

What types of learning are taking place when students are editing film?

It is interesting that when I set out to do this piece of research that I felt I could almost write the paper beforehand. I was 'that' sure that I knew what the outcomes would be. As an experienced teacher of English and Media Studies I felt as though over the years I had already seen the evidence in my class that would prove my intended outcomes and aims. How wrong can you be?

Aims and objectives

My aims can be encompassed under one heading, to find out: 'What types of learning are taking place when students are editing film?' I wanted to find out what was going on in students' minds when they edited; what skills they were using; what they were learning. I was also interested to know if any of these things could be transferred into other areas of the secondary curriculum.

I also wanted evidence of learning gains to take to the head teacher in order to gain funding for further film equipment, but also to try to get her to find a way to introduce Media Studies onto the Key Stage 4 curriculum at Great Torrington Community School in the form of a GCSE. At present it is a module within the English GCSE only, and for some time I have been 'nagging' for us to offer Media Studies as a GCSE in its own right.

Lastly, but most importantly, I wanted the students in my classroom to have a really good time; to enjoy the process of making a film. During the course of

their everyday schooling, particularly at Key Stage 4, students' days and lesson times are so organised and dictated for them that there is little freedom for such expression, fun, and dare I say it.... creativity. Most of the time we spend cramming them full of facts, exam technique etc. I wanted them to have a good time, and in doing so to feel more positive about their English GCSE and Media work. In 'Across the Curriculum' Hilary Radnor says:

'.... it is argued that to be an educated person – to be able to take control over one's everyday life – improves the interplay of the theoretical, the practical and the productive. This view emphasizes that learning in school should take account of this, and should not just be about acquiring facts and information. Time has to be built into the curriculum to engage in learning strategies which help the learner make sense of that knowledge, incorporating it into an existing meaning and value system, so that the learner can use that knowledge to improve his/her ability to operate in real situations.'

(Page 12. 'Across the Curriculum' Hilary A. Radnor.
Cassell 1994.)

I hoped that here I was building-in that time.

Planned outcomes

Loosely I thought the outcomes would fall into five major categories: communication, group work, technical skill, moving image literacy and creativity.

Communication

As I embarked upon this research I believed that editing film increased communication skills within students; that while editing they would discuss what they wanted for their outcome and that meaningful communication would develop. That students would engage with each other and thus the process of editing would benefit students by increasing their confidence and exercising their speaking and listening skills, which in turn would lead to an improvement in said skills. I also believed that the oral benefits were directly transferable to other curriculum areas and that teachers of other subjects would gain.

Group work

As pupils were going to work in groups of four this was seen from the outset as a group activity and I was sure that film editing would foster and develop group skills. I felt that students would have to negotiate with each other as they decided upon their outcomes; that they would need to compromise as each individual vision of what they wanted to create became a group vision. I also saw here an opportunity for promoting leadership skills: that from each

group a leader would come forth who would help the others work together to produce a final product.

I believed that as an enjoyable experience group editing could really have an effect upon students' group skills that could be directly transferable to all areas of the curriculum. I hoped I would see here something that could help me persuade colleagues in other subjects that using film in their teaching could be a means to improve the way that students worked together.

Technical Skill

In producing their films students would have to acquire technical skills to use the equipment: in this case the digital video camera and a new, relatively simple editing machine, the 'Casablanca Avio.' As many students had not used the digital camera before, and none had used the editing machine at all, I knew that they would have to quickly acquire the technical knowledge they needed to successfully produce their film. I was confident that one of the outcomes would be that students in my classes would become adept at using digital film and editing equipment.

Moving Image Literacy

Students cannot edit without learning and using some of the specific media language that goes along with making films. I felt that becoming articulate in media 'speak' would go hand in hand with acquiring technical skills. In lessons

preceding our film production I had introduced the language of camera shot, movement, sound, lighting and editing. As students began the production of their film they were rapidly beginning to use the jargon related to shooting the film. I knew that when they began editing they would soon begin to use and become familiar with the technical language needed to communicate when editing.

