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Teaching with video

Abstract

This paper focuses on the uses of audio-visual material in the context of University lectures. It aims to demonstrate the breadth and variety of the visual and audio material available; and by so doing stimulate the 'audience' to think about ways in which audio-visual techniques could be applied to their own areas of instruction.

Teaching with video

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This paper focuses on the uses of audio-visual material in the context of University lectures. It aims to demonstrate the breadth and variety of the visual and audio material available; and by so doing stimulate the 'audience' to think about ways in which audio-visual techniques could be applied to their own areas of instruction.

While it may be an old and rather trite statement that: 'a picture is worth a thousand words', it is difficult to overestimate the IMPACT of visual material. We are, as humans, extremely visually oriented, and making use of this fact means that learning can be maximised. However, it needs to be both thought through and prepared very carefully, or what you end up with is a mishmash of visual material which hinders rather than aids the learning process.

Timing, spacing, delivery and juxtaposition of the different forms of material is crucial. The lecture presentation, the 'doing', is the carrier of the message. The 'telling'; the pedagogical analysis, (which provides the rationale, explanation and justification), both informs the presentation and is the basis for its evaluation as to relevance.

Visuals

I would argue that visuals ALWAYS lift the quality of the presentation in a lecture, adding an additional dimension to the delivery. In the case of the Sociology 100 quadruple lecture, if you use the complete 50 minute product, then the problems of identical delivery, sustaining the fire (impact) and timing are solved in the preparation stage. If on the other hand you are using shorter video pieces throughout the lecture as an adjunct to the spoken word (and overheads), then the video excerpts provide a structure and of course enhance/multiply the impact. Furthermore, it is moving pictures not still images, that have the most impact.

There is, however, one caveat on the divide between single frame and moving images, and that is where you use a video camera (or a computer) to 'stack' the images in a sequence or to actually pan and zoom a single image. If the single image; and it can be a photograph, or a painting or drawing, is sufficiently detailed, then you can actually move around inside the image to focus in on say, a corridor or a painting on a wall, or one piece of the action in a painting of a crowd.

Sources of visuals

To utilise this method to the full the teacher has to both take the time to build up a suitable library of visual material and to have access to a video camera and mixing equipment. Professional mixing equipment is out of most peoples' reach because of cost, (it is certainly out of mine!), but using two video recorders at home produces a reasonable finished product. The camera I use is a Cannon EX1, cost: \$4 000, but any camcorder in the \$1 500 plus range should be adequate.

The University of Wollongong has only one general mixing facility (located in CEDIR) not directly connected to specific Faculties and there are three problems with doing your lecture preparation on their equipment. **Access:** it gets a lot of use. **Cost:** \$55 an hour is certainly out of my range. **Format:** the equipment is BETACAM not VHS so your own VHS library material can't be used. Even without the problems of access and cost it is formatting that makes this facility useless for lecture preparation.

The Faculty of Creative Arts and the English Programme in the Arts Faculty have VHS mixing systems and the Communications programme now has two (purchased October 1997), but there needs to be more systems available.

The rules

Visuals:

- 1) Visuals must be striking.
- 2) Visuals must 'carry' the story.
- 3) Visuals must come from a number of sources.
- 4) No absolute maximum length for each visual cut but less is more.
- 5) If possible the presenter should appear on the screen but beware of 'talking heads'.

Audio:

- 1) Direct audio 'message' should be:
Clear.
Paced.
Conversational (not a read out).
Obey the: 'no more than ten minute duration' law.
- 2) Musical overdubs must fit to both the visual cut and the topic.
- 3) Audio must link visual cuts together into a coherent whole.

NB: If you are preparing your tape at home one minute will take one hour.

There are four main sources of visual material suitable for use in lectures.

1) Documentaries shown on television*

Like all television based material you have to have a broad data base to draw on.

2) Movies shown on television*

This is a separate category because the images and stories belong to a different genre to the documentary and the use to be made of them in lectures works differently. If on the other hand you wanted material for a lecture on Violence in the Movies then most of the cuts would come from the movies themselves.

