VISUALS IN THE CLASSROOM

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF VISUALS

The teacher needs to have a wide range of resources in the classroom for his/her students’ development in the learning process. And these resources must include pictures.

Things that we see have an enormous importance in affecting and giving us information. The emphasis has to be made on giving the students “a reason” for listening, reading, writing or speaking. Visuals elements are, in this way, a very good “reason” in order to motivate students to interact with the foreign language because they can clearly “see” the language in use by means of meaningful elements which call their attention and, at the same time, motivate them to use the language in different ways. Moreover, the activities in which there are several skills practiced, or in which several things can be done, are more suitable for using them in the classroom than others in which there is only one possible task for students.

Challenges, on the other hand, can be a very important feature of every activity. The simple principle of introducing a challenge can make the foreign language a living and exciting element. Additionally, an activity is more motivating if students can have the opportunity of expressing themselves, using their words, talking about their ideas and feelings, etc.

**ACTIVITY 1: DESCRIPTION OF A PICTURE (picture)**

The class is divided into two groups (or more). The teacher shows a picture to one member of each group for a few seconds. Then, they have to describe it (in English) to their respective groups. The teacher waits some minutes till the groups finish drawing the picture. The winner group is that whose picture is more similar to the original one.

The element of challenge is present in this activity in order to make the description as motivating as possible.

**ACTIVITY 2: THE PARTS OF THE BODY (wall chart)**

The teacher shows the students a wall chart with a drawing. She/he puts it on the wall and then students can label the different parts of the body (placing the pieces of paper with the names in the right place). It is also possible to put it on some clothes, so students can learn and revise vocabulary related to the parts of the body and also to the names of some clothes.

It is a very visual activity, because students can clearly see the parts of the body, their names and some clothes. They can also change the clothes of the doll every day, or depending on the weather, their likes, etc.
**ACTIVITY 3: THE DOTS CHART (wall chart)**

The teacher shows the students a very different kind of wall chart. She/he explains the parts and how they have to complete it: it is a chart in which students have to mark the books that they have read and the films that they have seen, by means of putting on the chart colorful spots. They can choose their favorite colors, and also express their opinions, which is something motivating for them. The teacher can make a selection of some important titles for students to read or see the film during the whole course, choosing the level and (why not) the language of these titles.

By means of this simple wall chart, the teacher can clearly see the progress of each student, and also the success of the different titles among students. If all the students in general do not like some of them, the teacher can change it for following courses.

The personal element is present here. Students do not have to say only if they have read a book or have seen a movie, but also their opinions, how they feel about it.

The element of challenge is also present, because students will have to complete the chart during the course with spots, so this can be a living activity for them ("How many spots have you got?", "I have more spots than you!").

**ACTIVITY 4: THE BRITISH ISLES (wall chart)**

This activity is based on a simple wall chart of the British Isles (with the names of the main places). The aim is practicing the present perfect tense and the structure would like + infinitive. Students are asked to make sentences such as "I have been in...", or "I would like to go to...", and then they can stick colorful dots in those places which they have already been, or which they would like to go. The teacher can ask for volunteers, making them questions such as "Did you enjoy it?", "What is what you like more/less?", "Why would you like to go there?", "Have you known a lot of people?", etc.

So it is not only practicing the present perfect tense and the structure would like + infinitive, but also other tenses, vocabulary, grammar in general... To sum up: this activity is focused on the speaking skill, practicing many things that students have already learned.

Moreover, the personal element is present: students have the opportunity of expressing themselves, talking about their experiences, about their wishes, etc. It is also a great opportunity for the teacher to know a little more about his/her students, to be a little bit closer to them. So they can
feel more comfortable in class because it is a relaxed situation in which they also know each other.

2. **FLASHCARDS**

A flashcard is a type of card in which some visual element appears: it can be a picture, a photograph, or even a text. Flashcards have to be large enough for students to see them clearly even if they are far from them. They have also to be well cut out, and well colored in order to be easy to recognize. The name of the object can be also added.

They have the advantage that the teacher can prepare them at home, so they can be more attractive and colorful than a picture on the blackboard. Another advantage is that they can be used by the teacher more than once in classroom (it also happens with most visuals aids, such as wall charts, slides, pictures, etc). It is, surely, a feature of every activity that the teacher has to bear in mind: if an activity can be used more than once by the teacher, it will be more suitable than other activities than can only be used once.

**ACTIVITY 5: KEEP TALKING (flashcards)**

The class is divided into two groups (or more). One member of a group have to choose a flashcard (without being able to look at them), and then he/she has to be talking about the thing or person appearing in the flashcard for one minute, without stopping. Later, a member of the other group does the same. The marks of each group are followed by the teacher, who notes them in the blackboard.

This activity is considered as a competition game between the groups, in which the element of challenge is clearly present. Nevertheless, it can also be practiced as an individual exercise in which the teacher simply chooses some students for the activity.

Anyway, it is a very creative way of practicing the speaking skill and everything that students have already learned about vocabulary and grammar. It is also a great opportunity to express what they think, how they feel, their imagination, etc. To sum up, it is a simple and funny way of revising and having a good time.

3. **THE OVERHEAD PROJECTOR**

Though it can be a problem to have this object available in class, the overhead projector is very useful with large classes because the teacher can face the students as he is writing on the slide or explaining something appearing on it. The slides have to be prepared at home, but this is very useful because the teacher does not spend any time writing things on the blackboard: she/he has everything
prepared and written down in the slide. Then, some other explanations can be written down in the slide itself, or in the blackboard.

