Video Resources for the Teaching of Literacy

An Annotated Bibliography

by James E. Lobdell and Sandra R. Schechter

The impetus for preparation of this bibliography came from classroom teachers and teacher-educators, most of them associated with the National Writing Project, who expressed the need for a listing of available video resources to use for preservice and inservice education. In undertaking this review, we looked for video resources that feature instructors who effectively put theory into practice and that show literacy teachers and learners in action. This criterion eliminated from consideration many fine videos of lectures and talks by experts on literacy education.

The resources described below constitute a preliminary response and should not be considered in any sense a comprehensive review of literacy teaching-related videos. Some distributors, for example, failed to respond to our request for preview copies of their offerings; other videos may simply not have come to our attention. Readers are encouraged to submit their own recommendations for inclusion in future updates of this bibliography.

Introducing each stand-alone resource is practical information (who, where, how much) for those wishing to obtain the video. Where we review a number of videos within the same series, this background information is provided only once. For each entry we have included “Suggested specific uses.” Here we indicate subject matter audiences for which the resource may hold special appeal and specific topic or problem areas about which the video may prove insightful. It should be noted that some videos—notably, those in the ESL series—are aimed at audiences with very specific areas of interest, while others target audiences with broad interests. None, however, assume a great deal of prior knowledge on the part of viewers, which makes all suitable for diverse audiences of parents, school board

members, administrators, beginning and experienced teachers in a wide range of disciplines, as well as for literacy professionals.

Teaching Reading: Strategies from Successful Classrooms. (1991). Center for the Study of Reading, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Available from University of Illinois-Video, P.O. Box 2276, Station A, Champaign IL 61825-2276. Complete package of six videotapes, six viewers’ guides, and one instructor’s guide: $200; individual videotapes: $40 each.

This outstanding series of six videotapes presents actual lessons taught during the regular school day in six different classrooms around the United States. Teachers are portrayed as experts, and respect for them and for their students is evident in every aspect of the series. The teachers in all the classrooms believe in an integrated approach to teaching the language arts, emphasizing the connections among reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Throughout the series the importance of teachers sharing their expertise with one another is continually reinforced.

From the technical standpoint, these videos are virtually flawless. Voice-overs clearly and simply explain the whys and hows of what is happening on the screen without intruding on the all-important interactions among students and teachers. Four of the six tapes include a video Appendix in which an interviewer discusses classroom activities with the teacher. Viewers’ Guides contain background material on schools, teachers, and students, together with responses to typical comments and questions from those who have previously viewed the tapes. Complete transcripts are provided, keyed to onscreen time displays, which makes finding a given segment in the program simple.
Following are brief descriptions of the six individual tapes:

**Emergent Literacy.** Program: 33 minutes; Appendix: 10 minutes. Hispanic students comprise 90% of this literacy-based kindergarten class in San Antonio, Texas. Books, signs, and writing materials are abundant throughout the room, and children are encouraged to use them in a wide variety of ways, both in teacher-structured learning situations and in their dramatic play. The teacher frequently models reading and writing activities, encouraging children to draw and print in ways that resemble writing, and then to read what they have written. Parent involvement in school activities is fostered through visits to the classroom and through newsletters and reports sent home on a regular basis. In the Appendix, the teacher, the school principal, and a university researcher discuss what went on in the classroom, with the teacher providing further details on her overall plan for the school year and the kind of results she expects.

**Suggested specific uses:** For student and novice teachers, to demonstrate the need for and value of modeling the kinds of literacy behaviors one wishes and expects from students.

**Fostering a Literate Culture.** Program: 35 minutes; Appendix: 15 minutes. Fifteen third graders in Danville, Illinois, are the stars of this video and, according to their teacher, “the stars of this school.” These students have been classified as EMH (IQs range from 50-70), but teaching strategies are the same as for regular students, except that more time is allowed for learning so that students get lots of practice. Writing usually begins with a whole-group prewriting activity, and in one sequence the teacher and her students build a “semantic web” on the topic of deserts. In drafting, children are allowed to work with partners, and they are encouraged to develop the habit of writing independently through the use of journals. Discussion in the Appendix focuses on the integration of reading and writing with the teaching of content area material. The teacher also emphasizes her strong belief that parents must develop the habit of reading with their children at home.

**Suggested specific uses:** For administrators considering adopting a “hands on” approach where they spend considerable time in classrooms working with teachers and children.