Creativity

Most people would agree that editing film is a highly creative act – that the process of editing what you have filmed i.e. putting the film together in the most meaningful and aesthetically pleasing way, is in itself an art form – editing is part of the creative process that produces a work of art – the film! I thus thought it obvious that students were going to exercise their creativity and that again this would have a spin off into other curriculum areas.

About the school and the pupils

Great Torrington Community School is a secondary comprehensive in rural North Devon. There are approximately 900 students aged 11-16 on roll.

The students used for this research project were from year 10 and were two English classes (10Y and 10X.) Students were mixed ability ranging from level 2 on the English National Curriculum to level 8. The groups had been working on media as part of their GCSE English. This study is in some part based

upon all students in these classes, but mostly on one group from each class. From 10Y: Philip, Louise, Eleanor and Matthew (Philip's group) and from 10X: Paisley, Simon, Leitza, Gemma and Richard (Paisley's group.) Philip's group were all very able English students – all expected to gain grade A*. Paisley's group was very mixed ability, including two very able English students (Paisley and Leitza;) and a very able ICT student, but one who really struggles with literacy (Simon).

Preparation and Implementation

After learning in August 2001 that we had won a Best Practice Research Scholarship our initial preparation was in the form of a seminar at The Media Education Centre in Exeter on Thursday 14th October. It involved talking over the project and developing an idea of what everyone was to do. I already had an idea what I wanted to do before I got to the seminar and it was there that I finalised my contribution to the project. I was to look at the learning in process, as a case study. I knew I was coming up to the media studies unit of the GCSE with both of my Year 10 groups and intended to use these to observe students editing.

On return to school I chose to begin with the 10Y group. Normally I would have both classes do the same work at the same time, but for the purposes of this research I thought I would work with first one class and then the other, thus giving me further opportunities to collect data if I needed them. Also, the nature of the Avio machine meant I could only have three ongoing film

projects at any one time and if I had potentially twelve groups from two classes wanting to work on it at one time it would become unmanageable. As it turned out, it was fortuitous that I worked this way as it made the final outcome much more interesting.

I began by introducing to the pupils some of the technical language they would need for filming and editing: camera shots, movements etc. We then practised spotting them using Sarah Sugarman's short film 'Anthrakitis.' The intention being that they start to think what effects they could produce within their film, and also start to get used to using this new technical language.

10Y were then set the task of producing a short 2-3 min. film using a specific genre and asking for imaginative use of the camera for effect. They were asked to plan in storyboard form and had 15 min. to do the filming and one hour lesson to do the editing.

Philip's group were set a differentiated task in collaboration with the Food Tech. Department designed to give them extra challenge. They had to produce a 5 min. 'slot' for a cookery TV programme on African cookery using a visit to the school of an outside guest. To prepare for this they had researched cookery programmes on TV to determine what types of camera shots, angles and movements they would need.

The groups then worked in rotation: filming, editing and working on a piece of film analysis. This type of 'workshop' working was very successful as it

allowed students to all be engaged in something meaningful, and allowed maximum observation of the editing process.

Regarding the machinery, I did not teach the whole class how to use the camera and Avio at once, it seemed impractical to try to do this. Instead I gave the first group as it set out to film, a five minute 'this is how the camera works' lesson. It was very basic as I wanted them to explore the possibilities themselves and experiment with the equipment. Thus once further groups came to film, someone from the last group would give the demonstration. Thus the students were teaching each other how to use the equipment.

When we had first got the Avio, I had been taught how to use it along with two Year 11 students. I had given them a filming job straight away and they had very quickly become adept at using the machine. Thus I had two experts to call upon and for the first editing lesson I took them off timetable enabling them to teach the first group ready to edit (Philip's) how to use the machine. They in turn taught the next group and so on. The more students that used the machine, the more 'teachers' I had to call upon. This was very successful as it meant I was not having to spend time teaching students how to use the machinery, and also because each 'lesson' tended to be very basic and thus the groups also learned by actually using the equipment. A very 'hands-on' experience.

