

Video in Languages for Business and The Professions

Are there any of us teaching today who have not experienced student detachment and indifference? Are there any of us who have not had students—bodily in our classrooms and lecture halls—whose hearts, minds, and interests were far from us? Are there any of us in the profession who are not interested in re-engaging student interest in what is going on in our classrooms? According to the National Institute of Education, the key to re-engaging student interest is teachers—teachers becoming more accessible to students; teachers measuring student progress more carefully; teachers changing and improving their teaching methods; and, teachers using technology. It is the aim of this article to propose the possibility that in languages for business, the systematic integration and use of video can help carry the instructional load, offer teachers another method of instruction, and re-engage students' interests in their own learning. For the purposes of this discussion, "video" is defined as videotapes produced by the learner, and "languages for business" are viewed in the larger context of acquiring target language culture and communication behaviors as opposed to the narrow and limited acquisition of specialized business vocabularies.

In an attempt to knock down the traditional, teacher-centered methods of instruction, education's critics are pulling out the sledge hammer of accusation and pounding away with charges of "arid teaching . . . and self-serving curriculums. . ." (Scully, 1984). Armed with one educational assessment report after another, the critics are trying to force the schools to respond more effectively to the unprecedented and fundamental changes taking place in our society and world of the 1980's and beyond.

Unlike the huffing and puffing criticism of the past, the current attacks on education are disquieting for a number of reasons: they are well-orchestrated and aimed at every sector of education; they are led by prestigious groups such as the National Institute of Education and the Endowment for the Humanities; and, they leave the reader with the uneasy feeling that, this time, neither the attacks nor the critics will go away.

An in-depth, critical evaluation of recent "education reports" with their many recommendations for improving education is a mindboggling undertaking, and although it is tempting to conclude that "in and of themselves, they are overstatement at best, misguided at worst," the facts are that approximately 50% of students who start college never finish; about 12% of the best and brightest high school seniors do not bother going to college at all; and, an increasing percentage of students currently enrolled in higher education is dropping out.

Undoubtedly, there are as many reasons for not going to college or dropping out as there are students. Nevertheless, one of the major reasons may be the one identified by the National Institute of Education, namely, student disengagement or the mental detachment from learning. (Newell, 1984)

"Involvement in Learning—Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education," the National Institute of Education's assessment report which identifies teachers as the key to re-engaging students' interests in learning—like many of the other reports—has its critics. L. Jackson Newell, liberal arts dean at Utah, finds it ". . . long on general advice, short on ideas. . ." He points out that if faculty members were to imple-

ment the suggestions (become more accessible to students, measure student progress more carefully, improve their teaching methods, and use technology), “. . . it will require a shift in academic values” because “professors are already stretched to the point of disfunction by competing pressures. I refer not only to research, publishing, and teaching, but also to the moonlighting in which many engage for economical survival . . . I contend that it is no longer in the best interests of scholarship or teaching to expect all university professors to do everything at once.” (Newell, 1984). While no faculty member could realistically be expected to do everything at once, it may not be unreasonable to assume that most faculty members could, if they wanted to, shift their academic values enough to do something that could enhance their teaching and increase the number of ways in which students can contribute to their own as well as others’ learning.

It is the aim of this discussion to propose the possibility that in languages for business and the professions, the systematic integration and use of video can help carry the instructional load, offer teachers an effective method of teaching, and re-engage students’ interests.

The quest for verisimilitude, namely, making instruction more concrete and real, naturally leads language teachers in search of methods, materials, and techniques that will encourage the active use of the target language and reinforce appropriate communicative behaviors. Whatever else we may say about methods, materials, and techniques, one thing is certain: they are all tools of the trade.

A tool of the trade that has been around for a long time and is just now enjoying an almost unnoticed renaissance is the instructional use of video. No longer being overlooked in favor of computer technology, interest in video technology for the first time is beginning to surpass interest in computing. It is this phenomenal jump in the acquisition of video equipment that partially answers the question “Why video in business language courses . . . why not any one of the other technologies?” Not only is video “in,” that is to say, available, but it is also user-

friendly, able to help carry the instructional load, and a technology with which most of today’s students are already familiar via television.

Availability

In the approximately 81,000 schools in the U.S.A., the instructional use of video has taken a major jump. According to Quality Education Data, a market research firm, the number of U.S. schools using video equipment for instruction grew from 35,545 schools to 56,166 in the year ending September 1984. (Educational Technology, 1985). This increase is largely due to significant drops in prices for videocassette systems. A 1980 survey of educational institutions by Knowledge Industry Publications found that 60% of educational users surveyed owned 3/4” videotape machines; 54% reported having 1/2” equipment; and more than 16% had other formats. Eighty-six per cent had video studios, more than 80% had editing equipment, and 85% reported having cameras (89% specified studio cameras, 85% portable or portapak cameras). Seventy-nine per cent reported color cameras and 78% black and white (Darnov, Moore & Hickey, 1984).

