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INCORPORATING VIDEO AS A TEACHING STRATEGY IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

The use of video clips as a teaching tool in courses has increased in recent years. Positive benefits and favorable reactions from both students and instructors support its integration into course curriculum. In particular, interpersonal behavior and/or communication classes offer excellent opportunities for the effective use of this medium. Four different topic areas are discussed within which video clips are utilized.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years the use of video in courses ranging from foreign languages to physics has increased. Videos have become highly valued as teaching tools, and the availability of VCRs in many classrooms has facilitated their use (Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 1996-1997). Examination of the recent pedagogical research in the field reveals a number of key educational benefits related to this medium.

Educational Benefits of Video

Researchers have reported myriad positive effects associated with the use of video in courses which support its value as a teaching tool (Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 1996-1997). In general these include enhanced learning (Warren, 1991) and increased understanding of material presented (Hales & Shaw, 1995). Students find videos to be enjoyable (Levin, 1998), which may be linked to increased student responsiveness to instruction found when videos are utilized (Marx & Frost, 1998).

The effectiveness of communication and instruction can vary with the richness of the communication medium chosen. The mediums that offer the greatest number and variety of verbal and non-verbal cues are considered "richer" and more likely to have impact upon the receiver. Video offers a display range of verbal and non-verbal behaviors which may make the material more meaningful to students (Swan, 1996-1997), and seems to result in increased levels of affective arousal (Marx & Frost, 1998). For visual learners, video appears to be particularly effective (Corporation of Public Broadcasting, 1996-1997). These students are at a distinct disadvantage when purely auditory teaching strategies such as lecture are employed. Although integration of overheads or slides into a lecture presentation improves the environment for visual learners, video often has the advantages of being of higher quality (Corporation of Public Broadcasting, 1996-1997) and allowing behaviors to be presented in a complex form (Swan, 1996-1997).

More specifically, integrating video clips into courses supports inductive learning processes (Nicholson & Zadra, 1998). Inferences can be drawn and parallels developed to other situations. Video appears to be especially effective in showing real life application (Warren, 1991). Because of its ability to display verbal and non-verbal communication in a dynamic context, video is particularly well-suited to teaching actual skills (Wanne, 1991). Given these advantages, it perhaps is not surprising that teachers have been found to have positive attitudes toward the value of

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Learning, Volume 27, 2000

videos as a teaching medium (Warren, 1991) and students have evaluated their use favorably (Hannah, 1995).

Suggestions for Effectively Using Video in Courses

A study sponsored by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (1996-1997) on School Uses of Television and Video found that educators are becoming more deliberate and effective in fully integrating video into course curriculum. Teachers constantly grapple with issues such as how can this material be presented most effectively? How can this point best be made? The choice of video should come only after careful consideration, and it should be tightly woven into the curriculum in general. Marx & Frost (1998) encourage educators to have a particular objective in mind and choose video as a medium when it will accomplish most effectively a specific goal.

Grainer (1995) offers a number of pedagogical options when utilizing videos. Sometimes the class can be shown a clip and asked very general, open-ended questions regarding what was observed. In this case, the instructor is allowing students freedom to identify particularly significant behaviors or patterns. At other times, it will be more useful for the instructor to raise specific points and questions prior to showing the video to channel student's attention toward certain cues or issues.

Integrating Video into an Interpersonal Communication Course

Interpersonal behavior and communication courses have been identified as fruitful avenues for the use of videos as a teaching strategy. These courses typically offer a variety of topics such as emotions, power, conflict, relationships well-suited to investigation through video clips (Grainer, 1995).

Some examples of how video has been woven into the fabric of an Interpersonal Communications course follow:

Voice dynamics.

The way something is said is at times afforded more importance than what is said. Voice tone, volume, pitch and rate of speaking significantly impact voice quality and can influence the message received. For example, whereas boredom is associated with a monotone pitch and joy with loudness, an angry message often is conveyed with a combination of loud volume, high pitch and fast rate (DuBrin, 1997).

The actor Robin Williams is well known for his ability to vary voice characteristics for dramatic effects. Two excellent examples of this are as the Genie's voice in the movie "Aladdin" and as the disc jockey in "Good Morning, Vietnam." Specific excerpts are shown to illustrate the impact of various voice features.

Silence. Just as words and gestures communicate important meanings, silence also can serve valuable purposes in the communications process. For example, silence can be used to allow parties time to think, as a weapon to hurt others, to communicate emotions (particularly when accompanied by non-verbal gestures), as a response to personal anxiety or to prevent the communication of certain messages (DeVito, 1996). It is these latter two purposes that are illustrated in a video clip from the movie, "While You Were Sleeping."

Cross Cultural Communication.

Individuals raised in different cultures often display different behaviors and attitudes. These differences may be associated with a variety of factors considered to be under "the diversity umbrella" such as race gender, education,

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Learning, Volume 27, 2000

ethnicity, etc. (DuBrin, 1997). The interpretation of non-verbal gestures in particular can vary significantly from culture to culture (Etiquette, 94).

In a video clip from “The Beverly Hillbillies,” the Clampett family is shown moving to a different geographical region and their misinterpretation of non-verbal communication there.

Eye Communication. Eye communication serves four general purposes: (1) give and get feedback; (2) inform the party that the channel of communication is open; (3) establish dominance; and (4) signal the nature of the relationship (DeVito, 1996). The latter point is well illustrated by a segment from the video, “Mr. Holland’s Opus.” Students are asked how the eyes are employed to send a particular message to one person when the same verbal message simultaneously is being delivered to hundreds of other people.

SUMMARY

The benefits of effectively utilizing video clips in courses are significant and appear far ranging, and evaluations from both students and instructors have been favorable. Although opportunities exist across a wide variety of courses for successful integration of this medium, courses in interpersonal communication or behavior seem particularly conducive. Specifically, video clips have been integrated into the curriculum to display functions of voice quality, silence, cross cultural, and eye communication.

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