

Lesson Plan Critique

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### Introduction

In the original lesson plan, the formal operations and critical thinking skills that are needed for adult education are taken into consideration but, because the lesson plan is flawed in so many ways, any adult learners who may be subjected to such a plan would also be deprived of what should be a much more interactive, constructive, distributed, and social learning experience. The revised lesson plan is designed to correct that and it relies extensively on approaches to learning that include key aspects of constructivism, Vygotskian theory, and distributed cognition. The Behaviourism aspects are retained; however, they are less influential than they were in the original lesson plan because the application of the other approaches diminishes the need to rely so heavily on positive reinforcement for EFL learners who are typically shy about giving English presentations. In this critique, I will identify many of the aforementioned flaws—and missed opportunities—of the original lesson plan, relate them to appropriate learning theories, and describe how the application of these modern learning theories would dramatically improve the lesson plan and, ultimately, the learning experiences of future students in this course.

### Context

It is important to note that this particular lesson plan was/is designed to be implemented shortly after midterm week at a Korean university. It is part of a blended course in which each week is scheduled with two hours of classroom time plus several online activities, including the use of a learning management system and the creation of student ePortfolios (blogs). Most of the students are Korean, some of whom have studied overseas, returned to Korea (as “returnees”) and are at an intermediate to advanced level of English fluency. In a class of 24, there are usually three or four returnees, three or four international

students (non-Koreans), plus an additional 5 or 6 Korean and Chinese students who have very low levels of English fluency. Similar to the wide range of English abilities, there are also a variety of majors and grade levels in a typical class, ranging from freshmen Engineering students to senior International Studies students.

While so much diversity enriches the class with all sorts of experience, culture, and educational background, it also poses some challenges—one of the first of which has to do with Asian customs regarding age and gender. As a result, the first few weeks of a semester usually involve a period of indoctrination to western culture and teaching methods. Until they take this course, 99% of the students have only experienced traditional lecture classes and it takes time for many of them to come to terms with working in heterogeneous groups, not taking copious amounts of lecture notes, and being instructed to communicate and collaborate with a wide diversity of partners.

### **Social & Inner Language**

This brings us to the first Vygotskian theory that applies to both the original lesson plan and the revised version: contrary to traditional EFL classes in which “English Only” policies are often used, the multimedia course allows students who are experiencing constructivism for the first time in their lives to communicate with one another in their language of choice. This reflects the close connection that Vygotsky makes between external (or communicative) speech and inner speech (Vygotsky, 1978). The vast majority of learners in this class use Korean for their inner speech process, and, because the group discussions almost always require very high level critical thinking skills, it makes sense to allow them to use the same language for their external speech as they communicate with one another. This also happens to reflect on the analyzing, evaluating, and creating levels of Bloom’s revised cognitive domain taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2000) and some other key aspects of

Krathwohl's Affective Domain (Gano-Phillips, 2009). Furthermore, given the inherent shyness of EFL learners about speaking English in front of one another, this untraditional approach also falls in line with meeting students' safety and belonging needs in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs ("Maslow's hierarchy of needs," 2014).

### **Constructivism**

The original lesson plan would likely win von Glasersfeld's approval for the fact that it is not a traditional lecture/note-taking environment and students are encouraged to evaluate and reflect on the shots they have taken (von Glasersfeld, 1987). However, it ignored easy to implement opportunities for interaction and social learning. To improve on that, the revised plan first considers the very high probability that, as described in the "Context" section, there are likely to be several students in the class who are more knowledgeable than the others. This can be assessed during the first half of the semester as students are posting their images and videos on their blogs: those that feature outstanding composition, camera, and editing technique are easily identifiable. This helps the teacher to place a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) in each group and create positive and interactive conditions for the less knowledgeable students to get help as they advance in their Zones of Proximal Development during first phase of the Group Activity (Vygotsky, 1978). Of course, a lot depends on how much students are able to embrace and adapt to the more westernized approach to age and gender differences. The classroom teacher must therefore encourage this from day one and, on the first day of this revised lesson, it is extremely important that s/he makes sure that students understand that the key to success for the group activity is *experimentation*—that they try several different versions of the same shot type, trying out slight changes to light, angle, and composition. For this reason, the time allotted for this activity needed to be substantially increased.

Another aspect of the revised lesson that might win von Glasersfeld's approval is in the peer assessment that students are asked to do in Part B of the Online Group Activity. Here each group member will, in effect, be engaging in some careful self-reflection, which allows him/her to use his/her mind to "observe its own operations" and advance his/her "operative knowledge" (von Glasersfeld, 1987, p. 43).

### **Distributed Cognition**

This leads us to yet another missed opportunity. In the original lesson plan, most of the learning activity was individual and, with the exception of the brief presentations near the end of class, there was little opportunity for student interaction. For a practical, hands-on course like this one, missing an opportunity to allow students to interact with one another was completely unacceptable. True, they were able to interact with the environment they were shooting in—and one could even say that they were able to interact with their cameras and shots, which would undoubtedly please Piaget (Good, Mellon, & Kromhout, 1978, p. 688). But, by limiting learners to interaction with only inanimate objects, the original lesson plan also deprived them of a powerful knowledge-building process than can easily be achieved and enhanced by interacting with other people. That process is called *distributed cognition*.

