

GENERATING LANGUAGE THROUGH MEDIA

AUDIO-VISUAL PRODUCTION BY THE ESL STUDENT

By Linda New Levine

This is the second of a two-part article. The beginning installment of "Generating Language Through Media" appeared in the Fall 1975 issue of The TESL Reporter.

Another exciting student production technique is the filmstrip. Filmstrip production is one area where we can utilize the artistic talents of our students. In producing a filmstrip, the special materials needed are minimal. Each filmstrip requires one or two feet of U Film, a commercially produced product with a dull finish on which students may draw or print using a pencil, pen, felt tip marker, or typewriter. Planning sheets come with the U Film so that students may preplan their filmstrip accurately before they begin drawing on the actual film.

Filmstrips may be prepared on a wide variety of topics. They may be informative or done in cartoon style as a form of entertainment. As in the case of slide shows, filmstrips may illustrate a grammatical point or be in the form of a picture show. However, the show is limited or enhanced by the quality and creativity of the student drawings. Filmstrips can be most effective when done as a visual dialog in cartoon style. If your students are studying ways of buying things in the store, suggest that students prepare a dialog based on a store situation and produce a cartoon filmstrip to illustrate it. Any dialog used in a classroom situation can usually be illustrated through means of a student prepared filmstrip. Once again, the goal of filmstrip production should be presentation to the class with a filmstrip projector onto a movie screen.

Students working on filmstrip production must prepare their filmstrip together, aid each other in the production techniques, and cooperate on writing a script which they can

tape as an audio accompaniment to the filmstrip. If students have had adequate classroom practice in the target structures and vocabulary, the verbal interaction that occurs as part of the student work sessions will provide valuable experience in using the new language as a skill to complete tasks. Work sessions of this type also encourage the high density of interpersonal communication needed in language learning.

Filmstrips that are produced without an audio soundtrack may use a musical background, or they may be completely silent and rely on the printed message on the filmstrip itself. Filmstrips of this type may be used to generate discussion in the class as students question each other on what they have seen and discuss the topic more thoroughly. Teachers may find that some students react well to classroom conversations of this type, participating quite freely. Others do not, however, and may feel better about speaking before a class when their speech comes from a tape recorder as an accompaniment to a slide or filmstrip presentation.

A fourth technique for student involvement in media for the purpose of increasing conversational competence is the student production of movies. For this project, the students will need a Super 8 movie camera, preferably one that is light in weight and fairly simple to use, and a roll of Super 8 movie film. If the topic of the film will accommodate shooting the movie outside, then special lights and special film are not necessary. However, student films may be

produced indoors without special lighting equipment by using a high speed film. It is advisable, however, to use a tripod which will eliminate the jerky motions common to most amateur movies.

Movies are especially appropriate to topics involving motion, for example, sports events or a movie on My Typical Day which would illustrate particular verb tenses such as the simple present, or the simple past.

Movies are also a good means of illustrating a student prepared classroom dialog. Props can be used to designate the various characters such as an apron for the store clerk, and a coat, hat, and shopping bag for the customer. Elaborate background scenery is not necessary but a setting may be indicated by the use of a sign such as "Quiet—Hospital Zone" or "Mario's Fruit Market." When creating a movie dialog or a role-play situation, the student actors must act out the dialog twice, first as it is being filmed, and second, as it is recorded onto a tape recorder in order to provide an audio accompaniment to their movie. In this way, target structures receive extensive practice as the actors must know their lines fairly well before they go in front of the camera.

Movie production requires accurate planning. Students must decide what scenes they will shoot and for how long, keeping in mind that one roll of film produces a three minute movie. The work and planning sessions required for a project of this type give students adequate experience in using the new language as a skill. Conversational competence develops as a result of verbal interaction that is planned and prepared for by the teacher in advance.

