

Effective Use of Video in the ESL/EFL Classroom

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Effective use of video materials is the result of effective planning. Such planning should include consideration of technical aspects, appropriateness, alternatives, combinations, and interaction. This article addresses these points by suggesting questions for the teacher, insights from researchers and teachers and suggestions for assessing and compensating for low-interactive video lessons.

Questions and Suggestions:

TECHNICALITIES:

1. Is the video tape of good visual and audio quality?
2. Will the students see/hear the monitor well?
3. How does one hook up the equipment?
4. How does one operate the controls?
5. What is the most efficient way to cue the video before and during the lesson?

APPROPRIATENESS:

6. Is the length of the segment appropriate to the time allotted for the activity?
7. Is the level of language suited to the students and objectives or will it be a distraction?
8. Are the audio and visual elements of the segment congruent?

9. Is there enough or too much visual support?
10. How current is the material? Does this matter?
11. Can the segment stand on its own or does it require background information?
12. Is there anything in the segment that may be offensive to the students or that may make them feel uncomfortable?

Selection of effective video material deals with appropriateness. Generally, teachers may choose from professionally developed ESL/EFL materials, professional broadcasts, and teacher or student recorded video segments. Primarily, selection is determined by the objectives of the lesson. One should also consider length, language, visual support, currency, self-containedness, and cultural sensitivity. In general, consideration of these factors helps to eliminate distractions which could undermine the activity intended.

Several studies have shown the importance of visual and audio congruency. One study found that even native speakers have trouble comprehending, when the relationship between visual and spoken texts of a broadcast is not evident (Sherrington 1973). For most purposes, then, the best materials achieve effective communication through complementary coherence of visual and auditory elements.

Another study involving an educational children's program has confirmed that children focus heavily on visual elements, especially when the audio elements are too complex (Dennis 1979). One might expect a similar statement to be made about the second language learner.

Manipulation of audio and visual elements can be the basis for some interesting activities. For example, in their book of "recipes," Stempleski and Tomalin (1990) suggest distributing a

list of a few wh-questions, playing only the audio of a taped video segment and asking the students to answer as many of the questions as they can. They work in groups and discuss the reasons for their answers, and then the segment is played again with both visual and audio elements. Students then finish any incomplete questions and discuss information they gained by viewing. In this sequence, the students experience an exercise in intensive listening and gathering information from paralinguistic input.

Geddes (1982) also shows the importance of the visual element in preparing lessons for ESL students entering the university. When preparing them for the task of note-taking in the lecture hall, many teachers have used audio tapes, but there is some evidence that shows that video may be more effective. Because video includes gestures and a facial expressions, the experience is more realistic. The video lecture also gives L2 learners a focal point even if they spend much of their time writing in their notebook, as native speakers often do. Equally as important is the confidence the ESL students gain in proving that they will be able to follow lectures once out of the language program.

ALTERNATIVES:

13. Could materials other than video be more beneficial in pursuing objectives?
14. Why does the lesson need video's visual element and/or audio element?

Perhaps while considering one's objectives and needs, one may discover video is not the best choice. Some other media or materials may be more flexible and adaptable. Slides may be easily sequenced, and used repeatedly and for variable levels of

narration by the teacher or student. In other cases, realia may be more effective, especially for children. An overhead projector may be a better choice when one requires spontaneous sequencing, immediate annotation, and flexibility of pacing. Furthermore, an audio cassette of a video sound track may be sufficient for a particular lesson.

Willis (1983) points out some reasons for video sometimes being a better choice over audio cassettes. An audio tape may bring about feelings of dread as language learners become all too aware of how little they may understand. Video helps to fill in comprehension gaps in a realistic way and to make associations with cultural and behavioral contexts which might well aid in the retention of new words or structures. Language accompanied by the visual element tends to be more natural than audio taped language which has to be very explicit in conveying and repeating details of unseen setting, action, speaker, and characters.

COMBINATIONS:

15. Can comprehension or interaction be improved by using video with other materials or media?

Some of video's unique effectiveness comes through its use with other materials or media. Video can be used with other media to eliminate the shortcomings of traditional use. For example, in using a short video segment to demonstrate alternate intonation patterns of tag questions, the teacher may choose to link the video to a visi-pitch machine. Or when the linking equipment is not available, the video monitor and visi-pitch may be used side by side. (Sherrington 1973). In this case, one may question the use of the visual element at all. Why not simply use an audio cassette or demonstrate the intonation oneself? The advantage of the visual element is that it provides the L2

learner with input regarding the social and behavioral context for such utterances. Explanation of these by the teacher alone could be inaccurate, rather contrived, too abstract for the learner, and certainly inappropriate in getting young L2 learners to model the patterns.

Video may also be combined with a variety of audio tapes. In a sort of audio-visual matching activity, students are asked to view short video clips without sound. They then take turns listening to and circulating audio tapes. Each tape has only the sound track of one of the video segments. Students must listen to all the tapes and match them with the appropriate video clip. This activity can be used to distinguish simple narratives, or in more complex cases, to contrast verb tenses or prepositions, for example.

A common feature of these types of activities is that the students are more involved and responsible for the content, much more so than during traditional linear viewing. Without considering these possibilities, one risks using video in a limited way that leaves students passive observers rather than active participants. Traditional linear viewing of a video segment does not involve students enough: they are not interacting with the material, controlling the content, or checking their comprehension. Baggaley and Duck (1976) found that in such conditions, the students' comprehension will be minimal. Furthermore, the teacher may feel the need to repeat the video segment again and again, believing it will improve comprehension, but in fact, little more will be gained and much time will be lost.

How and to what extent students interact with information has a great deal to do with their success in mastering it

(Martorella 1989). Thus, the ESL/EFL teacher is faced with the task of developing activities with students' active involvement in mind, activities in which students select information, put it in a desired format or sequence, and check their comprehension in a manner that they choose. Computer driven video provides for this high degree of interaction. This combination can be achieved through expensive video disc equipment or through linking a common video recorder/player with a computer. The teacher also needs the appropriate authoring software to design the lessons.

An example of this is a video disc lesson designed by a composition teacher for an intermediate level adult group (Chryst 1990). The question posed in the lesson was: "Why do leaves change color?" and the task required that students use the video disc materials from the National Gallery of Art that were selected and sequenced by the teacher. After viewing the paintings on autumn through a guided tour with audio or a timed still frame sequence, students read notes (also on the disc) on each of the paintings. Finally, students wrote a one-page paper in answer to the question. Because students used the materials independently on their own time, class time was devoted to discussion and to the process of writing and editing. Using the authoring software, the teacher spent a couple of hours designing this lesson that s/he now has in her/his file for future use. Most importantly, s/he was able to devote valuable class time to the objective--the writing task--and to provide her/his students with a rich and motivating experience, one that could be matched only by arranging a field trip to the museum itself.

The effects of interactive video materials have been compared to those of traditional linear viewing. A recent study

(Martorella 1989) found that students scored relatively the same on recall subtests regardless of the material they viewed. On application tests, however, students using highly interactive materials scored markedly higher than those using little or no interactive materials.

It is important to identify the degree and the type of interaction inherent in a video activity. When working with basic non-interactive video equipment, the teacher needs to work deliberately to compensate for this by providing alternative sources of interaction. This can be achieved through peer interaction, or interaction with materials used in conjunction with video, as mentioned earlier.

By considering this wide range of questions, video lesson planners should become sensitive to the many factors that contribute to making a video lesson effective. Of major importance is videos's role in helping students efficiently attain learning objectives.

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