THE OVERHEAD PROJECTOR IN THE ADVANCED READING CLASS

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On many language courses the overhead projector is used imaginatively to present visual aids in the oral classroom. To aid listening comprehension, for example, a picutre sequence can be revealed frame by frame as the accompanying story is narrated. To prompt oral composition, a basic scene can be developed by superimposing additional detail. Such techniques exploit the following advantages of the OHP:

1. It provides control of focus: students all watch a central image to which the teacher can refer while facing the class.

2. It permits control of exposure: projected materials can be turned on, concealed, revealed and turned off, as and when required.

3. The use of overlays permits the addition and removal of detail.

4. Materials can be prepared in advance, transported easily, and stored for re-use.

5. Materials can be exploited in different ways for different purposes at different stages of a lesson.

These same advantages can be exploited profitably with projected texts, thus transferring some of the efficiency and dynamism of the oral classroom to the traditionally more passive reading class.

1. CONTROL OF FOCUS

Reading materials conventionally consist of a target text and accompanying exercises designed to guide, check and practice comprehension skills. Since reading is by nature a silent and private activity, it is essential for each student to have

a copy of the material for private consultation. During class-room analysis of the text, however, reading becomes a directed activity, and the teacher frequently needs to control the focus of the readers by drawing their attention to specific features for checking of comprehension, comment, or exemplification of form and usage.

A projected text makes it possible for the teacher to di-rect the focus of the students by pointing, underlining or cir-cling. There are several advantages to making textual refer-ences explicit in this way.

(i) It saves time and avoids misinterpretation by ensur-ing that the attention of all students is drawn to the precise place in the text in the minimum time.

Eg:

> The family is the smallest social unit in modern society. It is also the oldest, the most personal, and the most basic unit. Its form may vary from one society to an-other, but its functions

"How many cha-racteristics here?"

(ii) It can help the class to evaluate their fellow stu-dents' hypotheses by making these visually explicit, both be-fore and after discussion.

Eg:

> Its form may vary from one society to another but its functions are usually the same. These are rear-ing, protecting and educating children, and transmitting to them the social values inherited by the adult members of the group.

"Correct?"

> Its form may vary from one society to another but its functions are usually the same. These are rear-ing, protecting and educating children, and transmitting to them the social values inherited by the adult members of the group.

"Correct now?"

(iii) It can circumvent laborious verbal explanation by rapidly linking words or sections visually, in order to

establish their conceptual link.

> Eg: The *nuclear* family is generally a conjugal unit. By
> this is meant that, in most societies, the family
> grows out of the union of a man and a woman who have
> entered into a marriage partnership. It consists
> primarily of father, mother and offspring. The
> *consanguine* family, by way of contrast, comprises a
> nucleus of blood relations plus associated spouses.
> When someone marries, he or she is incorporated into
> the parental families and potentially is able to
> share a common life with all blood relatives. The
> former family type is a concentrated culture pattern;
> the latter is a diffused one.

(iv) It can introduce variety to the lesson by alternating
focus between the projected and the personal texts (eg: *"Now
answer the comprehension questions on page n."*) and by alter-
nating between teacher use and student use of the OHP (eg:
*Please show us all where you think the texts says that a mar-
riage partnership consists of father, mother and offspring."*)

2. CONTROL OF EXPOSURE

At times it is useful to control how <u>much</u> text the stu-
dents read at one time. The projected text can be revealed
gradually, in order to establish progressive understanding.
Predictions based on textual clues can be encouraged by con-
cealing the words which follow significant discourse markers un-
til the students have established acceptable hypotheses about
the possible continuation of the text.

> Eg: The family is the samllest social unit in
> modern society. It is also the oldest, the
> most personal and the most basic unit. Its
> form may vary from one society to another
> but its   .....?

Control of how <u>long</u> a text is exposed allows for rapid
skimming or scanning exercises. In these exercises, the text
is exposed briefly on the OHP while the students identify its
general content or select specific information.

Eg: *"You will see a text for 15 seconds. Find its title
      and the 2 terms printed in italics, and write them
      down."*

3. ADDITION AND REMOVAL OF DETAIL

The use of overlays permits the teacher to quickly isolate
different aspects of the text. Transparencies can be prepared
with circles which, when placed over the text, will highlight
specific words or phrases. Because the context remains constant,
it becomes possible to examine features of the same text at dif-
ferent levels. At word level the text might contain several
members of a lexical set, some unfamiliar.