Collecting data involved observing students editing and taking notes. I also used film and cassette tape to gather visual and aural data so that I could

manage and work with the rest of the class, then watch or listen to the 'editors' at leisure in my own time. Gathering data took several lessons and stretched over several weeks for each group. For 10Y this part of the research process took place during October and early November 2001.

On November 13th 2001 I had a mentor visit from Hilary Radnor. I was grateful, I had all this data and did not quite know what to do with it. Hilary's visit lasted two hours: for the first hour she observed and interviewed Philip's group, taping the conversation so that I could later use it; she then spent an hour with me helping me to find direction and focus on where to go next. I was also given valuable advice on how to write up my initial case study.

For the remainder of November and early December I gathered further evidence from the class mostly in the form of interview, and mostly from Philip's group.

By mid-December I had a lot of data: on film, on tape and in the form of notes. The data on film was useful; it was interesting that sometimes it was difficult to hear what the students were saying because of noise in the rest of the classroom: working in a 'workshop' way was bound to be noisy; yet even during those times when I could not make out what students were saying there was still a lot of visual data available. Filming was also useful because it meant that data could be gathered even when I was not there; a Learning Support Assistant filmed Philip's group editing for a whole hour when I was away at a meeting.

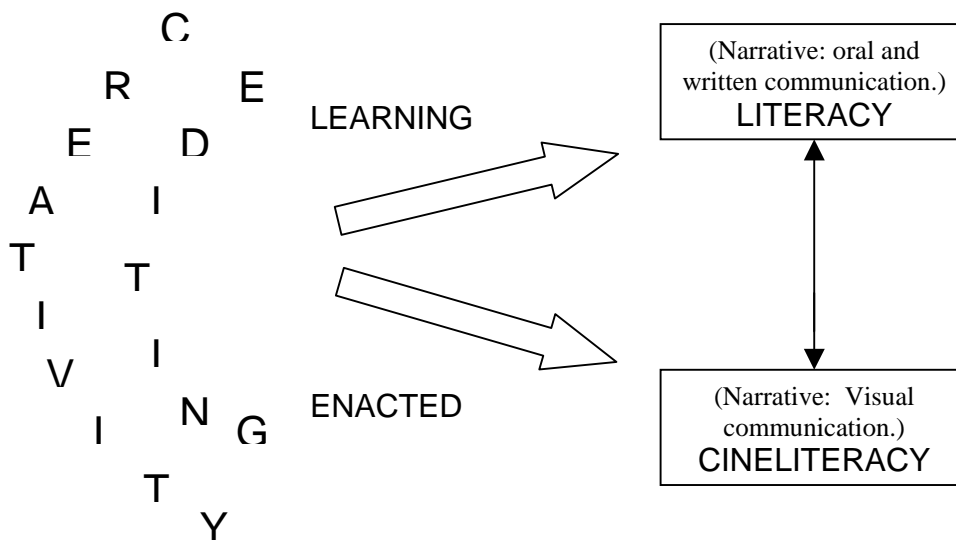
Data on tape was fascinating, it meant I was forced to really focus upon the talk that happened when students were editing.

Finally my notes – mostly I wrote down quotes – things students had said; though at times I made judgements in the form of notes about what they were doing.

I found all the data useful and after Hilary's visit had some idea of what to do with it.

The second half of December I spent drafting my initial case study. During this time I remained in email contact with Hilary, asking questions and for advice. On New Year's Day 2002 I finished my piece and emailed it to Hilary.

There was then a respite until the next seminar on 8th February 2002. This was very interesting as it was a chance to see what others had been doing and how the research as a whole was coming together. We were also given some really useful suggestions for reading. I found it fascinating that all six of us were focusing on entirely different areas and I felt we were thus really complementing, and learning a lot from, each other. Hilary was the central pivot of all this action, the one with the overview who was ensuring that all of us were working to produce everything needed for the final write-up. It was at this seminar that Hilary Radnor came up with our model:



We really began to see that what we were doing here was groundbreaking.

