

# Bite-sized educational videos for young learners

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In the fast-changing landscape of technology and its influence on education, there are increasingly new possibilities for enhancing learning which match the expectations and realities of learners and their lives. Whereas adults and teenagers are often the focus of these changes, the most digitally native – the young of today – are often overlooked in studies and models of how new technologies, such as smartphones, can aid learning.

This paper puts forth a relatively simple and actionable pedagogical system using smartphone devices, which I am calling bite-sized videos. Bite-sized videos are short in length and created by the teacher. The content can include vocabulary or grammar work, storytelling, phonics, listening practice, and more.

To put this in context, firstly there is coverage of the framework in which this system exists, which includes computer-assisted language learning, blended learning, mobile-assisted language learning, and teacher-created content. The pedagogical model of using bite-sized videos is then explained and discussed with details of a case study involving teacher training.

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## Background

### Computer-assisted language learning

The primary use cases of digital devices to store, analyze, share, and access information correspond well with educational contexts and the needs of teachers and learners. Technology has gone beyond the possibilities of traditional teaching materials in terms of interaction, autonomy, multimedia, methodologies, data, and more. In the field of language education, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has opened up new processes and outcomes for teachers and learners (Warschauer, 2004). Nunan (2011) lists seven areas where CALL-based pedagogy outpaces conventional materials:

- individualized study plans
- anywhere / anytime instruction
- patient tutoring
- a private space to make mistakes
- immediate, individualized instruction
- detailed records of achievement
- self-paced learning

The intertwinement of education and technology has made it an essential part of a teacher's proficiency (Fotos & Browne, 2004), yet there are continual calls for teachers to reevaluate their implementation and understanding of how technology can enrich language learning (Beatty, 2003; Donaldson & Haggstrom, 2006). Educators and educational institutes are required to continually assess the technological landscape as it changes the possibilities and expectations of learners. This is especially necessary as new devices, technologies, and the Internet increase the digital domain within our lives.

### Blended learning

Advances in connected technology means that the traditional face-to-face classroom setting can easily be supplemented, or even replaced, by content delivered digitally. New pedagogical models have been made possible and streamlined by utilizing new technologies to enhance traditional course structures. Within the flipped classroom model, the course content and the application of that knowledge have be "flipped." The lectures that would have been given in class are delivered by video through digital channels on computers and mobile devices. Concurrently, the tasks that would be set as homework are transferred into the class time (Sharma & Barrett, 2007).

Blended learning is a more integrated approach whereby content is delivered in the classroom and supplemented with extra or duplicated virtual classrooms (Nunan, 2011). The blend is generally defined as “a mixture of online and face-to-face course delivery” (Dudeny & Hockney, 2007) or “a face-to-face (F2F) classroom component with an appropriate use of technology” (Sharma & Barrett, 2007). Nunan (2011) describes four models for blended learning:

- Model 1: The “traditional” classroom is supplemented and supported by technology.
- Model 2: Technology delivers the content and is supported by web-based live instruction.
- Model 3: Technology delivers the content and is supported by supplemental face-to-face instruction.
- Model 4: The fully integrated classroom.

Whereas previously, teachers may be involved in using technology in open or distance learning at an institutional level, now teachers are now able to create an ad-hoc blend of the real and the virtual classroom on a course-by-course basis by using available digital tools and services.

### **Mobile-assisted language learning**

In the current technological landscape, there are few devices as popular and ubiquitous as the smartphone mobile device. These computers in our pockets have combined many previous technologies from the telephone and messaging, to audio/video recorders and digital media viewing. This convergence has streamlined the systems that were previously possible only with several bulky machines and laborious processes.

