

## **"THE CLASSROOM AS IT IS"—VIDEO TAPES FOR THE FL METHODS CLASS**

*by Helen Jorstad*

### *Introduction*

Preparation of foreign language teachers has never been an easy task. In few other fields do we know so little about the learner — or do we read and hear about so many ways to teach him. Consider the proliferation of "methods" in the past few years: traditional, new-key, direct, aural-oral, audio-lingual, Army, New, grammar-translation, reading. Added to the frightening array of methods there is a host of mechanical aids whose effectiveness and use the prospective teacher can only guess at as he considers programmed learning, computer-assisted instruction, language laboratories, electronic classrooms, as well as tape recorders, slide, filmstrip, and movie projectors, and audio-flash-cards. He wonders how to use any of them in individualized instruction, individualized programming, contracting systems, modular scheduling, or traditional schedules. One can readily see why beginning foreign-language teachers, though possibly better-prepared than ever before, feel so little confidence in their ability to teach and to justify foreign-language study for American students.

The problems of the methods teacher, then, loom very large indeed. Exposing his students to the vast display of methods, materials, equipment, and class structure that they must consider, his main task becomes that of giving the prospective teacher enough self-confidence to digest this smorgasbord and incorporate bits and pieces of knowledge into a strong personal philosophy of foreign-language teaching.

*The Carleton Project*<sup>1</sup>

Traditionally, methods teachers have relied on direct observation of classroom activity to expose future teachers to the bread-and-butter business of foreign-language learning. Watching a master-teacher in action, a student can ponder his philosophy and how it affects his manner of teaching, his attitudes toward the language learners, his

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<sup>1</sup>The Carleton Video Tape Project has been funded by grants from the Kettering and National Science Foundations. A catalogue giving more information about the Project and how to order tapes, as well as a complete description of each modern language tape available, may be obtained free of charge by writing to the Carleton Video Tape Project, Northfield, Minnesota 55057.

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motivational techniques, his objectives, etc. He also has the opportunity to watch a lesson plan fail, a motivational technique fall flat, or a carefully-prepared unit disintegrate in the face of a roomful of teen-agers whose interests the teacher neither anticipated nor clearly understood.

In short, he sees the classroom in its stark reality. Classroom visits, no matter how numerous, however, are often not enough to satisfy all the questions of the student. The mood and the question of the moment pass all too quickly, to be forgotten when there is finally a chance for group discussion of the various classrooms members may have visited. Moreover, there is thus no common experience as that felt when everyone can visit one classroom as a group.

This often-felt desire for commonality led to the initiation of the Carleton Video Tape Project (formerly known as the ACM Video Tape Project) by Dr. Helen Berwald, Professor of Education at Carleton College. By preparing a series of video tapes showing "The Classroom As It Is," the methods teacher has finally been able to take students into a common classroom. The added dimension has been obtained of being able to "freeze" the action as often as desired for discussion either by the methods teacher or by the students. In addition to their functions as a basis for discussion in the methods class, the video tapes are ideally suited for use in in-service training at conferences and workshops where teachers may see other approaches to problems they may have. Video tapes prepared in advanced classes are especially suitable for this purpose.

Each series of video tapes was made in a single classroom, daily, over a period of several weeks. Three cameras and eight microphones were remote-controlled, so that no engineers or outside personnel appeared in the classroom. The heart of the production was in a truck outside the school building. In most cases equipment was installed in the classroom well before taping began so that students could become accustomed to seeing it in the room. The teacher was equipped with a wireless microphone so that he was free to move about the room unhampered by cords.

What resulted was a normal classroom viewed from day to day, including office interruptions, shortened periods for assemblies, testing sessions, drill sessions, lessons that fell short of their goals, absent students who had forgotten to make up their work, and discipline. In short, "The Classroom As It Is" becomes a more authentic experience for the teacher trainee than a visit to a class where the teacher has prepared a model lesson plan to show off a roomful of students on their best behavior.

The Carleton foreign-language series includes fifteen video tapes made in a first-year French class shortly after the beginning of the school year; ten tapes made during the same period in a fourth-year French class in the same school; four tapes of a fourth-year French class in another school during the first four days of the school year; two tapes of German elementary school classes stressing preparation for viewing and for following up a televised German lesson; and seven tapes showing seventh- and eighth-grade German classes in the same school system.

None of the teachers was held up as a "model"; rather, each was simply brave enough to permit the viewing of his bad moments as well as the good ones. Nor was any of the classroom behavior put forth as a "good" or "bad" technique; rather, it was merely a "typical" one. Even though the video teachers may have a philosophy or technique of which methods teachers or in-service leaders may disapprove, exposing students and teachers to different views can be beneficial in helping them to create their own philosophy of teaching.

