

# Using master scenes in the classroom: a cinematic tool brought to school

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## Introduction

The way we teach is never static. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers are never tired of trying new ways of enriching their lesson plans. What once seemed a fits-all method gradually loses its glamour and leaves the floor to other, more student-friendly methods. Modern teachers explore a variety of activities in a bid to motivate their students: songs, flipcharts, role plays, journal writing, web quests, class debates, etc... Heather Smith, a former President of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, recalls how 35 years ago, when she started her career as a teacher, "everyone was taught the same lesson, completed the same workbook and phonics workbook" (Smith 2017). Things have changed since then, she admits, and "we don't teach students *what*



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to think but *how* to think... and to question respectfully... and to listen to the opinions of others" (Smith 2017). Among the methods that have so far been recognized as utterly efficient in boosting students' motivation and critical thinking is the use of videos and films in teaching course contents.

However, being constantly under the pressure of time constraints and the urge of programme completion, teachers often repudiate the use of films in their lessons. That is why, in this article, teachers will not be advised to use whole films in their classrooms, but simply work with their students on creating "master scenes" that would not take much time but would markedly improve their performance and enhance their students' learning.

### What is a Master Scene?

In cinematography, a master scene is an event that is recorded continuously, in one film shot, from the beginning to the end, in a single setting, as a continuous take. It is usually recorded from one angle and with

just one camera. It only requires three main elements: the camera, the location, and the time. The camera should be set on the characters that would be in view, the location should show the audience where the action is taking place, and the time usually refers to day or night. The master scene has a particular importance to the plot. It usually constitutes a climax or an intense point in the events, accompanied by a set of strong emotions. In an EFL classroom, a master scene would be essentially derived from course content themes and would follow the school and programme guidelines. Filming a master scene would purport to add flavor to the lesson and nurture students' attention. Hence, it would be projected at the opening of the lesson session or at the end, as a post-stage activity. For instance, if the theme of study is Shakespeare plays, the Balcony Scene in *Romeo and Juliet* would be a perfect master scene, either to introduce the lesson or to close it. Students would have to bring their costumes and learn the dialogue very well. The teacher would call attention to the linguistic input and





to the necessity of aligning body language and emotions with the content. More details about these procedures of conceiving a master scene will be explicated in a coming section of the present article.

### Advantages of Including Master Scenes in EFL Lessons

Nowadays, young generations are tech savvy. Thanks to the Internet, they have high access to a variety of media, from music and games to videos, documentaries, and films of all kinds. A great number of them are even skilled at film making and video editing. Therefore, including master scenes in one's lessons would allow teachers to align with the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner and reinforce learning objectives. Moreover, the use of film sections in the classroom has been the subject of numerous studies which almost exclusively emphasize its linguistic and communicative benefits. In fact, myriad studies have so far highlighted the uncontested value of using digital media, particularly films, in the classroom (Ismaili 2013; Bahloul 2012; Chen 2012; Schulten 2011; Hull 2003; Golden 2001; Weyers 1999; Huston and Wright 1983, among others). Bahloul (2012) stipulates that including film sketches in the lesson enhances students'

critical thinking and provides opportunities for introspection, particularly if the sketches were followed by interviews and class discussions. For Bahloul (2012), the visual aspect of the activity pleases to students because it belongs to a culture that they highly value. Similarly, Huston and Wright (1983) maintain that images and music contained in films are much more appealing to students than words and pictures displayed in textbooks. Films, and videos, merge instruction and enjoyment, pleasure and linguistic input. Films provide an ideal learning environment wherein students hear, feel, see, and manipulate content material themselves. Hull and Moje (2005:6), think that digital media, such as films and videos help "position young people to experience literacy as purposeful and themselves as skillful and confident makers of meaning." The present article suggests both teachers and students join to create their own film scenes, starting from the material derived from the official programmes. This would allow tackling a number of learning objectives, namely:

- Promoting collaboration, creativity, and communication (the three essential 21<sup>st</sup> century skills) among students;
- Providing students with a valuable opportunity to practice speaking and listening;



- Improving students' investigation and research skills;
- Increasing students' shared feeling of enjoyment;
- Enhancing free expression of emotions;
- Improving students' appropriate use of body language. Mehrabian (1972) argues that, whilst only 7% of our communication is conveyed through words, nonverbal and facial expression account both for around 93 % of it, with 38 % and 55 % respectively;
- Promoting students' and teachers' digital skills, as both would have to engage in creating the master scene which would enrich the lesson and add value to learning. Both would devise the scene, review its parts, edit it, show it, and comment on it;
- Downplaying feelings of embarrassment and reluctance among students;
- Turning the classroom into a Professional Learning Community (PLC) where all students are engaged in the same project and where no one is a passive observer, as even students viewing the scene would comment on it and use the language they are learning to engage in classroom debates about the content.

