

TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH MASS MEDIA

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Abstract

This article aims at analyzing the importance of using Mass Media in the classroom and finding the ways how to use Printed and Audio-visual Media. It is the result of an in-depth study, surveys and questionnaires thus trying to make the ideas in this article more trustworthy. It is based not only on the literature review but also on long personal experience. It is a brief description of some practical examples and some tips for novice teachers. Furthermore, this article tends to deal with some of the key issues of using media in the classroom. Here are included some of the findings of my research work on a post-doctorate Fulbright Program in 2001. The following issues are open for discussion: the importance of Media in general and in education in particular; Media are persuasive and pervasive, newspapers, magazines, radio, television and internet in the classroom, etc.

Introduction

Using various kinds of Media in the classroom has always been a challenge, and how to bring these Media in the classroom is more than a challenge. Students and teachers should be able to use in their classrooms different media through different technologies. Media provide teachers and students with creative and practical ideas. They enable teachers to meet various needs and interests of their students. They also provide students with a lot of language practice through activities using newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, movies, books, Internet, etc, and tasks which develop reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. They entertain students and encourage reading English in general, both inside and outside the classroom, promoting extensive reading by giving the students the confidence, the motivation and the ability to continue their reading outside the classroom. Media “inform, amuse, startle, anger, entertain, thrill, but very seldom leave anyone untouched”. (Shirley Biagy, 1996) Bearing in mind all these features and positive input of Media in Education I thought to undertake this study to give my modest contribution to the enhancement of teaching and learning English. I undertook a lot of surveys, questionnaires and interviews to make this issue more persuasive and more practical for the students. Based on my experience and the study in this field I also aimed at giving some practical advice and tip how to use Media in the classroom. As classroom teachers it is necessary to bring mass media in our classrooms exactly for all these reasons mentioned above. We should understand the media, the messages they give and their influence upon us, how to explore this abundant information and create a continuum of the liveliness media create in the life of people and why not in the classrooms where students spend a lot of their time.

It has been almost ten years that the following questions have always been in my mind:

1. How can Media help my students speak more?
2. How can classroom Media presentations help my students speak freely?
3. How can I help my students not to forget what they learn through Media?
4. How can we exploit a piece of learning material offered by various Media?

Through my research work on a post-doctorate Fulbright Program and my long experience with student teachers I have found some answers to the above questions but I am sure there are many other ways, hundreds to maximize the effectiveness of Media in the classroom. Here are some findings and answers to the questions:

1. Media provide huge information, they motivate students to speak and help them integrate listening, reading, talking and writing skills, through various kinds of activities.
2. A clear example are Power Point presentations which help students speak freely, eye contact, organize ideas. Through Media Presentations there is more communication and collaboration among students, while working with the pages of a book is more individual, less collaborative and less interactive.
3. There is so much information available at the click of a mouse but at the same time you have the feeling that there is little memory space in the brain and students may forget everything, so, try to select the most important things and review and review till they are located in the long-term memory.
4. We can exploit a piece of learning materials offered by various Media in several different ways through: analyzing a text in the book, reading and generating ideas from a text in the newspaper or magazine, watching and discussing a TV program or a movie, classroom presentations, exercises and activities using various kinds of Media, pair and group work, reconstructing the text based on the above information brought from different Media, engaging students in useful writing and revision activities, etc.

Once we mention the phrase “Multimedia in Education” it comes to our mind technology, computer, Internet, etc. On one hand we are right because nowadays the phrase “Technology in Education” has become the ‘buzz’ word in every environment. We the university teachers should think how to help student teachers to use Media successfully in their future career, especially think of what is practically hidden behind them.

