

Film in Action by Kieran Donaghy, Delta Publishing

You've just walked out of class and your Director of Studies calls you into their office to discuss a problem - a complaint by one of your student's angry parents no less. What have you done wrong? Have you been setting enough homework? Are you playing too many games? No, you committed that mortal sin, that terrible crime! You watched a film (or part of one at least) in class. What are they paying for? How dare you just sit around watching films whilst their child's English languishes in the gutter?

“What do you have to say for yourself?” your DoS cries.

Do you

- a) run?
- b) cry?
- c) pull out *Film in Action* and quote 'many teachers who use film in education see it as a source of enthusiasm to learners, which leads to improved academic performance and social interaction, as a tool to enhance reading and writing skills, and as a way to boost learners' creativity'?

You opt for c) and your DoS's eyes widen, they hear your words and are enlightened. The parents hear of this and bow to your superior pedagogical sense and you go on your way free to make the ELT classroom a safer place. Of course in an ideal world this would be the case, but in the modern classroom with frameworks of reference and schemes of work, fitting productive and meaningful use of moving images into a course is tricky at best. Help is here in the form of Keiran Donaghy's new book in which he sets out to offer a range of activities for the busy teacher with the pedagogical buttressing to go with it.

The book is split into three parts:

Part A outlines his reasons for using the moving image in the classroom. He wants to see its study in the modern world a mainstay on many a curriculum (not limiting it solely to the ELT classroom). It's a cogent argument but I find it hard to believe that teachers would be willing to replace the traditional arts, an area which has lost a lot of ground against other 'core' subjects such as maths and science, with cinema studies, however well made that argument is. The second section of part A outlines some general considerations in selecting appropriate clips such as length, content, challenge, and the variety of moving image texts out there, e.g. viral, branded shorts, and mash ups, some of which not all teachers will be familiar with.

Part B is where the meat of the book lies. This section provides activities arranged into two parts: those which are designed to focus on analysis and others on production, although some of these are the same activities featured twice with an analytical/productive slant. Each activity covers a column of the page, much like other books from Delta Publishing such as *The Minimax Teacher* and *Teaching Unplugged* (also in this series), with a brief description, making scanning for the right activity a breeze. Each task is arranged into three parts:

- Pre-production: This is the preparatory stage for the teacher and where it sets itself apart from other books of its type: the vast majority of activities come with a link to Donaghy's companion website with clips which can be used, thus saving the busy teacher valuable time.

- Action: The main class activity explained in a clear step-by-step manner (including suggested time limits).
- Post-production: These are either suggestions for homework which often require students to utilise some form of technology, or ideas for extension in class.

The activities are broad-ranging from a little discrete item practice (often what the busy teacher is looking for) to in-depth analysis of the medium of film as a whole rather than merely a means to an end, and whilst section A clearly has young learners in mind there is no reason why any of these activities wouldn't be appropriate with adults. There are some truly original ideas which use sound and dialogue in a productive and analytical fashion that will feel innovative and fresh to students and teachers alike. That said, I can't help feeling at times that the moving image has been crowbarred into some activities which are already considered ELT standards just to satisfy publishing requirements.

Part C provides plans for using more extended projects out of the classroom which will excite anyone who has chosen to pick up the book out of interest. These include how to run a film club, a film course, and film circles (a moving image adaptation of the literature circle from OUP's *Bookworm* series). They are thoroughly thought-out for the most part and include tips on the practicalities of running extended film projects. The *Film chronicles* activity, in which students ultimately make a short video in their community, is probably the most ambitious since it relies heavily on working independently outside the classroom (in my opinion, dooming it to failure with all but the most committed).

Film in Action at times (rightly) places a lot of responsibility on the learner which I feel many teachers will, unfortunately, be unwilling to give for fear of losing control or failing to produce an end product, although the author clearly considers the task process as being the main priority. Where it succeeds most is in providing clearly explained activities, pedagogical rationale for the use of moving image in the classroom and, above all, accompanying online resources which genuinely do help teachers. Keiran Donaghy has taken his seat alongside the likes of Jamie Keddie of *lessonstream.org* fame as an advocate for maximising the use of moving images in class. As to whether he actually places 'moving image texts at the centre of the language learning agenda' as the blurb suggests, I'm not so sure.