### *Class and Topical Tapes*

The Carleton Tapes demonstrate two unique approaches to the video tape process, each of which lends itself to a wide range of methods class and in-service activities: (1) Unedited tapes in which a full daily lesson is shown from beginning to end, and (2) "Topical" tapes, edited to focus on a specific part of the lesson, recorded on several successive days.

(1) *Unedited tapes.* These tapes, showing an entire class period, are most effectively used as vehicles for discussion of pacing, varying activities in a class period, progression in learning skills within the content of a complete lesson, student reaction and response to different approaches and different types of materials, interaction analysis, and development of classroom atmosphere. One can follow the progress of an individual student or of several students and can study their facial responses as well as their progress in language skills. A methods class can focus on the teacher's lesson plan for a long lesson, on the objectives of parts of the lesson, on techniques for motivating 25 different individuals, on the use of English in the foreign-language classroom, on the materials and media used in a lesson, on pacing warm-up activities, and on one particular teacher's philosophy of language learning.

The unedited tapes can be viewed either in their entirety or in small sections that the teacher discusses with the viewers as he stops the machine at various points in the lesson.

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Prospective and in-service teachers viewing the tapes become totally immersed in what is happening in the video classroom. They become intensely interested in individual students as they follow them from day to day, as evidenced by one comment heard in a methods class. "Isn't that teacher going to notice — who never responds with the class?" Teacher-trainees also become more and more adept at assessing the language learning they see as they view several unedited video tapes in succession. On several tapes, viewers can hear the video teacher comment upon the day's class session at the end of the tape.

Video tapes can become the basis for assignments that become very meaningful, more so than in a "hypothetical" classroom situation. After viewing a day's lesson, for example, methods students may be asked to plan the next day's lesson, or to write behavioral objectives for a part of the lesson to follow, to predict results on a quiz or test which follows several days of work they have viewed, to analyze and discuss the video teacher's approach to grading a test, to prepare a quiz based on classroom work they have watched — the list is limited only by the methods teacher's imagination. The principal advantage of the video tape process, however, lies in the fact that there can be instant feedback, not about how a hypothetical class *would* react, but about how *this* particular class *did* react. One need only view the next day's work to see what the video teacher did.

(2) *Edited tapes.* "Topical" video tapes edited to focus on one aspect of teaching — conducting a drill, teaching a dialogue, first steps in learning to read, the teaching of writing, motivational techniques — lend themselves more specifically to selective viewing. Typically the edited tape includes five or six sequences selected from successive full-day tapes to show progression from day to day in any one skill. Viewers can thus view the first day with a drill procedure and stop the tape to discuss objectives, teacher adaptation to student responses, etc., then postulate how the teacher will plan the next step in the drill material. They then view the next day's presentation, stop for discussion, view the third day's work, and so on. Interviews with the teacher at the end of the day's taping have been included with some edited segments so that viewers may also see and hear the teacher analyzing his/her own successes and failures, and introduce thoughts for further work the next day.

Other topical tapes lend themselves to careful examination of the extent to which student objectives in language learning vary from

teacher objectives. An example of this type of tape is #ML 833,<sup>2</sup> which focuses on the attempts of a fourth-year French teacher to individualize instruction through small-group work. It includes sections of six successive days to show how a teacher works with six individuals in two different groups. The procedures by which a teacher plans his work, so that objectives of each of the six individuals can be met, can be explored and discussed. One can also trace the progress of each of the six individuals, predict their roles in the work of the group, and see some of the final results of the group project.

Similar results are possible with another topical tape, #ML 835, which captures parts of four successive days in another fourth-year French class. Entitled "Techniques for Developing Speaking Skills," this tape is ideal for in-service work, for a variety of procedures to effect interaction is shown on a single tape. As with other tapes, it is possible to consider the extent to which needs of individuals were met in the classroom.

#### *Conclusion*

While no technological advance has ever proved to be a panacea, using classroom video tapes for pre-service and in-service training, combined with actual visits to foreign-language classes in the schools, seems to help the prospective or in-service teacher see his way through the maze of method, media, materials, scheduling, and classroom organization possibilities to the foreign-language student, who stands to gain the most. Video tapes can help the teacher trainee to understand that a good teacher can produce language-learning in many situations — as long as he is more concerned with the learner than he is with any particular method.

#### *ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

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<sup>2</sup>Copies of the video tapes described in this article are available for a dubbing charge of \$20 per volume. Purchaser may buy tape or supply his own in addition. Accompanying each tape are a video guide to show the location of important events on the tape, suggestions for use including related discussion questions, and background information on the class being viewed.