On the other hand, “Multimedia in Education” does not only mean computer and internet. We should not forget the use of other media, as each of them gets priority every now and then while being used in the classroom. Why are the Media Important? Media are important because we get to know the world through using them; we understand the world and try to change it. “We live in a world where media are omnipresent. An increasing number of people spend a great deal of time watching television, reading newspapers and magazines, playing records and listening to the radio... The school and the family share the

responsibility of preparing the young person living in a world of powerful images, words and sounds”(UNESCO Declaration on Media, 1982)

Teaching English through Mass Media 83Volume 2 Number 1, 2009Media Education is important because it develops students’ creative powers for those images, words and sounds that come to the students from various Media. Thus, creating more active and critical media users, who will always be more demanding in the future? Media Education has to do with film and television, press and radio, their impact on the students’ progress. It has to do with what to teach through media, when and how. Its aim is to enable students to develop critical thinking, analyzing and reflecting on their experiences while using various means of Media. Media Influence is Pervasive and Persuasive. Media today have an enormous impact. They have become so important that it is rarely that we can live without them. Every morning we may wake up with the radio music in the background, or we play a tape while having shower or being dressed.

Someone may run to the PC or laptop to check the mail or the news. On the way to school or work we may grab a newspaper and have a look at the headlines. At school we may go to the library and consult a lot of books and magazines for our research project. At home we may watch television for a while, etc, etc. Each of these experiences puts us in contact with a medium, or channel of communication. Radio, books, records and tapes, newspapers, magazines, movies, television, on-line media, new media, all these are called mass media, they reach many people at one time. In the years to come, media will become more pervasive. Understanding them and their influence will be crucial to wise use. So, as said above, everyday, everyone is affected by the Mass Media in some way or another, when you study a textbook for school, when you turn on the radio in your car, when you see a movie on TV, etc. The collective effects on society of all these media choices are tremendous; sometimes we are not aware of. Despite the criticism of the mass media, most thoughtful persons agree that mass media do a superior job in reporting the news and informing the public. It’s our task as teachers to help students and pupils understand this information, transmit it to the coming generations and try to use it for education purposes. Mass media provide students with a lot of language practice through activities using newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, movies, books, Internet, etc, and tasks which develop reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. They also provide students with lots of inside and outside classroom activities, promoting extensive reading by giving the students the confidence and the ability to continue their reading outside the classroom and above all they enhance motivation. Media keep us informed about what is happening in the world, they extend our knowledge and deepen our understanding

Nowadays the information is abundant, it comes through different sources, but we should try how to benefit from this information, how to learn about specific issues, how to become aware of problems, opportunities and resources, how to find issues we are interested in, how to identify the issues that have impact on us, etc. So, it is easy to get this information but it is difficult to choose and more difficult to bring it to the classroom.

Newspapers and the classroom Newspapers are easy to be brought in the class in different subjects and courses, especially in geography, history, literature, language classes, etc. Some of them have valuable information for these subjects, but we should know how to find this information. Many libraries have systems of classification according to the topics and issues and we can easily find our way in searching this information. If not we would spend a lot of time to find something. It is often said that academic success starts at the library. There are different purposes and ways for using newspapers in language classroom. They may be used for the culture they transmit. The more widely students read, the greater their understanding of this cultural meaning will be. They may also be used for reflecting changes in the languages well, and in doing so, helping students and teachers keep up pace with such changes. Most newspapers are linguistically up-to-date and provide valuable linguistic data. They may be used for the wide variety of text types and language styles, not often found in textbooks. At the same time, newspapers provide a natural source of many of the varieties of Written English that become very important to students, and valuable for language study as the students progress. So, they may be used as supplementary material and examples in Text Analysis, Academic Writing, Stylistics, Semantics, etc. while analyzing different types of texts. The variety of subjects and topics makes newspapers interesting and motivating for the students to work with. Newspapers report real-life events, and this arouses students' curiosity. Newspaper-based activities in the classroom may engage students in enjoyable activities and encourage their further reading. Newspapers are an invaluable source of authentic materials. The more students read, the more they want to explore. "People learn through reading, and reading about interesting new things in one's interest subject, undoubtedly helps motivation". (Paul Sanderson, 2002)