This has led to increased research in the field, as well as new organizations and conferences, as we navigate this new territory. An example is the m-learning project, which is organized and funded by partners across Europe to investigate mobile learning for young adults with large-scale trials and research. Attewell (2005) lists the findings of research into the use of mobile learning:

- allows truly anywhere, anytime, personalised learning
- can be used to enliven, or add variety to, conventional lessons or courses

- can be used to remove some of the formality which non-traditional learners may find unattractive or frightening and can make learning fun
- can help deliver and support literacy, numeracy and language learning
- can help learners and teachers to recognise and build on existing basic literacy skills which allow young people to communicate in notational form via text messages
- facilitates both individual and collaborative learning experiences
- enables discrete learning in the sensitive area of literacy
- can help to combat resistance to the use of ICT by providing a bridge between mobile phone literacy and PC literacy
- has been observed to help young disconnected learners to remain more focused for longer periods
- can help to raise self-confidence and self-esteem by recognising uncelebrated skills, enabling non-threatening, personalised learning experiences and enabling peer-to-peer learning and support

Although the technocentric perspective dominates mobile assisted language learning (Winters, 2006), many are in agreement that more focus should be on the ‘assisted’ element of the acronym. Mobile learning is “not just about learning using portable devices, but learning across contexts” (Walker, 2006). It is perhaps this convergence between new technologies and new pedagogies that makes this field so interesting as it develops. As Sharples (2006) states, “We now have the opportunity to design learning differently: to create extended learning communities, to link people in real and virtual worlds, to provide expertise on demand, and to support a lifetime of learning.”

### **Teacher created-content**

With recent technologies and the pedagogical models made possible, teachers are now empowered to create and share content more easily. Teacher-created content (TCC) has become a pressing issue with concerns as far reaching as copyright (State Educational Technology Directors Association, 2014) and redefining the curriculum and rethinking the course book (Frank, 2016). As stated by Fletcher et al (2012), “it is not a question of if the reimagining of the textbook will permeate all of education, but only a matter of how and how fast.” Although it may take some time for institutes and teachers to

implement the possibilities available even with the tools currently at hand.

In an article about teacher-created content, The Study Help Site (ref, 2016) listed many benefits which are summarized below:

- a teacher can create resources, such as lesson videos, that are situated in the student's specific learning context, such as the student's learning environment, previous lessons, classmates, class emphasized vocabulary, etc.
- teachers can tailor content to address areas of confusion or build off areas of strength that might be systemic in their classes
- students benefit from interacting directly with the source of the course content, for example they have the ability to ask questions of their teacher, who has an intimate knowledge of the course's content
- a school can develop their own resource pool across all of their academic staff – reducing reliance on outside content providers
- schools also benefit from resources that are more focused toward the needs of their student body
- creating digital resources in particular allows teachers retain their best ideas for use across school years
- teachers can leverage their work from one school year to another
- teachers can sometimes earn royalties on their original content

Bite-sized videos, the pedagogical system put forth in this paper, encompasses teacher-created content, blended learning, and mobile learning.

## What are bite-sized videos?

Bite-sized videos are short videos created by and starring the teacher. The videos can be created with a smartphone, camcorder, or webcam with little or no editing. Because the recording is a short process, it can be done at the start of a course, or periodically during the course period. The video files are then shared with the students or their parents/caretakers by email, messaging or with an online service such as YouTube. Students watch the videos in their own time outside of the classroom using their home computer or a smart device that their family has access to. The video content is flexible to fit the learners' needs, interests, and the course content. Here

are some ideas:

#### Vocabulary

Vocabulary related to the course topics is selected. The teacher holds a series of objects or flashcards and repeats the words. Learners are encouraged to repeat the words after the teacher. Guessing questions and concept-checking questions are included at the end.

#### Grammar work

Expressions are taken from the textbook or selected based on the upcoming classroom activities. The teacher repeats the phrases and encourages the learner to repeat after them. Pictures, diagrams, and mimes can be used to provide meaning and check understanding.

#### Storytelling

The teacher holds the book so that it is viewable on the video and tells the story. Common storytelling techniques are used such as discussing the book cover, drawing attention to the pictures, and using character voices. Questions can be included during the story or at the end.

#### Phonics

Letters or letter combinations are selected based on the syllabus. Large printed or written examples of letters or words are displayed while the teacher models the related sounds or blending techniques. Alternatively, the teacher shows actions for 1~3 sounds so that learners can watch and follow, such as the phonics miming systems of Zoo Phonics and Jolly Phonics.

