

Review from:

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Review: Film in Action (Kieran Donaghy)

Many TEFL moons ago (January 2000 to be precise), I had an input session on my Trinity Cert TESOL course at Oxford House, Barcelona that touched on using video in class. I say 'touched on' as in those days of dial-up internet and text-only websites, the input amounted to a couple of ideas for predictive viewing (playing the first few moments of a video before speculating about the rest of it, showing the video with no sound or playing the sound while obscuring the screen, etc) and a discussion of the difficulties of wheeling in a TV trolley, making sure everyone could see and hear, and a general assumption that we probably wouldn't ever use video in class that much.

And then, of course, YouTube happened, broadband happened, the availability and ubiquity of short clips skyrocketed and along with them came a million ideas for classroom use. However, it was in a way too much - too many videos to know what to choose from and too many ideas that had been thought of too quickly and essentially came down to playing a video together with some

comprehension questions (all the while hoping the students enjoyed it and thought the teacher was cool).

It is only now that we seem to be getting fully to grips with this influx of visual imagery and the plethora of opportunities it provides for our learners. This year's IATEFL conference featured a number of interesting sessions on how to get the best out of videos both from the viewing standpoint and the creative, productive standpoint (summarised in [this post](#)) and it also gave me the opportunity to get my hands on a hot off the press copy of Kieran Donaghy's new book *Film in Action*. Having had the summer to read through it and a few weeks either side of the holidays to try a few activities out in class, it's about time for a review.

Kieran is of course the teacher behind [Film English](#), the award-winning site of ELT lesson plans based around short video clips. Inevitably, the first question that springs to mind when considering getting this book is 'does it offer anything different to the website?' In short, yes, it does. First of all, as in all of the DELTA Teacher Development titles, Part A serves as a review of literature regarding film in language learning and an in-depth discussion of the benefits and potential pitfalls of using film in class. This section is very well-researched and referenced - indeed, it came in very handy over the summer as I tackled a question on authentic materials in the Trinity Dip TESOL written exam. The main point emphasised in Part A is that film in itself is not enough. Any clip or short film we select has to be an integrated part of the lesson with activities planned to fully exploit the language learning potential of the video.

Part B is a gold mine of film-related lesson plans in the usual DELTA style of a brief half-page plan with plenty of scope for adapting to your students' needs and level. I always enjoy

the fact that the ideas in these books are generally not pinned to a particular language point, level or age group giving them a high degree of flexibility. Crucially, each activity is not attached to a specific video. Instead, the kind of video needed is described - great for added adaptability and potential recycling - together with suggestions of where to find it and, for many activities, a suggested video - great if you are rushed for time.

Some of the suggested clips are ones that might be familiar to regular users of Film English but the lesson ideas are presented differently, offering more open-ended lesson options. Also, these clips only form part of the activities on offer. There are also activities which encourage students to think about how films are made and how narratives are constructed. The second chapter of Part B also moves into an area that was given a lot of coverage at those IATEFL talks I went to - producing video. With high quality digital video cameras increasingly available either integrated into handheld devices or as stand alone pieces of hardware, this is a logical and accessible way to move students on from viewing and discussing to creating and sharing.

Part C takes this whole idea even further with guides to setting up English language film clubs, CLIL-style film courses, and film circles for collaborative viewing and discussion of feature-length movies. It has to be said that this is a very comprehensive book full of more than enough ideas for teachers to incorporate into their lessons. It manages to cater to different needs as well. Those who are looking for quick ideas will find them, and those who are interested in incorporating film into their teaching as a way to deeply engage their students in language learning will find plenty to reflect on as well.

And that is where teachers and students can really benefit from using a book like this. As [Kieran said in his IATEFL talk with Anna Witcher](#), it is important to take time to observe and understand the moving images we see flying before us. It is also important to take the time to read this book carefully and understand how we can best utilise film to encourage language comprehension, production and reflection. I expect this book will soon be as creased up and dog-eared as my copy of *Teaching Unplugged*.