

Face-off: Video in the Classroom

Just before Christmas, 2011, TEC Associate Editor Michael Griffin (and dogme enthusiast) contacted EFL Classroom 2.0's founder, David Deubelbeiss, and asked the following question:

"What's the big deal about video?"

This simple question fueled the following email exchange. We hope you enjoy the results.

Dear Michael,

With all due respect, if video killed the radio, it certainly won't have any problem with the immobile book. The book can't even call out for help!

I jest, but only a little. It truly is a "move over Gutenberg" moment and for language teachers video offers the amazing benefit of bringing the real world into the classroom. And hasn't that always been the problem with the classroom? It's an artifice, it's not real, it's fake and a fraud. If we must have it, at least we can make it less artificial and more valuable towards the "ambiguity" that communication forces us to deal with.

There are other profound benefits. Video can be asynchronous. Rewind it, repeat it, review it, remix it. It allows control of the input and a foothold from which learning of a language may take place.

Video contextualizes. Really, video is a misnomer, I prefer the term moving pictures. We "imaginators" of the new visual realm process meaning through the eye, less the ear. Language learning will only profit by using images.

Video is and should be authentic. I repeat my above refrain, with the 3 noble truths of language learning. Real, Real, Real.

Video is highly cultural. Language and culture embrace like a double helix. You can't separate them and the best way to teach culture is through the eye (for the eye cannot see itself and thus be anthropocentric). Let's not forget to mention the paralinguistic elements that video teaches students. Not only voice, but the body, the nuances of language.

Finally, video is cool. Yep, that's it in a nutshell. Won't even explain it. It's just cool - the book, dull, grey, staid.

So there you go. Join the video revolution or miss out leading your students into a whole new realm of accelerated language learning. Video IS the new text.



Dear David,

Thanks so much for the insightful and entertaining response. While I certainly appreciate much of what you have written, David, I cannot help but wonder if video is not just another passing fad that will be discarded when something cooler comes along. Were cassette tapes not once considered the future and much cooler than record players? Was audio-lingualism not once considered cooler than grammar-translation?

I think you made some important and excellent points but I am not sure if video vs. textbooks is a fair comparison. To my mind, it is video vs. not video, or more accurately, video vs. hundreds of other things. For the record, you will have a hard time getting me to say too many positive things about textbooks.

You mentioned one of the main benefits of video being the fact that it is asynchronous. Good point. Is this another reason for video to be used outside of class when students can go at their own pace and continually review and remix?

What role (if any) do you see for teachers in the wake of this video revolution? Will the best teachers simply be those most adept at finding suitable clips?

You mentioned that video is and should be authentic. I hope you will say a bit more about this. I am having a hard time imagining a less authentic situation than the characters in "Friends" paying for those apartments after seemingly just drinking coffee every day. Aren't the students' lives much more authentic than the scripted lives that appear on television and in the movies?

Speaking of scripted, I am not sure that the dialogues we see in movies and TV actually accurately represent authentic communication that happens in the real world (as opposed to the reel world). While I will happily agree that dialogues in textbooks are infamously stilted and unnatural, I am not convinced that commercially produced video is any more natural or realistic.

You mentioned that video is highly cultural and I fully agree with this and think that video can be a great way to become familiarized with different cultures. Here I have two main concerns. The first is that video might not accurately portray the source culture and might help build and maintain stereotypes. My second concern is that students might feel they need to be masters of the cultures of English speaking countries when it is probably more important for them to be knowledgeable about their own cultures in this time of English as a lingua franca.

Also, what models are videos providing? Here in Korea, the native-speaker model is often unattainable. I worry that by continually measuring themselves against native speakers, students will lose confidence while using their time and energy inefficiently.

I am certainly not saying that video is bad or that it shouldn't play a key role in certain classes. I am simply saying that video is not a panacea and that like every tool it should be scrutinized and used in a thoughtful way. Personally, I see video as a potentially useful tool but not so much more than that. Perhaps I am missing something so I hope that you will share your thoughts with me, as well as the readers of *TEC*.

