

Jim Scrivener Interview Summary

Cuts in

[00:00] JS discusses Harmer's competing book *The Practice of English Language Teaching* and its videos: teachers showing off wild and whacky things; expert teachers showing off their special extra tricks and things. Not what teachers starting out need. Felt a book for teachers starting out needed something more down to earth, step-by-step what you can (not must) do. Main interest has always been the absolute smallest basic techniques that can make a difference. Tweaking.

[02:18] Wanted lessons that teachers can see as good examples of teaching, but achievable. So in the third edition of his own book *Learning Teaching* he wanted a little library of small clips of small techniques – that include mostly relatively new teachers. Wanted to show that it's very possible to do things.

1 JS: yes and i wanted it to be lessons that teachers
2 could see as good examples of teaching without
3 being amazing over the top league. so brilliant
4 that people would say i couldnt possibly do that
5 which i think is very often a reaction when you
6 see. i mean im not saying her lessons arent good.
7 i think lindsays hour long lesson is a really
8 good example of a coherent lesson taught by a
9 very good teacher but its not sort of in your
10 face with its blinding amazingness. and for the
11 techniques theres quite a lot theres a little
12 library of very small technique short videos. and
13 those are mostly relatively inexperienced
14 teachers. i cant remember exactly but i think one
15 of them had only come off celta a few weeks
16 before. so relatively new teachers doing things
17 not perfectly not expertly but you know showing
18 that its possible to do things. that was very
19 much what i wanted to get out of it.

[03:30] (*Decision to include whole lessons and clips?*) Macmillan originally wanted just the short clips, but he argued strongly for a longer lesson. You need to see how small bits come together/how a whole coherent lesson breaks down into small pieces. Would've liked to have more longer lessons from different teachers at different levels. Also basic, mercenary publication reason: CELTA requires observations, some can be on video – if there was an observation lesson included, trainers would use it and buy the book. Over years various lessons published on video (e.g. IH – very expensive), but not a great deal out there to fit requirement to watch whole lessons.

20 SM: okay and can you talk a little bit about the
21 decision to include both the sort of whole
22 lessons and the clips and some of your thinking
23 around that with millin.
24 JS: originally they were going to just go for the
25 library of clips and i argued very strongly for

26 the long lesson. i think there was a number of
27 reasons behind that. one is because i think you
28 do need to see how small bits come together or
29 how a big thing is broken down into small pieces
30 whichever way you want to view it. whether its
31 small bits that add up or big bits that can be
32 analysed down. i think its best for you to see an
33 example of what a whole relatively coherent
34 lesson looks like how a teacher handles not just
35 the bravo moment but the small changes between
36 things. how a teacher deals with something when
37 somebody doesnt give the answer they expect. that
38 sort of stuff. all the things that wouldnt be
39 captured maybe in little techniques. so that was
40 one reason. i thought it was very important
41 to have that and i would have liked to have
42 a lot more single hour lessons from different
43 teachers at different levels but that was all
44 that was practically possible. the other reason
45 was a quite basic mercenary publication reason
46 that the celta requires an observation of. sorry
47 more requires a lot of observation of lessons
48 than some of which can be on video. but i thought
49 if there was a video on there of a good lesson
50 that could fit the celta requirements then
51 trainers would probably use it and therefore
52 there'd be a reason for people to buy the book.
53 so those are quite down to earth reasons for
54 including it.

55 SM: yes so theres not many options available for
56 trainers of full scale you know one hour lessons
57 that are fairly dependable and have open access
58 or whatever.

59 JS: yes. i think its still true even now. i mean over
60 the years various lessons have been published on
61 video. there was a big international house series
62 of video tapes. i dont know if its ever been.
63 has it been replaced with dvds. im not sure.

64 SM: yes it was replaced by dvds but its not online so
65 i think.

66 JS: and its very expensive or it was very expensive
67 anyway.

68 SM: yes.

69 JS: and theres not a great deal of stuff out there
70 that would fit the requirement to have you know
71 to watch video lessons.

