TEACHING ENGLISH WITH VIDEO

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Abstract: *The purpose of this presentation is to show the importance of using video in classroom. This article will present some of the issues surrounding video with learners. It will discuss the benefits but also the potential drawbacks of using video, the different roles video can take and then present criteria for selecting videos, but also some pre-viewing, while-viewing and post-viewing video activities.*

Keywords: *video, learners, benefits, drawbacksn, activities*

English language teachers are often portrayed as being rather backwards when it comes to teaching using technology. It may be true to a certain extent. With a few exceptions, the majority of language teaching isn't exactly on the cutting edge of technology. The CD player and the DVD player are as about as high tech as many classrooms will get (although as little as several years ago cassettes and videos were the norm, that is when the television and video cassette player were working). In most training courses there is a lot of time devoted to methodology and language awareness, but perhaps only a 60 minute session on using technology.

Video is a valuable and possibly underused tool. There is always the temptation to simply put a video on at the end of the term and let the students watch a film without even challenging them to be actively involved.

Video as a listening tool can enhance the listening experience for the students. We very rarely hear a disembodied voice in real life but as teachers we constantly ask our students to work with recorded conversations of people they never see. This is often necessary in the limited confines of the language school and sometimes justifiable, for example, when we give students telephone practice. However, we can add a whole new dimension to aural practice in the classroom by using video. The settings, action, emotions, gestures that students can observe in a video clip, provide an important visual stimulus for language production and practice.

Film and video are very effective ways of both motivating the students and helping them to understand language, but they do need to be used with care and an understanding of some of the dangers and potential involved.

Jeremy Harmer identifies several main advantages of using video in classroom, but also some potential problems. "There are many reasons why video can add a special, extra dimension to the learning experience"[1]. He considers that one of the main advantages of using video in classroom is that students both hear and see the language.

One characteristic of video is that it presents language in the context of life; it shows students how language is used naturally in realistic settings. Students can see

[1] Harmer, J., *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, Longman, London, 2001, p. 282;

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facial expressions, gestures, and whether the speaker is hesitant or not about a particular subject. They can observe the body language of a situation, how far apart people stand, how the characters react to emotional situations-information that is difficult to get from a book or an audio tape. All these paralinguistic characteristics give valuable meaning clues and help pupils to see beyond what they are listening to, and interpret the text more deeply.

This context has several advantages.

First, the language is authentic; this motivates students and also teaches language that is useful. In addition, the context increases the probability that the second language input will be comprehensible; hasn't everyone had the experience of being able to guess the meaning of something said in a foreign language because of the context in which it was said? Moreover, the settings presented in video teach more than language-they teach culture, which many students need to know as much as they need to know English. Students who are new to the culture feel comfortable because they can see how others have handled typical problems with school, family, finding a job or going shopping.

Video can also add variety to the classroom so that more than one method is used to present language. Not only will this make a class more interesting, but it can help students with different learning styles. Many visual learners feel left out in the typical classroom setting but can benefit from the visual input of video. Auditory learners also benefit since they can listen to videos more than once. Because videos can be watched again and again, they can provide the repetition that language learners need. Videos appeal to a wide variety of today's learners. Teenagers, in particular, are part of the video generation. They have a positive attitude towards television and video. It is seen as being "modern" compared to books. Many are more comfortable watching videos than reading books. Many adult learners need to see cross-cultural situations being acted out. This adds to their confidence in facing new situations in a new language.

Once the decision has been made to use a video in class, thought should be given as to what purpose the video is being used for, which is the role of the video. The way the video is used and the materials prepared for use with the video will depend on the role the video is to take. Below are four possible roles for video:

- *Developing listening skills*
  Listening for global understanding, listening for detail.
- *To provide information*
  To provide content relevant to students' needs and interests.
- *Presenting or reinforcing language*
  Grammar, vocabulary, functions.
- *Stimulating language production*
  Video used as a basis for discussion, a model for learners to follow, a visual aid.

