



Film as a learning tool

Film is a dominant medium in the lives of most children, and indeed most grown ups. Be it TV, cinema or You Tube, we use film as a source of entertainment, information and communication. So learning about film making is not a distraction from the traditional curriculum, rather it is an increasingly relevant medium which we should be teaching children to use effectively.

Making a film of any length is a cross curricular process which develops both academic and personal skills. From planning to final publication, the process requires strategic thinking, communication, artistic vision, awareness of audience and purpose, mastery of technical skills, patience and collaboration. Whether children work their way through storyboards and scripts, or whether they make it up as they go along, they are developing their skills at organising and expressing their ideas in a logical sequence that makes sense to a viewer.

The process of making a film covers many curriculum subjects, but there is no area of the curriculum that cannot form the content of a film. And film is not necessarily made by pointing a video camera at live action. Animation, slideshows, and a host of interactive computer applications can produce real time footage which can be assembled into a film. Anybody can capture footage on a cheap phone or camera. Judicious editing, the addition of soundtracks, graphics and special effects can be used to enhance the content. It is just as important to learn how inappropriate production can detract from the meaning.

Film can be used as a storytelling medium, as an art form, or as a reporting device, to document a learning process. Whatever its purpose, film is a medium that requires an audience. When children write in an exercise book, they may have no expectation of a readership beyond the class teacher. However, when they make a film, they will expect to show it to family and friends. Therefore, they are forced to consider the needs of the viewer. Difficult decisions have to be made: it is easy to shoot hours of film, but challenging to choose the right bits to include. Setting a maximum time limit for the final product really focuses the attention on precision and economy of expression.