

RESEARCH INTO
'LES ENFANTS DU
CINEMA'
AND OTHER RELATED
FRENCH PROJECTS
LINKING SCHOOLS AND
CINEMA

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INTRODUCTION

The research took place over a period of four days in Paris during which a three-day conference organised by Enfants du Cinéma was taking place. The researcher was able to attend the introductory sessions of this. In addition, interviews were carried out with personnel from the following organisations:

Centre National du Cinéma
Ministry of Culture
Ministry of Education
Les Enfants du Cinéma.
Cinema managers who participate within the scheme.
Regional educational inspectors.

In comparing comments made by all interviewees with elements of discussions that have taken place within the Film Education Working Group so far there are a number of significant differences which are worth highlighting from the outset:

- None of the interviewees had any problem in dealing with the concept that there were “quality films” which students should see; the fact that there was a canon of films which were important and that students should have access to.
- There was a genuine belief that film should only be seen in the cinema in the best possible circumstances - good print, excellent sound system and projection.
- There was a lot of hostility regarding bringing film into a study of other media . Film was seen as something very separate and not to be confused with television studies, communication studies or media studies. Film was perceived as an art form above other media and thus should have special consideration given to it.
- All activities related to film came under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture. In France there is no need to add the idea of Media to Culture (and then link it with Sport). Culture; its teaching, its existence and the sense that there was both a filmic culture and a French culture, both of which were worth preserving, were totally accepted by everybody.

A TIME OF CHANGE

It is interesting to note that just as in England and Wales, the French education system is undergoing a transformation at the moment. Of relevance to this study, the Minister of Education is insistent that study of “the Image” be introduced at all levels. This term is all embracing - paintings, advertisements, television, internet, games, sculpture and in there somewhere, film.

Obviously, the organisers of Ecole et Cinéma and the CNC are fighting hard to preserve the space that they have created especially for film and cinema. One thing in particular which concerns them is the move to place part of the “Image” education into out of school projects. All are in agreement that cinema should stay as part of the school day and thus retain the validation that this gives it as an important cultural form and activity.

Standing in the way of this change is lack of teacher expertise. So, at the moment teacher training is high on the agenda of all three organisations - Ecole, College and Lycéens.

THREE PROJECTS - ONE AIM

30 years ago there were 10,000 cineclubs in French schools, showing “important films” to students and thus, it was hoped, creating a more cineliterate audience for the future. Teachers who ran these cinema clubs were to become some of the new cinema managers of what we would term art house cinemas in the 70’s and 80’s. Thus, there are cinema managers with this passion not only for film but also with an educational background.

TV and video killed off the cine clubs but the zeal of the organisers remains.

In 1989 Colleges au Cinéma was founded by the Centre National du Cinéma. Its success was based on the fact that the Ministry of Education agreed that cinema visits could form part of the school curriculum, thus overcoming the attitude that this activity was merely “fun” and had little educational value. Effectively, the cultural experience of cinema going was validated.

The principle of the project is that schools register with a local organiser and that students will then see a minimum of 3 films a year in their local cinema in school time at reduced prices. Two films are screened each term in the participating cinemas. The programme is aimed at students aged between 12 and 15 years old and is divided into two sections, one for the lower and one for the upper age range.

The films (25, which are rotated year by year) which constitute the overall annual programme are selected by a panel. More details on this process are given later

Teaching materials for students and teacher resource packs are produced for each film in the programme and are circulated to schools and colleges participating. Each local council will select 12 films from the overall programme to be run in their area. Local groups are formed which deal with the selection of

films consisting of local government officers, educational advisors, teachers, cinema managers and directors of local cultural affairs.

Individual cinema owners do run courses for teachers to introduce them to the theory behind the teaching of film, although this is by no means widespread. Cinema managers do usually introduce the film and place it in its context so that students are aware of the issues of the film which are raised in the study material.

In 1994 Ecole et Cinéma was founded by the organisation Enfants de Cinéma with the backing of CNC. This project has much the same aim as Colleges but is obviously aimed at the 5-11 age range. Its basic mechanics are the same - a range of films which are programmed locally by panels of managers and teachers.

