

Teaching literature via web 2.0

Engelbert Thaler

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ENGELBERT THALER (FREIBURG)

Teaching Literature via Web 2.0

1. Teaching Literature

Reading plays an important part in people's lives – and should do so in the TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) classroom. It is true that "reading is like an infectious disease, which is caught, not taught" (Nuttall 1982, 192). But teachers are able to create the virus and make it grow, by providing a literature-rich environment. When discussing the role of literature in the classroom, one has to address at least five questions: What? Why? When? Where? What for?

The first question calls for a definition of what literature to use in class. Against the background of broad and narrow definitions, McRae (1994) distinguishes between Literature with a capital L and literature with a small l. Making us aware of jokes, puns, graffiti, advertisements, newspaper headlines and other texts not usually regarded as 'great' works, he encourages teachers to use forms which may not be of outstanding aesthetic quality ('high-brow' literature), but are motivating because they are short, easy or fun.

The second question refers to the rationale behind teaching literature to EFL students. Various scholars point to several reasons (e.g. Nuttall 1982, Duff/Maley 1990, Nünning/Surkamp 2006, Thaler 2008a): language development, intercultural learning, personal enrichment, motivational value, interpretational openness, and the social prestige of literature.

Asked about the age when teaching literature should start, some people demand a level which is advanced enough to understand linguistic subtleties and grasp the full meaning. Such an attitude, however, contradicts our broad view of literature and the conviction that understanding and appreciating literature has to be gradually developed in a long process. Thus literature can be made use of at all levels – from beginners (primary school) to pre-intermediate and intermediate pupils (secondary schools) and finally advanced students (university). The age and level of a group have to be considered, however, in terms of reading material, teaching goals and classroom procedures.

Where can literature be read and taught? The most common, but not the only place is the classroom itself. Reading inside the classroom can be supported by a cosy reading corner and a well-stocked classroom library. Reading outside can take place at the school library, at home, at public places, on the internet, and even on a digital reader (e-book).

The final question, "what for", draws our attention to the aims and objectives our students are supposed to achieve. Drawing on the two models of CLT (*Communicative Language Teaching*, Savignon 1991) and ICC (*Intercultural Communicative Competence*, Byram 1997), the goal of teaching and learning literature in class may be found in LCC: Literary Communicative Competence (Thaler 2008a). Such an aim comprises

knowledge, attitudes and various skills, i.e. reading, analysing (interpreting), and creating, and supplements traditional cognitive elements with production-oriented, creative methods. The three domains of knowledge, skills and attitudes as well as the three skills should not be dealt with as separate dimensions, but foster literature-based communication and negotiation of meaning.

2. Web 2.0

The term Web 2.0, which was first used by Tim O'Reilly (2005), is supposed to express a new feature of the Internet. Traditional websites limit visitors to retrieving information and viewing content, and can only be modified by the owner of the site. Based on an architecture of participation, Web 2.0 encourages users to change from passive consumers to active producers (everybody can participate). The roles of supplier and consumer become interchangeable, with the amount of user-generated content increasing enormously. Social software allows for interpersonal communication, and the fourth power (centralised media) may develop into a fifth power of decentralised, independent, internally linked people (Oldenbourg 2008).

It is no wonder that the concept of Web 2.0 has come under criticism from various sides (Thaler 2008c). It is argued that it does not constitute a new version of the WWW, as the "old" Internet also had participatory elements. Quite often catchy neologisms are coined to promote economic interests, and as the term Web 2.0 was first used by a media company, it may be little more than a marketing buzzword. The term is woolly, comprises a row of quite different applications, and may be followed by a sequel called Web 3.0. As far as TEFL is concerned, no methodological framework has been suggested yet to sensibly use these technological innovations in the classroom.

3. Literature meets Web 2.0

To bridge the gap between technology and teaching, one first has to select those elements of Web 2.0 that hold some potential for classroom use. The following table gives a survey of relevant applications including some suggestions for using them in literature lessons.

Name	Example	Teaching literature: ideas
Wiki (WikiWiki, WikiWeb)	Wikipedia	Compiling an A-Z of literary terms
Blog (Weblog)	Textblog, audioblog, videoblog, linkblog, edublog	Teacher's lit-log Students' lit-logs
Photo sharing website	Flickr	Using it as a pool for presentations Commenting on photos

Feeds (RSS)	BBC feeds	Subscribing to a "literature" category
Social network	MySpace	Communicating with literature pen pals
Instant messaging	ICQ	Chat on a literature assignment
Podcasting	Audio podcasts, video podcasts	Subscribing to lit-casts Producing lit-casts
Collaborative synchronous text processing	SubEthaEdit	Simultaneous editing of a text
Video sharing website	YouTube	Cf. below

Among those applications, video sharing websites such as YouTube, where you can upload, view and share videos for free, have received most attention in public (Thaler 2008b). The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* even hails them as "das Medium der Zeit" (Kortmann 2006, 13). At YouTube 100 million videos are watched daily, 70,000 videos are uploaded every day, US presidential campaigning was heavily influenced by it, and even the venerable British monarchy has established its own *Royal Channel* at YouTube. Over the last three years no other medium has experienced a boom comparable to *Deine Röhre/Deine Glotze*.