The tape recorder is a technique of student production which I have already discussed as an aid or an accompaniment to slide shows, filmstrips, and movies. Tape recorders may also be used to produce shows in their own right and without visual accompaniment. ESL classes studying the simple past tense might prepare a radio style news program in which they announce the news of the day. The news material may come from a newspaper or be manufactured by the students to create comical effects. Students studying vocabulary relating to weather may announce the day's weather and make their

predictions for the next day. The simple present tense may be practiced in a radio interview with a famous personality. In the interview, Mr. X may be asked questions about what he does in his occupation. The question pattern using do and does would also apply to the interview situation. The tape recording can be turned into a "Twenty Questions" type game if Mr. X remains unidentified and the rest of the class is asked to guess his name or his occupation. This kind of activity provides a good review of various questioning structures while providing the high density of verbal interaction required for developing conversational competence.

The student produced tapes can be catalogued in the classroom or school library for later retrieval. They can easily be listened to by individual students throughout the day if a small junction box and earphones are provided for individual listening.

The last area of student production which I will discuss is that of student-made overhead transparencies, color-lift transparencies, and dittos. An overhead transparency is a sheet of clear acetate which can be written or drawn on and then projected onto a screen through the use of an overhead projector. Overhead transparencies may be made by students to illustrate a talk they are giving to the class, for example, a student-made map of Italy for a student's discussion of his native country. These talks may be prepared by small groups of students in work sessions, thus providing for verbal interaction among the students involved. Student talks may also be delivered extemporaneously by individual students. In this situation, teacher guidance may be provided in one of two ways: prior to the delivery of the talk or during the talk itself in the form of informal questioning. Transparencies may also be used to facilitate practicing dialogs as when students produce a map of the streets and shopping areas in their town and ask directions of other students in the class.

Color-lift transparencies are also projected onto a screen with an overhead projector. With a color-lift transparency, however, students are able to lift the images and colors from magazine photographs onto a clear Contact sheet. The photographs used must have a clay base. If a chalky substance comes off when you rub the photograph with a wet finger then you know the photo has a

clay base. Examples of this kind of photograph are found in magazines such as *National Geographic*. After cutting out the photo, students cover it with a sheet of Contact and rub the print with steady pressure all over. The two ply sandwich is then soaked in warm water. The paper will peel away and the Contact sheet will contain the colored image. Wipe the sheet gently with water to remove the clay residue and dry. The result will be a duplicate of the magazine photo which can be projected onto a screen. Color-lift transparencies are useful when students wish to illustrate a subject too elaborate to be drawn. These transparencies may be used to illustrate a speech about a student's native country, or an elaborate picture may be used to initiate a class game such as "I See Something" or "Twenty Questions." Dittos are commonly used in schools by teachers but they can also be used to advantage by students. If your students are interested in popular music, you may suggest that they share the songs they enjoy by writing the lyrics onto a ditto which can be duplicated for the entire class. Student compositions can also be written onto dittos, duplicated, and distributed to the class as part of a book which will be added to with each new composition. I have found students check their writing more carefully when they know it will be read by their peers. Creative teachers will find many more ways to expand these suggestions in their own classrooms.

I would offer a word of caution at this point. The projects which have been suggested presuppose that before new skills are used in media production there has been a comprehensive presentation of the new material in the classroom and a period of controlled practice of the new structure. Teachers cannot ask students to use skills and structures that they have not previously taught.

Many teachers in the past have been reluctant to use audio-visual devices because they are unfamiliar with their use. The rewards which accrue from using these materials, however, should encourage more and more teachers to explore their use. Most teachers will necessarily be limited by the equipment they find available to them in their schools. However, all schools contain some of the materials discussed here and more of the new schools being built include budget

allocations for cameras of various types for their media centers. The purchasing of expendable equipment such as film may not be a problem for some school systems. In those schools which do not provide funds for this material, however, students may volunteer to purchase their own. A roll of Polaroid film, purchased jointly by a team of three students, doesn't make a big dent in their budgets, but it does require them to plan more carefully so that none of the film is wasted.

Language teaching becomes subordinate to language learning when teachers recognize student differences, and allow for self-directed learning in a social context through the means of student media productions.

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