



Using Movies To Teach Soft Skills

Author: Dr. M.Raja Vishwanathan

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
National Institute of Technology Warangal

Abstract

Movies have long since been used in classrooms to teach second languages, especially teaching ESL students the nuances of stress, rhythm and accent. They are also used to train students in higher educational institutes such as IITs and NITs where a movie is screened on open air auditorium every week with the theme of movies ranging from the banal to the most sophisticated.

In modern times, movies perform an additional function of being an instrument of teaching soft skills to students. They also serve as a source of entertainment. Hence termed as “edutainment”.

Often advertisements are issued by Engineering colleges and Companies inviting applications for the posts of soft skills trainers, the reason being that Recruiters need employable graduates with EQ, IQ and other skill sets, especially, Team working skills and leadership skills. There can't be a better way to impart soft skills training than through movies. This paper reports an “experiment” conducted in one of the National Institute of Technologies (NIT) to evaluate the efficacy of whole length movies in teaching soft skills.

Introduction:

The most challenging aspect of teaching is to look for approaches that are adequate in engaging the unwavering attention of students while also enabling them to absorb key ideas, concepts and themes with ease. The task at hand is all the more challenging since one is dealing with techno savvy students. Visual aids in the form of PPTs, video clippings, animations and pictures in particular are very useful in keeping the most recalcitrant learner engrossed.

It is easy for any learner to visualize themes and concepts which may be vague or of an intellectual standard that is impossible of attainment sans any teaching aid apart from chalk and talk.

The Study:

The motive for using movies to teach soft skills was born when I undertook to teach soft skills as an open elective to students of third year engineering at the NIT, Warangal.



I used recorded video clippings from YouTube to illustrate leadership skills, negotiation skills, e-mail etiquette, time management, etc. and was encouraged by the fact that students responded well to my attempts to teach them using visual aids.

According to Gebhardt :

1. Movies are popular and have universal appeal across cultures, providing current language usage
2. They present visuals containing speech and action dialogues.
3. It is an effective medium to teach the nuances of facial expression, gestures, other body language appropriate to the dialogue (2009, itesl.ej).

A point that is echoed by Voller and Widdows (1993) too :

Films are fun but that does not mean they don't have pedagogic value too. The fact that movies are more associated with entertainment rather than study, makes it a more exploitable teaching tool (p.342)

Method:

To illustrate my point that movies are an excellent example to showcase leadership and team-working skills, the movie "Dirty Dozen- part II" exemplifies the team building model of Tuckman's .

Tuckman's model comprises of five stages: viz.

1. Forming
2. Storming
3. Norming
4. Performing
5. Adjourning

In this model every stage is built up on the previous one. This demands a significant understanding and adjustment to the team's approach and to any assignment set for it .

The first stage begins when the team actually forms, with none sure of their team members and their skills.

This is the "sizing up" stage where members try to understand the skills and talents of their team mates. The second stage encompasses the identification of resources. After getting to know what their team members are like and grasping an understanding over the situation at hand, the team settles down to perform the given assignments.

In the third phase, members agree on the best way to tackle tasks set for them and find common



ground for completing the tasks. The final stage is when members realize the benefits of working in tandem and helping / consoling/ counseling each other. This is where the group establishes an identity of its own and achieves the expected results.

I usually show them war movies and the movie “ Dirty Dozen (Part II)” is admirably suited for the purpose. The movie was deliberately chosen because every stage in the process is clearly delineated and the sub titles being in English makes comprehension easy.

The theme is also easily followed : Major Reisman, an American Major, is chosen for a dangerously challenging assignment as punishment for insubordination : handpick 12 men condemned to harsh sentences, including death by hanging and hard labour to assassinate a General who is planning Hitler's assassination! .

The prisoners include hardened criminals who are accused of a variety of crimes ranging from murder to rape to disobedience and they are not easy to befriend, train, or control.