The reasons for the enormous popularity of YouTube and other video sharing websites are manifold (cf. table below).

Reasons for popularity	References
Online democratisation of star status	Warhol's 15 minutes of fame (Lindemann 2007)
Audio-visual appeal and novelty value	"Durch die weit verzweigte Welt der Internetvideos zu stöbern, das ist momentan ein Fest für Augen und Ohren" (Kortmann 2006, 13).
Immediate access to hitherto unavailable sources	"We also have access to the guts of news – original documents, full transcripts, unedited video" (Fitzgerald 2007, 45).
Unlimited visibility of life	"Life is on the record now" (Jarvis cited in Fitzgerald 2007, 45).
Virtual communities substituting traditional bonds	<i>Bowling Alone</i> (Putnam 2000)
Availability of the means of production	"Wenn als Hardware-Repertoire bereits eine Kamera im Mobiltelefon ausreicht, kann sich jeder als Filmmacher fühlen" (Thaler 2008a, 14; also cf. Masiero 2007).

As is the case with Web 2.0 in general, YouTube has come under criticism from various angles (Thaler 2008b). There are technological problems due to the limits to length and file size, the quality of the videos, and the streaming technique. Moreover, according to Lake (2007), 99% of all videos are without any aesthetic value (which still leaves about 700 aesthetically pleasing ones at YouTube every day). From a legal point of view, copyright violations, unclear authorship and guerilla marketing pose serious problems. Furthermore, in spite of YouTube's terms of service and regular checks, some videos contain inappropriate content and offensive comments. Eventually cultural critique complains about crowdsourcing, voyeurism and exhibitionism, digital Maoism and a McDonald's-style best-of culture (Lanier 2006, Kortmann 2006, Lake 2007).

Despite those justified points of criticism, YouTube holds considerable potential for language teaching. Its videos

are short,
current,
popular,
permanently available,
for free,

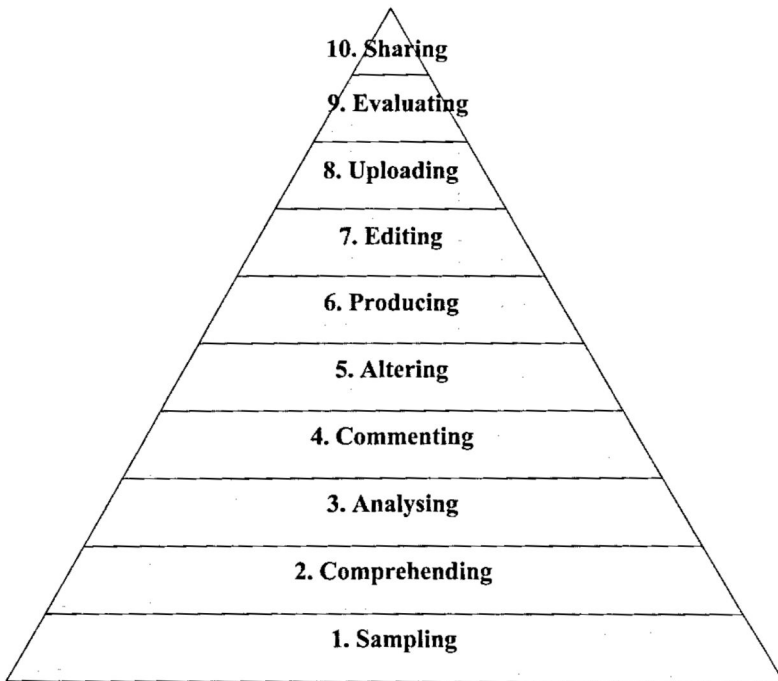
promote listening-viewing comprehension (Thaler 2007a, Thaler 2007b),
foster productive competences (Sherman 2003),
contribute to intercultural learning (Sherman 2003),
develop critical cultural awareness,
expand media literacy (cf. Thaler 2008b),
and also improve CLC: Communicative Literary Competence.

To become acquainted with the value of YouTube for literature classes, a sampling of relevant videos seems helpful. The following table lists and briefly describes a few LitVid (literature video) examples.