Dear Michael,

“A passing fad”? Surely you jest? Don’t think in terms of “video” but in terms of images and visuality - that’s the revolution. Have you seen Chris Anderson’s TED talk about the social power of video/YouTube and how the Gutenberg revolution is waning? Video IS the new textbook and I’d bet my precious 8-track stereo on that! And for language, it just makes everything REAL and alive - something a textbook page can never do. However, I’m not big on the term “video”, but prefer “The Watching Revolution”. A recent post of mine, “Extensive Watching” (<http://tinyurl.com/76ks3jp>), outlines how this is really going to replace extensive reading programs and the teaching emphasis on SSR (Sustained Silent Reading).

You ask quite rightly about the role of teachers (and yes, this is where the focus should rest). You ask, “Will the best teachers simply be those most adept at finding suitable clips?” Of course, curation and materials development always make a great teacher but it is only part of the story. Video can be used in many ways other than as a hook or “engager”. I’ve written an ebook with loads of ways to use video (<http://ddeubel.edublogs.org/2011/06/22/the-video-teaching-revolution/>) and I’d suggest, like I infer above, thinking of it as replacing the textbook. No more opening pages, or plowing through exercises - now we just use the forward and rewind buttons. So, no, good teaching is much more than choosing good video clips.

You suggest that there isn’t enough authentic video out there. Ummmm - couldn’t disagree more. There is over 35 hours of video uploaded onto YouTube every minute! The majority authentic, unproduced, unscripted and from reality’s unpredictable mouth. I’d also suggest we get over the neat distinction of authentic vs non-authentic. Fact is, a lot of our conversation, the majority of it, is very scripted. We speak in conventions using tried and true phrases. It’s a necessary part of communication and valuable to learners. I’d also bet there are a lot of second language learners reading this who learned a lot of their English through “Friends” episodes.

About culture, I agree we have to think about the local culture and local ‘Englishes’ but there is already enough video being produced in this vein and rather than inhibiting, video is empowering to local expression and utterance. Video is culture neutral and I don’t buy into it being just a big cultural imperialistic tool. It’s all about how it is used. Anyone can cheaply make video nowadays, you only need a \$15 phone.

I’ll leave my rebuttal short. In brief, I think you devalue the role of video in language learning because you see it as just another interchangeable tool or delivery method. It is anything but. It is a form of disruptive media that is having all sorts of profound influences across the globe and cultures. Like moveable type, it is impacting the whole world of learning and empowering communication in directions we can only guess at. It isn’t just another tool in a teacher’s kit, like PowerPoint or TPR. It IS the platform underlying how we will teach and learn now and in the future. We will all have to be connected and video will be that thread.

David,

Thank you again for another thoughtful response. It seems that while we agree on quite a few points we might have to agree to disagree on others.

My concern with video and “The Watching Revolution” is teachers simply and blindly replacing one teacher-fronted tool and style of teaching with another without really considering the students or their needs and wants. I guess what I am mostly advocating is a thoughtful use of technology and materials in the classroom and not just doing things because they are cool and because we know we can do them.

You write that “Video is the new textbook”. I am sorry to tell you that this is not convincing or persuasive for me. I am not all that thrilled with the old textbook! I don’t think we need a new one. I don’t see using the forward and rewind buttons as an improvement. For that matter, I never really thought that opening the pages of textbooks was the problem. I thought that it was the inanity of the exercises and the way that they are often used.

In fact, I don’t think it is a competition between textbooks and video, but instead video vs. anything and everything else, and I still remain unconvinced that video wins this much fiercer competition.

You paint an optimistic and positive picture of the use of video for language learners and teachers. In some ways I hope you are right. I truly hope that video can help teachers and students go well beyond what they are doing and can do at the moment. Until then I will remain skeptically optimistic.

Thanks again and best of luck with the revolution.

How do you use video in your classroom? TEC would like to know. Please send your experiences using video with your students to tecfeedback@gmail.com.