In 1998 Lyceens au Cinéma , run by CNC , came into being, putting the final part of the jigsaw in place - the 16-18 year old audience.

Key points:

- Only Ecoles au Cinéma has a full time organising body. The other two projects are run out of CNC.
- All three projects produce support materials for teachers participating in the scheme as well as materials for students.
- Funding for all three projects comes from CNC. However, at the departmental level, funding comes from a variety of additional sources - local council, county council, education departments and, of increasing importance, DRAC (Directions Regionales des Affaires Culturelles)
- Key concerns at all three levels - transport, finance, training of teachers and also cinema managers.

COMMERCIAL BASIS

All three projects are based on a commercial footing with regards distribution and exhibition. From the outset, in 1989, a deal was arranged which set a basic ticket price of 12FF, this receipt to be split 70% for the exhibitor and 30% for the distributor.

CNC takes charge of producing copies of the films and also subtitling.

Looking at the figures in Appendix 3 one can see that with an annual box office of £2.4 million, for certain distributors and exhibitors, the three schools projects

make a substantial contribution to their business. The schools project in particular form an important part of the income for distributors of what might be termed “smaller” films.

THE FILMS

The films which form the project’s programme are chosen at a national level by a panel which includes teachers, the organisers of the projects, film critics, representatives of cinema owners and academics. The criteria of choice are as follows:

- a) films recognised as cinema classics
- b) contemporary films which have been critically acclaimed
- c) films which are interesting cinematographically which give a perspective on other cultures
- d) films of different styles and from different countries
- e) films whereby permission can be obtained for screening and for the making of new copies.

Teachers who participate in the scheme can also put forward their suggestions. Last year 210 titles were proposed by teachers to be included in the scheme at the Colleges level. This figure was immediately reduced to around 50 simply because prints were not available of the other films, or that there was no longer a French distributor for the films.

In each of the projects, about five films change each year. Within the 25 films that are available for choice, approaching 50% will be French. One “film” will be made up of a series of short films and there will be a documentary film available for booking.

The selection is made up on a 50/50 basis of classic films and what are defined as “films of today”.

Because the films are pre-booked in the March of the preceding year to the project, the organisers can calculate how many prints of each film will be needed. Some films will have only one print in circulation. In Ecoles et Cinéma, the maximum number of prints of any one film is currently eight.

Over the three projects there are currently 600 prints of 75 films. Because of the high pick up in Colleges au Cinéma, there are proportionately higher numbers of prints of certain films in circulation.

One key factor is the quality of the prints. All three organisations believe that each print should be of the highest possible quality. However, this is not always the case and certain prints of popular films start to show wear and tear very quickly. The organisers believe that more training is needed in the care of prints as they travel round the country and manager and projectionist training are a priority here.

At a local level, there is great variance as to how the cinema programme is selected. In certain areas there are committees of teachers who work with the cinema managers in order to select the films. In other departments, it is the cinema manager alone who creates the programme.

Selection committees can consist of a small number of teachers or representatives of every school which participates in the scheme.

EXHIBITION

Prints are created for the project and are then held by the distributor. It is up to the regional/departmental co-ordinator to book the films directly with the distributor. However, as has been stated, Enfants de Cinéma are aware of the possible requirements for each film.

The experience so far with regard take up of individual films is interesting. Many teachers will “play it safe” with their selection - *The Crimson Pirate* was the overall top film last year (played in 18 departments). Although films are regularly changed within the programme, the teachers tend to stick with films that they have seen before.

Certain cinemas will run previews for teachers. Again, there is great variance across the country. New films to the list will be shown in some cinemas. Others will show the most popular films as preparation for the teachers. Other cinemas will not hold any previews.

What is interesting is that in certain locations, the managers with the help of the local inspectorate and teachers participating in the scheme will produce additional materials for the teachers to use in the classroom.

SCHOOLS

There are no direct links between the films within the programmes and the school curriculum. It is left to teachers to decide how they will fit the film seen into their teaching. It is believed that the study of film and the viewing of film are culturally important and therefore should happen.