On the other hand, the overhead projector needs no special nor difficult preparation (its use is very easy, both for teacher and students). Masking, for example, is very easy with an overhead projector: the teacher simply needs to place a piece of paper over what he/she wants to hide. Then, this simple act made by the teacher can be used in order to create many creative activities in which students can use their imagination to guess the item that is masked, or in which the teacher uses the overhead projector as a creative support for his/her theoretical explanations.

**ACTIVITY 6: WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES? (slide)**

The class is divided into two groups (or more). The teacher gives to each group a copy of the two pictures, which have ten differences (nevertheless, the two pictures are also shown in the overhead projector by means of a slide). The groups have to discover the differences (talking among them in English). The teacher waits some minutes, asking them from time to time how many differences they have already discovered. When there is one group that discovers the ten differences, the teacher asks someone of the group to mark them on the slide, for everyone to be able to see the differences.

The element of challenge is also present in this activity, as a competition game between two groups.

4. **BLACKBOARD USE**

The blackboard is one of the most useful of visual aids: it is always available in classroom, and it can be used for many purposes without special preparation.

It should make things clearer to the class, but unfortunately many teachers use it badly. There are three main principles, which are very basic but teachers (and future teachers) need to take them always into account:

- Write clearly and large enough for all the students to read what you are writing.
- Stand on a side, not hiding what you are writing.
- Talk as you write in order to involve students as much as possible.

Then, I show my mates a slide in which two teachers appear in front of a blackboard. Their attitudes are very different: teacher A is doing what we should not do, and teacher B what we should do (according to the previous principles).

**ACTIVITY 7: BLACKBOARD USE (blackboard and slides)**
I present to my mates a slide with the image of a blackboard after a lesson. I explain that the lesson was about people selling goods at the market. The teacher introduced the past perfect tense, and students practiced with some sentences. The teacher also introduced key vocabulary for goods (mat, pot, basket), and added other words which were not in this lesson (plate, bowl). The teacher revised time expressions and introduced the new item midday.

I ask my mates to divide the class into two groups and tell me the problems that this specific blackboard (the one of the previous slide) has. I wait some minutes, and then ask them for their conclusions while I note them on the slide (the expected ones are the following:)

- It is too crowded. Some items could have been presented orally.
- The most important elements are the examples showing the past perfect tense. They should be in the centre.
- Concerning vocabulary, similar items could be closer.

One way of organizing the work in a blackboard is the H model, having areas for lists, for planned work, etc. At the same time as explaining this, I show them another slide with the image of the same blackboard, but with the work presented in an organized way to facilitate the students the understanding of the lesson, their main issues.

5. **CRITERIA FOR JUDGING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AIDS (slide)**

At this point, I will comment the following chart (by means of a slide) in which the most important features of every activity of this presentation appears. In order to complete the last column (called “Would you use it?”), I can ask my mates for their opinions (“Do you like this activity?”, “Which is your favorite activity?”, “Which is the activity that you like less?”).
6. **CONCLUSIONS (blackboard)**

To finish my presentation, I want my mates to think about the following questions, while I write their answers on the blackboard as follows (expected answers:)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of visual Skills practiced</th>
<th>Description of a picture</th>
<th>The parts of the body</th>
<th>The dots chart</th>
<th>The British Isles</th>
<th>Keep talking</th>
<th>What are the differences?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Picture</td>
<td>Wall chart</td>
<td>Wall chart</td>
<td>Wall chart</td>
<td>Wall chart</td>
<td>Flashcards</td>
<td>Slide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking, vocabulary, grammar</td>
<td>Reading, vocabulary</td>
<td>Reading, grammar</td>
<td>Speaking,</td>
<td>Speaking,</td>
<td>Speaking,</td>
<td>Speaking, vocabulary,</td>
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<tr>
<td>(present continuous, there</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>grammar</td>
<td>grammar</td>
<td>grammar,</td>
<td>(there is/are)</td>
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<td>is/are)</td>
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<td>(present</td>
<td>(present</td>
<td>connectors</td>
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<td>perfect; would</td>
<td>perfect; would</td>
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<td>like</td>
<td>like + infinitive</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Low-intermediate</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Intermediate-high</th>
<th>Intermediatel-high</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low-intermediate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Information gap</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Choice</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Feedback</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>Easy to prepare?</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>~</td>
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<tr>
<td>Easy to organize?</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>Would you use it?</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Why using visuals in the classroom? | Why NOT using visuals in the classroom?
---|---
- To provoke interest and motivation in the students | - Class books give confidence to the teacher
- To create a meaningful context | - Students are not strictly controlled (their responses, attitudes...)
- To give them a rich stimulus for learning | - It is easier for the teacher not to use his/her imagination
- To give them opportunities for expressing themselves and challenges | - Sometimes, it takes a long time preparing the activities
- To have a good time (both teacher and students!) | 
- The classroom has a personal, colorful and funny image for students | 
- Visuals provide the teacher with a great variety of activities |

I conclude my presentation saying to my mates: "I hope that you think the positive answers are much important than the negative ones". Then, I give them sweets to thank their active participation in all the activities of my presentation.

7. **BIBLIOGRAPHY**


8. KEY WORDS

development

challenge

opinion

option

attraction

practice

opportunity

feeling

game

motivation

meaning

learning

stimulus

imagination

color

interest

variety

participation

freedom
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