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ABSTRACT

Whether the advantages of video-tape outweigh the initial obvious difficulties depends on one's basic attitudes to teacher training. Video-tape can serve the demonstration and practice aspects of the methods course in unique ways by providing the language teacher with an "invaluable" means to (1) observe and analyze the teaching of others and (2) analyze his own classroom behavior. He can prepare his own demonstration films to suit his own curriculum; these films can be saved and indexed in a reference VT library at a rather small cost (a VT reel of about two hours playing time costs about $50.00). Demonstration tapes are used in primarily three ways: (1) as "standard lessons; (2) for teaching techniques of classroom observation and analysis; and (3) for teaching application of theory to procedures. Video-tapes may be used as an initial step in learning to analyze classroom behavior, e.g., isolating such elements as presentation of teaching points, different types and classes of drills, explication of grammar by analogy or by analysis. Evaluations by student-teachers agreed that watching themselves on VT "definitely contributed to a sense of self-image and self-realization." Presented is the author's step-by-step "Video-Tape Practice Teaching Cycle" and a checklist for her observation and analysis report. (AMM)

THE USE OF VIDEO-TAPE IN THE TRAINING OF FORFIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS

by

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The use of video-tape in training teachers of foreign languages is a fairly recent development in teacher education. As an alarming amount of this new technique is by necessity carried out on a trial and error basis, it might be useful to recount here our experiences with video-tape during the past year at the University of Pittsburgh. I work primarily with English as a foreign language, but I also have teachers of French and Spanish, and if one thing has become clear, it is that the target language is not a variable that needs consideration. Good language teaching is good language teaching whatever the language, and the procedure in using video-tape remains the same.

The disadvantages in using video-tape in teacher training are so obvious and so immediate that all but a very determined instructor will soon give up. There are procedural difficulties of scheduling and coordinating, of breakdown of equipment and of hauling either equipment or students around. VT is exceedingly time consuming if properly used in a methods course, and the preparation of demonstration films even more so. We have just prepared a forty minute demonstration film for a Spanish teachers workshop; it took 18 man-hours to prepare it, counting the filming, selection of suitable teaching episodes, and the final editing. VT should not be undertaken as a spur of the moment thing as I did with my first go at it.

Whether the advantages of video-tape outweigh these initial difficulties depends on one's basic attitude to teacher training. I believe that in teaching skills and techniques, demonstration and practice are as important as theory. (Let it be said somewhere that ultimately teaching is an art. But even Arthur Rubenstein must practice and

perfect his techniques. Talent is necessary in all art, but it is not sufficient, and it is the technique aspect we are concerned with here.) Video-tape can serve the demonstration and practice aspects of the methods course[1] in unique ways. A renumeration of the advantages really becomes a list of the various functions of VT.

Basically these functions fall in two categories: Video-tape used (1) for demonstration classes where the language teacher learns to observe and analyze the teaching of others and (2) for practice classes where he learns to analyze his own class room behavior.

VT is very suitable for demonstration classes of a master teacher in full flight. The tape can be stopped while the class discusses aspects of the teaching, it can be backed and replayed instantly, and it can be edited to contain only those behaviors the instructor wants to discuss.

What most distinguishes it from regular demonstration films available for rental or purchase is that the methods instructor can prepare his own demonstration films to suit his own curriculum. These demonstration films can then be saved and indexed in a reference VT library at a rather small cost (a VT reel of two hours playing time costs about $50).

The demonstration tapes are used in primarily three ways: (1) as "standard" lessons, (2) for teaching techniques of classroom observation and analysis, (3) and for teaching application of theory to procedures.

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[1]Since different institutions divide the various elements in a foreign language teacher training program into various combinations, I use the "methods course" here as a generic term for theoretical aspects, techniques and procedures, practice teaching, materials adaptation and production, audio-visual aids, all of which should be included somewhere in a teachers program.

