

VIDEO REVIEWS

ESOL Beginners and ESOL Reading and Writing for Work

Auckland: Auckland Institute of Technology, 1994.

\$65.00

Under Observation: From Practice to Theory

Adelaide: National Curriculum Resource Centre, 1987.

A\$65.00

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Tutor trainers frequently want to show examples of students engaged in learning activities or specific teaching or classroom management techniques. For TESOL students, observing real teachers and students in real classes fulfils the need to see how theory is applied. But how do we produce that classroom within a classroom? While observing real classes is always useful, there are some advantages in videos: the ability to re-view and scrutinise selected parts and yet to capture the sense of being in the class.

So what makes a video worth using for professional development or teacher training? First, the lesson does not have to be the ideal lesson but it should have some features that will be useful or stimulating. There also need to be follow-up tasks or questions that involve and challenge the viewer to observe, analyse, interpret and reflect. Regardless of the content, however, it is essential that the technical quality be of a high standard. This review looks at three such videos.

Alison Kirkness of the Auckland Institute of Technology Centre for Professional Development has produced two videos aimed at tutors working with adults. Tutors with some experience may wish to use them independently but they are probably more effective for a group of tutors/trainees with a facilitator. Each section of the lesson is professionally edited yet unscripted and in real time. Both videos can be approached on more than one level. For beginning tutors, they can be used to help develop observation skills, perhaps without the workbook exercises. For more experienced tutors, exercises lead to discussion and analysis of classroom practice. The workbooks are well laid out and can be easily adapted for making overhead transparencies and separate worksheets to use with single segments of the video.

The 14-minute *ESOL Beginners* is broken up into short, self-contained segments and can be viewed as a whole or just selected parts in separate sessions. Unfortunately, there are no exercises on the last sections on organising group work and encouraging communication but the discussion questions using same format for the other sections could be created by the course leader.

While on one level this video shows how a beginners class learn and use vocabulary in a communicative context, the added value is being able to access the tutor's decision-making

process. The workbook exercises invite the viewer to become an active participant in how teachers make decisions at every step of the lesson. Tutor Margaret Gleeson's reflections are focal points of the workbook exercises and raise issues for discussion. Her comments are one practitioner's response to familiar problems. For example, when a learner offers "trouser" for trousers, she comments: "I always explain trousers and jeans by pointing to the two legs. Perhaps it doesn't seem so logical to the learners... after all a sweater has two arms and a bra has two cups." This allows the facilitator to guide the discussion to a theoretical basis for the choice that is behind the pragmatic response. A range of choices available to the tutor is then given. Tutors can discuss alternative choices and contextual constraints. In the "Eliciting Vocabulary" section, the viewer is asked to justify various forms of feedback which could be provided to beginners when incorrect forms are given: for example, should the tutor leave the student to self-correct, give the correct answer, or accept any word that gets the meaning across? Would you accept "cap" for "hat" or "pants" for "trousers"? How do you explain the differences? Discussing the deeper teaching and learning issues behind these seemingly trivial questions actively involves viewers in their own learning.

Reading and writing activities might not always lend themselves to video but there was plenty of interaction in tutor Derryn Holt's literacy class, the focus of the second of the videos produced by AIT. This 20 minute video is best seen as a whole rather than segments. Again the viewer is invited to discuss the tutor's comments on how she meets the literacy and learning needs of her learners.

The workbook contains tasks relating to lesson planning and use of techniques. The tutor's own notes and explanations are provided after this section, and we are asked to consider how the lesson could be adapted for use without a Language Master machine -- a resource not widely used. However, the real value of the video is not in seeing this particular technique but in discussing the issues in adult second language literacy teaching, the justification for making choices and decisions, and the authentic classroom interaction and responses.

David Nunan's video *Under Observation: From Practice to Theory*, although made in 1987, is included in this review because it also has the theme of relating practice to theory. This 26-minute video comes with a workbook which unfortunately has several typos and two omissions: a key with which to assess the classroom management aspects, and a set of criteria). The brief introduction, in which David Nunan announces the learning outcomes, is followed by an entire lesson, in real time, and it needs to be watched as a whole. The large beginners class of adult migrants learning language skills needed for planning a day trip is not intended to be an ideal lesson. While the tutor's plan and reflections on the class are not discussed in the worksheet, the pre- and post-viewing worksheets guide viewers through a process of observing, interpreting and relating practice to theory. After viewing, groups list all the satisfactory and unsatisfactory aspects of the lesson and, when all suggestions have been listed on the board, the groups then agree or disagree with them. In doing so, viewers move from an initial, often emotional, reaction to a specific event -- such as teacher feedback to a student -- to critical reflection and arrive at Nunan's conclusion that "All practical decisions are underpinned by theory... beliefs about the nature of language, the nature of teaching and the nature of learning." The video is suitable for any level from introductory training to in-service professional development. Because the facilitator should first elicit what the viewers want to look at, the group can focus on these aspects, whether it be group work, error correction, types of communicative activities or some other aspect. This video

lesson always provokes strong opinions among trainees I have shown it to and challenges them to back up their responses with evidence or theory.

All of the videos require careful pre-viewing and perhaps some adaptation of the worksheets for particular audiences. Most importantly, course leaders should not present the lessons as model lessons but use them as starting points for both new and experienced tutors to react to, to reflect on the teaching methods used and to relate what they see to their own practice. If you are building up TESOL training resources and want videos of good technical quality showing real adult ESOL classes, you should put these on your list.