A scheme of work using a video sequence may, however, encompass more than one of these roles. Learners may watch a video to find out information about, for example, a famous person. The same lesson may also include work on developing listening skills to enable learners to extract the relevant information. It could then be used to develop vocabulary on the topic of "lives".[1]

[1] Gallacher, Lynn, *Video and Young Learners*, (article) on www.teachingenglish.org.uk

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How a teacher uses video in your classroom depends on his/her focus. There are several issues that must be taken into consideration:

- **Anticipate needs**: The teacher has to look closely at the script and clip. He/she must identify how much new vocabulary might need clarification, find the words that need previewing before watching, identify the words/expressions which can be guessed from context, look at the facial expressions or gestures/action and see if they can help him/her explain language. These points should be marked on the script and used them during a pause tape while involving students using questions.
- **Have an aim**: The teacher must have a purpose in playing a clip to the students: he/she must look at request forms and practice them, give students practice in giving a commentary, telling a story, lead to a discussion on an issue, give a concrete task for students to complete while viewing so they use the language he/she wants them to use and this helps them concentrate on the clip.
- **Length**: No matter how keen students are on the film or subject matter, they can only cope with so much at once. Teachers should avoid overwhelming them. The extract mustn't exceed 5 minutes of film**.** Short video sequences are easier to manipulate and they can be the starting point of a number of exercises. The teacher needs to design activities to keep his/her learners involved.
- **Run through**: The teacher must estimate the time students will take to do each activity and how many times he/she will need to show the clip again. He/she must run through the whole thing and get the timing right.
- **Set context**: If the clip comes from a sequence or part of a story, the teacher should set the scene before starting, briefly outline plot, characters or situation if necessary, show the clip with sound off for a few seconds to elicit where the people are, who they might be, what they are talking about etc.

When selecting an authentic video for use in the classroom certain general criteria should be kept in mind:

- *Watchability*
  Choose an interesting video to motivate the student. Imagine that a native speaker regards this video. It should be captivating.
- *Completeness*
  "The ideal video clip…… tells a complete story or section of a story"[1]. This idea of completeness is important for young learners whose primary motivation for watching a video is enjoyment.
- *Appropriateness of Content*
  The content should be suitable for the age of students.
- *Level of maturity (if teaching children)*
  Children mature very quickly so a group of 11 years old children watching a video made for 8 year olds would probably regard it as "too babyish". On the other hand using a video intended for older children with a group of younger children might lead to the children not being able to understand the concepts in the video.

[1] Tomalin, B., *Teaching young children with video* (1991) in Stempleski S & Arcario P. ;

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If, however, the video is being used for presenting language or for comprehension tasks there are further factors which should be considered when selecting a video.

- *Speech delivery*
  "Clarity of speech, speech rate and accents are all factors in determining how difficult a video excerpt will be for students to comprehend".[1]
- *Density of language*
  This refers to the amount of language spoken in a particular time. Videos where the language is dense are more difficult for learners to comprehend.
- *Language content*
  "In using video to present language, an important factor to consider is the linguistic items (particular grammatical structures, language functions, or colloquial expressions) presented in the scene".[2]
- *Degree of visual support*
  A good idea is to choose scenes that are very visual. The more visual a video is, the easier it is to understand - as long as the pictures illustrate what is being said.
- *Clarity of picture and sound*
  If the video has been copied from the television it is important to make sure both the picture and sound are clear.
- *Language level*
  The language level of the video should be appropriate for the level of the class without the teacher having to explain too much.

There are however a couple of potential problems that teachers should watch out for.