Chong (2017), an English Language Teaching (ELT) blogger, ascertains: "There is no project that utilises more skills and requires more teamwork and discussion than one that requires students to produce a short film."

### ***A Classroom Master Scene: the Burst of Students' Emotions***

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, defines emotions, such as fear, love, hate, joy, excitement, anger, and sadness, as "a positive or negative experience that is associated with a particular pattern of physiological activity". The Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics links emotions to Amygdala – a part of the human brain whose role is to direct attention and to attach emotions to received stimuli. A plethora of studies have also highlighted the important role emotions play in people's lives (Ledoux 2012; Ledoux 2003; Russell 2003; Ledoux 1996, among others). The French film director, François Truffaut (1979), highlights the importance of emotions such as insecurity, fear, compassion, and relief in Hitchcock's films. Truffaut (1979) asserts, that "Hitchcock is not particularly concerned with teaching or reforming us, but with intriguing, moving, captivating us, and above all making us participate emotionally in the narrative he has chosen to conduct." Strong emotions generally characterise master scenes, thus distinguishing them from ordinary ones. Master scenes are built around plot sections which crackle with emotions. In a classroom setting, a master scene bursting with emotions would nurture motivation, phase out apathy, and increase interest in the taught content. Emotional factors are





believed to have a strong effect on students' language learning and use. Engaging students in devising, screening, and performing master scenes helps rid them of embarrassment and fosters elation and attention. In fact, master scenes are the most influential of all scenes because they purport to motivate the emotions of both actors and viewers. If students perform the master scenes themselves, they will gradually learn to freely express their emotions, to acquire more self-confidence, and to see a valuable purpose in what they are learning.

### Teachers:

#### *Sage on the Stage or Guide at the Side?*

To begin with, EFL teachers need not be discouraged believing that using master scenes in the classroom is a waste of time. Schulten (2011) stipulates that starting a lesson with one film scene is highly motivating, and that teachers are not required to show an entire film. Screening key scenes which do not take much time would have a remarkably positive impact on students' performance. Similarly, teachers should not think that filming sketches in the classroom would require sound mastery of digital tools and information technologies. In fact, this is no longer considered as a hurdle for improving one's teaching. Nowadays, nearly all educational institutions have cinema and film clubs with members and staff who are willing to collaborate and share knowledge. In Tunisia, for instance, the Tunisian Federation of Cinema Clubs was founded on April 4, 1950, and has since then been striving to install cinema clubs in all schools around the country. In the United States, and according to the website <https://www.teachingtimes.com/articles/filmclub-creativity.htm>, thousands of films are produced by students and screened every year. The Guardian of November 19, 2013 (paragraph 5) also stipulates that in the United Kingdom: "Film clubs are being run in more than 7,000 schools, with 220,000 young people watching, discussing and reviewing film. This service provides, for free, a curated catalogue of DVDs, curriculum-linked guides, film-making tutorials and a members magazine." Hull (2003:233) insists that these new types of "literacies" have become part of our lives. They are not "just add-ons, nice to have but dispensable; they are at

the very center of those forms and practices of communication and representation that are crucial in our new times." As a matter of fact, a teacher is no longer "sage on the stage". They are now required to seek ways to incorporate master scenes in their lesson plans. It is a project that would be highly appreciated by students. If teachers themselves are keen on conducting task-based projects in their classrooms, it will be easy for them to pass their passion to their students. They will also enhance their creativity through collaborative work. Aston et al. (2003:3) write: "Whatever is being taught must engage the learner as an active agent for meaning to emerge. In the deeper process of learning, the learner moves from the known to the unknown." A teacher's role is crucial in facilitating students' acquisition of what is unknown. He/she should first of all conceptualise the needs of these new generations of learners through asking themselves two vital questions: "What are the everyday literacies that learners bring into the classroom?" and "How can I value and integrate these literacies into my own practice?" (Sanders and Albers 2010:3).