Newspapers are also a great source for ESP teachers. They can be used as teaching materials to develop students' language skills. They can be used effectively with a wide range of levels from Elementary to Advanced, either interpreting them or using them as they are. Some newspapers are easy to read, easy to use. The committed teachers can design exercises to develop reading comprehension, critical thinking skills, writing skills, grammar skills, vocabulary, map/chart reading skills, geography skills, social study skills and more. Having a lot of newspapers and information the teachers should be careful with the way how to organize a certain activity using them. So, they are particularly suitable for mixed-ability classes, depending on the activity, questions, etc. In planning a lesson using a newspaper, the teacher should take into consideration the length of the article, paragraph, the complexity of the language, the density of information, the subject-matter and content, the time available and the level of the students. Nowadays, we are living in a period of rapid technological changes in mass communications. Through Internet, we are now able to access thousands of newspapers and magazines worldwide. Internet has increasingly become a major source of newspapers and magazines for language teachers; just find the web site and click. But we should be very careful in choosing suitable

newspaper materials to use with our students. It is helpful to bear in mind these questions: (Paul Sanderson, 2002)

- Will my students find the materials interesting? If yes, they will raise students' motivation. If no, the students will be frustrated.
- Are the materials appropriate for their level of knowledge? If they are too difficult to be understood, students will be discouraged. Otherwise their level of understanding would be O.K.
- Are the materials appropriate for the students in terms of language level? Choose more challenging materials, choose materials where the language level is suited to the level of students, choose tasks that can be done by the students at a certain level.
- Should I use only materials from today's newspapers? The answer is yes and no.
- Lessons take time to prepare. The schedules of the teachers are periodically busy. Once we find an interesting material, we may use it over and over again, avoiding articles or news mentioning dates or topical events, data for well-known personalities, etc.

Teaching English through Mass Media 85 Volume 2 Number 1, 2009

Another very important issue about newspaper use is materials collection. It is an on-going process and worth doing it. Choosing and collecting short articles, weather forecast, advertisements, headlines, etc. is a hard task, but we may use them at a later time and more than once for different students. So, it is necessary to be very careful in organizing newspaper materials. Once we start collecting them we should begin thinking to organize them, put under certain categories, systematize them, etc. Everyone has experienced many times the frustration when he/she knows that he/she has that piece of information but does not remember where he/she has put it. It is good to categorize the materials under certain titles, headlines, advertisements, etc. or under topic titles, sport, cinema, relationship, according to language level of students, etc. Of great importance are the use of the photographs and illustrations. We should be careful to prepare these materials in good quality to use them again and again, and with every passing year we create folios and enrich them, then photocopy what we want for students' use. We should not avoid using newspapers in the classroom only thinking that they are difficult for our students. It is true that the language there is difficult, but after all it is authentic. There are several ways of making newspaper materials usable for the various levels of students, by selecting interesting newspapers and the students will be interested in reading them and would skip some difficult expressions. A very important thing that enhances success in using newspapers in the classroom is the careful design of tasks. "Grade the task - not the material is a well-known maxim in language teaching". (Paul Sanderson, 2002) In spite of the difficulty of the texts, the task should suit the level of students, this is more important than the difficulty of the text. The involvement of students in pre-activity, while-activity preparation techniques, in the selection of materials and in carefully designing the tasks

are the key to success. Here are some pre-activity and while-activity preparation techniques that can be used in combination with one another: (Paul Sanderson, 2002)

- Give the students the materials before the lesson, ask them to look for vocabulary at home
- Explain any key vocabulary in the materials
- Summarize the newspaper item
- Ask the students to brainstorm what they know about the newspaper item
- Tell the students the headline and show any accompanying photograph
- Before reading, write on the board and explain key vocabulary
- Ask the students to predict the story-line
- Allow your students to use a dictionary during the activity
- Encourage your students to go for the overall meaning of a text, rather than to understand every word
- Encourage your students to bring to their reading their own world knowledge
- Try to help the students in understanding the grammatical complexity of the text, facilitate to assimilate the density of information, guess the low-frequency vocabulary, tc.