Every teacher participating in the scheme will receive a “Cahiers de notes” on the films for which they have booked. These contain a series of essays, often

written by an academic, which deal with the themes of the film as well as notes on the director and cinematic aspects of the film (film as art). They will always have a breakdown of one particular scene, shot by shot, with an analysis of the scene. These “notes” are meant to inform the teacher and are not directly related to classroom practise. It is up to the teacher to decide how to approach the film.

Each child who attends a screening is given a leaflet with information about the film and also images from the film. This is true at all levels of the projects from Ecole to Lycée.

In reading the evaluation of “Ecole et Cinéma” it is interesting to note that a number of departmental reports raise the issue of the gap left by the materials - it is often felt that there should be more guidance in how to deal with a film in the classroom, suggested activities that the teacher could carry out.

There has also been requests for more generic packs about film and Ecole et Cinéma have responded with a study video which has recently been published, looking at the creation of sequences (although not necessarily from films which form part of the programme.). In addition the CNC have produced a study video on Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal*.

The analysis of sequences from the films screened is hampered by the fact that copyright laws in France forbid the use of videocassettes in schools. Thus it is not possible for schools to review films and carry out a close study of a particular sequence.

Because of this approach it is difficult to suggest what the learning outcomes of such activities could be. Certainly, in reading some of the evaluations one would have to conclude that the key outcome is that children are exposed to a variety of films that they would not normally see and thus their experience of culture is widened. Beyond this we can only suggest that in each classroom there will be a different outcome.

At certain levels of the project, particularly at the Colleges au Cinéma stage, many managers point out that the students who come along are there simply “for the experience” and that as far as they are aware neither preparation for the screening nor follow up work is carried out.

EVALUATION

i) Performance Indicators

Put very bluntly, there aren’t any! The projects are valued on a cultural level and providing that attendance levels are acceptable and that the materials that are circulated are of high quality then the projects continue as part of the general cultural development of students.

One could say that the cinemas set the performance indicators in that if a manager believed that the operation was not financially viable then they would withdraw their cinema from the scheme. Similarly, if the distributor believed that it was not worthwhile to have their film in the scheme they would not participate.

Certainly at the Colleges au Cinéma level, many distributors actively seek to get their films included in the list as this can provide a useful secondary revenue for films.

ii) Overall Evaluation

This is carried out at a local level. Teachers are sent questionnaires asking how they followed up the screening in school and what benefit they thought their students got from the cinema trip. However, it appears that this is not carried out in every area and there has not been any attempt so far to pull together the results of these local evaluations into a document which would give a national perspective on what happens in “film education”. The large evaluation document produced by Ecole et Cinéma is mainly a “number crunching” exercise and description of what happens as opposed to the value of what happens. It is assumed that because the children are seeing “good films” then it is a “good thing”.

iii) The inspectorate

The people from the inspectorate with whom we spoke seemed vague about what their expectations were of the project. Because it dealt with culture and involved children in looking at the 7th Art, aroused their imagination and involved them in an activity with which they could relate, then all was well.

With the current introduction of study of “L’image” we are certain that more criteria will be applied to the projects. Currently there are a number of top level meetings being arranged between the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of National Education, the CNC and the members of Les Enfants de Cinéma to discuss the future of the projects within “image education”. We have asked that we be kept abreast of all developments.

iv) General

The overall feeling is that the effects of the programme will only be seen in years to come and it is impossible at the moment to evaluate the results of what is happening at all levels of the project.

The fact that more and more departments wish to participate in the schemes suggests a positive reaction to the whole scheme. Currently, Ecole et Cinéma restrict the number of new departments joining each year to 5. The departments

must show a commitment to the project by committing money and also training possibilities for teachers.

COMMUNICATION

Key to the whole programme is the departmental co-ordinator. This will be a cinema manager or representative of the cinema. Attached to this person will be someone from the local educational inspectorate, but it is the cinema manager who is key.

He/she will co-ordinate the programming, order prints, be responsible for publicity, distribute all teaching materials to the schools.

They in turn are accountable to the national co-ordination body, Les Enfants de Cinéma, who are in return accountable to the CNC and the Education Ministry. Feedback seems to be in the form of an annual report although we assume that at a regional level the education authorities will also oversee what is happening.