Although statistics on the availability of video equipment are of interest, and perhaps, even useful, they are not synonymous with evidence that the increasingly available equipment is being put to good use. What the statistics do seem to show is that if we want to use video in our teaching, we have a better than average chance of finding it in our schools.

User-Friendly

Technology that is difficult to operate gets in the way of instruction and learning. Today’s videocassette systems (1) are continually in the process of becoming easier to use, transportable, light-weight, and cost-effective. Cameras usually weigh less than five pounds, the recording/playback deck—to which the camera attaches via an umbilical cord—weighs less than 15 pounds. Videotapes can be played back through a TV or monitor. Once the basic equip-

ment has been acquired, the day-to-day operational problems are few because, generally speaking, the equipment is rugged, and videotapes can be re-used (averaging about a 100 passes).

Most often when video is used, it is used in the passive, non-active modes of large-group viewing, small group viewing, and individual viewing. Like film, it is used to “. . . present information that involves motion, describes processes, documents events, and shows relationships. . . .” (Kemp, 1980). This traditional use of video has aided and abetted a situation that has been described by John Loughary as a “machine-independent system. . . .” (Loughary, 1966). In the traditional, teacher-centered methods of instruction, we can virtually remove every machine from every classroom without significantly changing instruction or learning. This is because, according to Loughary, “. . . educators have used machines to assist them to achieve results which were planned independently of the machines.”

If we elect to use video in an active mode, namely, do-it-yourself productions created by students, then the results we want to achieve cannot be planned independently of the video being used; video in this case helps us carry the instructional load and cannot be removed from the teaching/learning process without changing the outcome.

How? How could we go about integrating student-produced video in languages for business? We begin by considering two procedural matters: First, the tangible externals, namely, equipment selection and integration of video into the curriculum; and, secondly, the elements of course design such as problem, objectives, strategies, learning activities, and evaluation of student progress.

Equipment Selection

It is not the aim of this discussion to examine all aspects of equipment selection; many fine books exist on the subject—a selection of which can be found at the end of this article. At the risk of belaboring the obvious, suffice it to say

that four components comprise the basic videocassette system: camera, microphone, videocassette recorder (VCR), and television receiver/monitor. In addition to these basic pieces of equipment, other supplementary equipment may be desirable (2).

The selection of the specific video equipment for the nucleus of a portable, studio, or combination system depends on a number of factors, not the least of which is cost. In starting up a video production unit, we can project the cost of the basic, portable videocassette system to be in the range of \$2000-\$3000 (3). Even at a bare minimum, a basic studio set-up with supplemental equipment will cost about three times as much, ranging from \$9000-\$12,000. This is not to say that video is cheap; it is reasonable, however, and as prices continue to decline, it is becoming more and more within reach of schools with modest budgets.

Integration of Video in Curriculum

Plato, in the Seventh Book of *The Republic*, defines education as the business of helping citizens develop their innate powers of vision by turning them in the right direction towards the light. Plato's view of helping individuals develop their own power of vision has been overshadowed in favor of the authoritarian tradition which views teaching as a means to the end of filling empty vessels. It could be argued that if our students are empty vessels to be filled, it may be so because they are bodily in our classrooms but mentally detached from what is going on. In student-produced video, the spotlight is not on the teacher dispensing information, but rather, on students who are actively engaged in their own learning; both teacher and video technology are there to help facilitate the development of the learner's innate powers of vision.

Since, in teacher-centered methods of instruction, teachers do spend most of their time dispensing information, it may be difficult for them to switch from being the primary source of information to being responsible for creating a successful learning environment for students who will take center stage with a technology that allows them to develop their powers of vision.

How easy is it for teachers to become managers of the learning environment? Undoubtedly, it depends on the individual teacher. However, the charge that teachers end up lecturing because they are not trained or prepared to do anything else may be hard to swallow not because it is false, but because it is true.

The second set of procedural matters that must be considered is the matter of course design. Here it is necessary for us to examine the learning problem, objectives, strategies, learning activities, and evaluation of student progress.

Learning Problem

The learning problem facing business language teachers is the real-life communication interaction, that is, the communicative behaviors as they occur in business and the professions. For example, in languages for business, the real-life communicative behaviors can be found in such areas as advertising, buying-selling-merging a company, hiring-promoting-firing, customs laws and regulations, product development, etc. Each of these communicative behaviors can be further broken down into units, each with a basic learning objective or goal.

Basic Learning Objective

For each unit of the larger communicative behavior, we must state what it is we want our students to be able to do as a result of having studied the unit. Although for the purposes of this discussion, we are using English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in our examples, the framework is adaptable to Business French, Business German, Commercial Spanish, as well as non-specialty language courses.