The newspaper activities might be a lot, interesting and multidimensional. They might be about the headlines, headline combinations, articles, categorizing articles, news flash, putting it back together, exchanging the news, ranking articles, press conference, filling in the gaps, news in brief, photographs, predicting photographs, famous faces, photo stories, moving pictures, putting the picture in the story, advertisements, classifying ads, role-plays ads, job interviews, horoscopes, problem page letters, TV guides, cartoons and strip cartoons, acting out cartoons, strip cartoon stories, weather forecast, predicting the weather, matching weather forecasts, newspaper reading corner, find someone who... special interest groups, newspaper puzzles, crosswords, and many others.

Magazines in the Classroom

There are different kinds of magazines. According to a questionnaire done with high school and university students most of them mentioned that they liked to read mostly political, scientific, fashion, cultural, entertaining and sport magazines. This interest of the university and high school students should be exploited by the teachers to up-date their teaching materials and break the monotony of the lesson by using always the textbooks. As with newspapers, magazines are resources for different subjects, cutting out pictures and passages associated with particular topics. Magazines are also sources in language development in providing pictures to stimulate verbal or written stories. For example, they may be used for introducing colors and clothes, means of transport, short stories, stimulating picture discussions and for other supplementary materials as well, which cover a topic that may be under discussion in a language class. As for the ways how to use

magazines in the classroom we can refer to the ideas and clues given for the newspapers. Both newspapers and magazines have a lot of things in common.

The Role of Books in Everyday Life and Education Books are crucial in modern life as well, a driving force in education, business, law, science, medicine and entertainment. Through books the students gain the legacy of knowledge earned by those who came before. (Beckert, 1992) People of all ages find information, pleasure, relaxation and inspiration while reading books. Books lack the immediacy of other mass media, but they make up for that by greater thoroughness and permanence. Books are saved and treasured in great public libraries and in personal collections. Readers go back to famous books, rereading them again and again. Others enjoy a book once and pass it on, wanting others to share their discoveries. 'Those who have already discovered the joy of books, however, are hooked for life. And as others become aware of the vast array of books available, they too will find that unrivaled knowledge and pleasure await them between the covers of books' (Beckert, 1992).

There is also a vast area that text books cover. Besides them there are a lot of books that we read as a class assignment, a novel in the English class, in the course English through Prose and Poetry, in British and American literature course; a book on the planets in the science class, and many others. So, books are among the most enduring of the mass media. Some people save them for years, and libraries save them for centuries. Here is the right place to mention the words of Franklin Roosevelt: "People die, books never die".

Radio and Education

Radio plays an important part in developing people's imagination, in creating pictures in the mind through the power of words, it stimulates the imagination to fill in the visuals, etc. The listeners see the drama in their heads. Thus, when radio is used in the classroom it helps students to promote their imagination, to voice their creativity. A lot of radio programs contribute to language learning. Besides getting new information and entertainment, in language classes' radio helps the pronunciation, the intonation, the pitch of voice etc. These might be successful if we undertake adequate preparation and design carefully graded tasks. Students gain a feeling of satisfaction from having understood something of an authentic broadcast; we can see the joy in their faces. They develop greater confidence in their ability to cope with English as it's spoken outside the classroom. Albanian students may use BBC World Service news bulletin, Voice of America or other foreign radio stations. In case students have no possibilities, the teacher may record the news bulletin, transcribe it and prepare to explain any difficult vocabulary that may come out. Then the teacher may ask the students if they have listened to the news in Albanian the day before, because nearly all the news, especially international news, is almost the same. So if the content is somewhat known to the students, they will be more motivated and the success of the task will be easier.

In the classroom the students may be put into groups to discuss what is going on in the world and what they predict they are going to listen to. The teacher or one of the students may write all the predictions on the blackboard. The first step might be to listen to the headlines, several times, as they are short, but convey a lot. Then the teacher may ask the students to identify which of the stories they predicted are included in the headlines.