#### Listening practice

The teacher reads an article or reenacts a dialogue or monologue with a partner. An activity is given, such as choosing the correct picture or remembering a detail from the listening text. The activity can be included at the beginning, in the middle if the listening text is repeated, or at the end with the learner being required to watch the video again to get the answer.

Many of these videos include activities and questions, such as repeating, miming, or answering questions. Answers can be included in the video or saved to be covered during class time

at the beginning of class or as an exit ticket. Assessment of the learners' progress in relation to the videos depends on each case. Assessment can be built into the videos, as with the question or assignment suggestions above, or an added component, such as a handout to be completed for each video. Tracking of watching habits is also flexible depending on the autonomy of the learner. Options include a schedule/weekly planner agreed with an adult or worksheet completed by the learner.

## Bite-sized videos: A personal take

My personal interest in the use of smartphones for educating young learners came about from watching my son learn so quickly through the use of smartphone apps. At about two years old he developed an interest in numbers, perhaps due to an app called CutieMonsters. This app features cartoon monsters with spots on their body and limbs that respond with animated and spoken numbers when touched. Through using this app, my son quickly learned to recognize, pronounce, and correctly sequence numbers. This is when I realized the unique features of apps to provide the regular, repetitive, and fun practice that young learners need.

My son, who is now almost four years old, has now extended his interests to the alphabet, vocabulary, and expressions. Alongside apps which includes skills such as handwriting and matching vocabulary, he now watches videos of children playing. This category of videos on YouTube has become wildly popular, with channels such as Ryan's Toys Review getting close to half a billion views on some videos. As my son watches these videos, he repeats a lot of the expressions. Although some parents may dislike the use of smartphones and apps, I live in an English-poor EFL environment so this practice and exposure is welcomed.

Another personal experience related to language content delivered outside of the classroom was my first experience of scanning a QR code (a type of barcode) on an English language song book my son brought home from daycare. The QR code opened a link on my phone leading to a song video hosted on the publisher's website. As soon as I played the song, my son started singing the lyrics and miming the actions he had learned from his teacher. This was an eye-opening experience for me in how course content can easily transcend time and space through the use of technology, even though I had no

direct contact with my son's teacher.

It is within this context that I have become a proponent for teachers leveraging children's interest in technology and videos to provide more language practice that can be used to augment classroom content.

## Why bite-sized videos?

This section will include reasons for implementing a bite-sized videos system with links to research and theory.

### **1. Young learners are growing up with technology**

In 2007, when mobile digital devices were set to be revolutionized by the release of the first iPhone, Dudeney & Hockly (2007) stated, "Young learners are growing up with technology, and it is a natural and integrated part of their lives. For these learners the use of technology is a way to bring the outside world into the classroom." Indeed, this has come to pass, as many children now have no experience of using tethered devices such as landline telephones and desktop computers. For many children, mobile connectivity and Internet access is as much a part of their everyday lives, and their learning experience, as a television or a printed textbook.

### **2. The system is easy to set up**

Recording equipment is becoming cheaper and more accessible, whether it's a smartphone, a camcorder, or a webcam. Indeed, smartphone ownership is growing in most countries and many people have access to one. Recording video is now relatively easy and doesn't require specialist video production knowledge. Making short videos that are 'bite-sized' is also easy and less daunting than creating professional educational content. Furthermore, the content of the videos is chosen and organized by the teacher, so the teacher should feel more at ease with it than if it is enforced by an outside agency.

### **3. It encourages learning outside of the classroom**

One of the common laments of teachers, especially in an EFL setting, is that young learners often only spend a few hours a week in a language class and have little to no exposure outside of class time. Exposure to comprehensible language input is a key component of language learning, according to Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis. Providing enough language practice



for young learners to sustain interest, retain new language, and progress is an issue all language teachers have to consider. Terrell (2007) discusses the struggle to provide enough opportunities for young learners to practice and internalize new vocabulary and listening skills. Copland and Garton (2014) list the use of technology to increase language exposure as one of the areas that deserves closer attention in future young learner education. Bite-sized videos could be one technique for overcoming this issue.