The movie's plot is given below:

During World War II, during the time Germany occupied France in September 1944, Waffen-SS ,General Dietrich Wolf Kahler plots with other high-ranking Nazi officials to make a second attempt on Hitler 's life. In England General Worden gets to learn of the plot through the French Resistance.

He and other Generals amongst the Allies get worried because if Dietrich is successful in assassinating Hitler, several Nazi commanders may continue the war beyond 1945. Moreover, Worden opines that Hitler is their “best ally,” as he is "paralyzing his own army." with his own incompetence. meanwhile, Major John Reisman (Lee Marvin is put on trial for hijacking a shipment of steaks which was meant for high-ranking American officers, when Worden summons him and tells him that he is to again train twelve convicted US soldiers for a suicide mission with the objective of assassinating General Dietrich before he could assassinate Hitler.

Reisman considers the idea of preventing Hitler's assignation plot as ludicrous, but he has little choice, with Worden threatening to put him back on trial should he not cooperate. Reisman returns to the Marston Tyne Military Prison to select the new Dirty Dozen, with the assistance of MP Sergeant Clyde Bowren (Richard Jaeckel. He initially selects thirteen prisoners - a baker's dozen (Wikipedia) They are : Sam Sixkiller , Arlen Dregors, Otto Deutsch, Robert Wright, Tommy Wells, Conrad E. Perkins, Didier E Clair, Gary Rosen, Anderson, Baxley, Reynolds , and Sanders. The entire movie is shown to sustain continued interest of students There is no note taking or speaking when movie is in progress.



Instead students retain in memory as many details as they can keep the objective in mind: watching the movie for inputs in soft skills taught that week. This ensures a lively debate on soft skills being talked about at the moment. This movie shows how teams are formed and the ways to get the best out of team members.

The questions I set for my students are divided in two phases:

Before the movie:

1. Account for the title “The Dirty Dozen-II”
2. What does “dirty” imply?
3. How to learn team building and leadership qualities.
4. Identify one or two qualities about the Major and each of the twelve men. Did your assumptions about leadership or team building coincide with what you had seen? Explain.

After the movie:

1. Identify stages in Tuckman model that you think the movie has covered.
2. Have all the phases of the Tuckman model been covered?
3. To know the opinion of students on team building?
4. What difficulties do you intuit in implementing any of the stages of the model? Why?

The method was successful in that it has evoked keen participation and enthusiasm among students who see the significance and the necessity of soft skills in real life.

Conclusion:

The rationale for using movies as authentic material to teach any intangible skill is supplied by Sherman: ..., video is today's medium. Print is still a powerful medium, but most people prefer to spend time using audio-visual media; video techniques, discourses and clichés are more familiar to them than the world of the books and papers(2010, p.2) moreover Its both entertaining and educative to exploit the potential of movies to teach any soft skill since movies exist that cover a gamut of such skills sets.

The choice of movies and the type of questions put to the students will determine the success rate of teaching soft skills through movies.



References:

- Heffernan, N. (2005). Watching movie trailers in the ESL Class (TEFL/TESL). The Internet TESL Journal, 11(3). Retrieved 18 December 2015 from <[http://iteslj.org/Lessons/Heffernan-Movie](http://iteslj.org/Lessons/Heffernan-Movie%20Trailers.html)> Trailers.html
- Hyman, Kenneth (Producer). Aldrich, Robert (Director). (1967). The Dirty Dozen- Part- II USA: Metro Goldwyn Mayer. Sherman, J. (2003). Using Authentic Video in the Language Classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. The Internet TESL Journal, 10 (10). Retrieved 12 April September 2014 from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/GebhardtMovieTrailers.htm>
- The dirty dozen : next Mission. (1967) retrieved 25-12-15 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dirty_Dozen:_Next_Mission
- Voller, P and Steven Widdows. (1993). Feature films as text : a framework for classroom use. ELT Journal 47(4), 342-353.