

Content Video in the EFL Classroom

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The growing acceptance of content teaching within EFL as a motivator for students has led in recent years to the creation of native speaker-taught content courses within the English language departments of many universities. While some universities restrict these classes to higher level students, many others are open to students at lower intermediate levels. Such classes are necessarily different from so-called content-based courses offered to ESL students in overseas universities. The latter are designed for intermediate and upper intermediate students who hope to enter overseas junior colleges or universities, and there has been considerable attention given to these kinds of courses by Brinton et al (1989) and others. By contrast relatively little has been written about the appropriate teaching methodology for content classes taught in Japan to lower level students. While this presentation will be focusing mostly on using video in these kinds of content classes, it is impossible to separate the approach and theoretical principles that guide this aspect of content-based teaching, from the larger field of the discipline. For this reason, the following general guidelines for effective content-based teaching outside of the foreign university environment are offered.

Some General Suggestions for Effective Content Teaching within EFL

- Activities to foster language acquisition should be integrated, whenever possible, with those designed to teach information or content
- An emphasis should be placed on visual and experiential learning- especially through videos selected and edited by the instructor; student produced materials such as posters and projects; realia, group skits and dramatic presentations
- As in regular EFL courses, all four skills, including speaking should be integrated. In comparison with courses taught in foreign universities, listening should be emphasized over reading and writing
- Teachers should have more than just a casual interest in the topic being studied and should have access to materials, especially videos and books aimed at, or adaptable to, the listening and reading level of the students

Some Suggestions for Selecting and Customizing Documentaries, Movies and other Video Sources for Content Classes

1. Documentaries:

Documentaries should be used only if they are visually dense and/or have English captions. Most interviews should be edited out and total length should be less than a third of class time. They should be used largely as a supplement to a (text based) unit on a particular topic. Interactive and communicative information gap activities based around these documentaries are essential for lower intermediate students, and add to its language acquisition value.

2. Movies:

Entire movies should not be shown in class, but carefully selected films with a strong cultural or historical content can be watched by students for homework and can be accompanied by "movie notetaking" diaries in which students take notes about what they have learned, both content and language wise. Films should have either English subtitles or subtitles in the student's native language.. Student "movie diaries" and carefully edited extracts from the films can be the basis for class activities.

3. Public Service Information Announcements and Political Ads:

Public service information and political commercials dealing with contemporary social problems and issues are a rich and interesting source that require relatively little customizing by the instructor. They also lend themselves well to communicative activities. Unlike commercials, public service announcements do not sell a product or service made by a company or manufacturer. Usually made by the government or a non profit organization, they give advice or information about an issue. From a teaching point of view, they can be treated much like commercials. However, they can give an additional insight into the culture of the country in which they were made, since they sometimes reflect that culture's societal goals, as well as it's

sense of morality. Students should be asked to focus on who the announcement is aimed at and what behavioral change is being promoted.

Content teaching (in English) is far from being a routine task. Yet often, it is a job which falls by default on EFL professionals with little background in the subject they are asked to teach. However, the accessibility and intrinsic interest to students of video (and of course the resources in the World Wide Web), promise to make the task both easier and more challenging.

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