

Lesson Strategies with Video An EFL Teacher-Training Course at Iwate University

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Introduction

Language teachers have often been interested in integrating audio, photographs, video, and most recently, computer applications into their lessons, with the purpose of providing a multimedia learning experience for the language learner. In this way, the teacher is aiming to present the target language to the learner as realistically, or accurately, as possible, making the language lesson 'come alive'.

Video, with its audio and visual components, has been shown to be one of the most effective ways for providing a language class with a "realistic" presentation of communicative exchanges. The video camera and player are currently available to most teachers at schools in Japan, yet video is not being used very often as an integral teaching tool in language classrooms. Some of the more common reasons one hears from language teachers seem to be: "No one else in my school uses it"; "It's too complicated, and I don't know what to do with it"; and "I have no time for it because I have to cover the curriculum requirements."

For these reasons, the course, 英語科教育法特別講義 -I-, was developed here at Iwate University as *EFL Teaching Methods-I: Using Video*, as part of the undergraduate English Education teacher training program in the Faculty of Education. The purpose of this course is to pre-empt the above-mentioned problems by providing the English education student with an understanding of how video can be used as an integral part of the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) curriculum, and thus help to make the language lesson more effective for the language learner.

Course Background / Rationale

While the use of recorded audio alone can provide a good deal of the target language to the student, such as vocabulary, phrasing, intonation, and so forth, a critical part of communication is missing in audio: the non-verbal

component. By non-verbal, we mean the aspect of the communication that is not spoken, such as facial expressions, hand and body gestures, and physical proximity (the distance between the speakers). Also important to the language learner is the setting or context in which this interaction takes place. In fact, non-verbal communication can often comprise most of the communication in a language exchange, and it is therefore essential for the language learner to experience this. (For an in-depth look at this communication phenomenon, please see the text *Nonverbal Communication* by S. Weitz.) One of the major advantages of using video in a language lesson is that the learner can appreciate both the verbal and non-verbal aspects of communicative reality 'first-hand'.

Course Overview

The course is conducted as a workshop and seminar, not as a "straight lecture." Students take an active part in lesson planning, presentation, and critique discussions, using English as their foundation language, and contributing their own personal views and ideas.

The course seeks to meet two specific objectives:

1. Provide a general background of various communicative language teaching methods to the English education student.
2. Give each student an opportunity to research, plan, and implement English lessons in a controlled, practical, micro-teaching atmosphere, and receive feedback from one's own peers as well as from the course instructor.

The class is comprised primarily of 2nd to 4th-year students, majoring either in English education, or in elementary education with a minor in English. The 90-minute class meets once a week, for approximately 15 classes per semester.

Throughout the course, the students take turns assuming the role of English teachers. As part of their weekly homework, they select a teaching point—a language function or grammar feature that they will present in a lesson. In groups of two to four students, they develop a lesson plan, write a video script and make a short, 2- to 3-minute video program as the focus of

their lesson. In addition, they may create handouts or other visual aids for their lesson. The lesson presentation is typically 10- to 15 minutes in length for each group.

All aspects of the lesson are presented in English, so as to create a so-called immersion atmosphere where the students may come to feel that they are learning in a native- or target-language environment.

An important aspect of the course design is its micro-teaching environment. *The Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning* at Harvard University (USA) offers this definition of micro-teaching:

Micro-teaching is organized practice teaching. The goal is to give instructors confidence, support, and feedback by letting them try out among friends and colleagues a short slice of what they plan to do with their students. ... Micro-teaching is a quick, efficient, proven, and fun way to help teachers get off to a strong start.

While one person takes his or her turn as teacher, everyone else plays the roles of students. It is the job of these pretend pupils to ask and answer questions realistically. It is the job of the pretend teacher to involve his or her "class" actively in this way.

Such a scenario typically runs for five to ten minutes. When finished, the person conducting the class has a moment or two to react to his or her own teaching. Then everyone else joins in to discuss what they saw that they especially liked. Finally, the group may mention just a few things that the practice teacher might try doing differently in the future.

In this type of educational setting, the students who are not presenting the lesson as teachers assume the role of learners in a classroom. In fact, they assume the level which is being targeted by the lesson plan. For example, if the lesson plan is designed for a 1st-year junior high school class, then the so-called pretend pupils in the micro-teaching session assume the roles of

1st-year junior high school students.

After the lesson presentation, the class then discusses, or critiques, the lesson plan, the video and the overall effectiveness and appropriateness of the lesson presentation for an E.F.L. classroom. The instructor encourages the students to share their ideas with each other freely, but reserving his own comments for the end of the discussion. This critique period is one of the most essential aspects of the course design, as it provides a forum in which peers can provide each other with their own opinions and ideas based on the lesson presentation. The presentation schedule for the course is such that each group will have the opportunity to teach a different lesson at least three times during the semester, so that there should be a progressive improvement in design and implementation based on critiques of previous presentations.

Student evaluation is based on participation in both the design of the lesson assignment and critique, and on the quality of the lesson plan presentation.