#### Devising a Master Scene in the EFL Classroom

A master scene need not take much time – four or five minutes are enough to convey a message and to express a set of emotions. It generally requires identifying a setting, preparing a plot, deciding about actors, and preparing the costumes that the scene needs. The script would be written with reference to topics dealt with in the classroom. A classroom master scene generally involves six steps: brainstorming, storyboarding, assigning the roles, practicing the scene, filming the scene, and editing and sharing the product (see Table 2 below). The following tables, 1 and 2, describe a master scene that was made by a group of Tunisian 9<sup>th</sup> grade students. In Tunisia, 9<sup>th</sup> grade students are 15 to 16 years old. They are enrolled in preparatory schools. These schools welcome 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students coming from primary school. Preparatory schools can be compared to the United States' middle schools. They are a hinge phase between primary schools and high schools.



**Table 1: The Conceptual Frame of a Sample Master Scene**

Scene plot	Related theme	Textbook	Grades	Actors
A Family argument about pocket money: a son expressing dissatisfaction and asking for extra money. Parents refusing any request for increase in pocket money. Daughter trying to appease the situation.	Family Relationships: Module 1, Lesson 4, pp. 20-23	Proceed with English; 9 <sup>th</sup> grade textbook.	9 <sup>th</sup> grade students, 15 to 16 years old.	Four students playing the roles of a father, a mother, a son, and a daughter.

**Table 2: A Master Scene Procedure**

Steps	Objectives	Modes of interaction	Teacher's role	Students' role	Skills	Linguistic input	Equipment/costumes
1 <b>Brainstorming</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Draw on students' prior acquisitions (Lesson 4, Module 1: Pocket Money)</li> <li>- Elicit new lexical items related to pocket money</li> </ul>	Individual work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- asks questions related to pocket money</li> <li>- draws a spider-gram with lexical items related to pocket money</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- respond to teacher's solicitations</li> <li>- generate ideas and lexis related to pocket money</li> </ul>	Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- expressions of opinion (I don't agree, I do believe ...)</li> <li>- expressions of advice/ suggestions</li> <li>- lexis: savings, extras, purchase, stationaries, siblings</li> </ul>	Pens/ pencils Papers Visuals
2 <b>Story boarding/ writing the script</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- develop students' writing skill</li> <li>- develop writing for a purpose (an argument about pocket money)</li> <li>- enhance students' collaborative work</li> <li>- enhance students' communicative skills (turn taking, respect of partners' skills, listening to others...)</li> </ul>	Group work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- facilitates communication</li> <li>- reminds of the need to use the target language (English)</li> <li>- keeps time</li> <li>- reminds of plot and events</li> <li>- elicits linguistic input</li> <li>- reminds of techniques of script writing</li> <li>- consults with script writing specialist (scene heading, parentheticals, transition ...)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- work in groups (of 4 or 5) to produce a storyboard</li> <li>- write, in response to a particular content and theme</li> <li>- exchange ideas about problems with pocket money</li> </ul>	Speaking and writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- expressing arguments</li> <li>- agreeing/ disagreeing</li> <li>- advising, warning, expressing dissatisfaction...</li> <li>- lexis related to pocket money</li> </ul>	Pens/ pencils, Chart papers, flipcharts



<p>Visuals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Role-related costumes (father, mother, arguing son, daughter...)</li> <li>- Setting (lights: day or evening, place: living room)</li> <li>- money (coins, notes)</li> </ul>	<p>Digital equipment (camera, memory cards, light reflector, headphones, a tripod)</p>	<p>Videos, mobile phones, laptops, snap</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- discussion manners</li> <li>- providing arguments for (or against one particular role) ...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- expressing arguments/ tension</li> <li>- agreeing/ disagreeing</li> <li>- advising, warning, expressing dissatisfaction...</li> <li>- lexis related to pocket money</li> </ul>	<p>Lexis related to film making (scene heading, a shot, screening, camera use, take/ retake)</p>	<p>Discussing, advising, sharing</p>
<p>Speaking</p>	<p>Speaking</p>	<p>Speaking Digital media skills</p>	<p>Speaking Appropriate body language</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- discuss roles with specialist</li> <li>- opt for appropriate roles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enact the master scene</li> <li>- freely express emotions that the role dictates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- make use of their own digital skills</li> <li>- hone practice, following specialist's instructions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- edit the film they produced</li> <li>- share product with mates</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- coordinates between student actors and specialist)</li> <li>- ensures a smooth work atmosphere</li> <li>- provides positive feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- monitors students' use of</li> <li>- supervises students' body language and facial expression</li> <li>- facilitates expression of emotions (through nodding, eye contact, feedback ...)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- coordinates</li> <li>- reminds of time (a scene of no more than 5 minutes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- monitors communication</li> <li>- guides editing</li> <li>- facilitates sharing the master scene with other students</li> </ul>
<p>Group work (students + teacher + a casting specialist)</p>	<p>Group work</p>	<p>Group work Collaboration with a specialist in film making</p>	<p>Group work</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- enhance collaborative work among students</li> <li>- identify students' individual potential and aptitudes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- enhance speaking skills</li> <li>- enhance expression of strong emotions (anger, disappointment, relief ...)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- enhance students' digital media skills</li> <li>- promote student motivation</li> <li>- develop students' sense of achievement</li> <li>- practice project-based learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- develop students' digital and linguistic skills</li> <li>- enhance collaboration</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assigning roles</b></p>	<p><b>Practicing the master scene</b></p>	<p><b>Filming the master scene</b></p>	<p><b>Editing and Sharing</b></p>
<p>3</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>6</p>