- *Passivity*
  Students are used to passively watching TV at home on the sofa. Teachers should try to avoid learners 'switching off' in class when the video is switched on by providing stimulating activities where the student can interact with and learn from the video.
- *Parents*
  This is linked to the above. Some parents may get annoyed when hearing their child has spent the class watching the TV "as they can do that at home". This can be prevented by ensuring that time actually watching the video is kept to a minimum and also by the children having something concrete to show to parents connected to the video: a worksheet, picture etc.
- *Poor quality tapes and disks*
  Poorly filmed material won't engage students. The quality must be sufficiently good to attract the students' interest.
- *Stop and start*
  There are students that lose interest and become frustrated when the teacher constantly stops and starts the video, only showing little extracts at a time. So, teachers should try to avoid too many interruptions of the video sequences.

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[1] Stempleski, S. & Arcario, P., *Video in Second Language Teaching: Using, Selecting and Producing Video for the Classroom,* TESOL Inc, 1992, p. 115;
[2] Stempleski, S. & Arcario, P., *Video in Second Language Teaching: Using, Selecting and Producing Video for the Classroom,* TESOL Inc, 1992, p. 116.

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Current thinking on video in the classroom advocates an integrated approach, not simply using the video in isolation but within a sequence of tasks: pre-viewing, while-viewing and post-viewing, always depending on the role chosen for the video. If for example, the video is used only as a stimulus, a pre-viewing stage would not be necessary. Below are suggested activities for the three stages.
Any pre-viewing activity will be associated with developing learners' comprehension strategies. Native speakers use many strategies to aid comprehension and these strategies can also be applied to learning a second language.
Activities :

- Tell learners they are going to watch/listen to a story/advert/news report about.... What do they expect to hear and see?
- Class discussion about video topic.
- Learners do quiz on topic of video. The quiz could be True/False or open-ended questions.
- Give learners two minutes to brainstorm vocabulary connected to topic
- Learners put written summary of video in order
- Learners watch video with sound off, then guess topic and content
- Learners read story/news article connected to video topic
- STORIES: Using flashcards of story - Ask learners if they can guess what happens in story. Flashcards need only be quick line drawings done on A4 card or even paper.
- STORIES: Learners predict story by numbering pictures from story on worksheet. To make the worksheet draw basic pictures illustrating main ideas of the story on paper. Make sure they are in a different order to the order they appear in the story.

In most cases you will want the learners to watch the video or video extract more than once. The aims for watching the video for the first time and further times will probably be different. Tasks completed while viewing a video for the first time are commonly associated with developing listening skills and in particular listening for global understanding. Activities for a second or third viewing are often associated with providing information (to provide content relevant to students' needs and interests.) and presenting or reinforcing language (grammar, vocabulary, functions).
Activities

- Developing listening skills
  - Learners watch video to confirm predictions made in pre -viewing activity
  - Learners answer comprehension questions
  - Teacher stops video and asks learners to predict continuation
  - Providing information
  - Learners make notes about content which will be used in post-viewing activity. This could be information they have heard or information they have seen.
  - Presenting or reinforcing language
  - Learners listen for specific pre-taught vocabulary. 6-8 vocabulary items would be enough. Learners say stop when they hear the vocabulary.
  - Learners listen for examples of grammatical structures and note them down.

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- Learners participate in telling story along with video. This could be used after a video has been watched a few times. The learners are given a character in the story and the sound is turned down at various points. The learners try to say the words.

Post viewing activities are often connected to the idea of using language that came from the video or the video could simply have been used as a stimulus and the post viewing tasks are not connected in anyway to language found in the video.

Activities

- Using language
  - Learners read story/news report and compare it with video
  - Learners act out/record own version of video
  - Learners write similar dialogues to one they heard on the video
- Project work
  - Make posters/wall displays topic
- Craft work
  - Draw characters from story
  - Make book based on story
- Stimulus
  - Learners discuss aspect of video
  - Learners describe people in video.
  - Learners decide how old people in video are.
  - Learners vote on ugliest/best looking person

Video material can be a very useful source and asset for the language teaching-learning process because it combines both fun and pedagogic instructions in an authentic material that reflect real interaction. By employing videotaped material teachers can always create an indefinite number of language teaching activities. The activities above are mere examples based on one short segment and each focuses of a different language skill that EFL students need to acquire.

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