Title	URL	Description
A Day in the Life of an English Literature Student Part 1	www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8UOMGQfuLk	Undergraduate student at Bangor University shows us student life
Behind the Literature on Oscar Wilde	www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpxdD9HEuWY	University class reveal background information on Wilde
Literature Throughout the Ages	www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tCRbj_wqgU	University course illustrate the process of writing great American literature
"The Raven" by Poe	www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKVp4vcAAHE&mode=related&search=	18 Youtubers present a Poe poem
Zadie Smith Interview	www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PAmXET6hT8	Interview with star author ZS on her novel <i>On Beauty</i>

Romanticism: Literature and Art	www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkdgCSR6DYs	Rock music pimped PPP on romanticism
<i>Hamlet</i> Trailer	www.youtube.com/watch?v=lysrT0x675k	Trailer for a <i>Hamlet</i> film adaptation by a high school class
Songs Inspired By Literature	www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdRVPzonNTA	Compilation of pop songs influenced by literary works
Goth Chick Talks About Gothic Literature	www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IF_O5SAiZ8	Short clip about Gothic literature presented by a Goth girl

Sampling, i.e. watching several videos at video sharing websites on a certain topic or genre, should be the first step when integrating video into literature classes (1). The clips can be viewed as stream in the web browser or saved on the hard disc and presented with a Flash Video software player. This introductory stage can be followed by nine further phases summarised in the so-called 10-level learning pyramid (Thaler 2008b). The diagram below shows this framework, which allows for individual and flexible use as teachers do not have to go through all the various stages, but may select those that suit their interests and objectives best.



The rather passive task of sampling should be supplemented by comprehending (2): the students' understanding of the content is checked, the language used in the videos is practised (competences, skills, grammar, vocabulary). Then the video is analysed (3) by drawing the learners' attention to aspects such as source, authorship, technical quality, cinematic devices (camera, point of view, shot, montage), message, impact, socio-cultural background (Fraser/Oram 2004, Stempleski/Tomalin 2001). The formal analysis of the video should then be elaborated on by a personal comment (4). As most video sharing websites have a 'comment' button, students can express their own opinion in written form online. With the help of a subtitle editor like White Horse, students may add subtitles or captions (5). The next step of producing one's own video (6) constitutes the central stage of the learning process as the development of media literacy is linked to hands-on experiences of the learners who take an active role. The video can be produced with the help of a digital camera, camcorder or just a mobile phone. Experience has shown that preparing and producing the video is facilitated by a storyboard, which may look like this:

Project title:

Take Nr.	Action	Dialogue	Setting, camera, sound, props etc.
1			
2			

Then the video can be edited (7), i.e. it is cut, a title is added, music and effects are selected, which may be done with the help of a simple tool like Movie Maker. After a user account at a video sharing website has been opened, uploading (8) the video from the PC (or mobile, camera, camcorder) just takes a few seconds. Evaluation (9) should be carried out at three levels, i.e. assessing the product (video), the process (project work) and the discourse (social relevance of video sharing websites). The final step is sharing (10) with regard to the double meaning of common usage (of services) and participation (at a video sharing website).

4. Empirical research

The author's empirical studies, which explore the interface between Web 2.0 and YouTube on the one hand, and reading and literature on the other, fall into three fields: surveys, teacher training, action research.

One of the surveys was aimed at teacher trainees' attitudes towards video-sharing websites. 101 students from both the University of Education at Freiburg and Freiburg University who study English to become EFL teachers were given a questionnaire focusing on their relationship to Internet video viewing. 9% of them watch YouTube and similar sites several times a week, 20% do so once or twice a month, 52% rarely, 18% never. 60% hold the opinion that those videos are suitable tools for foreign language learning, every fourth student is unsure. Most of them are convinced that using video-sharing in the EFL classroom will raise motivation and foster media literacy.

What students worry most about are cyber-bullying (towards pupils) and cyber-harassment (towards teachers).

As far as teacher education at the University of Education at Freiburg is concerned, YouTube was made a topic in a seminar called "Introduction to Teaching English Literature". Employing the loop technique, i.e. learning about a teaching method by getting actively involved in this method, the author gave his students some media-based assignments. One of them was to design, produce and upload a literature video at YouTube. Some students enjoyed this task very much, others objected to making their products available to a global public. The quality of the videos varied considerably as to technical know-how, originality of script, and amount of language output.

Several classroom research projects were based on the action research paradigm, with the student-teacher becoming a researcher (Altrichter/Posch 1994, Allwright/Bailey 1991). Three double-lesson sequences were planned and carried out in different secondary schools, giving the 7th, 8th and 10th graders basic information on YouTube, presenting selected videos, doing some language practice and raising their critical cultural awareness. One of the sequences was centred on the SIBL (songs inspired by literature) video (cf. above), with the aim to enhance pupils' enjoyment of literature and to make them aware of the links between pop music and literature. Apart from the double-lesson sequences a few TEFL students also designed and taught a three-month project in 9th grade of a secondary school. In groups pupils wrote, produced and uploaded Internet videos guided by the 10-level learning pyramid (cf. above). Although most pupils enjoyed working with YouTube videos, one observation could be made in both the short and long projects: The more open the teaching setting was, the less efficient the lessons turned out to be. Autonomy does not work without guidance. Therefore a balanced teaching approach combining open, learner-centred methods with closed, teacher-fronted instruction seems most promising.

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