**The Reading/Writing Connection.** Program: 39 minutes; Appendix: 16 minutes. The African-American and Hispanic students in this Harlem second grade classroom are shown learning to read and write in real-life situations that make the activities meaningful to them in personal terms. Although students often work in groups, they are not grouped by ability but on the basis of interests or friendships or for the purpose of specific learning activities, and groupings are always flexible. The teacher has a shared reading period in her classroom, and the Appendix features a discussion of how best to communicate to parents the reasons for classroom practices such as invented spelling, so that what parents do with children at home does not run counter to what happens in the classroom.

**Suggested specific uses:** For all teachers who are experiencing difficulty getting cooperative/collaborative learning groups to work effectively.

**Teaching Word Identification.** Program: 40 minutes; Appendix: 10 minutes. The Benchmark School in Media, Pennsylvania, is a private school for children in grades 1-8 who have had difficulty in learning to read. Most are non-readers when they enter the program, although their tested intelligence levels range from low-average to superior. The Benchmark Word Identification approach focuses both on reading as a meaning-getting activity and on the teaching of spelling patterns. Although practice in decoding is considered fundamental, it is only a supplement to the school’s total reading program. Children are encouraged to read independently by providing them with a wide variety of books at appropriate reading levels. Students also engage in a broad program of writing, speaking, and listening activities. In the Appendix, the classroom teacher and the director of the school, co-authors of the Word Identification Program, speculate about the reasons their approach has proven so effective with the student population they serve.

**Suggested specific uses:** For teachers and administrators who may feel the need for a more structured approach to literacy learning but who are wary of strategies that are too “programmatic.”

**Literacy in Content Area Instruction.** Program: 44 minutes. Community involvement plays an important role in the learning that goes on in this third grade classroom in Lansing, Michigan. The student population of the school is racially and ethnically diverse, with the majority of children coming from low-income, single-parent homes. The teacher, to help children learn that books are not the only places to find what one needs to
know, takes children on field trips and invites community representatives into her classroom. In a unit on communication, visits to a newspaper and radio and TV stations, as well as visits from local media personnel to the school are highlights. Also featured are two high school students who perform their own rap songs and explain to the third graders how they do research for the lyrics they write. There is even a “video-within-the-video” when students make a tape to send to their pen pals in California. The Viewers’ Guide explains that assessment is often done through the use of portfolios, which allows the teacher to evaluate the contributions made by individual children to the overall achievement of a group.

Suggested specific uses: For parents and other community members, to encourage/improve their involvement as partners in their children’s education.

Teaching Reading Comprehension: Experience and Text. Program: 34 minutes.
Kamehameha Elementary School in Honolulu, famed for the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP), is the location of the classroom featured in this video. These third graders are Polynesian-Hawaiian children, and are also part Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, or Filipino. The special reading program shown was developed to make instruction as responsive as possible to the children’s cultural background. The “talk story” style of interaction which children are accustomed to in their lives outside the classroom is encouraged by the teacher as part of learning activities in class. Students frequently speak without being called on, and several often speak at the same time. This approach may seem inefficient to outsiders, but it has significantly improved these children’s performance in school. The tape includes highlights of a four-day reading lesson, and demonstrates the ways in which the teacher works to integrate information from the book with the children’s own experience. (The entire text of the book used is included in the Viewer’s Guide.)

Suggested specific uses: For all teachers of culturally diverse students to emphasize the necessity for adapting teaching strategies to the learning styles students bring into school with them from their home and community backgrounds.


This award-winning video shows kindergartners engaged in the kinds of literate behaviors that often precede learning to read and write. Drawing, nonphonetic letter strings, scribbles, phonetic letter combinations, invented and conventional spelling are all encouraged in this classroom. Children who say they “can’t write” because they “don’t know all those words” create their own stories and then read back what they have written. The importance of social interaction during the writing process is clearly demonstrated as these children work together and share their stories with each other, and techniques for teachers in structuring lessons around “circle time,” “writing at tables,” and “reading in the author’s chair” are demonstrated onscreen and described in the comprehensive teacher’s guide.

Suggested specific uses: For use in both preservice and inservice contexts, to demonstrate that different children learn to be literate in different ways.

The following four videotapes were produced by the Fairfax County Public Schools as staff development aids for teachers learning to use a process approach to writing instruction. While the technical quality of these videos is not as high as those produced commercially, the strongly practitioner-oriented focus of their content tends to compensate for this shortcoming. Available from the National Council of Teachers of English at $65 each ($49.95 for NCTE members). Each tape is approximately 30 minutes in length.

