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**TEACHING WITH VIDEO**

The use of videotapes has been a comnon feature in language teaching for many years. It is rare, these days, for a publisher to produce a major coursebook without a video component added in, and teachers frequently enliven their classes with off-air material or tapes produced for language learning.

To some people videotape is merely a glorified version of audiotape, and the use of video in class is just listening 'with picfures'. But there are many reasons why video can add a speciale, extra dimension to the learning experience:

* **Seeing language-in-use:** one of the main advantages of video is that students

do not just hear language, they see it too. This greatly aids comprehension, since for example, general meaning and moods are often conveyed through expression, gesture, and other visual clues.Thus we can observe how intonation can match facial xpression. All such paralinguistic features give valuable meaning clues and help viewers to see beyond what they are listening to, and thus interpret the text more deeply.

* **Cross-criltural awareness:** video uniquely allows students a look at situations

far beyond their classrooms. This is especially useful if they want to see, for example, typical British 'body language' when inviting someone out, or how Americans speak to waiters. Video is also of great value in giving students a chance to see such things as what kinds of food people eat in other countries, and what they wear.

* **The power of creation:** when students use video cameras themselves they are

given the potential to create something memorable and enjoyable. The camera operators and directors suddenly have considerable power. The task of video-making can provoke genuinely creative and communicative uses of the language, with students finding themselves 'doing new things in English.'

* **Motivation:** for all of the reasons so far mentioned, most students show an

increased level of interest when they have a chance to see language in use as well

as hear it, and when this is coupled with interesting tasks.

If we wish to use video successfully in crasses we need to be aware of a number of potential problems:

* **The ‘nothing new’ syndrome:** just switching on the monitor in a crassroom is not especially exciting for a television (and Internet) viewing popuration. Both in our choice of video material and in the way we exploit it, we have to provide video activities that are unique learning experiences and do not just replicate home television viewing.
* **Poor quality tapes and disks:** poorly fiImed and woodenly acted material will not engage students who are used to something better. When deciding whether to use a videotape or disk, we have to judge whether the quality is sufficiently good to attract our students’ interest.
* **Poor viewing conditions:** we have to be sure that students can see and hear the video. The monitor must big enough for the people at the back of the class to see the screen clearly. We also need to see if we can dim the ambient light sufficiently for the picture to be clear.
* **Stop and start:** some students become frustrated when teachers constantly stop and start the video, only showing little bits at a time. It can also be extremely irritating if a teacher fails to show the class how the ‘story’ ends. Sometimes this is done on purpose - as a spur to creativity or prediction – but at other times teachers

fail to take students’ natural curiosity into account.

There is no hard and fast rule about this. We need to ask ourselves how many stops and starts we ourselves could cope with, and how much we would want to see the end of a sequence. The answers will guide the way we use video with others.

* **The length of extracts:** some people think that more than two or three minutes of video sends students to sleep. Others, however, like to show students whole programmes.

Short video sequences of between one and four minutes can yield a number of exercises, demonstrate a satisfying range of language, are easier to manipulate, and can be highly motivating. Such short extracts are usually the best option; where we want to use longer ones – because of the topic, or because it is impossible to extract a good short extract – we will need to design activities to keep our students involved.

* **Fingers and thumbs:** students can be irritated by teachers who cannot find what they want or get back to where they have just been on the tape or disk. Teacherts themserves become frustrated wnen the machine does not work the way they want it to. The only answer is for us to familiarise ourserves with the system we’re using.

There are three basic types of video which can readily be used in class: ‘off-air’ programmes, ‘real-world’videos, and language learning videos.

* **Off-air programmes:** programmes recorded from a television channel should be engaging for our students, and of a sensible length. We have to consider their comprehensibility too. Apart from overall language level, some off-air video is also extremely difficult for students to understand, especially where particularly marked accents are used or where there is a high preponderance of slang or regional vernacular. The best programmes and excerpts are ones which we can use for a range of activities inciuding prediction, cross-cultural awareness, teaching language, or as spurs for the students' own creativity.

