
Teacher-Made Materials: Video Tape

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It is not surprising to hear that more and more language teachers are turning away from the traditional textbook and are seeking more up-to-date materials, more relevant materials, and even more class-specific materials. As foreign language teachers, we are acutely aware of the myriad problems that abound with any materials that are to be used in the classroom. This seems to be particularly true in the field of foreign language teaching.

One solution to this problem that has become more and more a reality in recent times has been the introduction of more and more teacher-made materials. At first these may have been used to supplement classroom instruction. In time, for some teachers, these home-made materials have undoubtedly been used as the primary means of instruction. In this article, we propose neither a temporary, stop-gap measure nor a panacea for all of the problems with existing textual materials. Rather, we merely suggest an addition to whatever is currently being used in the classroom.

With today's emphasis on high tech and with the video revolution that has encompassed not only the United States, but many other countries in the world as well, it stands to reason that a very convenient and contemporary means of producing materials would involve video.

By definition, teacher-made materials are simply those materials that are made by the teacher. Teacher-made video tapes, therefore, are not those which are professionally made

and/or available through normal, commercial outlets. Instead, the teacher-made video tapes we will discuss in this article are based on regularly broadcast television shows.

Advantages of Teacher-Made Video Tapes

The wide range of readily available material on commercial and cable television today offers many advantages.

First of all, currently taped material can be extremely relevant in today's ever-changing world. It is quite difficult to be more up-to-date than last week's or even last night's programming. In contrast, commercially produced teaching materials, such as 16 mm movie films, are not only expensive but often outdated before they can be used.

A second reason for using teacher-made materials is that they are quite adaptable on a class-by-class basis. That is, the particular needs of a given class can be more easily met by having an inexpensive and widely available choice of materials at hand.

Thirdly, and just as important, teacher-made materials are relatively inexpensive to create. The VCR is no longer a plaything of the upper income class. It is certainly affordable. A simple unit, capable of recording from a television set and playing back the recording is readily available for purchase at less than two hundred dollars. Consequently, more and more VCR's are appearing in private homes.

There is one small problem in this area. Make sure that your VCR is completely compatible with the equipment that is available in school. Most of us have at home and are now using the half-inch VHS format. BETA format VCR's are priced even lower in many cases, but may not be available in many school audio-visual departments. Many universities still have 3/4 inch U-Matic format.

Two Important Caveats

There are two problems that must be considered before proceeding any further. First, there is the problem with tape speed. Newer home units have 3 speed possibilities. In contrast, even some very sophisticated multi-format machines play at only one speed. Recordings made at extended play cannot be replayed at standard speed unless the VCR is capable of switching the speed automatically.

The second potential problem is a bit more serious. This is the matter of United States copyright laws, which are a bit complex at first. However, the "guidelines," as they are called by our local Public Broadcasting System station, can be broken down to a few, understandable references for our needs.

The guidelines that follow apply only to off-air recording by non-profit educational institutions. A teacher in such an institution can act as an agent for the institution for taping purposes.

A broadcast program may be recorded off-air simultaneously with the broadcast transmission. Such a program may be kept for a period not to exceed 45 consecutive days after the date of the recording. At the end of the 45-day period, the recordings are to be erased or destroyed.

The recordings may be used once by individual teachers in the course of relevant teaching activities. They may be repeated once only for the purpose of instructional reinforcement. This may occur only within the first 10 days of the 45-day retention period.

Off-air recordings are to be made only at the request of and used by individual teachers. These are not to be regularly recorded in anticipation of requests. No broadcast program may be recorded off-air more than once at the request of or for the use of the same teacher regardless of the number of times that the program may be broadcast.

Reasons for Using Video in the Classroom

We find that there are several justifiable reasons for using video in the classroom. One of the problems that our ESL students have is a gross misconception of what American culture is. In part this is due to their exposure to American television programs that are highly rated in their own countries but that give a distorted view of America. Such programs include Dallas, Dynasty, T. J. Hooker, and so forth. Watching these shows without time to discuss the cultural implications leads to a stereotypic view of America and Americans in terms of sex, violence, dress, and so forth. We can use these same television shows to help teach parts of American culture as well as to obviate some of the problems that they cause.

We live in a visually oriented society. More and more we are exposed to video as a medium for news, entertainment, and education. Our students are used to video and respond well to it. Some students may

respond more favorably to video than to traditional book learning.

Suggestions for Using Video Programs

Assuming that the teacher has decided to pursue the possibilities of using video in the classroom, and that the equipment and legal technicalities have been taken care of, the first order of business is to decide what topics are suitable for classes, followed by deciding which of the cultural ideas are to be related. Finally, we must decide which of the skills are to be actively involved with the presentation.

The following list of television programs is tentative, at best. You will notice that many of the programs listed are found on cable television. With more and more of America being wired for cable and with the range of usable programming that is available on cable rather than on commercial television, we have decided to use cable listings as well as commercial.

We have listed several possible topics that we find useful for English as a second language at the university level. With modification, many of these can be successfully used at the secondary level as well as for adult education. We do not find them particularly useful, at this stage, for elementary school.

For each of the programs cited, there are possibilities of using all four of the language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The fifth skill, culture, is implicit in the programs themselves.

1. **FOOD.** "On the Menu" gives ideas of popular dishes in different areas of the country and helps to do away with the

misconception that hamburgers and pizza are all that Americans eat and that there is no American cuisine.

2. **CLOTHING.** "Style" shows popular clothing styles in the U.S.

3. **ENTERTAINMENT.** "At the Movies" and "Sneak Previews" offer a discussion of currently popular movies.

4. **SPORTS.** "ESPN Sportscenter" provides a discussion of the days' results in different sporting events, rather than simply watching a ball game, which generally does not require much use of language skills.

5. **HOLIDAYS.** "The Grinch Who Stole Christmas," "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," "Frosty the Snowman," "The Great Pumpkin," "Homecoming," "The Easter Bunny Show," and so forth are all good for discussion of traditional American holiday celebrations.

6. **HUMOR.** "Family Ties" and "The Cosby Show" portray situations which are probably closer to real family settings and relationships than those on any other shows, unless reruns of "Family" are available.

7. **RECENT HISTORY.** "Father Knows Best," "Leave it to Beaver," and "The New Leave it to Beaver" are also popular. The first two, while somewhat dated, may be useful in contrast with the last one in showing changes in dress and lifestyle of typical middle America.

There are, of course, many more programs—too many to list here. The preceding was meant only as an introduction to the possibilities of using home-taped programs in the classroom. We have not

made mention in this paper of the various activities that may be carried out. These would of course include listening comprehension exercises, cloze activities, writing exercises, and so forth. That topic, however, will be reserved for future discussion.

About the Authors

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