

MEDIA WORKSTATION

The Matchstick Figure

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“What if the teacher ‘cannot’ draw?”



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In instruction visuals have many key roles to play. Heinich *et al* (1999), succinctly refer to the visual's role as to provide a concrete *referent* for ideas; to *simplify* information; and as a *redundant* channel: helping learners to comprehend visually what they might miss verbally.

Most visuals used in the classroom are pre-prepared by the teacher, often presented complete to the class as an *iconic referent* to a point being made during a lesson. At times, though, there can be a need for *progressive disclosure* of a picture, or of pictures within a narrative framework.

This can be achieved by slowly peeling off masks from different parts of a pre-prepared visual, or uncovering friskets on an OHP transparency, but just as effective, and at times more so because of the 'personal' element involved and the originality of the material used, is the spontaneous drawing of the sequence on a black or white board.

The generally acknowledged use of the board nowadays is as a means of displaying impromptu material (Ellington & Race, 1993), so actually building up a *live* visual narrative for the students to interact with fits perfectly that suggested usage.

One problem. What if the teacher 'cannot' draw, or can draw 'only a little'? In either case, trying to create the impromptu visual narrative would be useless, as students trying to guess what the image represents tends to defeat the point of the iconic nature of the exercise, in which they (say, during a language lesson) are prompted into saying a sequential series of words that describe figures and actions, and that finally form a whole composition.



a narrative sequence from Johnson & Johnson (1971)

Which is why the use of matchstick figures is suggested. Easily learned and swiftly rendered, these figures make for easy recognisability, and lack of clutter makes necessary cues effective. Of course, there are rules that need to be followed also in this. For example, iconographic and representative consistency is expected: a woman must always be drawn the same, as must a man, a dog, etc. (Johnson & Johnson, 1971), so a certain amount of training and planning is needed. But once that is in place, the simplicity involved assures success.

References

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