Specific Objectives

Specific objectives focus on how students demonstrate mastery of the basic objective. Returning to our previous example of a unit on commercials in an ESP course, we could state the specific objectives as follows: Students will

be able to: 1) plan, script, record, playback, and evaluate a 30 or 60-second commercial on the theme "Be Good to Yourself;" 2) evaluate their student-produced commercials in terms of visual, verbal, non-verbal, and cultural communication factors.

Staying with our example of ESP commercials, let us next look at possible teaching strategies in terms of what could appear in the teacher's lesson plans.

Possible Teaching Strategies

In the teacher's lesson plans, the following strategies could be noted and employed:

(1) Students are to view selected (teacher-previewed) Tab, Geritol, and L'Oréal commercials, copies of which have been placed on reserve at the language laboratory, the library, and the student center.

(2) Students are to read *How To Be Your Own Best Friend*, analyzing the relationship between people being told to be good to themselves on the advice of a book, and how they can be shown the same thing with a commercial for a product or service.

(3) Furthermore, students are to read *Be My Guest* (copies of which are on reserve at the language laboratory and the library) for an examination of the concept of how we can best serve ourselves by serving others.

(4) A teacher-led discussion using the Socratic method of the be-good-to-yourself theme is scheduled for the end of the week.

(5) The teacher outlines and explains student-produced, 60-second commercials that will be the culmination of the unit.

(6) The teacher divides the class into groups of five; each group is to research, plan, script, record, and present a 60-second commercial for a real or imagined product or service woven around the theme of "Be Good To Yourself."

(7) Individually, each student will prepare a "storyboard" of a possible commercial; each group will negotiate whose commercial will be student-produced, and the group will then de-

velop a "shooting script" for the student-selected commercial.

(8) For students who need to refresh their video basics, the following reference books are on reserve in the library: John LaBaron's *Making Television*, chapters 1 and 2; Fuller, Kanabe, and Kanabe's *Single-Camera Video Production*, chapters 1 and 2; Peter Utz' *Video User's Handbook*, 2nd Edition, chapters 5,6,8,14, and 16. Arrangements have been made with the language laboratory personnel for students who want "hands on" video training. Call for an appointment.

(9) Students are encouraged to view selected titles from *The Bellcrest Story*, *Bid For Power*, and *ESP Business*, which are available for viewing at the language laboratory.

(10) Also on reserve in the library: *The Complete Handbook of Business English* and *The Book of Business Knowledge*.

Learning Activities

Besides commercials, what other types of learning activities can business language teachers work into their lesson plans? In languages for business and the professions, do-it-yourself activities are of two general types: student activities and teacher activities.

Student Activities

The following activities—and different versions of them—can be undertaken by business language students:

(1) **Simulation Games.** Realistic imitations and contrived models of business communicative behaviors.

(2) **Teaser Scenarios.** Brief, one-minute videos showing a business or professional speaking situation which stops mid-sequence; students must come up with suitable and appropriate completions.

(3) **Roleplays.** Little plays in which students assume various identities in selected business communication interactions; these are recorded, played back for analysis, and evaluated.

(4) **Mime Scenarios.** Videos without audio to illustrate non-verbal behavior; students supply suitable audio, that is, dialogue to go with the visuals of target language communication scenario.

(5) **Talk Show Take-Offs.** Video versions of popular talk show formats where students research and role play prominent business and professional people who are interviewed by one or several hosts.

(6) **Spoof & Counter-Commercials.** Fifteen, 30-second, and 60-second spots which are researched, scripted, and recorded by students for real or imaginary products or services in the form of comic versions or counter versions taking opposite point of view.

Teacher Activities

In do-it-yourself student-produced video, teachers are not dispensers of information but information gatekeepers, information managers, and diagnosticians-counselors-tutors. Their new functions in each of these capacities are as follows:

As *information gatekeepers*, teachers determine basic and specific learning objectives based on subject content and how students think and learn; they select appropriate materials and learning experiences that will help students achieve learning objectives in an enriched learning environment created and monitored by the teacher.

As *information resources managers*, teachers prepare students for use of appropriate learning resources and explain the reasons for their use.

As *diagnosticians-counselors-tutors*, teachers assist students in maximizing their learning potentials, help students identify personal learning difficulties, and devise strategies to overcome such difficulties.

Evaluation of Student Progress

Perhaps, no area of learning is as troublesome as testing and evaluation. In courses built around student-produced video, we have an opportunity

to evaluate the improvement of learning in a manner not possible without video. With student-produced video, students (without teacher present in the room) record their classroom video projects. At the same time that students are recording such projects, the teacher (in another room) views the production and records comments and suggestions for improvement on the second, unused audio track (4) of the videotapes. Students playback the tape—complete with teacher comments—and devise ways in which to improve problems in pronunciation, syntax, grammar, and non-verbal communication. The project is re-shot by students and re-evaluated by the teacher for evidence of improvement. Grades are assigned on the basis of improvement.