I use them as demonstration of good teaching as does everyone else, but there is one aspect of this that seems to be overlooked. When we language teachers informally evaluate our own classes, the criterion or standard by which we measure them is usually earlier classes we have taught ourselves for the simple reason that we rarely have access to other teachers' classes, much less an evaluation of them. It is important for the experienced teacher as well as for the novice that he be supplied a collection of standard lessons against which he as a language teacher can compare his own performance, that he observe in practice as well as in theory what good methods in teaching really are. A standard lesson then is a yard stick, a lesson selected by an experienced methods instructor to demonstrate soundness in techniques and procedures.

But it is not enough merely to observe good teaching. It does not follow that the teacher understands what he sees. The second way I use demonstration video-tapes is as an initial step in learning to analyze class room behavior, i.e. to isolate the various elements of a class such as presentation of teaching points, different types and classes of drills, explication of grammar by analogy or by analysis, etc. VT is also excellent for teaching various tools of examining class room behavior, such as the Flanders-Amidon Interaction Analysis. It should be fairly evident that the first step in learning to analyze one's own teaching behavior is to learn the techniques of such analysis and to practice such analysis on others where the learner need not also

worry about personal feelings and reactions.

If I said earlier that observation and practice are as important as theory in a methods course, that is not to imply that theory is not important. Without sound theory, no amount of practice will serve because future decisions as to the soundness of innovations in procedures will have to be based on theory, not on past experience. Experience has no predictive powers on new situations; it is useful only with similar situations. However, it remains a fact that teachers often are reluctantly passive against large doses of theory, and also that the application of theory to practice is rarely taught. This is the third way I use demonstration tapes and where I have found them very adaptive. Presented with a concrete example of a teaching situation, teachers seem to find the abstract wordiness of theoretical speculation more palatable; no doubt also because it forces the instructor to discuss theory in terms of specific examples. The majority of these discussions of theory and its application probably take place most naturally during the class discussions of the students' practice teaching VT sessions but by accident we stumbled on the following technique.

One student's micro-lesson turned out to be a veritable goldmine of various classes of drills. I had a type-written script made from the tape, presented the class with the transcript and asked them to identify the various drills in terms of whether they were mechanical, meaningful, or communicative.[1] This of course led to an extensive discussion of a theoretical classification of drills. This particular class, all experienced teachers, had earlier in the year objected rather vociferously to "too much theory,"

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[1]For a definition of these terms, see my article in Foreign Language Annals, IV: 2, December, 1970, pp. 187-193.

and I remember asking them what we were doing now, theory or practice. To a man they chorused "Practice!" no doubt pleased that I had given up my foolish ways with theory. They were of course deeply engrossed in theoretical speculation, but what they meant was that it seemed practical to them; they could see the application of it in their hand. We then viewed and discussed the tape again in terms of theory, but applied to a particular situation.

The success of this particular technique has led me to think of a way to experiment next term with a problem solving approach as part of the curriculum. I much prefer inductive learning and teaching but as all methods instructors know, it is difficult, time consuming and at times impossible. There are no texts for a problem solving approach to training teachers of foreign languages. It should be possible to tape micro-lessons on e.g. grammatical explication, assign three different lessons to the class for viewing and item analysis and then ask for an evaluation of the lessons in terms of assigned readings. The readings will constitute theory, the tapes observation of actual practice, and the evaluation will provide the link of application of theory to practice. It just might work.

The use of video-tape in combination with micro-lessons in practice-teaching has certainly achieved -- at least in the literature -- more attention than other uses of video-tape. There are discussions of directed change of teacher behavior as the expected terminal behavior of VT use, and of the definite achievements of these objectives. No doubt because of my own experience, I remain rather doubtful of these claims. There are no measurements in my field that I know of which will objectively measure specific change in behavior. And I know of no experiments which particularly isolate VT in teacher training as the causal factor in behavior change. I

mention this as I want to be quite clear in not making any claims that at present are not supportable. The extensive use of VT necessary to establish change in teacher behavior is simply not practical in a methods course. However, let me add the cameraman's comment about this. "Well," said he, "I don't know about that, but I certainly see change in your behavior. Weren't you dead set against this to begin with?" He was quite right; I had initially been very negative about the use of VT.