All television programmes have copyright restrictions which vary from country to country. It is important to know what that law is and realize that breaking it can have serious consequences.

* **Real-world video:** there is no reason why we and our students should not use

separately published videotape material such as feature films, exercise ‘manuals’, wildlife documentaries or comedy provided that there are no copyright restrictions for doing this. Once again we need to make our choice based on how engaging and comprehensible the extract is likely to be, and whether it has multi-use potential. We need to judge the length of the extract in the same way too.

* **Lansuage learning videos:** many publishers now produce free-standing language learning videos - or videos to accompany coursebooks. Frequently these have accompanying workbooks.

The main advantage of specially made videos is that they have been designed with students at apartyicular level in mind. They are thus likely to be comprehensible, designed to appeal to students' topic interests, and multi-use since they cannot only be used for language study, but also for a number of other activities as well.

The danger of language learning videos, however, is that they fail the quality

test either because the production is poor, the situations and the language are inauthentic, or the content is too unsophisticated. Our choice, therefore, has to be limited to those which our students will accept and enjoy.

There are a number of teaching techniques which can be used in video-based lessons.

All of the following viewing techniques are designed to awaken the students'

curiosity, t hrough prediction activities, so that when they finally watch the video sequence in its entirety they will have some expectations about it.

* **Fast forward:** the teacher presses the 'play' button and then fast forwards the

video so that the sequences hoots pass silently and at great speed, taking only a few seconds. When it is over the teacher can ask students what the extract was all about and whether they can guess what the characters are saying.

* **Silent viewing (for language)**: the teacher plays the tape at normal speed, but

without the sound. Students have to guess what the characters are saying. When they have done this, the teacher plays the tape with sound sothat they can check to see if they guessed correctly.

* **Silent viewing (for music):** the same technique can be used with music. Teachers show a sequence without sound and ask students to say what kind of music they would put behind it and why. When the sequence is then shown again, with sound students can judge whether they chose the same mood as the director/composer.
* **Freeze frame:** at any stage during a video sequence we can 'freeze' the picture,

stopping the participants dead in their tracks. This is extremely useful for asking

the students what they think will happen next or what the character will say next.

* **Partial viewing:** one way of provoking the students' curiosity is to allow them

only a partial view of the pictures on the screen. We can use pieces of card to cover most of the screen,only leaving the edges on view; we can put little squares of paper all over the screen and remove them one-by-one so that what is happening is only gradually revealed.

A variation of partial viewing occurs when the teacher uses a large ‘divider’,

placed at right angles to the screen so that half the class can only see one half of the screen, whilst the rest of the class can see the other half. They then have to say what they think the people on the other side saw.

Listening routines, based on the same principles as those for viewing, are similarly designed to provoke engagement and expectations.

* **Pictureless listening (language):** the teacher covers the screen, turns the monitor away from the students, or turns the brightness control right down. The students then listen to a dialogue and have to guess such things as where it is taking place and who the speakers are. Can they guess their age, for example? What do they think the speakers actually look tike?
* **Pictureless listening (music):** where an excerpt has a prominent music track,

students can listen to it and then say- based on the mood it appears to convey - what kind of scene they think it accompanies and where it is taking place.

* **Pictureless listening (sound effects):** in a scene without dialogue students can listen to the sounds to guess the scene. For example, they might hear the lighting of a gas stove, eggs being broken and fried, coffeebeing poured and the milk and sugar stirred in. They then tell 'the story they think they have just heard.
* **Picture or speech:** we can divide the class in two so that half of the class faces

the screen, and half faces away. The students who can see the screen have to describe what is happening to the students who cannot. This forces them into immediate fluency while the non-watching students struggle to understand what is going on, and is an effective way of mixing reception and production in spoken English. Halfway through an excerpt the students can change round.

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