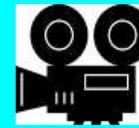


Big Issues in Small Slots - Two Video Centered Activities - by Mark Rebuck (Nagoya University, Japan)



Introduction

Teachers, either through personal choice or external constraints, will differ in the classroom time they allocate to global issues. Some may devote an entire course to a single topic such as HIV/AIDS or gender. Others will focus on a different world problem each week, as advocated by Altan (2010, p. 63). A teacher using the recently published *Taboo Talk* (Lynch, 2012), would also likely follow this one-issue-a-lesson pattern. Still other practitioners will allocate an occasional class to issues, perhaps two or three in a fifteen-week course. This article looks at two activities, the *Controversial Issue* slot (CI-slot) and the *Dictation-Video-Dialogue* cycle (D-V-D cycle), that occupy less course space even than the occasional-lesson approach. They provide options for language teachers wishing to inject substantive content into pre-existing lessons.

Controversial Issue (CI) Slots

As I describe in Rebuck (2012), CI-slots involve students watching a video, engaging in a simple focus-on-language task, then listening to their teacher's view on the issue raised in the video. Like the D-V-D cycle, to be explained later, CI-slots are kept short (around 10 minutes) so as not to displace other parts of a lesson. Two videos that I have used for these slots are briefly described here. Readers might like to use the internet links to view the videos at this point.

Video 1: "I was lovin' it"

The video shows an overweight, middle-aged man dead on a mortuary trolley, with a woman weeping over his body. In the corpse's hand is a half-eaten hamburger.

Link: <www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mx0IJnO3o8g>
(Google search: "Mc Donalds-I Was Lovin It")

Video 2: Environmental destruction during COP10

Made by a local conservation group campaigning to save a unique urban ecosystem, Hirabari Satoyama, the video opens with a scene of a tranquil forest and lake. Captions appear which read: "COP10開催中に伐採が始まった" (*The felling began in the middle of COP10*); the scene

then changes to one of destruction with trees being cut down. The video ends with the captions "私たちのお金を里山開発に使わないで" (*Don't use our money to develop Satoyama*) and then a close-up of a certain bank's passbook being cut in two. This bank financed the construction company that is in the process of building a housing estate on what was once a sanctuary for a myriad of flora and fauna. (COP 10—*Conference of the Parties*— was an international conference on protecting biodiversity held in Nagoya in 2010)

Link:

<www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWwwqiVzmIw>

(Google search (in Japanese): 十六銀行さん 私たちのお金を里山開発に使わないで)

Being short (around one minute each) with highly visual, immediately understandable messages, the two videos were suited to this activity. Here I will focus on the Video 2 slot because it dealt with an issue in which I was personally involved (see Rebuck, 2012, for details of Video 1's CI-slot). Video 2 was incorporated into a lesson focusing on the phrase *used to*, in which students talked about changes in their lives and in the world around them. The stages of this particular CI-slot were as follows:

1. Playing the video: The video was paused at the opening scene and students were asked to describe what they saw ("There is a forest"; "There is a lake"; etc.).
2. Post-video language task: Following the video, students completed sentences with *used to* by inserting the appropriate phrasal verb:
 - *There used to be a big forest but it was [cut down].*
 - *There used to be lakes full of fish and frogs but they have been [filled in].*
3. Disclosure of the teacher's view: I spoke with some passion about the folly of destroying the last *satoyama* ecosystem in Nagoya and explained why the bank in the video was being criticized. By writing key words and phrases on the board and by translating some low frequency lexis, I provided support for the students during this "live listening."

Students' views of the CI-slots

A questionnaire survey was given to 52 students enrolled in a private university in Nagoya to ascertain their views on the CI-slots. Full details of the questionnaire used and the procedure can be found in Rebeck (2012).

The videos used in the CI-slots were positively evaluated by the majority of students. For Video 1, 88% of the respondents considered it a “very appropriate” or “appropriate” classroom resource. For Video 2, the figure was 93%. Analyzing the responses to the open-ended questions (translated by me from the Japanese) revealed two main reasons for this positive response:

1. Topic relevance: the Japanese word *mijika* (身近), familiarity or closeness, appeared in many comments. For Video 2, this familiarity was both spatial—Hirabari, being the location of the Aichi Driving Test Center, was a place known to all the students— and temporal—this CI-slot was incorporated into a lesson a week following COP10.
2. Awareness-raising: for Video 2, twenty comments (46%), including the one below, indicated that this CI-slot had alerted students to a reality of which most had been unaware.

Without this lesson I would never have known about the environmental destruction that was happening so close to my house.

Other reasons given by students for their positive evaluation included this one in reference to Video 1:

In Japan it is rare to see criticism of McDonalds and other fast food establishments, so it was refreshing to watch.

There were only 10 comments that negatively evaluated either of the videos. One student, for example, labeled Video 1 as “biased advertising” (*katayotta senden*), which echoed McDonalds’ own criticism of the advert as “outlandish propaganda” (Clark, 2010).