The most important point made by this video is that, in order for students to develop as writers, they must be allowed plenty of time for thinking. Three different teachers demonstrate a variety of ways in which they help their students develop and expand their thinking in preparation for writing. These teachers encourage the kinds of talking and drawing that help children to clarify their ideas, and they model their own writing processes for their students.

Suggested specific uses: For teachers unfamiliar with using the “writing process” approach, especially with younger children, this idea provides a range of strategies which may encourage them to experiment with varying their own techniques.

A fourth grade teacher shows how she uses Charlotte’s Web and the theme of friendship to help students generate ideas for writing. Brainstorming ideas about friends leads to webbing and the webs serve as guides for children’s first drafts. In a sixth grade class, fables from *The Canterbury Tales* are used as guides for figuring out the characteristics of the genre. Students then do a group-write of fables, which in turn leads to the writing and illustration of their own individual stories.

*Suggested specific uses:* For teachers who question whether the “writing process” approach does a disservice to the teaching of literature.


Revision is defined in this tape as a re-seeing that enables the writer to change, clarify, and refine what she or he has written. A second grade teacher models the process with her own writing. A fifth grade teacher uses his own writing—a piece on “historical events” — to model the revision process, then students work together in small groups. One of the realizations they come to, entirely on their own, is that writing about history requires finding out a lot of factual information.

*Suggested specific uses:* For teachers or student teachers who need or seek help making effective use of peer workshop groups in writing revision.


This tape highlights ways in which children can be motivated to write through the publication of their writing in attractive, impressive formats. Some of the schools have publishing centers staffed by parent volunteers; other schools provide carts loaded with publishing materials that roll from room to room as needed, so that teachers and students can work together in producing finished books. An editing/proofreading mini-lesson shows some of the final stages in preparing a manuscript before it “goes to press.” Strategies demonstrated are sentence-combining, punctuation of dialogue, and correction of spelling errors.

*Suggested specific uses:* For teachers, administrators, school boards, and others who are not certain of the value of publishing students’ writing and fear that it may be too costly or not “cost-effective.”

****

*Classroom Roles of the English as a Second Language Teacher.* Iowa State University. Available from the National Council of Teachers of English at $65.00 each ($49.95 for NCTE members).

The six videotapes in this series are aimed at audiences of ESL teachers, educators of ESL teachers, and supervisors of ESL programs. Technically, these tapes are very competently done, although not as “slick” in appearance as some of their commercially-produced counterparts.

*ESL: The Teacher as Parent.* Order No. 71915-1234. 30 minutes.

The teacher in this preschool program provides a comfortable, secure setting for her students, and structures activities that call for a lot of physical participation, associating words with movement and gestures. She alters the language she uses in working with them in many of the same ways parents do when children are learning their first language. Recognizing that some of these children’s parents are illiterate in their native language, this program not only teaches English but works to prepare students for further schooling.

*Suggested specific uses:* For beginning ESL teachers and also for regular classroom teachers who may feel underprepared for dealing with non-native speakers of English in their classrooms.

*ESL: The Teacher as Mentor.* Order No. 71907-1234. 18 minutes.

The pullout program presented in this tape is oriented around a mentor-noice approach in working with third through seventh graders. Since students at different levels have different needs, teachers who act as tutors focus on tailoring each mentorship to the needs of the individual. Both mentor and novice participate in the same activity, each at his or her own level.

*Suggested specific uses:* For teachers in and administrators of pullout ESL programs, to demonstrate beneficial application of one-on-one instruction.

*ESL: The Teacher as Consultant.* Order No. 71869-1234. 18 minutes.

The teacher of an intermediate-level college class in scientific English lays out a problem-solving activity for his students, one which will require them to work collaboratively and also allow them to function with the maximum degree of independence from him. One group of students is shown building an object and writing instructions on their procedure which another group is then asked to follow. The focus of the activity is always on successful completion of the task, never on correction of pronunciation or usage. After the second group has constructed the object, they comment on what was good about the first group’s instructions. The
The teacher provides a clear explanation for viewers of what/how/why he teaches as he does.

**Suggested specific uses:** For ESL and other teachers, to demonstrate effective ways of using cooperative/collaborative learning strategies with students from different language backgrounds.