But there are certain claims we can make. All my student-teachers' evaluations agreed that VT definitely contributed to a sense of self-image, of self-realization. They were able to compare their micro-lessons with the "standard lessons" they had watched in the demonstration viewings without the distraction of simultaneously running a class. As one of them put it, we may not actually achieve a change of behavior but certainly self-awareness is the first step in directed change. This self-awareness seems to be a natural result from watching oneself on VT.

But this leads us to what is probably the most important concept an instructor of teachers can instill in his student-teachers. Perfection of techniques and solutions to problems are important, but they are not the most important objective. There will be new techniques and new problems when the student-teacher is far from the help he can find in the methods class. The most important concept a methods instructor can teach his students is to objectively and analytically examine their own teaching as a matter of course. It is not enough that the instructor criticize and help the students improve their teaching. They must be taught to criticize and improve their own teaching by themselves. For this particular objective I find VT invaluable. It is not particularly difficult to teach the techniques of classroom teaching evaluation: demonstration films and one way glass do

very well for this. But to instill a positive attitude of self-criticism is very difficult. To be able to see oneself teach without the distraction of the classroom, to discuss particular activities with other colleagues in terms of practical application of theory, to be involved in group dynamics where the expected behavior is to analyze and discuss all teaching are factors which have in my experience been the most efficient in bringing about such an attitude.

We use a certain ordered set of procedures, but first various decisions of a technical nature have to be made. Whether to film in the studio or class room, whether to film a micro-lesson or part of a regular lesson, whether to use camera men or stationary cameras, whether to use volunteer guinea-pig students or the teachers' own students are the most basic problems. Generally speaking, the objectives for using the VT are the best criteria for making procedural decisions. E.g., for a demonstration film or tape it does not matter if the teacher feels the teaching situation is artificial; we want to depict soundness of techniques. If cameramen and a studio give better results technically, that's what we decide on. But if the objective is a novice's self-realization of his teaching, the decision may well be stationary cameras and no cameramen, the real class room and part of the real class rather than a studio situation. The truly technical problems are best left for the technician, but only after the purpose of the video-taping has been very carefully explained. If a particular type of drill is to be demonstrated, student response becomes very important and will necessitate a certain type of microphone over another. The technician must know the intended use of the VT in order to make his decisions.

Step by step, this is how we worked out a Video Tape Practice Teaching Cycle. For optimum results, the cycle should be repeated.

Step One. The initial assignment can either be given on a specific teaching point like any - none, or else the student-teachers may be asked to choose their own teaching point. They should have very specific directions on how to plan their micro-lesson; this is not the place for a test in writing lesson plans.

Step Two. I check over the lesson plan with each student. They appreciate the opportunity to make sure their lessons look sound on paper. This is particularly true of the non-native speakers.

Step Three. Next we video-tape the lessons. We have found 7-9 minute lessons the optimum time for getting into stride while trying to economize on time.

Step Four. Next we rerun the recorded lessons but only for the teachers taped. Actually we let the guinea pig students watch as a "thank you"for their participation but at this point there is never any discussion of the lessons. Occasionally I am not even present. The objective is for the teachers to make their own analysis and comments on their own teaching, to be able to view their performance comparatively peacefully before the onslaught of a class discussion. These comments serve later to introduce each particular session: it seems only fair that a teacher get the first chance to comment on his own teaching. It is typical that the more expert the teacher, the more critical his own comments on his teaching. These analyses are handed in as a written assignment, and compared with my own comments, it gives me a fairly good idea of how each particular student is progressing in his self-analysis as well as in his teaching.

Step Five. Next all the tapes are rerun, each teacher introducing his own lesson. Self deprecation is not encouraged. The entire class is encouraged to identify successful features as well as particular problems.

