

In the Classroom 26

What the Heck Is a MovieTalk?

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Stan Skrabut: Thanks ever so much for coming and joining me once again. You don't know how much I appreciate you coming to join me on this podcast. I really, really do appreciate it because I know you could be listening to many other podcasts instead of this one, and you're hanging out with me. Today, we are exploring this idea called MovieTalks. What the heck is a MovieTalk? I had no idea. How did I get started in this? One of the Spanish instructors that we have, a wonderful instructor, she asked me if I knew anything about MovieTalks and how to do it.

I'll be trying to figure out the easiest way that she could do it, and she wants to create immersive activity for her face-to-face and online classes. Well, I knew nothing about MovieTalks, but as a good instructional technologist, in short order, I figured it out. I want to share what I learned with you. First of all, what is MovieTalk? A MovieTalk is a technique for language learning development, and it was created by Dr. Ashley Hastings. This basically focuses on short videos, short films. It could be Pixar, it could be just any other film, and it's basically a visual vehicle to create some engagement and comprehension around language.

Why would you use a MovieTalk? Basically, a MovieTalk is a way that you can introduce new language, and it allows students to-- You can work with students basically where they're at, that if you have some novice students that you can adapt the MovieTalk to work for them. If you have some advanced students, you can make it more complex and work for them. It allows you to differentiate your instruction because the students will pick up information based on what their learning language ability is at the moment. Beginning students are just going pick up a few words. Advanced students will pick up words and some grammatical nuances that you put in there.

You can use the same video, the same movie for different levels. In a study, students in the focal skills listening module, of which instruction time was mostly spent on MovieTalk, showed three times greater listening comprehension compared to standard ESL classes while equaling progress in reading and writing. This was two different studies, one by Hastings in 1995, and another one by Hugh in 1998. How do you do a MovieTalk? The first thing that you need to do is you have to choose a video. Things that you want to consider when you're choosing the right video.

First of all, it has to be short. You want to keep it somewhere around five minutes in length. When you present the video, it's going to be silent. Actually, you're going to turn the sound off when you present this video. Now, other strategies is you could take a video, get the clip, and strip the audio from the clip if you were doing it, say, in an online class and you wanted the students to look at that video first, provide their input,

and then once they submitted it, then they could get the one with the rest of the audio. Has to be visually engaging. Basically, something that students could describe what they're seeing.

They could describe the action, they could describe the scenery, they can describe the conversation that's going on, even though they're not hearing it. It has to be relatively simple as far as the plot so that the instructor can describe it. There's many different ways of approaching this. One way is to have the instructor describe what's happening in the scene and the visual is supporting that. I'll go into how to conduct it in a little bit. Naturally, the video has to be engaging. The plot that you're looking at should be obvious when the volume is on or off.

By watching the video, you should be able to have an idea of what the video is about. Once you've chosen the video, the next thing you want to do is you want to study as the instructor. You want to study the video, familiarize yourself with the video, and figure out how you will make this comprehensible to your students. You can identify two to four target structures, chunks of language that you're going to use that you will use to describe the videos. Some instructors write a full script, which makes it easier for them to focus on that vocabulary. Basically, the more you prepare by writing down questions, sentences, or any language, the more successful that you're going to be.

Now, how to go ahead and conduct this MovieTalk. With your video in hand, the first thing that you're going to want to do is introduce new language. This would be part of your normal lesson. That, however you introduce language, it could be writing it on the board, it could be in discussion, many different ways that, as a language instructor, you probably already know how to do this, but introduce that language and get them ready for this. Next, establish rules and ground rules. There is an instructor out there, Annabel Allen, who uses MovieTalks, it seems, a lot. She's tremendously excited.

I've put an article in the show notes, and I put a variety of articles in the show notes where I've gathered my research for this. She is just totally excited about this idea of MovieTalk. Anyway, she has some rules. First of all, folks that already know the video, they can't spoil the video for the other people. There is no whining allowed in her class, and folks need to participate 100% of the time. Apparently, she has penalties for this. There's some other guidance that you may want to pass on to the students. For example, they should only speak in the target language.

They need to keep their eyes on the screen, focus on what's going on in the screen as well as the instructor, and that they need to respond to questions or indicate that they don't understand. As the instructor, you are basically going to describe what's on the screen. As you're doing this MovieTalk, basically, you are going to freeze the frame of the video. You'll play it for a few seconds, you'll freeze it at a place where you have prepared to stop, and then you will go into your lesson. It could be you, as the instructor, are describing the scene for the students using all the gestures that you would normally use in order to do this, or you're having students respond to questions that you're asking and have them describe things that they see on the screen in the target language.