In the revised plan, students can not only interact and socialize, but they can also "create their cognitive powers in part by creating the environments in which they exercise those powers" (Hutchins, 2000, p. 9). This is achieved in both the face-to-face Group Activity part of the lesson and in the online section in which the groups must collaborate and embed assigned definitions to the Online Glossary. And it is extended further in Part C of the Online Group Activity. By peer-editing, students build on one another's knowledge, much like occurs when they collaborate on other online projects such as wikis and presentations.

**Conclusion**

Although the revised lesson will take more time to complete than did the original lesson, the additional affordances that it brings to the learning experience make it well worth the additional time. As any blended course should aspire to do, the revised lesson facilitates the development of an effective Online Learning Community (OLC) by encouraging students to interact and collaborate “within an environment that is safe, inviting, and promotes member trust and respect” (Khoo & Cowie, 2011, p. 51). It does the same in the classroom, too, by encouraging students to experiment, discuss, and work towards a common goal. Perhaps it is too idealistic to hope for, but this is how all lesson plans and blended courses should work.

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## **Appendix A: Original Lesson Plan**

### **Overview**

This lesson plan should be for university EFL students; however, in its current state, it could probably be used for high or even middle school students (although not all that effectively). The theoretical perspectives that currently apply utilize some elements of behaviorism as well as a few aspects both Piaget's and Vygotsky's approaches. Because students are adults, they are capable of formal operations and critical thinking skills, which they will need for producing and explaining the "best" shots. Because most EFL students dread public speaking in English, this lesson pulls them into the proximal development zone. Some particularly shy students will need ample amounts of positive reinforcement, which is where the behaviorism kicks in.

In my critique, I hope to recommend some social constructivist approaches that will not only increase interactivity, but will also facilitate the creation of a learning community in which students will build knowledge socially and from which they will gain valuable experience in the real world. This will increase the amount of time needed for this lesson, but it will prepare students for their ultimate goal of producing a film that people will want to watch. It will also narrow the scope to university students only.

**Original Lesson Plan: Multimedia Writing Class**  
"The Language of Film"

This is a blended EFL university class (elective), taught in a computer lab (2 hours per week), and supported by a learning management system.

**Objectives:**

- understand basic terminology and concepts related to filmmaking
- produce a number of different types of "sample shots" that are frequently used in filmmaking
- explain in writing the general purpose(s) of the types of shots they created as well as the specific purpose for the sample shots they produced
- make a short English presentation of the shots they produced, using some filmmaking vocabulary

**Materials:**

- students' smartphones and USB drives
- departmental camcorders for students who are unable to use smartphones

**Procedure:**

*Before Class* - SS's must prepare for class ahead of time by doing a reading assignment that is posted in the LMS. They will be instructed to read it for before the next class so they will know what to do when they are given some time (only 20 minutes) to create shots.

*In Class* - At the beginning of class, students will be assigned 2 different shot types from the homework reading assignment and then given 20 minutes to produce examples of their assigned shots.

They will be free to leave the classroom and shoot in whatever location they choose with either their smartphone cameras or, if needed, a departmental camera. Students will be encouraged to experiment by taking several shots, modifying them slightly (e.g. slight changes to light, angle, or composition) and seeing how the modifications improve (or worsen) the shot.

At the end of the 20 minutes, students will return to the classroom and transfer the videos to their computers and their USB drive.

Students will be instructed to watch all of their clips, choose the best one for each assigned shot type and write a short paragraph about it. They will be instructed to explain 1) how this type of shot is generally used in filmmaking and 2) the specific purpose(s) for their own sample shot.

After 30 minutes, the instructor models a short presentation in which s/he shows some video clips, describes the kinds of shots they are and the rationale behind them. Students will then be asked to copy their two sample shots to their USB drives and, using the classroom projection system, make a brief presentation to the class in which they show and describe their best shots, hopefully using some of the filmmaking vocabulary and concepts that were in the reading assignment and modelled for them in class.

*Closure* - show a familiar movie trailer that has several clear examples of basic shot types (e.g. extreme close up, reaction shot, wide shot, a shot pertaining to when, etc.) and call on 3 or 4 students to identify one type of shot that s/he just saw.

**Homework:** Proof-read the paragraph and submit it via the LMS.

## **Appendix B: Revised Lesson Plan**

### **Lesson Plan: Multimedia Writing Class**

Collaborative Film Glossary (based on the article "The Language of Film")

This is a blended EFL university class (elective), taught in a computer lab (2 hours per week), and supported by a learning management system and student blogs (ePortfolios).

