# Integrating four skills in English conversation instruction

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This paper will explain the theoretical and practical aspects of a video-based, integrated skills approach to teaching English conversation. It will explain the advantages of using film in the EFL classroom, including authentic language, cultural awareness, and increased student motivation. In addition, the theory behind integrated skills EFL instruction will be explored. Finally, a sample syllabus and lessons utilizing the movie *Big* will be explained in detail, including the use of a movie script, discussion questions, student-generated dialogs, and evaluations based on oral presentations.

　この論文は、ビデオ使用によって四技能を統合した英会話指導方法の理論的、実際的な側面について論ずるものである。EFL（外国語としての英語）教室での映画使用は、本物の言葉への接触、文化的意識の目覚め、学生の学習意欲の向上といった利点をあげることができる。加えて、4技能統合のEFL教育を支える基盤となる理論についても探る。最後に、授業例として映画Bigを利用した授業を紹介する。この授業は、映画台本を使用し、質疑応答、学生間の会話で構成され、口頭発表で評価を行うものである。

## Why use video in the classroom?

According to Marcikiewicz (2000),

> Using popular films in the EFL classroom offers not only *practical*, but… *exciting* possibilities of contextualizing both language teaching and learning … [and] … owing to their popularity, films generate learner's interest and simultaneously increase their motivation, thus creating a climate conducive to successful learning. …[They] provide learners with broad cultural awareness … [and] … enable learners to practice the language they already know and to learn new elements through integrated skills practice" (p. 2-3).

In short, students like to watch movies, and as a result, learning English as a foreign language becomes a much more enjoyable endeavor.

Many in the TESOL field support the use of films to teach ESL and EFL. Stempleski, Tomalin, and Maley (2001) state

> It [film] is motivating, and it provides a source of authentic and varied language. Many films are well known and some are recognized worldwide as a common frame of reference. The medium of film is excellent at communicating cultural values, attitudes, and behaviors…bringing the outside world into the classroom and providing a stimulating framework for classroom communication and discussion. (p. 1)

The key point here is that films offer students *authentic* language as it is used in the *real* world and thus will improve their understanding of and fluency in English.

More importantly, films offer students a visual dimension to language learning. According to Harmer (2001),

> One of the main advantages of video is that students do not only hear language, they see it too. This greatly aids comprehension, since…general meaning and moods are often conveyed through expression, gesture…and other visual clues…All such paralinguistic features give valuable meaning clues and help viewers to see beyond what they are listening to, and thus interpret the text more deeply. (p. 282)

The importance of the visual aspect of language teaching through film cannot be overstated, for as Harmer (2001) points out, "…most learners show an increased level of interest when they have a chance to see language in use as well as to hear it, and when this is coupled with interesting tasks—the success is nearly guaranteed" (282).

## Why take an integrated skill approach to teaching English conversation?

According to Marcikiewicz (2000): "The integrated skill approach towards learning is considered by many theoreticians as more efficient than approaches in which every skill is taught separately" (p. 6). Oxford (2001) claims that in contrast to classes conducted within the framework of a segregated skills approach, students are exposed

> to authentic language and challenged…to interact naturalistically in the language… [and in addition,] …English becomes a real means of interaction and sharing among people. This approach allows teachers to track students' progress in multiple skills at the same time … [and] … promotes the learning of real content, not just the dissection of language forms. (p. 23)

An added benefit to the integrated skill approach, like the use of film, is student motivation. Oxford (2001) states,

> the integrated skill approach can be 'highly motivating to students of all ages and backgrounds.' Furthermore, since it is motivating to students, the application of integrated skill approach into the EFL classroom, where the teacher is using authentic materials, is likely to guarantee success in language learning (p. 24).

The film-based syllabus explained in this paper requires students to become *active* as opposed to passive viewers. Lonergan (1989) states,

> Most language learners will be experienced in passive television viewing as domestic viewing tends to be passive. The support materials made by the teacher or supplied with the films should encourage positive viewing by the learners; they must participate so that the output of the video is not just one-way, to an unresponsive audience (p. 6).

The structure of spoken language must also be understood by students in order for them to be able to communicate clearly in a foreign language. This structure follows certain rules that lead to successful communication, and according to Harmer (2001), these include sociocultural rules

> Such sociocultural rules—or shared cultural habits—determine how women and men speak to each other in different societies, how conversations are framed when the participants are of different social or professional status, and guide our behavior in a number of well recognized speech events…(p. 274).

Marcikiewicz (2001) continues

> The rules of organizing communication are vividly illustrated in films, which thus enable the learner to see them in context, in real life situations. Students observe conversations in films; they are able to see the rule in context, thus in the production process; recognizing the culture-bound linguistic

and extralinguistic signs they were taught in the course of a lesson based on the film, they imitate the conversations they have witnessed in their own dialogues, role plays, and a vast variety of other activities (p. 8-9).