[06:18] Biggest problem in getting videos: such a palaver to get good quality. The most experienced people are Cambridge exams - regularly film e.g. DELTA lessons. The problem is not the video, but the sound. Can get video even on single camera, but audio is a major issue – to get a real feel you have to hear not just the teacher, but also the interaction between students and between the students and the teacher - difficult to capture unless you mike up every student. One boom mike

doesn't capture it all, or you get background noise. A lot of teachers now able to film a classroom video on their phones that's good enough for reflection, but really hard to get a video of publishable quality.

[07:49] Has just been working on another book where they did a number of days of filming with classes, similar in some ways to the techniques clips, but when looked back at it, despite professional film company two cameras, lots of mikes, none of it was good enough for various reasons. (?) not good enough, camera missed key things, tendency to focus on what teacher was doing, not get the interaction between students.

[08:55] (*Basic requirements in terms of cameras etc. to capture something useable?*) JS not the technical person, but at a guess, minimum two cameras, one following teacher and another able to zoom in on interaction. One back, one side-front. Audio is the big issue. Depends on number of students – 12 students in a semicircle, still probably minimum three microphones. Doesn't remember how they solved the problem with microphones for his third edition (*of Learning Teaching*) – thinks there were lots of microphones. Also: relatively small class. Another thing: getting students to do these films is difficult. Logistics and costs of good videos are a big challenge. Wanted to have them filmed in large classes overseas, to see real teaching in real locations. Not possible. For English publishers, end up borrowing classes from language schools.

72 SM: but not on the whole. yes thats true. i dont
73 think theres a lot of video out there full stop.
74 but certainly theres a shortage of kind of full
75 scale lessons or longer clips that are well
76 filmed. because obviously theres a bit of a
77 production issue with just a camera at the back
78 of the class.
79 JS: well ive got things to say about that if you
80 want to talk about it.
81 SM: yes no id be interested because you know one of
82 the things that were trying to encourage is a
83 little bit more you know medium quality sharing
84 of video resources so id be very interested if
85 you had views on that.
86 JS: i dont know the answer to that because I mean
87 im not the technical person. but I would guess
88 that its a minimum of two cameras really. you
89 need one camera permanently moving around
90 following the teacher and one camera with
91 another not a static camera but another
92 camera able to zoom in on students student
93 student interaction student teacher interaction.
94 so one sort of at the back of the classroom and
95 then one to the side of the classroom maybe the
96 side front to capture students. thats the
97 minimum in terms of the video probably. but as
98 i say the audio is the big issue. the audio is
99 really really hard and unless youve got you

100 know maybe you could do it with say three. it
101 depends on how many students are in the class.
102 if youve got a class with forty students then
103 thats a big issue. but if youve got a class
104 with twelve students in a semi circle then youd
105 probably still need three microphones in front
106 of three sections of the room as a minimum.
107 SM: what how did you solve you know for your video
108 for the third edition do you know how they
109 solved the issue with microphones.
110 JS: i dont remember very clearly. i think there were
111 lots of microphones. i think if you look on the
112 desks i think there are microphones on a number
113 of desks and it was a relatively small class for
114 some of them. theyre all snow students. and thats
115 another thing getting students to do these films.
116 i mean therere so many. people criticise the
117 videos for various reasons and quite rightly. but
118 the logistics and the costs of creating a good
119 video. youve got to get the students youve got to
120 get the teachers. i mean my wish list was to have
121 them filmed in large classes overseas in you know
122 real secondary school and university classes with
123 forty students or fifty students or whatever. so
124 we could see real teaching in real locations. but
125 thats just not possible so you end up for
126 british publishers you end up borrowing classes
127 from language schools because thats really all
128 you can do.

[11:01] Discuss criticism that available videos show small classes in private schools.

JS: Teacher in Ecuador or Nepal not going to get much out of watching 6 students round a table in a private school in UK – so alien to anything they understand about teaching, as good as useless. One of the reason for doing techniques clips rather than whole lesson.