Conclusion

Student-produced video, like all instructional methods, has its critics, most notably those who point out that it is highly elitist. This charge is made not in the sense of “student-produced video is a superior method,” but rather in the sense of “only the wealthy, suburban schools can afford it—not the poor, inner-city schools.”

Although some schools have more money than others, no school—suburban or inner-city—operates entirely without money. Without a doubt, video is not cheap; what is doubtful, however, is that *no* inner-city school can afford it, and *all* suburban schools can. Each school has its spending priorities; money spent on video equipment cannot be spent on something else. It is not just a question of money; it is also a question of priorities.

Given the opportunity to improve, many of us in education do what we have always done, only more of it. Most of us believe we can produce the perfect course—provided we are given enough time, resources, financial rewards, and the best and the brightest students with which to do it.

Student-produced video allows teachers to be innovative (5) and experimental with the new tricks and tools of the trade. As information gatekeepers and managers, as diagnosticians

and counselors to our students, we can create a rich learning environment in which our students learn by *doing the target language via video*—a technology that is available, user-friendly, and increasingly less expensive. Students can use video in simulation games, teaser scenarios, roleplays, mimes, commercials, and other activities.

When it comes to using video in languages for business and the professions, we must, as Neil Postman suggests, “. . . assume an experimental posture because there is no strong evidence that what we are doing now is the right thing.”

References

- Darnov, P., Moore L., & Hickey, A. (1984) *Video in the 80's*. New York: Knowledge Industry Publications, 76–77.
- Educational Technology*. February 1985, p. 1.
- Loughary, J. (1966) *Man-Machine Systems in Education*. New York Harper and Row, 4.
- Newell, L.J. (1984) A catalyst and a touchstone. *Change*. Nov./Dec. 8-9.
- Postman, N. (1974) Toward multiple learning theories. *American Education in the Electric Age*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications, 134.

Author's Notes

- (1) Video is available in a number of formats: two-inch quadraplex for professional studio decks using four video heads; one-inch semi-professional broadcast quality; three-quarter inch width also called “U-matic;” half-inch width, and quarter-inch width. Half-inch is the most popular format. The standard of the 1970's—open reel half-inch—has given way to the color videocassette recorders (VCR) of today. Two VCR formats are available: Beta and Video Home System (VHS); they are incompatible.
- (2) Supplemental equipment includes but is not limited to the following: a switcher, if several cameras are used; a special effects generator if, in addition to switching among cameras, fades, dissolves, wipes, and image mixing are desired; basic editing equipment which includes an editing videotape machine (with editing controller for precise scene location) and a recording videotape machine; a sync generator to stabilize all electronic signals in the system, a time-base corrector connected to the videotape player/recorder to insure acceptable sound quality when mixing materials from various sources, a test signal generator for signal alignment from recorders to monitors and receivers, audio

and video mixers to combine materials onto a single videotape, and a title/character generator for letters and numbers.

- (3) Sony, Hitachi, JVC, Panasonic, and other manufacturers of video products have cameras in the \$1000-\$10,000 range for educational applications; microphones in the \$75-\$100 range; 1/2" VCR's in the \$1200-\$1600 range; black/white monitors in the \$200-\$800 range; and, color monitors in the \$400-\$1000 range. Prices vary due to the bidding process.
- (4) This kind of evaluation technique is an adaptation of what is known as "video self-confrontation" (VSC). Using a two-track or stereo recorder, a teacher is able to observe students taping a video project and simultaneously record comments on the second audio track. For example, students tape their sound on Audiotrack 1, while the teacher in another room (via monitor or one-way glass) records comments on Audiotrack 2. When students replay the videotapes, they can listen to both audio tracks separately or simultaneously.
- (5) We can be innovative all the way through graduate school. Darnov, Moore & Hickey (Video in the 80's, 69) tell of an unusually innovative approach to video at California's University of Advanced Studies (CUAS) where Ph.D. candidates in education produce "video" theses in order to earn the Ph.D. in education. Depending upon the candidate's background, CUAS recommends video courses—scripting, producing, planning,

etc.—and once the candidate is experienced with video, he or she must produce an inexpensive, high-quality video on a particular topic. What does the university do with all these student-produced videos? It is accumulating an impressive video lending library.

Suggested Video Texts

- Practical Video*. White Plains, NY: Links, 1974.
- Single-Camera Video Production*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982.
- Television Production*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979.
- The Video Primer*. New York: Links, 1974.
- Video in Education and Training*. New York: Focal, 1980.
- Video User's Handbook*. 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982.

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