In order to direct the discussion, the entire class is given a check list (see Appendix) for each lesson. The teacher introduces his lesson; we run the tape while the class fill in their check lists. I may comment or even stop the tape at a particularly interesting point, or else we run each micro-lesson straight through and then the class discusses the lesson. There is often disagreement which leads into theoretical discussions of language teaching pedagogy. This step is very time consuming but worth every minute. Unless the class overlooks a significant point, I stay out of this discussion as much as possible. The class is learning to analyze and evaluate by themselves. It is a heuristic process and should not be marred by an omniscient instructor pontificating ex cathedra. At the end I sum up, comment and ask the teacher if he wants to make any further comments. One inviolable rule is that the teacher whose class is under discussion has lost all right to speak after his introduction unless specifically asked to do so. The reason is of course, that the discussion easily turns into self-justification, and if the possibility for this is removed objective self-analysis is hastened. One teacher asked to comment on the criticism of his teaching, said flatly that he disagreed with me. I had said that it seemed to me the teacher spoke more than the students and he objected strenuously to this. I asked the class what they thought we should do next since the disagreement was, after all, a question of facts. Someone suggested that we run a Flanders, which we did, and I was delighted to be proved wrong. This sort of situation, I think, demonstrates more efficiently than any amount of words, that you can isolate a problem, that you can and should deal objectively with it rather than impressionistically, and on the basis of data take necessary measures. I also think it vital that the instructor can demonstrate that he too can be wrong, that he expects this

to be so and that he himself analyze and admit it. Nothing I know irritates student-teachers more than an instructor who won't admit to flaws in his own teaching.

Personal comments are never allowed in the discussion. We firmly acknowledge that teaching is ultimately an art and that we are not here to comment on each other's God-given talents. We are working on procedures and techniques, and the discussion is limited to that. A comment like "The class seemed bored because the teacher used too many mechanical drills" is entirely legitimate; it is a procedural comment. "The class seemed bored because the teacher didn't come across" is not allowed. If the matter of discussion is a question of an unpleasant personality such comments are not helpful; if it is a procedural problem, I want to know what it is. The instructor has to be very firm on this in the beginning, but the class very quickly catches on and will shortly not accept such comments.

Occasionally there are snags. One of the brightest students in one class did an abominable lesson, lecturing all the while on a most dubious grammatical explanation, and was promptly taken to task by the class. He gave a stirring and angry performance of self-defense and justification (after that lesson, the Rule). I was astounded by his inability to analyze his own teaching, but I was also depressed that I had apparently taught him nothing. At such a point it seems best to just go on to the next lesson and forget about the maverick. I later asked the maverick to my office and asked him how he could have been so stubborn. This is what he answered, "I know what should be done and the others did it and I couldn't and I felt ashamed and that is why I said the things I did." Self-awareness is the first step to change.

Step Six. The student-teachers hand in their observation charts of the lessons. It gives me a very good idea just how far along they are in being able to analyze the techniques and procedures of a language lesson. They are not graded on these, of course. The teachers can see the comments on their individual lessons if they want to.

Step Seven The students write a reaction-evaluation report on the VT experiences. These are not graded either since they are for my benefit, and honesty is more useful than cant. I discuss their comments in class and together we agree on improved procedures for next term's class. They know and I know that the procedure just outlined is far from perfect, but they also know that they are actively helping in making it better, and they all agree that no matter how traumatic an experience, it is worth doing.

APPENDIX

CHECKLIST FOR

OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS REPORT

on

Class in _____ level:_____ age:_____

Lesson Plan:

1. Teaching point: (What is it? Taught with known vocabulary? Only one thing at a time? Appropriate for level and time?

2. Presentation and identification of patterns: (How presented? Natural language? Time? Reading by class? Checking for comprehension?)

3. Analysis of structural patterns: (In target language? Time? Verbal explanations easily understood? Visual representations clear?)

4. Drills: (Time?)

   A. Conduction: (Manner - voice, posture; correction; Pace; Cueing - words, objects, pictures, gestures; Directions - examples, explanation.)

   B. Construction: (Class, progression form mechanical to communicative? Types, variety of?)

Feedback:

1. Student Response: (Language behaviour: oral participation, written participation, response to orders)

   A. Participation (Time?)

   B. Reaction (Degree of interest)

   C. Result (Do they learn what is being taught? Is expected terminal behavior achieved?)

2. Materials: (Do they help or hinder the teacher in achieving his objectives?)