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

- understand and use basic terminology and concepts related to filmmaking
- produce a number of different types of “sample shots” that are frequently used in filmmaking
- explain the general purpose(s) of the types of shots they created as well as the specific purpose for the sample shots they produced
- prepare and deliver a group English presentation of the shots they produced, using some filmmaking vocabulary
- contribute student-composed definitions and embed student-made example videos to the Collaborative Film Glossary
- further develop positive working relationships in a growing community of learners

#### **MATERIALS:**

- a learning management system that affords collaborative working space, such as a wiki or glossary (for the purpose of this lesson plan, the focus will be on the latter)
- students’ smartphones, classroom computers, and projection system
- departmental camcorders and tripods for students who are unable to use smartphones or who need stability for their assigned shots

#### **CLASSROOM PROCEDURE:**

##### **Before Class**

SS’s must prepare for class ahead of time by doing a reading assignment (called “The Language of Film” by Michael Wohl) that is posted in the LMS. They will be instructed to read it for before the next class so they will know what to do when they are given some time to create shots. T must divide SS’s into groups that each have at least one peer who is a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). MKOs can be determined by assessing students’ work that is produced in the previous, more basic “How to Shoot Video that Doesn’t Suck” activity.

##### **In Class**

###### **A) Whole Class:**

At the beginning of class, review the reading assignment, engage SS’s interest, and show SS’s [This is a Generic Brand Video](#), then show them the [Dissolve.com](#) website with its thumbnails for the short clips that were used in the Generic Brand video. Play a few of the short clips (different shot types) and, for each one, elicit SS’s responses on what type of shot it is. Check for understanding. Set up the group activity and inform SS’s that each group will be giving a short, informal presentation near the end of class. (15 minutes)

**B) Group Activity:**

1) Form groups and assign 3 or 4 different shot types to each group. Groups are then given 40 minutes to produce examples of their assigned shot types. They are free to leave the classroom and shoot in whatever location they choose with either their smartphone cameras or, if needed, a departmental camera. *SS's are told to experiment by taking several shots, modifying them slightly (e.g. slight changes to light, angle, or composition) and seeing how the modifications improve (or worsen) the shot and notice how slight changes in light, angle, and other elements make a difference. SS's should also be instructed to **not** combine several shot types in one video. They should demonstrate only one shot type in each video clip. This means that the video can be as short as 5 seconds or as long as 120 seconds so that each "best example" video can be included with the Glossary definition that SS's will later submit online.* (45 minutes)

2) Groups return to the classroom, watch, review and discuss their shots, then collaboratively decide which are the best examples of each kind of shot. They are reminded to consider how each type of shot is generally used in filmmaking and what the specific purpose would be for each of their own example shots. (20 minutes)

3) After deciding on the best examples, the groups upload their example shots to at least one group member's YouTube account. (They should be reminded to use the "Unlisted" privacy setting so the videos can later be embedded into the .) While waiting for the uploads to process, groups organize their informal presentation. They are free to nominate an individual presenter or make it a team presentation. (10 minutes)

**C) Whole Class:**

First, the T models a short presentation in which s/he shows some video clips, describes the kinds of shots they are and the rationale behind them. Then, each group gives a 2 to 3 minute presentation in which they show each of their examples shots and identify it and explain its purpose (both in general filmmaking and in their own scene). (15 minutes)

*Closure* - show a familiar movie trailer that has several clear examples of basic shot types (e.g. extreme close up, reaction shot, wide shot, a shot pertaining to when , etc.) and call on 3 or 4 students to identify one type of shot that s/he just saw. (5 minutes)

*continued...*

## ONLINE PROCEDURE

Before next week's class, each group needs to make a contribution to the collaborative "Language of Film" section of the Glossary module on the course Learning Management System. The following online instructions would guide students through this process:

### Online Group Activity

#### Part A.

Your first online group task is to embed each of your group's best "Language of Film" YouTube examples to a definition in the "Language of Film" section of our Online Glossary.

***Do not copy and paste the text from Wohl's article for your definitions.*** Re-write or paraphrase the definitions in your own words—in a way that makes the most sense to you, the writer. (I have provided an example of such a paraphrase in the example.)


An example definition is provided below:

M

**Medium Close-up**

**The Medium Close-up (MCU)** includes the whole upper body of a person. The way someone holds their shoulders and back it conveys a lot of information about the character in the shot. This is because the way a person holds his shoulders, positions his neck and back, and possibly leans forward or backward or to the side can deliver important messages to the person watching him/her. An MCU is close enough to allow the audience see the subject's face, but far enough away to provide a reasonable level of comfort.

Please see the Example Video:



#### Part B.

After all your group's glossary items have been submitted, you will need to submit a peer review that provides the following information:

- List the members of your group, including your own name first.
- Gives each shot type that was defined by your group and describes the example video in general terms.
- Describe your contribution to the video examples and glossary entries.

- Describe the contribution of the other members of your group.

Please indicate whether, in your opinion

- We all contributed equitably to the Film Glossary
- One or more group members made an outstanding contribution and deserve extra recognition. Please describe:
- One or more group members did not participate equitably in the assignment. Please describe:

**Part C.**

1. Each group will be assigned the task of peer-editing the written definitions of another group.
2. All revisions should be complete by the assigned date (to be announced) and each group of Glossary definitions will be assigned a grade. Individual grades will also be assessed, according to the information given in the peer reviews and, of course, teacher observation.
3. The Glossary will "go live" and be accessible to other students at this institution and, because there are so many terms to know in the language of film, it will be just the beginning of an ongoing project for future semesters.