As a result, the dialogs found in movies become an excellent model of natural, spoken language.

In addition, films provide an excellent medium for speaking practice because they require students to *listen* to the dialog. Byrne (1990) claims,

> Speaking involves responding to what has been heard…*speaking is an integral part of listening*. In the classroom, you will need to ensure that the two skills are integrated through situations that permit and encourage authentic communication (e.g. especially through talk and discussion in small groups) (p. 130).

An important aspect of the syllabus described in this paper are discussion questions that students answer in small groups or pairs, and student-generated dialogs which students write, practice, and act in front of the class. Writing and acting these dialogs is an effective way of integrating the skills of listening, writing, and speaking. The discussion questions provide another forum for speaking practice. Harmer (2001) suggests allowing students to work in groups

> before they speak in front of the class. They have time for choosing the ideas and the language to express them, and since they are prepared for the discussion—and in the context of the film-based classes, they also have been exposed to model

vocabulary of the film dialogues—the level of stress is reduced. (p. 272)

Finally, this syllabus requires all students to prepare and give oral presentations related to a theme found in a movie, which provides both writing and speaking practice. Harmer (2001) claims that "such speaking activities are not designed for informal spontaneous conversation; because they are prepared, they are more writing like. The introduction of such an activity—centered around a film—results in the activation of both skills: speaking and writing" (p. 274).

## Methodology

The following syllabus is based on the movie *Big*, directed by Penny Marshall and starring Tom Hanks. Although it was produced in 1988, this fantasy story of a twelve-year-old boy trapped inside a thirty-year-old body remains a winning comedy today. The story revolves around Josh Baskin (Hanks) who one day at a carnival wishes he were big, only to awake the next morning to discover that his wish has come true. While waiting to find the *Zoltar* machine that granted his wish, Josh is hired by the MacMillan Toy Company where he is quickly promoted and finds success due to his innate knowledge of what toys are popular with children. He falls in love with a colleague (Elizabeth Perkins), but the more Josh experiences adult life, the more he wants to return to the carefree life of his childhood.

Using *Big*, this syllabus takes a video-based, integrated skills approach to teaching English conversation, combining listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities. Each week, the students are asked to read and study a word-for-word transcript (prepared by the instructor) of the dialog found in *Big* before watching the movie without subtitles. While watching the film, the students use their script as a reference. This activity builds their English vocabulary and understanding of slang and idiomatic expressions. For example, in Scene 1, Josh is playing a computer game in his bedroom when his mother calls him from downstairs:

> **Mom:** Josh, don't forget to take out the garbage.
>
> **Josh:** Just a second! Throw the…

Please note that all of the examples appearing in this paper are taken from scripts prepared by the author. At the end of each script, underlined vocabulary words and phrases are explained. For example,

> "Just a second":  A common way to say, "Just a moment" or "Please wait," or "I'll be right with you" (Scene 1).

By the end of the film, the students have greatly increased their knowledge of authentic English expressions used in everyday speech.

Since this is a speaking class, the students are given discussion questions prepared by the instructor based on themes in the movie and are asked to respond to these questions with their partner. For example, in Scene 8, Josh makes his wish, *I wish I were big,* on the Zoltar machine and his wish is granted. He wakes up the next morning to find that he is an adult. The students answer

> **Discussion Question #3:** Josh finds the Zoltar machine and makes his wish to become big. *If you*

*found a Zoltar machine and could make one wish that will come true, what would you wish for? Why?*

After asking and answering several discussion questions, the students are asked to ask and answer one question in front of the class.

The students are also required to write an original, two-part dialog each week based on situations found in the movie. The dialogs must be typed and students are asked to bring two copies to class where they will practice the dialog with their partner, then choose one of the dialogs to "act" in front of the class. At the end of each script, the students are given a choice of three situations from which they write their dialog. For example:

> **Situation #1:** In Scene 6, Josh convinces his parents to let him ride on the roller coaster because he wants to impress Cynthia. *Imagine that you want to impress a boy by doing something very daring or dangerous, but you have to convince your mother or father to let you do it. What do you tell them? How do they react?*

A partial example of a student-generated dialog follows:

> **A:** Mom, can I go skydiving this weekend?
>
> **B:** What? Skydiving? Are you crazy? It's too dangerous!
>
> **A:** Please! I have to go!
>
> **B:** What do you mean you *have* to?
>
> **A:** Well, there's this guy that I really like and…

The students have three situations from which to choose from, so they produce a variety of dialogs which their classmates enjoy watching.