#### **4. The videos can be graded and organized according to level**

The acquisition of language structures follows a predictable order (Krashen, 1982) and textbooks are carefully organized to reflect this. Bite-sized videos can be created for each step of language acquisition, from simple utterances in present tense to more advanced structures such as comparative and superlative form. Videos can be made according to units in a course or textbook, with vocabulary and grammar to match the sates of the course. The videos can then be presented systematically so that learners have access to future content and review content.

#### **5. Watching is self-paced**

Nunan (2011) lists self-paced learning as one of the benefits of using technology over conventional teaching materials. Indeed, issues concerning the teaching of multi-level classes is one of the most common questions that comes up in my experience of teacher training. Having self-access videos that support the course content would be one tool to assist in helping learners who are struggling to have multiple exposures to the language needed. The mobile and 'on demand' nature of smartphones further helps to create a pace that suits each learner.

#### **6. It provides opportunities for teachers to connect with parents to encourage learning**

The role of social support support in child development has been a focal issue since Vygotsky (1978) claimed its importance. Assistance by an older or more experienced other, which allows a child to operate at a high level than they can alone, was conceptualized as the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Closely related to the idea of a ZPD is scaffolding, a term coined by Wood et al (1976) to describe the support an expert can provide to a learner to help in completing a task. Parents of young learners can take a key

role in providing this support and scaffolding if they are considered in helping to deliver course content.

In setting up an online learning resource for parents and young learners, Terrell (2012) found that most parents of young English learners in an EFL setting wanted to encourage English use outside of the classroom and that they would speak English with their children when given specific tasks. Ultimately, it was found that the online resources “provide a useful way to providing practice of materials presented in class, which could be effectively supported by their parents” (Terrell, 2012).

In a workshop to define mobile learning, Winters (2006) and a group of teachers listed the relationship between the learner, teacher and parent/caregiver as one of key issues in using mobile technology for education. This relationship could be a key factor in the success of a mobile learning system with young learners, given that young learners have less autonomy and rely on their parents for structuring their lives and access to technology. Bite-sized videos provide the opportunity for parents to engage and motivate their children in learning.

### **7. The content is chosen/created by the teacher**

In my experience, teachers often tune in to the needs, social dynamics, and the interests of their learners. This is often called teacher intuition. Having the teacher directly involved in the creation of content for learners could help to tap in to this intuition and the knowledge the teacher has about the unique characteristics of their learners, whether this is cultural, social, or age appropriacy. Connections can also be included to make the video more relevant, such as the use of a class mascot or the classroom as a setting. The teacher is also more aware of the video content, and so they are able to reference and answer questions more easily than if the content is created by outside agencies.

Depending on each setting, the teachers may choose to include content to support vocabulary acquisition in relation to the textbook, or they may choose to use the videos as an extra component for content that couldn't be included in the class time, such as storytelling. The teacher can set up and arrange the balance of content in accordance with the needs of the course and their learners.

### 8. They could help to lower the affective filter

Krashen (1982) believed that the affective filters can positively and negatively influence language learning, for example self-confidence, motivation, and anxiety. In a wide-ranging project using many blended learning tools and techniques with four primary and secondary schools, the use of blended learning in Chinese language education was found to improve engagement, confidence, motivation, interest, behavior, and initiative (State of Victoria, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2012). The teachers involved in the project also increased their knowledge and confidence in using ICT whilst increasing their enjoyment of teaching.

Watching their teacher in the bite-sized videos, learning alongside their parents, and having the opportunity to re-watch videos may help to bring down this affective filter and provide encouragement, motivation, interest, and confidence. Having access to course content through computers/smartphones also provides a “private space to make mistakes” (Nunan, 2011).