I'm going to talk about book talks here at the end of this, but when you freeze the frame, you're basically doing a book talk. When you see a teacher sitting down with children with a book open, and describing what's going on, and reading the dialogue, that you're basically doing that, but you're using a video. As I was indicating, once you've discussed the first image, then you push play, and then you move the film forward until something else happens, something else appears on the screen that you want to talk about, and then you pause the film again. Then, once again, you go through this process of pausing and describing until you have finished the clip.

Basically, you're going to ask questions every one to two statements in order to check that the students have actually comprehended the information. Once you're done, what you could do is you can playback the whole clip, but turn the sound on. That way, it just closes things up for the students. That's basically how you do a MovieTalk. You have a video, you pause it regularly. During those pauses, you describe or students describe what they can see on the video that adds to the story and lets them walk through the story. Follow-up activities that you could be using in conjunction with this MovieTalk.

You don't necessarily need to do it, but here's some thoughts that you may want to do. Students, first of all, read the script. Students, basically, can read the MovieTalk script and do a reading activity. Activities that you would normally do in your class, everything from speaking to listening to reading, that is what they can do. You can give them a quiz, so it gives them an opportunity to practice their new vocabulary. It could be a very simple, true-false related to the video. Having students retell the video so you can replay the video after you have gone through and basically described it. Now, you can play the video again, but this time have students do this.

A writing activity that you can ask students to write five minutes about the MovieTalk. If you want, you can have those different images. Pull those images up and use this as a writing activity. Students can also write captions. A teacher would show a screenshot, and the students would write the caption for that particular scene. Here are some MovieTalk tips that you may want to consider. Have your students add details to what's going on that you can use those questions or ask questions. Have students add details to flash it out using the vocabulary that they have. Ensure that you take care of making sure that they comprehend the language that's being used.

That as far as what they see on the screen, it may be a little ambiguous. If it's important that they know specific words, then you need to make sure that they get those details. Try to limit your vocabulary that you're using. You want to have them learn a few words at a time in a vocabulary, that you're not going to suddenly ask them to learn 100 new words, but basically introducing a few words at a time. One strategy is to hold the end of the video and keep that suspense up. You can actually use this after the lesson is done and send them home with their homework to watch the full video.

That's another strategy, and that comes also from Annabel Allen. That's one of her tactics, is she basically runs at a time and then, "All students, you have to go-- This is your homework. Go do it," because they didn't get to the end of the video. One way

that you can make this a lot better for students is to take students' suggestions. This also comes from Annabel Allen. She mentioned that when she takes suggestions from students, that when they go home, when they're watching videos, they're thinking in Spanish. They're trying to figure out how to use this video in their Spanish class. Therefore, by using the students' suggested videos, they're more engaged and more involved.

Another strategy for this MovieTalk is actually to do a screenshot book talk. You can take a video and capture different frames just doing a screen capture, and you can narrate the screenshots of the different frames and turn it into a book talk. With this, you can add narration, you can add comprehensive questions, personalized questions, and have students go back and provide those details based on the images that they are seeing. With this idea of a book talk, what you can do is present the book talk before you do the MovieTalk. That way, when they come to class, they're more prepared in what will be happening.

They can follow along a little easier and a little quicker, and you can approach this MovieTalk in a different way. You could also use the book talk after the MovieTalk. This way, it reinforces the information that you provide in class. Two different ways that you can do a book talk before the MovieTalk or right after MovieTalk. Basically, it provides two different ways of preparing. One is to warm them up. The other one is to reinforce what they're doing. That's what I have on MovieTalk, and I think this is a great tool for language learning. It just makes it a little more engaging.

I remember my language classes, that I would be sitting in class, and we didn't use a lot of imagery. That the instructor, we would have dialogue, and we'd have things to read and write, but we didn't see a lot of imagery, things that could spark our interest in the language. I am pretty interested in how this MovieTalk will work. I'm excited to hear back from the Spanish instructor and see how she was able to incorporate this into her class. At the end of this, I have put a collection of resources in the show notes. Please go check those out. You can get to them at twowordsblog.com/podcast, and that will take you to this podcast episode, and you'll be able to check out the show notes. Before I let you go, here's a little plug for my book.