Eg:

The *nuclear* family is generally a conjugal unit. By
this is meant that, in most societies, the family
grows out of the union of a man and a woman who
have entered into a marriage partnership. It con-
sists primarily of father, mother and offspring.
The *consanguine* family, by way of contrast, com-
prises a nucleus of blood relations plus associated
spouses. When someone marries, he or she is incor-
porated into the parental families and potentially
is able to share a common life with all blood re-
latives. The former family type is a concentrated
culture pattern; the latter is a diffused one.

With the simple switch of an overlay one might transfer at-
tention, in the same paragraph, to the cohesive function of
"the former" and "the latter" at discourse level.

4. ADVANCE PREPARATION

It is preferable to prepare texts for projection by photo-
copying directly on to an acetate sheet. This ensures that the
projected text will have the same typeface and layout as the
student texts, thus minimising the difficulty of transferring
focus from one to another. Texts can, alternatively, be typed
on to a special OHP skin, or as a last resort printed by hand
(though in this case more space is required, and it may be
better to select excerpts if the text is long).

In order to avoid marking the master text so that it can
be re-used, a clear transparency, or the roll on the OHP, can
be superimposed for underlining or circling in class. Special
overlays can be prepared in advance with coloured pens.

Selected exercises from the reading unit, such as those
requiring gap-filling, can also be copied on to transparencies
for use as feedback. Answers can be included on the prepared
transparency, or left blank to be filled in on the spot by
teacher or students.

Transparencies can also be cut into strips for shuffling
on the OHP. This makes it possible to compare visually student
answers to exercises requiring paragraph organization. In this
type of exercise students are asked to put jumbled sentences in
their logical order, using semantic and cohesive clues. To
turn such exercises into an enjoyable group activity, give each
group a set of the sentences pasted on to separate strips of
card. When the groups have finished shuffling and discussing
the sentences, ask one group to show its solution to the class
on the OHP. Alternative answers can then be presented for dis-
cussion by re-ordering the acetate strips.

The next paragraph of the text on "The Family" is suitable
for presentation in this way.

Eg:

Because the conjugal family is a self-contained unit and dependent for progress on its own resources, re-lationships among its members can be very intimate.
This allows greater freedom of expression for indi-vidual personality, but when relationships break down the consequences for individual members, espe-cially children, can be traumatic.
Disruption of the consanguine family, contrarily, is virtually impossible.
Members usually consider collective responsibility more important than individuality, and as a result the extended family is usually stable, conservative and traditional.

5. VARIETY OF EXPLOITATION

The OHP can be fruitfully used at different stages of the
reading class, and for different purposes. A summary of

suggestions follows, with the cautionary note that as focussing on projected print demands concentration, it is tiring if used constantly. Use of the OHP should always, therefore, be planned to alternate with private and group work on the text and accompanying exercises.

(i) Overview of text

The projected text can be revealed briefly at the beginning of the lesson to establish the significance of the title, sub-titles, obvious discourse markers, layout and typographical changes.

(ii) Progressive processing of text

The projected text can be revealed gradually during presentation in order to encourage predictive reading, and to establish progressive rather than post facto understanding of its development. This technique may be used with the whole text, or with selected paragraphs.

(iii) Linguistic analysis of text

When the text is familiar, overlays can be used to highlight interesting or new linguistic features at different levels. Overlays may isolate recurrent nominal or verbal forms (such as compound nouns or modal verbs), contextual referents, connectors, linkers, discourse markers of sequence or contrast, passive constructions, or the grammatical forms of definitions. This technique may be used to prepare the students for exercises based on such items, or to review their form and function in context.

(iv) Feedback

Students can be asked to indicate on the projected text the source of their answers to comprehension questions. Answers to exercises can be projected, instead of read aloud or written on the chalkboard. The OHP is particularly useful for feedback after groupwork: group leaders may be asked to present their solutions to exercises requiring logical sequencing of sentences, or to copy group summaries or outlines on to transparencies to present on the OHP for class evaluation.

This paper has suggested ways of exploiting projected materials photocopied from a conventional reading unit. It is also possible to prepare supplementary material for the OHP, using it either as an alternative to the chalkboard (eg. to present additional information or exercises prepared by the teacher) or as an alternative to the photocopied handout (eg. to present authentic advertisements, tables of content or newspaper articles for skimming and scanning exercises). The further potential of the OHP as an aid in the reading class will soon become apparent to those who experiment.

A useful article on practical aspects of using the OHP is Getting the Most Out of an Overhead Projector by J.Rhodri H. Jones, English Language Teaching Journal Vol XXXII No. 3 April 1978.