As shown in the Table 2 above and starting from step 2, working on the master scene would require the collaboration with film specialists, particularly in steps 2, 3, 4, and 5. It would also require special equipment that could be provided by cinema clubs and English clubs available in almost all schools.

### Assessing Students' Performance in Master Scenes

Assessment goes hand in hand with teaching and learning. Conducting master scenes in the classroom is a project that provides teachers with another opportunity for garnering information about their students' progress. Below are two checklists: one for teachers and another one for students. The teachers' checklist would be used to gauge students' performance and to keep track of their progress. It is a four point-Likert scale checklist, with 1 being "poor" performance, 2 being "average", 3 being "good", and 4 being "very good". The checklist could be used more than once, every time the student takes part in a classroom project. The second checklist would be used by students and would help them self-assess their performance.

#### 1 Teacher's Checklist

Assessing Students' Performance	
a - Student's Name:	.....
b - Class:	.....
c - Date:	.....
d - Project:	A Classroom Master Scene
<b>Scale:</b> 1: poor; 2: average; 3: good; 4: very good	

#### 2 Students' Checklist

Students' self-assessment checklist is based on statements of a dichotomous format requiring students to respond using "yes" or "no". Students would tick where it is appropriate to them. Its main purpose is to help students reflect upon their performance. Students' self-assessment checklists should not involve a long list of items, lest students be annoyed and eschew responding to it.

	Statement	Yes	No
1	I enjoy working in a group.		
2	I collaborate easily with my team mates.		
3	I listen to my team mates and ask for permission to speak.		
4	I ask my teacher or my team mates for help when I do not understand something.		
5	I love filming master scenes in the classroom.		
6	I do not hesitate to play the role that is attributed to me.		
7	I ask the digital media specialist for help when editing the film.		
8	I will always be willing to take part in making classroom master scenes.		

Criteria		Scale			
		1	2	3	4
Team work	Positively contributes to the making of the master scene Easily collaborates with team members Listens to other members and knows when to take turn Is creative (adds ideas to the group, makes suggestions, asks questions ...) Manifests enthusiasm and motivation				
Language	Deploys language that is appropriate to the scene Draws on prior acquisitions Speaks fluently and accurately (easy flow of speech, no hesitation, correct grammar and vocabulary ...) Uses effective communication manners (tone, intonation, pauses, pitch...)				
Body language	Adapts body language to scene requirements (eye contact, posture, gestures, voice audibility ...)				



## Conclusion

The objective of the present article is to highlight the uncontested pedagogical benefits of using master scenes in an EFL classroom. These scenes are not retrieved from ready-made films but are made by students themselves. Proponents of integrating master scenes in the teaching process maintain that such a project does unleash EFL students' anxiety about the language and ignites their motivation to learn English. The article also demonstrates that teachers are required, nowadays, to view their job differently. They have to work on common projects with their students, solicit specialists' collaboration and be ready to share these film projects with their colleagues. Bahloul (2012:2) argues: "Time has come for teachers, students, artists, parents, and administrators to embrace common projects through the lenses of the camera. Time has come to celebrate learning in and through the movies." Consequently, future EFL programme designers need to recognise the shift that has occurred in the profile of the modern time learners and plan lessons accordingly. The master scene plan and the two checklists involved in the present article are meant to help teachers meet these new needs and insert master scenes in their lessons.

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