**ESL: The Teacher as Conductor.** Order No. 71850-1234. 22 minutes.

The teacher in an intensive, beginning-level college ESL class demonstrates behaviors and techniques for eliciting correct words, forms, and pronunciations when students' vocabularies are still very limited. Starting with drills, she carefully orchestrates the move to real communicative situations, in which students talk about what they know best — themselves and the artifacts of their own lives.

**Suggested specific uses:** For ESL teachers who are concerned with rendering non-native speakers proficient as quickly as possible but without adopting "saturate" techniques.

**ESL: The Teacher as Guide.** Order No. 71877-1234. 27 minutes.

An intermediate-level reading class teacher at the college level works to build on students' real-world knowledge in expanding their linguistic competence. One of her major goals is to help students develop writing strategies that they can use successfully for studying on their own.

**Suggested specific uses:** For ESL and other teachers, to remind them of the importance of building on students' real-world knowledge and skills in helping them to master the skills required of them in schools.

**ESL: The Teacher as Integrator.** Order No. 71885-1234. 17 minutes.

A group of advanced ESL graduate students participate in a "treasure hunt" at a museum. The wide range of speaking, listening, and note-taking skills that they use there fosters the integration of activities in a number of different realms: real world and classroom, verbal and physical, oral and written, structured and free, simple and advanced.

**Suggested specific uses:** For teachers interested in a "whole language" approach to second language learning.

-----

The following two videotapes, each with an accompanying instruction booklet, are well done, both technically and in terms of the quality of instruction they offer. Available at $225.00 from Workshop Productions, 3832 North Seventh Street, Tacoma WA 98406. Additional instruction booklets are available at $3.00 each.

**Beginning Writing Groups.** 30 minutes.

This video presents two student authors reading aloud short essays that they have written on the subject of racism, then receiving peer responses. The tape records the techniques used in the essay reading and reader response groups.

**Suggested specific uses:** For use with students, teachers, and student teachers who have limited experience with the use of writing groups.

**Student Writing Groups: Demonstrating the Process.** 35 minutes.

The process demonstrated in this tape is the same as that in "Beginning Writing Groups," but the writers are older, more experienced, and the single essay read and responded to is much longer and more sophisticated. In fact, the producers do not recommend this video for use below the Advanced Placement level in high school.

**Suggested specific uses:** For teachers and students in advanced writing classes, to demonstrate the whys and hows of peer revision groups.

-----

The two videotapes described below are not strictly on the topic of literacy learning, but they deal with some of the urgent social issues that surround language differences in America — issues which often have a powerful impact on the teaching and learning of literacy. Recommended for audiences from junior high through adults. Each video is accompanied by an excellent instructional guide. Available from New Day Films, 121 West 27th Street #902, New York NY 10001.


Regional, social, and ethnic differences in the way Americans talk are brilliantly portrayed, examined, and analyzed in this Peabody Award-winning video documentary. The attitudes Americans have about their own and others' speech, particularly the negative stereotypes and prejudices associated with certain regional dialects, foreign accents, and ethnic or social-class vernaculars, are depicted; the positive attitudes and social prestige that can also accompany many of our language differences are not overlooked.
Suggested specific uses: For high school and college students and teachers and for community groups.

**Yeah You Rite!** (1990). Purchase: $150.00; rental: $75.00. 28 minutes.

Many of the same virtues exhibited in "American Tongues" are present in this superlative documentary on the rich and varied linguistic and cultural traditions of New Orleans. With its 50% black-50% white racial mix, New Orleans is also a linguistic potpourri of French, Spanish, African, Irish, Italian, German, and Slavic accents. The divisive roles so often played by dialect stereotypes are nicely balanced in this program by the strongly positive roles that local ways of speaking can also play in binding together the many disparate cultural groups of the city. A distinctive feature of the video is that its narrator does not speak the "Standard American English" of most radio and TV announcers, but has a pronounced New Orleans accent.

Suggested specific uses: For the same groups and purposes as "American Tongues," but emphasizing additionally how ways of speaking affect social relationships.

If you know of videotapes you recommend adding to this list or if you would like a more fully annotated version of this list, write to Sandra Schecter, Associate Director of the National Center for Writing and Literacy, 5513 Tolman Hall, School of Education, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720.

James Lobdell is working on his Ph.D. at the University of California, Berkeley, where his research focuses on ways of using drama as a means of learning in secondary English classrooms. He also supervises student teachers at UCB. Sandra Schecter is the Associate Director of the National Center for Writing and Literacy and a National Writing Project teacher consultant.