncomfortable with my presence in his house or being filmed.

During our first shared review, after watching the short extracts I had taken, Cassie and Ned reflected that it was unlikely that Connor minded being filmed as he was happy to be filmed by family members. Based on his traumatic early life experiences, we agreed he probably was uncomfortable with me in the house. We agreed to draw on Video Enhanced Reflective Practice (VERP) whereby unlike VIG, the clients take the film themselves and choose the clips to share. This is an approach generally used for professional development (Kennedy and Landor, 2015). **I spoke to Cassie and Ned about the principles of attuned interaction and guidance, the length of videos to take and the need to watch them first and Cassie and Ned had examples from the videos I had been able to take.** We agreed to do the shared reviews in the evening after Connor had gone to bed. In line with VERP, we continued to use the practices associated with VIG, such as the underpinning values and beliefs, the use of the Principles of Attuned Interaction and Guidance (PAIG) to microanalyse the video, the way the clips are reviewed and the way I would work as the VIG practitioner. In addition, Cassie and Ned continued to set goals **/helping questions, which related to how they supported Connor to manage transitions particularly ending favourite activities calmly alongside general emotional regulation. Additional goals were discussed but it was agreed they reflected Connor's developmental needs.**

We undertook two more shared reviews drawing on video that Cassie and Ned took within their family life over the next year. After this cycle of shared reviews, we discussed how to develop the work further, and Cassie and Ned were clear that they were happy with how things were going at home. They were confident of strategies and ways to support with transitions and his emotional regulation at home, but felt it would be a useful intervention to involve school staff in. By this time, it was March 2019, and Connor had been at his school for two terms, and was halfway through his Reception year. Post-adoption funding was agreed for half termly meetings whereby Connor's key school staff and parents could meet together to share short extracts of film. A creative partnership was formed!

The practice of collaborative VIG at home and school

This creative use of video continued to draw on key aspects of VIG including the values, such as respect, trust, cooperation and appreciation and beliefs of VIG, particularly 'Everyone is doing the best they can at the time.' Helping questions/goals were set collectively and strengths focused and as a VIG practitioner I sought to be attuned in my interactions with everyone attending the meetings, with a focus on maintaining an appreciative eye.

Key differences were that whilst the videos always contained Connor, sometimes these videos were simply to celebrate him and his achievements rather than interaction focused. For example, videos shared included Connor playing with his sibling at home or a child at school. Initially, the principles of attuned interaction and guidance were used to steer our reflections, but over time, the discussion became less focused on these. Instead it moved towards reflection on what the adult with Connor was doing, thinking and feeling and how this impacted on Connor, or simply celebrating Connor himself and his progress.

We had agreed areas to focus on, and these went beyond transitions as identified in the first round of VIG, to include learning, the development of peer relationships and again emotional regulation. The helping questions/goals were strengths-focused, so everyone was focused on recording short videos where Connor was successful in his learning, playing or working with friends or becoming regulated, both at home and at school. As an example, one of the helping questions was exploring what helps Connor with social skills and socialising with other children at home and at school. A baseline description of how Connor was managing prior to March 2019 was noted so we could look back and see the progress made.

We met four times over the next year, rather than six as planned, as there were unplanned interruptions or cancellations, and three the year after as the funding was limited to termly in the third year. The team included myself as VIG practitioner, the Head teacher, the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo), the class teacher and Connor's Mum. Sometimes the teaching assistant who supported Connor could attend, but this was dependent on when it took place as someone was needed to support and be with Connor! The meetings took place in a private room in school. It had to be carefully timed and planned to minimise inconvenience for Cassie, whilst avoiding Connor seeing her in school as this led to him immediately wanting or expecting to go home.