[12:14] (*Process of deciding which skills you wanted to use?*) A balance of things that seemed to be useful - book aimed at CELTA and Trinity courses, so what teachers typically need, balanced against what is demonstrable on a short video.

[13:25] (*What things difficult to show?*) Tends to be the things where it isn't the teacher doing stuff, but when students are doing stuff, i.e. are learning. A lot of classroom stuff takes ages, is quiet, difficult to capture. End up with teacher-fronted stuff, the teacher doing things to the students.

[14:30] (*Anything else you'd ideally like to do, other than large classes in different countries?*) Within that, also local teachers, so real teachers, real students, real contexts. Along with that, showing possibility of better teaching in contexts where people typically say it's not possible - sometimes just things the teacher is scared of. Show ideas can work in the context and students learn more than from (typical) lectures.

[16:05] (*How do trainers typically use the materials from the third edition?*) Thinks techniques used as part of seminars and trainees referred to them if they have a problem. Very short, so not a burden. Hour-long lesson often used as marking time for trainers while trainees do observation.

[16:41] (*Any unusual ways people have used the video content?*) People prepare worksheets but not otherwise.

[17:16] Should be lots more video in teacher education. When he was training regularly, lack of video was a pain, situation not hugely improved now. Thing you learn from is observing – learned more through observing than anything else. Not just steal ideas, but also absorb the atmosphere an individual generates in a classroom; can't get it all through video, but can get some sense. Just seeing other teachers being different is fantastic input – possible to be like this (not shadow or copy of teachers we've experienced and internalised). The more teachers observe, the better. Would be great project to prepare something like the IH videos, but with real lessons and classes, lots of teachers in lots of contexts, possibly also with extracts, so if didn't want to watch whole lesson, could just watch clips that focus on specific things. That, with worksheets – a course for in-service year after initial qualification. Just watching, coming together and talking about the lessons.

129 SM: yes no thats very interesting and the other side
130 of that is that you know.
131 JS: when i was training very regularly doing
132 celtas and trinities and things like that
133 the lack of video material was a real pain and i
134 dont think the situation has hugely improved. so
135 i think there needs to be a lot more available
136 not just for those courses but for all teacher
137 training courses because the thing you learn from
138 is observing. i learnt more from observing other
139 teachers than anything else in my career i think.
140 not just to steal ideas but just to absorb the
141 the atmosphere that an individual generates in
142 a classroom. and you cant entirely get that from
143 a video but you can get some sense of it. you can
144 think oh its possible to be that way is it. i
145 hadnt realised that you could be. i thought you
146 had to be like this as a teacher. because most of
147 us carry into the. This is donald freedman stuff
148 you know. most of us carry into our teaching the
149 thousands of hours we observed of teaching when
150 we were students in school. its the hidden
151 syllabus that we learnt the teacher. and then
152 typically a lot of teachers just carry that
153 process forward you know. they go in and they be
154 a copy or a shadow of the teacher that they were
155 taught by. and just seeing other teachers being
156 different is a fantastic input. so the more that
157 people can observe the better. and so i think it
158 will be a great project to prepare something like

159 the international house videos were but with real
160 different context classrooms around the world
161 large classes and lots and lots of lessons.
162 possliby also with extracted bits from those
163 lessons so people that dont want to watch a
164 whole 45 minutes or whatever can just watch
165 two minute clips that focus in on specific
166 things and draw attention to them. so that with
167 worksheets thats a teachers training course for
168 an in service year after youve done your initial
169 qualification. that would be a brilliant years
170 work just watching different lessons coming
171 together talking about them saying what you like
172 what you dont like.

[20:07] (*Macmillan promo suggests interactive video*) Going to reposition it as a digital thing – perhaps referring to a projected digital version, where it’s possible there might be an element of interaction. SM discusses NILE interactive tools.

[21:50] (*Anyone else doing interesting things with video? Let us know.*)
Closing remarks.