Then ask the students various questions about, what has happened? Where did it happen? How many different stories have you heard for the same event? etc. Then let the students listen to the news bulletin 2-3 times and then give them time to discuss about the above questions. In the meantime the teacher may explain any key vocabulary. We know that it is difficult, but if we can make copies of the news bulletin, it would be possible to organize follow-up activities. Students may transcribe certain stories, use dictionaries to check the meaning of unknown words, group words according to various fields, etc. They may also compare the language of the news bulletin with the language of a newspaper of the same date and the same topic. So, we can organize listening and reading comprehension activities. At last the students may report on what they have listened to. There might be tens of different activities using radio in the classroom. We have practiced these procedures with such topics as: The War in Iraq, Pollution and Environment, Global Warming, Weather Report, Poverty, Holidays, etc. 5. Television and the Classroom Most people today watch about three to five hours of television a day. 'Defenders call TV a window on the world, a magic carpet of discovery. They claim that it enlarges both knowledge and understanding. Defenders say it encourages a new way of thinking, with interlocking hopes, needs and problems. Critics call it the idiot box. They say it promotes mindless viewing of mindless programs. Critics say it stifles creativity and promotes distorted thinking. Social observers often urge parents not to use television as an electronic baby-sitter'. (Beckert, 1992) "It's no use complaining that children today would rather watch TV or videos than read". (Philippa Thompson, 2000) We the teachers should try to exploit students' viewing habits as a starting point for developing more active literary skills. The teachers need to know the interests of the students and what they like most to watch in order to keep high their motivation, undertake different duties, fulfill various assignments and feel the success. In a questionnaire the students were asked which TV station they watch most and why? Most of the students replied that they preferred to watch Top Channel because they like it very much. Here are some of the considerations that the students wrote:

- It has a lot of information
- It is a powerful and trustworthy station
- It is attractive, entertaining, informative, serious
- It gives quick and exact information in different fields
- 'Fix fare' is one of the most watched programs
- News is of high quality, quick and fresh

- The staff is very professional and well qualified
- It uses an advanced technology
- It gives a lot of interesting documentaries
- It has a wide range of programs, etc.

These considerations show that the students watch that TV channel that meets their interest. Through their answers we see that the students really think about what they watch. We also see what they are interested in and so, we should try to exploit those TV programs to promote students' learning. TV programs may be used as warming-up activities, pre-activities for the coming issue, as supplementary materials for a certain topic, for up-to-date information, to update the information in the textbooks, etc. Documentaries are also educational. Documentaries on

Wildlife, on Civil War, on Discovery Channel, and others, have opened valuable windows for our students. Through them our students can learn about languages, cultures, science, etc. Some of these documentaries, if carefully selected may be used successfully in the classrooms and be a part of the curriculum. They may help students to better understand the subject. As we cannot use TV information when it is given, we can bring this information into the classroom through videotaping various TV programs for later use. Often activities using television, video and movies overlap, there is not a strict division among them. 6. Using Movies to Teach English We should encourage the students to see as many films as possible outside the classroom or parts of films in the classroom. Watching films is very important as it increases their visual and critical awareness. Watching films in the classroom can be realized through recording them. We have tried to make the activity of film-watching an active rather than a passive one. This can be done in a variety ways as setting questions about the film, promoting discussions in small groups, asking the students to comment on various things, inviting criticism, etc. We may also stop the film from time to time and ask the students what has happened so far or guess what might happen next. Another way might be turning the sound down and asking the students to imagine or make up dialogues. Anyway it is difficult to use films in the classroom. Sometimes they are difficult to understand but Western Films for example are easy to understand because there is a lot of action in them. Some other films are easy to understand because there is a clear conventional story line, as love stories, epics and science-fiction drama which have simple plots. Of great importance are the subtitles and dubbing which might be in English. They help a lot the aim of helping learning English through films, depending on the procedure the teachers decide to follow. Sometimes the teachers recommend students to see a film dubbed into or subtitled in Albanian, if possible, before seeing it in English. It would be great to find English films with English subtitles. They make understanding the language easier as listening to authentic language is more difficult than seeing the expressions written, thus matching the words with pictures and voice. Jane Shermon says, "The eye is more powerful than the ear". (Jane Sherman, 2003) In this case the students are offered both reading and listening. Judging from our experience usually students prefer more