The meetings lasted for about an hour and about six short one to three minute videos were shared and then discussed. We had some initial difficulties with sharing film when we were able to meet in person, however this was managed by Cassie emailing her video clips of Connor at home to school so they could be shared on the Interactive Whiteboard. We started each shared review by reminding ourselves of the helping questions or target areas. We developed a pattern of either the class teacher or Cassie sharing a video, starting with a brief explanation of why it had been chosen,

and then each of us taking a turn to make an appreciative comment or reflecting something that was interesting.

Evaluation of collaborative VIG at home and school

In line with the appreciative eye of VIG, the evaluation largely focused on positive aspects of the process and outcomes. **This fits philosophically with VIG and VERP and aligns** with the values of the Association for Video Interaction Guidance (AVIG-UK); respect, trust, hope, compassion, co-operation, appreciation, empathy and connections (Kennedy and Landor, 2015). To ensure a balanced view, data was also collected on any difficulties and suggested developments to the process.

The views shared here have been collated from email responses from the headteacher, the SENCo, the three teachers and Cassie, Connor's Mum.

1. What aspects of the process of collaborating and sharing videos made it work?

Central were relationships between the parents and school staff, described as strong, positive and trusting, as mentioned by all participants with many mentioning how it brought the adults together. In addition most of the participants alluded to the need for open, non-judgemental and honest communication within the meetings, alongside the value of careful micro-analysis of the video, drawing on positive aspects, alongside shared goals.

The ability for all parties to actively listen and talk without judgement (teacher)

Honest and respectful meetings with a shared goal (Head teacher).

We were all part of team 'Connor'. It felt like a positive, celebration of Connor and his journey (teacher).

The commitment to want the best for Connor from all parties (teacher).

(The facilitator) would pick up on a touch or word and notice how it positively impacted the child and we could then build on that both as parents and at school. Things we wouldn't of even realised were helping them (Cassie).

2. What was difficult about collaborating and sharing videos and how could it be improved?

There was much less written about the difficulties, although three participants mentioned funding the sessions, one shared that it can be difficult to find the time to video and two suggested having more frequent meetings. There was also a desire to involve other professionals and school staff who worked with Connor in the sessions, but that release time and coordinating diaries made this difficult.

3. What were the positive outcomes from collaborating and sharing videos?

Three key themes within the responses included the value of Cassie seeing Connor enjoyed and learned at school which in turn enabled her to feel confident. All of the adults involved highlighted the video helped them see Connor as a whole person and learning about strategies to try and support Connor in order to develop a consistent approach. For Cassie, it also led her to feel confident about sending Connor to school.

I particularly loved seeing (Connor) in school as it's not something as a parent you normally get to experience. (Connor is) very negative about school at home and will often go in upset so it was wonderful to see him at school happy and safe (Cassie).

It helped me feel more confident about sending (Connor) into school as I knew he was actually ok once there which helped me to relax and I think that in turn helped him (Cassie).

A personal delight was seeing both the joy and relief from (Cassie) when she watched the school videos where she could see how happy (Connor) was in school and the successes which may have seemed small to many other parents but were significant to him (SENCo)

For all parties to see the children's successes and excellent approaches used by the adults in the two settings was not only delightful to see but allowed the two settings to learn from each other. (SENCo)

It was great to see what strategies were being used at home for us to deploy at school (teacher)

For school to see what works for Connor at home was so important – it meant we could ensure (Connor) had consistent support in both settings (Cassie).

Conclusions and implications for practice

Whilst this creative approach to the use of video has grown out of a more typical approach to VIG and then VERP, and much has changed, as a group, we all felt there were important things to share. In order to engage in work such as this, it is key to establish positive working relationships from the outset, share goals, enable sensitive, attuned facilitation in the meetings and have open and honest communication. These resonate with the values and beliefs of AVIG UK, although some of the practices differed. As with many interventions and approaches, time and cost can become barriers. In addition to Connor himself progressing in his learning, beginning to develop relationships with peers and becoming more emotionally regulated, there were additional latent outcomes from the process. These included further enhancement of the team around the child (Connor), development of strategies to support him, greater confidence as well as joy in seeing success – an essential part of the impact for us all!