Course Procedure

It is assumed that not all students will have had opportunities to use a video camera before the course begins. For this reason, on the first day of class students are given the assignment to spend the subsequent week making a brief video of a friend performing some task, which is determined by the student. Previous task ideas have included buying a drink from a vending machine, starting a motorcycle, and cooking fried rice. In this way, the student can become more familiar with the camera's features and controls, as well as with the visual basics of focus, zooming and camera movement.

In the second class, the students view and discuss each other's homework videos, and the instructor makes technical comments on camera use and technique.

The instructor then presents to the class the concept of the functional approach of language usage, which will form the basis for the students' communicative lesson designs. The functional approach is a way to see spoken language as comprised of a set of communicative activities, where we use the language to accomplish certain tasks. For example, we greet one another, ask for information, make suggestions, apologize, talk about our

family or about our weekend plans, and so forth. These activities are comprised of certain key phrases (e.g. Greeting: "How are you?"; "Nice to see you," etc.) Appendix 1 provides a list of several common language functions used for student lesson design. (Please see the references *Threshold Level English*, by Van Ek and Alexander, Wilkins' *Notional Syllabuses*, and *Communicative Syllabus Design and Methodology*, by K. Johnson, for more detailed descriptions of the functional approach and its application to a foreign language syllabus.)

The basic steps of a typical communicative lesson design are then demonstrated to the class. These include:

1. **State the learning objective** (e.g. "Today we will learn how to greet each other.")
2. **Pre-teach** (introduce new vocabulary and phrases, grammar points, and develop awareness of the topic among the students)
3. **Present the lesson** (show the video to illustrate how the language is used; complete in-class worksheets or projects based on the video; etc.)
4. **Classroom practice** (small-group practice; fill-in-the-blanks, role-plays, dialogs, games, etc.)
5. **Check learning** (test, fill-in-the-blanks, dictation, etc.)

Appendix 2 shows a more detailed list of design considerations, which is given to the class as a handout and then discussed.

《Lesson Assignments》

Students are then divided into work groups. Each group is handed their lesson assignment, which consists of a slip of paper containing one of the language functions listed in Appendix 1. As actual classroom teachers have little say in deciding the basic set of syllabus elements that they must teach, so too each work group of "teachers" must plan and present a lesson based on their assigned topic. As the course progresses and the students have had more practice in designing lessons, they may be given two or three language functions from which to choose.

The class is given access to a multitude of function-based texts used in monolingual (English-only) EFL classes. From these, they can garner key phrases for their assigned language function, as well as ideas for developing dialogs, activities, games, and so forth. Many of the students feel overwhelmed at first by the great diversity and range of the lesson presentation styles of these texts, and so the instructor assists the students in focusing on each lesson's basic design and how the language function is being taught in the particular texts.

《Materials Preparation: Video Production, Posters, Games, Handouts, etc.》

Each group is given a week or two, depending on class size, to prepare their lessons for presentation. During this work time, they must decide on their objective as represented by their language function assignment, determine the vocabulary and phrases they will teach, design visual aids (such as posters), in-class worksheets, and other activities their students will use, and determine how their students' learning will be checked and design materials for this. And of course a major part of their design work is to create a video that will be used as an integral part of their lesson. This includes setting up a situation, writing a script, rehearsing and taping the segment, and if necessary, editing the segment. As the entire lesson is presented in English as the target language, the video script is also in English. This means that the performers in the video need to be sure their script is grammatically correct and appropriate to the situation or context, and that their pronunciation and intonation are as natural as possible. The instructor offers practice and advice on these aspects, too, as well as correcting all additional materials used in the lesson.

《Lesson Presentation》

On their presentation day, the group stands before their class of 'pretend pupils' in a micro-teaching setting. They greet the students (in English), and present their lesson. Because it is a group presenting the lesson rather than a single teacher, each member takes a certain role in the lesson presentation. During the lesson, the group tries to augment the English environment by using a variety of English terms for the classroom. These are handed out to the teacher groups ahead of time for them to refer to, and are presented here

in Appendix 3.

《Critique》

The purpose of the critique is to allow students to assist each other in recognizing advantages and disadvantages of the lesson plan and its delivery, to share ideas with each other, and to gain confidence in teaching. The question posed for the critique is, "How can the lesson be made more communicative?" (Douglas Brown's *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, and *Teaching Language as Communication* by Henry Widdowson are good sources for learning more about designing and applying effective language lessons.)

Following the presentation, the class is given a few minutes to get their thoughts together. Members of all the groups can discuss their impressions among themselves, and then the instructor asks the entire class for comments on the lesson. The critique then takes the form of an open, class-wide student-focused discussion.

Following the student-to-student critique, the instructor offers comments on the lesson, as well as on the student critique session itself, such as students' comments, ideas, etc.

《Student Evaluation for Course/ Final Report》

The lesson presentations often provide the instructor with the insight necessary to provide a final grade for each student, and a final examination or report is not usually required. However, a report assignment may be given if a more comprehensive evaluation of a student's progress is required, in particular, for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of the instructor and the course itself.