One reason that students never seem to tire of a movie like *Big* is because they get to use their imaginations. For example, another discussion question asks *Obviously, what happened to Josh (suddenly becoming an adult) is a fantasy story. But if you could wake up tomorrow morning and be any age for a day, what age would you like to be and why?*

In addition, *Big*, like many other films, offers insight into American culture. For example, in Scene 10, the adult Josh returns home to try and convince his mother that he is really her son. But when he first enters the house, he tells his mother, "Sorry, sorry" and runs back outside and wipes his feet on the doormat before reentering his home. A question posed to the students is *Why does Josh say "Sorry" and go back outside?* The students learn that it is very common for American mothers to yell at their children, "Wipe your feet!" before coming inside.

## Syllabus

In a twelve-week semester, two films are shown in a class that meets once a week for 90-minutes. For example:

> **Week 1:**  *Big*, Scenes 1-16
>
> **Week 2:**  *Big*, Scenes 17-33
>
> **Week 3:**  *Big*, Scenes 34-48
>
> **Week 4:**  *Big*, Scenes 49-65
>
> **Week 5:**  *Big*, Scenes 66-80
>
> **Week 6:**  Oral Presentations

## Teaching Options

There are several ways in which this syllabus can be taught, depending on the level of the students and time-constraints. One option is to have the students watch the movie (about 25-minutes) without stopping the tape. The students then work in pairs and ask and answer assigned discussion questions and practice both dialogs. After practicing (about 25-minutes), the students ask and answer their assigned discussion question and act one of the dialogs in front of the class with their partner.

Another option is to watch the movie and stop the tape at each discussion question, calling on students for their answers, and asking additional questions about selected scenes in the movie. Again, the students practice both dialogs, choosing one to act in front of the class. This option works particularly well for more advanced students.

Finally, a third option includes watching the movie without stopping the tape, and assigning pairs to ask and answer all of the discussion questions. The instructor visits each group and randomly asks each student discussion questions. Again, the students act one dialog for the class. All of these options should be followed by a question and answer period in which students must ask the instructor questions about or related to the movie they have just watched.

## Evaluation

After finishing a film in four to five weeks, all students are required to prepare and give an oral presentation based on a theme from the movie. The purpose of this oral presentation is to test their ability to communicate clearly in English, and requires students to organize their thoughts, use detailed examples, and practice repeatedly until they know their topic without memorizing a written speech. In addition, they are asked to speak with confidence, maintain eye-contact, and stay within the two to three-minute time limit.

In *Big*, a central theme is toys, and Josh is asked to create a new toy for his company. Josh invents an electronic comic book. The students are asked to create a new toy with which their classmates would enjoy playing. Their toy can be or do anything, and it does not have to be something real—it can be based on fantasy—so students are encouraged to have fun and use their imagination. Students are instructed to

1) Create your new toy.

2) Prepare three note cards in outline format. Write words and phrases only to help you remember in case you forget what you want to say. Do not write your entire presentation on your note cards, try to memorize, or read to us!

3) Draw pictures of your toy. Use posters that are big enough for everyone to see easily.

4) Practice and time yourself (2-3 minutes).

In the introduction, students introduce themselves to the class, introduce their toy, explain why they chose to invent it, and show a picture of their toy. In the body of the presentation, using detailed examples and posters to illustrate, students explain everything about their toy—size and shape, what it is made of (plastic, wood, metal, etc.), cost, what it does or can do, and how it is used. In the conclusion, the students must convince the audience why

they should buy their toy. Finally, the students thank the audience.

While each student gives their oral presentation, the instructor sits at the back of the room and listens to, times, and records (optional) each presentation, evaluating each student using the following criteria worth a total of 50 points:

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Interesting Topic** | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| **Organization** | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| **Enthusiasm/ Loud Voice** | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| **Confidence/ Eye-Contact** | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| **Detailed Examples** | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| **Pronunciation** | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| **Rhythm & Pace** | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| **Overall Fluency** | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| **Note Cards/ Visual Aids** | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| **Time (2-3 minutes)** | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

In addition, the instructor makes written comments about what the student did successfully and what aspects he or she needs to improve.

The students are given a final grade in the course based on their class participation (regular attendance/coming to class on time), their ability to ask and answer discussion questions clearly with their partner, their ability to write an interesting dialog in natural sounding English with as few mistakes as possible and acted with a partner, and their oral presentations.

## Conclusion

As Marcikiewicz (2001) points out,

> The use of films as teaching aids in the EFL classroom is not a new idea…movies are motivating and a contextually rich resource for language teaching and learning…this method not only provides wide possibilities for greater interaction among students, but foremost, it combines entertainment with learning, which contributes to its efficiency (p. 19).

The syllabus and methodology described in this article have been tested and used with Japanese university students over the past thirteen years, with great success in integrating listening, reading, speaking, and writing when teaching English conversation. The methods described here can be adapted to meet the needs of any EFL student, and these methods will continue to evolve and grow, for as Quebbemann (1991) states, "…the variety of exercises that can be done is limited only by the imagination of the teacher" (p. 28).

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