ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING WITH TED TALKS

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Din 1984 până acum TED Talks au câștigat notorietate și recunoaștere la nivel mondial , cu mici discursuri motivationale TEDx si cu o mare acoperire la nivel global. Cu mai mult de 2.000 de discursuri disponibile online, gratuite și cu sloganul "Idei ce merită a fi răspândite", nu este de mirare că profesorii au început să folosească aceste materiale de înaltă calitate în cadrul lecțiilor/orelor. Chiar și autorii de cărți din domeniul educației au început să includă aceste discursuri în seria de manuale. Deși includerea acestor materiale suplimentare în cadrul orelor pare a fi o provocare dificilă, cu siguranță merită tot efortul.

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Since 1984, TED Talks has featured lectures from around the world on technology, entertainment, and design. These lectures are available to the general public and have been used by educators since going online in 2007 [5]. Free transcripts in English and subtitles in over 40 languages accompany most of the lectures, delivered by native and non native English speakers. TED lectures were used as an extensive listening resource in a new academic speaking and listening course. As the lectures were a core listening task, their efficacy was gauged for future classes. To accomplish this, the following research questions were developed:

1. How do students view the effectiveness of the activity in regards to their listening skills?
2. What other benefits are engendered?
3. If the activity does not improve listening skills, what are the causes and how could these causes be addressed?

The paper will begin with an overview of some recent trends in the teaching of English language in the EFL / ESL arena. The definition, purpose, and benefits of extensive listening practice will be explored, followed by details of how the TED lectures were incorporated into an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course[1]. While TED has been around since 1984, it seems that TED Talks have gained notoriety and worldwide recognition in just the past several years with smaller TEDx conferences popping up around the globe. With more than 2,000 talks available for free online and the tagline "Ideas worth spreading," it is no wonder that educators have sought to use these high-quality materials in their lessons.[5]

While incorporating new supplemental material such as TED Talks into your class may seem daunting, it is well worth the effort. Here are some tips to help you choose appropriate talks for your ELLs and scaffold them for the most effective student learning.[3]

Selection

Selecting an appropriate TED Talk from such a vast library is the initial challenge, and what you ultimately choose will depend a lot on your students and objectives.

Choosing Content

We have found TED Talks in general to be fairly challenging from a language learning standpoint. They are often fast paced, contain highly specialized vocabulary, and cover complex topics. For these reasons, we often choose talks that complement units in our textbook and either add to the information already covered or present a contrasting view. If you would like to choose a talk on an entirely new topic, it is important to remember that topics that are familiar to students will be easier for them to comprehend than completely new ones. As engaging as many talks about obscure topics are, these are going to present quite a challenge for language learners, especially at the lower levels.[4]

Determining Language Level

Speaking of level, determining whether or not a particular TED Talk would suit our students' language level was one of the biggest challenges we had. Listening to the material ourselves was a fine starting point. There was a lot of guess work initially and some talks certainly worked better than others, but we have recently resorted to putting the transcript through an online analyzer. While reading and listening are entirely different, using free readability analyzers has been very helpful. Even if not 100% accurate, using the same analyzer on different talks can help determine how they compare to one another.

As obvious as it is, feedback from students has made clear to us that certain talks have been easier to comprehend than others due to the materials the speakers use during the talk. When watching TED Talks, keep an eye out for those that make use of detailed slides, which will aid comprehension.

Pre-teaching Vocabulary

We recently started creating academic listening and speaking units without a textbook and found an interesting website, lextutor, while looking for a way to pull out vocabulary words. The site itself is nothing special to look at, but just paste in the material and click submit to have the words sorted into various categories, which can help you identify the level of the talk as well as which vocabulary words to pull out. For example, an analysis of one TED Talk revealed that affect and design were two words on the Academic Word List (AWL) that occurred very frequently while acoustics and architects, which are off-list words, also repeated and would likely need to be pre-taught for students to grasp the full meaning of the lecture.