## Issues

Although there are many potential benefits, there are also some issues that need to be considered. Several trials will be needed to find out the practical concerns that may arise. Issues may include:

- Internet and computer access
- Recording time and equipment
- Acceptance of this new way of organizing a course
- Tracking students’ viewing
- Choosing and trailing the content for the videos
- Assessing the success of the project

## Action research

To trial some of the issues surrounding teacher-created content, a video creation component was included in a graduate school TESOL course at a university in Seoul, South Korea. Seventeen participants, with teaching experience between 6 months to 12 years, were given the task of creating storytelling videos to use with their students. The assignment was presented as flexible to suit the teaching contexts of the participants, so they were able to choose the storybook and include the storytelling elements they felt necessary. The video lengths were dependent on the length of the book and the

speed of the storyteller. At the end of the assignment, a questionnaire was provided for feedback. The open-ended question provided some helpful comments regarding the assignment:

What are your opinions about this assignment?

- “I found it very useful and I can imagine myself making a teaching video in the near future. Students will be comfortable because they already know me in the video.”
- “I would like to use this system for young learner’s video portfolios such as kindergarten progress report.”
- “It’s hard to use a textbook in a limited time. However, if I make this video for storytelling it saves time. [...] Therefore, I’m impressed with this way to deliver the story, which is useful and practical.”
- “My daughter really liked it [the video]”

Many of teachers found it useful to create their own videos to be a useful project. One unintended outcome mentioned by several teachers is that they found it helpful to watch themselves and critique their own teaching and storytelling style. Peer feedback (watching the videos) was included in the assignment, but self-feedback was not considered in the planning stages. Here are comments pertaining to that:

- “The assignment gave me an opportunity to look through what’s my teaching style.”
- “Even though I read stories almost every day, I couldn’t have an opportunity to monitor the storytelling that I have done. I realized the weak point of my storytelling. I will try to fix this for my future storytelling.”
- “It was a good chance to see myself telling stories and consider things to improve for my future class.”
- “I’ve never experienced making teaching videos (I’m too shy to do this). Anyway, after taking a video, I’ve learned lots of things; I should practice at least twice before filming and should think of better storytelling for young learners.”
- “I can check my storytelling and get good opinions about it.”
- “I had to consider many factors like visibility, quality of audio (am I speaking clearly?), etc. Since I am teaching elementary school students right now, I think using this kind of video will definitely help me and students.”

Perhaps this is due to the teachers seeing the assignment through the prism of professional development due to its

inclusion in a course, rather than the effects this technique may have on their learners. It may be useful to look into this more and find out how videos could be used for reflective self-feedback.

A list of tips and suggestions for recording were developed after the assignment based on some of the issues found in the videos:

#### General tips

- Consider the background. A plain wall is best.
- Face the best lighting source, e.g. a window or lamp.
- Hold your materials or storybook close to the camera to fill the screen.
- Don't move your storybook/materials around too much.
- Buy a book stand to prop up your materials if necessary.
- Record multiple takes and choose the best.
- Short videos (3~12 minutes) are better than longer videos.
- Add titles, subtitles, text screens with extra information, key words, questions, or your website.

#### Recording on your smartphone

- Buy a cheap tripod or stand if you plan to make many videos.
- Record horizontally, not vertical.
- Edit using an inexpensive app such as iMovie or Pinnacle Studio.

#### Recording on your computer

- Upgrade your microphone if necessary.
- Check the settings on your webcam and record at the best quality.

Further research is needed, specifically into aspects related to implementing this with young learners, to uncover some of the issues around delivering content, its effects, and working with parents/caretakers. I hope to do some of this research in the next few years if circumstances allow.

## Conclusion

Several advances in technology and educational fields have led to new options for teachers to implement in their courses. Computer-assisted and mobile-assisted language learning have made blended learning a practical solution for many teachers who want to provide more for their students. The

proliferation of smartphones has increased and simplified technology and access, but also created a new way for teachers to create and share content. Although there are many studies and organizations concerned with implementing these possibilities with older learners, there are many opportunities for helping young learners.

Using bite-sized videos is one possibility for teachers of young learners to use technology and implement a simplified version of a blended learning system. There is a lot of potential for this new teaching model to enhance existing courses, but further research is needed into the practical implications.

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