3) Video material you shoot yourself

- 1) The intercuts from my own material filmed at Uluru in 1996 and in Kakadu in 1997 illustrates the use you can make of this source. You **MUST** keep the Hi8 master tapes as part of the library, not simply transfer them to VHS and reuse the masters, because every time you copy down from the original you lose quality. The originals in this case are 4 hours of tape from Uluru and 3 hours from Kakadu.

- 2) This source also includes film of the presenter; either in the landscape being filmed – which ‘personalises’ the visual material, or speaking directly to the camera in a different background setting. The former obviously has more impact but, because it is unlikely that you are going to have the audio text prepared during the filming, a suitable background becomes an important element in the final product.

So what is ‘suitable’? I think the background breaks down into three categories:

- a) **Academic:** If you want a thread throughout the video that identifies it as a lecture, then the presenter could be at a lectern ‘giving’ a lecture. Or seated in an office with a background of books and pictures. Or, for that matter, in the great outdoors of the Wollongong Campus with buildings as background.
- b) **Complementary:** If, on the other hand, the theme would be better served by a background directly linked to the overall visual text, then the visual cuts with the presenter have to blend in. In the Aboriginal Tape I have not used this source but there are plenty of local shooting sites of bush, cliffs, rocks and water available. If you were making a tape on warfare then a variety of War Memorials as background would have maximum impact; and you can find these in every suburb and country town. For a tape on pollution: a background of rush hour cars or smoking chimneys or a garbage tip or rubbish along the shoreline or . . . , the list is only limited by your own imagination.
- c) **Discordant:** Without a doubt this is a far more risky background because there is always the problem that it will confuse the message rather than support it. However, it can act as a reinforcer of the message by offering the opposite. If the theme is Aborigines, then a background of a

cityscape – as a symbol of what has replaced that culture – carries a considerable impact. If the theme is warfare, then a pleasant rural landscape as background to the presenter may catch the audience’s attention in a different way.

- 4) **Videos of still images.** The Frontier Programme, uses this method for at least half of their three part series; and The Civil War series and the Pacific Century series from 1995 and 1996 also draw heavily on this method of altering the still image to a moving one.

I have already discussed ‘stacking’ images sequentially and zooming and panning on a single image. The point to be stressed here is that often there is no other form of visual text available and this source both bridges the gap and offers another form of visual presentation.

Audio sources

- 1) **The lecturer as a voice-over on the video.** Record the material onto an audio tape and then using a microphone and stereo system input it onto the tape. The theme and direction of the lecture is contained in the audio and CONTROLS the tape.

On a lecture tape on Aborigines which is 46.21 minutes long, there are four audio dubs with a total length of 16.10 minutes. The shortest is 2.00 minutes, the longest 7.05 minutes, and stays within the ‘no more than ten minute duration’ rule.

On reflection, ten minutes is roughly the time between commercial breaks on television, so you could argue that this time frame takes advantage of audience conditioning.

The voice over also allows you to pick up on themes from the other video cuts on the tape and reinforce and restate them. One example being the woman talking about ‘Aboriginality’ and the presenter restating it in one of the audio dubs

- 2) **Music.** The range is huge. The task is to provide a good fit with the visuals and the lecture.

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- 3) **Voice-overs from a range of people, not just the lecturer.** The Frontier programme, for example, uses a number of well known Australian actors, Geoffrey Rush among others, as the readers for a range of people writing across the span of time covered by the tape.

If intercutting videos heightens the impact, then a change in the voices presenting the audio message is worth considering. A lecture on the Environment using quotes from David Suzuki and David Attenborough for example, could use Canadian and English 'voices' to vary the delivery.

Conclusions and a warning

Visual material should be an INTEGRAL part of all lectures because it adds both impact and an additional dimension to the delivery. Furthermore, utilising the full range of audio-visual material maximises the learning experience. However, it seems to me that one potential problem is that variety can become "busyness"; and then what you get is a jumble of images and voices which obscure and confuse, rather than help to impart the message.

** readers are advised that permission from the copyright holder must be obtained before material recorded from television is re-edited (ed.).*