

'Videotelling'

Jamie Keddie

British Council: 13th December 2011

Report by Scott Sherriff

Introduction

Jamie Keddie is a teacher/ teacher-trainer based in Europe and also a writer and presenter. Recipient of the ELTons award in 2009 for his TEFL clips website, now known as www.lessonstream.org, he is currently an associate trainer at Norwich Institute for Language Education. Keddie's published work includes 'Images' in the 'Resource Books for Teachers' series. Examples of 'videotelling' activities can be found on the 'LessonStream' website and Keddie is currently writing an ebook on the subject.

Keddie's seminar sought to demonstrate how the video sharing culture that has become so prevalent in our society can be harnessed in the ELT classroom to enhance language learning. 'Videotelling', as Keddie describes it, is storytelling for the YouTube generation.

The Birth of 'Videotelling'

Keddie described how we all see events differently and how we engage in constant reconstruction to create our own meanings. We share these reconstructions through storytelling - in this case, the retelling of narratives that have initially been communicated through video - be it a description of the fantastic goal that was scored in a big game or a personal opinion about Lady Gaga's new video.

Keddie mentioned how, as a teacher using video in the classroom, he had often found himself reaching for the play button too soon. He suggested that in doing so, he was closing the door to natural communication (i.e. videotelling) that would be essential to language acquisition.

'Videotelling' seeks to maximise the communicative elements of storytelling with a method that sees the tutor presenting narrative details of a video clip to their class, eliciting as much information as possible at every stage, before finally screening the extract.

Keddie proceeded to deliver two 'Videotelling' exercises to the audience.

Story No. 1- 'Ghost Chips'

Keddie slowly and meticulously added layer upon layer to a tale about Bruce and George.

We were asked to imagine that we were sitting around a kitchen table with people that we didn't particularly like. We were doing a jigsaw puzzle. There was no speaking at the table, just the 'tick-tock' sound of the clock.

Bruce, the hero of the story, didn't like being in this scenario. It was his first nightmare.

We were also asked to picture Bruce walking down the street with a tight anorak and cut-off jeans. He was walking with a ghost. This was his second nightmare.

Throughout the story, Keddie skilfully elicited much of the vocabulary from the audience, pausing to recap frequently on previous elements of the story before providing further details.

Bruce was with his friend, George. Bruce had a dilemma. George was in danger. He might die. Bruce was deciding whether he should say something or whether to remain silent.

Keddie invited the audience to speculate about the exact nature of the scenario and the type of danger faced and offer explanations accordingly. One audience member thought it was connected with a poker game. Another thought that Bruce might stand to benefit from George's death. Clearly the audiences' attention had been captured and imaginations sparked!

Again, Keddie questioned the audience. Where are the characters? How old are they? The audience offered more ideas before Keddie played the clip:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIYvD9DI1ZA>

The full picture behind Keddie's 'videotelling' slowly emerged. The clip was sponsored by the New Zealand government as part of an anti-drink driving campaign. Bruce was concerned that his friend George was going to drive home while under the influence of alcohol.

Keddie had powerfully demonstrated how a short advert could be turned into a substantial whole-class communicative event.

Story No. 2 'A Story about Real Estate'

Keddie began his second story, telling his audience that it would be concerned with real estate and eliciting information around this topic. Keddie then displayed the following on the screen behind him:

Risky	Market
Housing	Market
Fierce	Acquisitions
On the	Owner
Real	Estate
Previous	Competition

As Keddie's 'videotelling' unfolded, we were invited to reply with collocations extracted from the given list; '...the property was *on the market...*', '...the *previous owner* had been murdered', etc. when appropriate.

The audience were told that the real estate featured in the story had a sea-view. Keddie listed the characters in the story. There was 'The Victim', 'The Hero', 'The Villain' and 'The Lurking Monsters'.

He then presented a list of phrases that would provide the basis for what he described as an 'organic gap-fill':

particularly partial to	the tide is out
in search of a meal	from out of nowhere
through the sea	runs for his life
the approaching danger	the fastest runner

Keddie continued, asking the audience to contribute a phrase from the given list when apposite- 'Our hero was not.....*the fastest runner*', 'Suddenly,.....*from out of nowhere*, the villain appeared', etc.

To conclude the story, several members of the audience were given a piece of paper containing phrases including 'makes herself at home', 'life and death' and 'at the scene'. Keddie continued with the tale and invited selected audience members to supply the required expression to complete his sentence when needed.

As with 'Ghost Chips', Keddie recapped the story from the beginning at various intervals, reinforcing vocabulary acquisition and corresponding meanings as he proceeded.

There was, Keddie explained, no specific, inherent language point to the exercise. Rather, the learners are engaged in a process of continually reconstructing what they have learnt and making sense of it.

Having concluded this story, it was time to play the clip:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22J7e-Eqfw4>

It was an extract from David Attenborough's television series 'Blue Planet. The 'real estate' in Keddie's title was a reference to the shell of an underwater snail!

Final Thoughts

Over the course of a riveting seminar, Keddie had provided two examples of 'videotelling'. The levels of listening were incredibly intense, and this alone would make the exercises highly valuable in the context of an ELT classroom. However, 'Videotelling' seeks to transcend the unidirectional experience of much storytelling and transform it into a truly collaborative, shared experience. It activates the receiver of the story at every stage. Indeed, it is likely that the 'listener' will be so immersed in the narrative they will be unaware of just how much has been elicited from them or how much language they have acquired. It is certainly fair to say that the Spring Gardens audience were captivated by the process and Keddie will have inspired many tutors to attempt to replicate this in their classrooms.