reading than listening, with few exceptions. While using a film in the classroom to help our English we have paid attention to the accent, voice, body language, choosing of the words, training ear and the eye, lifestyle, plot idea, summary, what's going on, why and how, and many other things depending on the aim we have put to ourselves. The overall aim has always been to maximize comprehension and learn more English. But we all know that watching a full feature film needs more time than teaching hours. So, we need to be able to fit films into a classroom schedule organizing different activities that help this aim. In order to save time we might tell the story of the film ourselves, illustrating it by showing three or four key scenes without telling the end. Another way is the use of video-cassette. The students may watch the film themselves in the video-classroom or at home and come the next day and present what they watched and what happened in the film. Another way of using the films to teach English is that of comparing the film with the book if the same story appears in both ways. This kind of activity can be done before or after watching the film, it can be used to adopt or compare characters, to compare differences and similarities, using the Venn Diagram, between the book and the film, the examples might be numerous. The book may be used to supplement and clarify the film, but at the same time the film may be used to illuminate the book. All these could be done through several activities. We may also give assignments to our students, write about your favorite film, your favorite characters, your favorite actors, what makes them your 'favorites', the differences you see if a book has been made into a film, etc. When a preliminary work is done before watching the film the above activities may produce interesting writing activities. These kinds of activities also contribute to the promotion of critical thinking especially in evaluating films and improving language skills. Other ways of using films in the classroom are: Segmenting the film, pre-watching, while-watching and post-watching activities, which are very useful as cloze exercises, quizzes, related readings, websites, film presentations, discussions, research work, etc. Of course, there are not ready made recipes to be followed. Teachers should be creative and decide themselves for the procedures that they feel that have worked well. Let us see a questionnaire prepared by Akis Davanellos. We have adapted it to our experiences, students and our classes: (Akis Davanellos, 1999) The students are asked to tick in which of the stages these activities should be carried out. Some of the activities may be carried out in two stages. The first one is done for the students. After filling this questionnaire the students had a very interesting discussions and a lot of interaction. Activities to be carried out Pre While Post

1. Prepare the students psychologically for the film which is to be shown V
2. Expose the students to the target language
3. Ask the students to reflect on the film shown
4. Provide students with some necessary background information about the film
5. Involve the students in language production
6. Prepare the students linguistically, vocabulary, accent, etc.
7. Making personal comparisons about the topics of the film

8. Provide the students with reasons for watching the film
9. Increase motivation and arise interest around the topic
10. Parallel performance of tasks, listening and note taking
11. Refer to the title of the film and predict its content
12. Write a review about the film giving your opinion
13. Watch the film or parts of it and order the events
14. Predict the content of the film
15. Build up a story based on visuals to compare it to the actual plot of film
16. Ask the students to fill in questionnaires about the film
17. Answer true/false questions about the plot of the film
18. Write a letter to the main character of the film
19. From a list of words tick the ones mentioned in the film
20. Write the summary of the film
21. Listen to the music of the film and anticipate its content
22. Guess the meaning of the words/expressions while watching the film
23. Design posters to advertise the particular film
24. Answer multiple choice questions
25. Pre-teaching of the vocabulary to ease students' viewing
26. Give out a speech about the film (pros and cons)
27. Role play a scene from the film after writing your version of the script required for the acting out
28. Ask the students to answer comprehension questions
29. Write an article in the newspaper about the plot of the film
30. Ask students to re-write the story of the film involving themselves in it
31. Ask the students to change the ending of the film