

The Integration of eBooks and Travel Documentary Films for Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Yugang Zhou, DLIFLC, United States

The IAFOR International Conference on Education - Hawaii 2018
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Authentic travel documentaries provide language learners with a deep insight into the target language and culture. A travel documentary not only takes people to travel but also serves as a miniature encyclopedia encompassing such aspects of the target country as history, politics, culture, geology, music, military, society, economy, etc. which is a rich resource for language learners to probe into. The combination of travel documentaries and eBooks offers an immersion-like learning experience where people feel like they are personally on the scene. It is hoped that this can offer a unique and innovative perspective for language teaching and learning.

Keywords: eBooks, travel documentary films, foreign language

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Interactive iBooks with embedded widgets used in travel documentary films effectively integrate the skills that are essential to the development of foreign language proficiency. They offer a great platform for combining language learning and cultural appreciation. To integrate foreign language skills through the use of travel documentary films in classrooms, language teachers can provide hyperlinks, online video clips, TV shows and movies to encourage students learn the authentic target language virtually. However, the authors believe that by using iBooks interactive widgets, teachers can take the advantage of the latest Apple technology to promote this authentic learning a step further, not only to centralize the audiovisual delivery means, but also to foster an engaging learning environment. Thus, sharing linguistic knowledge and cultural appreciation between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves, is at everyone's fingertips. Widgets such as Split Worksheet, Panorama views, and interactive maps, etc. provide visual, audio, textual and contextual integrated information. The combination of travel documentary films and iBooks features present language teachers and students alike a solid ground for teaching creativity and learning autonomy.

Why travel documentary films

Language teachers often use various kinds of authentic materials in their teaching curriculum, such as news report, interviews, TV series, movie clips, website article, novels, essays, editorials, etc. However, the author notices that language teachers often leave aside and are not paying enough attention to a very important genre, documentary films, especially travel documentary films.

A 'travel documentary' is a documentary film or television program that describes in general in a noncommercial way (Lopriore, 2015). Travel documentaries can be used as valuable language learning and teaching materials. In the first place, travel documentaries provide students with a deep insight into the target language and culture. As a Chinese saying goes, one needs to read ten thousand books and travel ten thousand miles; book knowledge and traveling should go hand in hand. Werry (2008) believes that travel offers one of the few contemporary opportunities outside of the education industry where explicitly designated, non-vocational learning about other times, places, and peoples takes place. Traveling is not just a fun and interesting way to spend one's time in new places, it is about having real experience with the target country, the authentic language, culture and society which you may not be able to know, no matter how many books you read or how many stories you listen to. When you travel to a certain place, you immerse yourself in that environment, learn about ordinary people's stories and their real life, and you realize that these people are like your people in many ways. You may realize that different cultures are equally complex and valid, and you find it easy to accept their ways of perceiving the world, to get past the stereotypes and misconceptions that too often divide us. You even make an emotional bond and connection with the place in your life later on.

It is not the author's intention to advocate that all the students should go out to travel around the world to learn their languages, which is not practical. However, thanks to the modern technology, the media and all the rich online resources, we are able to simulate real traveling and achieve similar effects. Travel documentary films are full

of target language culture knowledge and provide a great treasure for language teachers to take advantage of.

Secondly, travel documentary films invite students into an immersion-like learning experience where learners feel they are virtually there. Another Chinese saying goes: what's learned from books is superficial after all, it's crucial to have it personally tested somehow. The typical format of travel documentaries is composed by the sequence of images, a combination of voiceover narration and interviews, and by social actors, i.e. real people accompanied by on location sound recording (Lopriore, 2015). Travel documentaries are not just about beautiful views and good scenery, they actually cover almost every aspect of the target country, such as politics, economy, culture, history, geology, music, military, society, customs, etc. A well-made travel documentary is an encyclopedia that exposes us to the real people, real language use, real context that are essential to language learning and socio-cultural competence.

Why iBooks embedded apps & widgets

iBooks, with its interactive widgets, is the latest Apple technology. It makes the sharing of knowledge easily accessible and the learning process fun and engaging.

iBooks widgets and apps, such as Split Worksheet, YouTube Player, Google Map, Linoit & Panorama views provide visual, audio, textual contents and contextual viewpoints which are not imaginable in traditional paper books. With the interactive built-in iBook widgets, the learners can ask, answer and comment on the questions raised by the teacher as well as other classmates. As a result, the effectiveness of the film is being maximized. Take the iBooks widget Panorama views for example. This widget can take advantage of the rich online resources of 360 panorama view websites and easily embed them into iBooks, which makes the access of those 360 panorama views so readily available that within seconds one can be “transported” to almost anywhere in the world and immerse oneself in the real life like environment. As Johnson & Vanspauwen (2015) said, iPad and interactive books created with iBooks Author can do great things, but the creativity and innovation of the teacher and the content is what makes them shine.

How to put it into practice

Take a travel documentary film for example. In 2012, China Central Television made an epic documentary of 189 episodes, totaling 9000 minutes' program to document the geographic land where 30-degree north latitude runs through. In China, 30-degree north latitude stretches through 9 provinces, covering more than 20 thousand kilometers. From the very first island in the east end to the highest plateau Tibet Plateau, the majority of the Chinese population live in this belt of land for thousands of years. This belt is like an encyclopedia of China covering knowledge of history, geology, society, culture, politics, etc. This authentic travel documentary series provide language learners with a deep insight into the heart of China vibrant with Chinese language and culture. When combined with iBooks widgets and apps, it provides a great way to improve language learners' socio-cultural knowledge. It is a topic that will be of interest to all language teachers, especially those who teach post basic students.

Given a travel documentary film like this, there are different ways to utilize it for our teaching purposes. Considering the fact that the author is now teaching post-basic language students, this article will focus mainly on the ways in which how those intermediate or advanced students will be taught. A typical language class that teaches a travel documentary film is designed based on the following procedures.

The first phase is Pre-listening, which intends to activate students' schemata or background knowledge about the travel destination that is to be covered in the travel documentary. If the class is flipped classroom, students could also be assigned to do autonomous research or online discussions before they come to class.

The second phase is While-listening, which can be further divided into three layers. The first layer is Listening Comprehension, where students listen to answer content questions, open ended questions with difficult words and sentences comprehension. Other activities include scanning and skimming for main ideas; summarizing the listening article in target language, etc. The second layer is In-depth Analysis where students analyze sentence and discourse, rhetorical devices and grammar points. The third layer is about fostering Higher Order Thinking Skills where students focus on the tone, attitude, implication, inferences and socio-cultural phenomenon.

The third phase is Post-listening, where students apply the linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge of the listening material through real life tasks or scenarios that simulate real life situations, task based projects, debates, discussions, panels, etc.

Conclusion

To conclude, travel documentary films and interactive iBooks widgets and apps together offer a new possibility of innovating language teaching classes. The creative combination of these two resources offers an immersion-like learning experience where people feel like they are personally on the scene, thus greatly increasing learners' linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge.

References

Lopriore, L. (2015). Being There: Travel Documentaries. *Iperstoria – Testi Letterature Linguaggi Rivista semestrale ISSN 2281-4582*, (216-228)

Werry, M. (2008). Pedagogy of/as/and Tourism: Or, Shameful Lessons. *Review of Education, Pedagogy & Cultural Studies*, 30(1), 29.

Johnson, P. & Vanspauwen, N. (Jan 21, 2015). Teaching Language Classes Using iBooks Author and the iPad. Retrieved from:
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/book/teaching-language-classes/id777953566?ls=1&mt=11>