A key feature of the CI-slot was the post-video teacher talk. In response to the statement “It was good for your teacher to give his opinion on controversial issues,” all students indicated either strong agreement or agreement. A number commented that listening to the teacher’s opinion was a chance to reflect upon and deepen their own. It was interesting that 15 comments, including the following one, indicated that no particular significance was attached to a view just because it emanated from their *sensei* (teacher).

The opinion of the teacher is just one of many. Hearing [his/her] opinion makes us aware that such views exist and makes us think about our own views.

Teachers who disclose their opinions often argue, as Hess (2005) points out, that they are duty bound to “model the importance of taking a stand on issues” (p. 47). Such a view was echoed in this comment:

If the teacher takes a neutral stand and just talks about innocuous things, then we will also take a neutral stand on everything. If the teacher gives his opinion, then we will realize that we should give our opinion.

The D-V-D cycle

While the CI-slots were generally positively evaluated by the students, it is likely that some teachers will feel uncomfortable about airing their views to a captive student audience. In addition, as a language activity, it is not a particularly balanced one, focusing mainly on listening. A less teacher-centered activity that practices the four skills is the D-V-D cycle. It involves three stages:

1. Dictation

A dictation provides background information to the video while increasing listening proficiency and improving writing. There are numerous ways this step can be carried out (see Rost (2011, p. 185 for a summary of different forms of dictation), but what I call a “divulged dictation” is one variation well suited to lower-level students. It involves students transcribing a passage after having seen it temporarily projected onto a screen.

2. Video screening

3. Dialogue

A dialogue focusing on the issue raised in the video is practiced by students in pairs. A gap filling exercise can add a limited degree of personalization to the activity.

One of my lessons includes an authentic recording in which *to put off* (here used with the meaning *to deter*) is a key lexical item. Mining the audio text post-listening, I focus on this item to illustrate key features of phrasal verbs. Then, in the last fifteen minutes of this lesson, I include a D-V-D cycle centered on a public awareness video aimed at putting people off some behaviour. One such video—and there are many on YouTube—is a road safety video on which the D-V-D cycle described below is centered. Readers are warned that the video

is hard-hitting and graphic, but watching it will help to clarify what follows in this article (see “Video” below for link).

Dictation: The passage below is read by the teacher:

The video you are about to see is a public information film that was made by the Welsh police. It aims to raise people’s awareness of road safety. Specifically, it was made to put people, particularly young people, off texting while driving. The video has been shown in high schools in and outside the UK.

Video: The video is screened

Link: Video 1

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9krX9fHAFHM&feature=related>>

(Google search: "don't text and drive")

3. *Dialogue:* Here’s an extract from the handout:

Practice the dialogue below in pairs. Use one phrase from a–d in the box to fill in gaps 1 and 2

- | |
|---|
| <p>1 a) It was a complete waste of time
b) It was OK
c) It was quite interesting
d) It was really interesting</p> <p>2
a) I don’t think it will.
b) it might.
c) it may make people think twice about [doing it/texting while driving]
d) I think people who watch it will definitely not [do it/text while driving] again.</p> |
|---|

B is telling *A* about his/her previous lesson, which was this one.

A: How was your last lesson?

B: []. We saw a video that was made to raise awareness of the dangers of texting while driving.

A: Why did your teacher play such a video in an English class?

B: I think it was to illustrate one of the uses of the phrasal verb *put off*. And maybe he showed the video because he wanted to put us off texting while driving. After all, many of us will be getting our driver's license in the near future.

A: Do you think that just watching a video will really put people off texting while driving?

B: Actually, []

Conclusion

Johnston (2003) points out that one pedagogic dilemma teachers face is “balance[ing] the need for a focus on language with the simultaneous need for language teaching to be about something meaningful” (p. 145). The CI-slot and D-V-D cycle are two ways I have sought to achieve such a balance. They are not, however, without their problems. Although neither was conceived as a discussion activity— their purpose was to provide stimulating content for learners whose proficiency would have precluded discussion in the L1—students were not provided with any opportunity, such as written homework, to respond to the message delivered in the video and expressed by their teacher. Also, since opposing voices were not introduced, it could be argued that a certain viewpoint was being imposed on the students.

Finally, readers who have viewed the “texting and driving” video may also have doubts about its appropriateness as a classroom resource. The issue of appropriateness amongst others is one that I will explore in a future article.

References

- Altan, M.A. (2010). Teaching global issues. *Modern English Teacher* 19 (1), 60-64.
- Clark, A. (2010, September 14). McDonald's targeted in US health ad. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2010/sep/14/us-health-ad-targets-mcdonalds>
- Hess, D. (2005). How do teachers' political views influence teaching about controversial issues? *Social Education*, 69 (1), 47-48.
- Johnston, B. (2003). *Values in English language teaching*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Lynch, J. (2012). *Taboo talk*. Tokyo: Cengage Learning.
- Rebuck, M. (2012). The CI-slot approach to controversial issues: The students’ views. *The Language Teacher*, 36(3), 9-14.
- Rost, M. (2011). *Teaching and researching listening* (2nd ed.). Harlow (UK): Pearson.

This article is based on the author’s JALT 2011 conference presentation and on his 2012 TLT article listed above.

Mark Rebuck

Nagoya University, Japan

E-mail: <reebuk67@yahoo.co.jp>