Duration of the Talk

Duration will also play a factor in the selection process. Because the material is often challenging and students will likely have to listen to the material several times, we often stick to the talks that are less than 6 minutes, which is a duration option in the TED Talks search function. For more advanced students, longer talks may be more suitable. For lower level students, you may want to pull out 1- to 2-minute clips to work with, instead.

Scaffolding

Once you have selected a TED Talk for your class, you will likely set about creating activities around the content that will scaffold student learning. While we imagine most teachers use TED Talks in their video form, the transcripts could certainly be adapted and used for reading practice, or talks could be incorporated into a reading class as an extension of a unit on the same theme. As we mentioned already, choosing talks related to textbook content is one of the easiest things to do as you are likely to already have related activities at your disposal. Depending on the focus of your class, there are different pre-, during-, and post-talk activities you could do. Here are some to consider.

Activities: Before the Talk

Whether for reading or listening, the focus of activities before the talk will likely be on activating prior knowledge and vocabulary development. To get students interested in and talking about the topic, choose some images, general questions, or perhaps a survey. Students can work with these materials in the classroom or at home. Vocabulary activities can mirror the patterns students are used to. At the lower levels, you should do matching activities in class and create a Quizlet study set for students to use, while at the higher levels, students have more ownership over their study materials.[4]

Activities: During the Talk

While students are listening to the TED Talk or reading the transcript, activities can focus on note-taking with various levels of support depending on student level. Because we use TED Talks in an intermediate-level listening and speaking class, we often provide gap fill notes or blank outlines to get students started, whereas advanced-level students could just be asked to take notes on their own without that framework. Similarly, readers could be asked to take notes or create an outline pulling out the main ideas and details, facts and opinions, and more.[4]

Comprehension questions assigned as homework can help focus students on key information and provide you with feedback on what areas students need more support.

Activities: After the Talk

Once students have processed the information in the talk, there is a wide array of post-listening or -reading activities to choose from, and because this is the production stage of learning, we always find it to be the most fun and interesting. Discussions around the topic can be set up to be done orally in class or written in an online forum. Give lower level students frames for agreeing, disagreeing, asking for clarification, paraphrasing, and other types of responses you want to encourage and develop. Group or individual debates, presentations, and reports can all extend the topic and serve as skill development or practice and even assessment. Once the unit is complete, include the TED Talk material in whatever assessment method you choose.[4]

TED Talk Recommendations

If they happen to fit into your curriculum, we can definitely recommend a few TED Talks that we have used. For a beginner listening and speaking class, Jay Walker's "The world's English mania" and clips from Tom Wujec's "Build a tower, build a team" were both excellent additions to units about English as a global language and team building in business,respectively. For an intermediate listening and speaking class, we use Birke Baehr's "What's wrong with our food system" to present an alternate view to the one in our textbook of genetically modified food and also as a way to discuss what makes a good presentation. In the same class, I have also used Julian Treasure's "Why architects need to use their ears" in a unit on architecture, although it is somewhat difficult to listen to at times due to the examples he uses. While putting together a unit on art, I found Ken Robinson's "Do schools kill creativity?" but ended up only using the anecdote about the dancer, which starts around the 15-minute mark. Keep in mind that these are just a handful of the many amazing talks out there, and if they do not work for you and your students, you can find one that will.[5]

Conclusion

TED Talks are a fantastic resource for teachers in any field and can be used as primary or supplemental material in the ESL classroom. If you want to see what others have done with TED Talks, look no further than TED Ed for "lessons worth sharing," where teachers have posted lessons they have created around specific talks. Once you have selected and scaffoldeda particular talk for you students, I hope that you will post it for other teachers to see as well. For even more information about TED Talks, visit the TESOL Blog to see what Alexandra Lowe ("TED Talks as Authentic Listening Materials: Turning Points and Near-Death Experiences") and I ("TED Talks for English Language Teaching") have said about them in the past.

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