The tasks that the student needs to describe to successfully complete the report is intended to reflect a realistic, practical aspect of knowledge application to a teaching situation. The student is provided with a copy of a traditional, grammar-based lesson taken directly from a textbook commonly used in Japanese junior high school EFL classrooms. The report assignment is as follows:

Imagine you are a junior high school English teacher in Japan. Look at

the attached lesson. Design a lesson plan *in detail* to teach this lesson using:

- a video camera
- a blackboard
- handouts for the students.

Write out your lesson plan, your video script, and your student handout in detail. Be as creative as you can.

The instructor makes an evaluation based on how communicative and effective the student has made the lesson.

Conclusion

One of the purposes of this course is to enable the English education student, as a future language teacher, to feel more comfortable—and even excited—about using video as a tool for language teaching/learning in their own classroom. By providing a chance for these students to design their own lessons, produce their own video segments, and present the lesson in a micro-teaching environment, followed by constructive feedback from their peers, the student gains an understanding of how to integrate the various components of a lesson plan into a realistic and effective lesson presentation.

Appendices

Appendix 1: A List of Some Common Language Functions

Apologizing

Asking about and describing people (*may include appearance, occupation, where they live, etc.*)

Asking about and describing one's family (*Getting and giving information about brothers, sisters, etc.*)

Asking about and expressing likes and dislikes

Asking for and giving name, address, and telephone number

Asking for clarification (*for example: asking about spelling, meaning, pronunciation, and asking for repetition*)

Asking for information (*for example: at a travel agency, at a library, etc.*)

Describing locations of places (*for example: specific buildings, stores,*

movie theaters, parks, the airport, train station, etc.) Giving Directions *could be included in this.*

Describing locations of things (*for example: The pencil is under the chair: The book is on the third shelf from the top, all the way to the left; etc.*)

Giving opinions / Responding to opinions

Introducing yourself and others

Listening for information (*news or weather report, train schedules, descriptions of movies or people, etc.*)

Making an offer / Responding to an offer

Making and responding to greetings

Making invitations / Responding to invitations

Making requests / Responding to requests (*also: Asking for a favor / Responding to a request for a favor*)

Making suggestions / Responding to suggestions

Starting a conversation

Showing appreciation (*for example: Thanks: Thank you very much: You're very kind; etc.*)

Appendix 2: A Class Handout of Lesson Plan Considerations

Designing an Effective Lesson Plan

There are many ways to design and present a successful lesson plan using video. One method has the following steps:

1. **State the learning objective**
2. **Pre-teach** (introduce vocabulary, grammar points, develop awareness)
3. **Present the lesson** (show the video to illustrate how the language is used; complete in-class worksheets or projects based on the video; etc)
4. **Classroom practice** (small-group practice; fill-in-the-blanks, role-plays, dialogs, games)
5. **Check learning** (test, fill-in-the-blanks, dictation, etc.)

As you design this type of lesson plan, answer these questions:

What is the level? (Grade/age/previous knowledge) You need to be aware of what your students already know, so you can know where you can take them next.

What is your teaching objective? It is important to tell your student what you expect them to learn. You can do this by writing the *lesson objective* on the board at the beginning of the lesson. For example, you can write: “At the end of this lesson, you will be able to make requests”.

How will you prepare your students? It is a good idea to pre-teach the important parts of the material. You can do this by listing the vocabulary they will use, or describe the situation of the video, such as “You will see a video. A man and a woman are ordering lunch at a restaurant.”

How will you meet your objective? Decide on how you will combine the video and “live” parts of your lesson effectively

How will the students practice? The students will need to try out what you have taught them, so as to improve their learning. You can do this through games, fill-in-the-blank exercises, matching, role play, and so forth.

How will you know if they learned? You need to know if your lesson was successful. Did your students meet the objective? Do you need to practice certain items more in the next class? You can usually find out by giving them a final learning check or test. This can be done in many ways, but some useful methods include T/F questions, dictation, fill-in-the-blank exercises, matching, interviewing, and so forth.

Appendix 3: Classroom Terms in English

Starting Class - Greetings

Good morning / afternoon, everyone.

How are you, [Toshi]?

I'm fine, thank you.

Commands

Stand up. / Sit down. / Come here.

Quiet, please.

English, please.

Class work

Look at the board / your handouts.

Watch the video. / Listen to the tape.

Turn to page [32].

Repeat after me.

Let's practice. / Let's talk. / Let's try it.

Talk with your partner / group.

Look at the top / bottom / left side / right side of the page.

Circle / check / fill in the right answer.

Teacher responses and encouragement

Good. Not quite. Try again. Once again. Pardon?

How about you, [Hiromi]?

Do you know, [Ken]?

Louder, [Yoko], I can't hear you.

Who wants to try? Anyone else?

Ending Class - Leaving

Good-bye, everyone.

Have a good lunch / afternoon / math class!

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