This seminar moved us onto the next phase of our project and gave us further direction. It was decided that as my first class had worked under really tight constraints: that they had to storyboard their film and had a set time etc. that my second class would be given a lot more freedom. Thus 10X were just asked to produce a short 2-3 minute film and given as long as they needed to film and edit.

From February to March 10X worked on their films and I collected data.

Giving them more freedom threw up some difficulties however; it was not as easy to manage within the classroom. Because of lack of time constraints it took much longer for each group of students to finish their film than it had the 10Y group and ensuring that everyone was engaged in meaningful activity for such a long period really stretched my teaching ability to the full. Working in a workshop style meant I could not teach the whole class without some

students missing out as they were out filming or editing etc. I got round this by developing several media tasks and teaching to small groups within the 'workshop' environment.

Data collection for this group was the same as that for the 10Y group: in the form of film, tape and written observations.

It was also during this period that I immersed myself in some reading: see reading list.

On 19th March I had my second mentor visit from Hilary. It differed from the first in that this time she spent the first hour observing Paisley's group editing and in discussion with them, and the second hour in discussion with Philip's group. We did not have time to meet and so Hilary sent notes and a tape of the discussions in the post. We then had several emails where Hilary again helped me to focus upon what I was to do next and what other data I needed to collect.

The rest of March and the beginning of April I spent looking back on my original opinions and views; my data; and gathering further data from Philip and Paisley's groups.

June 14th was our final seminar; all were present with the addition of Mark Reid from the British Film Institute. It was fascinating sharing our data and discussing outcomes, I could really see the whole research coming together.

As before we were given instruction and advice about how to write up our final piece and the deadline of 14th July: it seemed ominously close!

The end of June and beginning of July was a frantic race to write up the final case study. I emailed the first draft to Hilary who came back with several changes and new ideas; thus finally on 12th July I sent the final version.

It was over.

Actual outcomes?

Observing students edit is a fascinating activity, there is an awful lot going on. Initially pupils need to overcome the problem of working with the technology. It proved easy to learn how to use the Casablanca Avio; students rapidly became experts and then taught others how to use it. In a matter of 5 minutes they were going from sitting 'cold' at the machine, to starting to edit their material.

The first thing one observes is the group dynamic, in general there tends to be much discussion about which parts of film to download, where to cut and trim individual scenes and in what order they need to go. This tends to be done with real thought; a real wish to get the best possible outcome.

Students tend to stay very focussed, they are glued to the screen; there is intense concentration, even in a noisy classroom with a lot of groupwork going on.

Once scenes are downloaded and students are ready to begin editing this seems to be where the real challenge lies. Downloading scenes is straightforward; if things are not right students know they can manipulate them to get what they want. Editing the scenes is different, they want the best possible outcome and a lot of work goes into achieving this. It was found that when filming what most groups tended to do was to film the scenes in order; editing became merely trimming scenes, sequencing them, adding transition effects between scenes and then finishing them by adding titles and credits. Thus, for most of the students the editing process was not always the most creative part.

For Philip's group this was not so. They had not known what was going to happen on the day of filming so had to film everything they could and then try to impose some sort of structure upon it. Paisley's group had a similar experience in that they had filmed both within school and at home. Both Philip's and Paisley's group had more material than the other groups and it was out of sequence when filmed.

Editing for both these groups was a real challenge, it was a lot less constrained and thus there was a lot more flicking from scene to scene to remind themselves what they had as they were trying to sequence it. For

example, at one point Philip's group were looking through the scenes and stumbled upon one for which they had spent a long time looking. They then had to find where it went which meant going to the sequence they had made, going back to the beginning, watching and slotting it in where they had wanted it. Both Philip's and Paisley's group had a much more 'realistic' experience of digital film editing than the majority of the students.

Comparable for all students was that once the sequence was in place and the groups happy, it was a matter of finishing off: adding transitions, titles, music/dialogue etc. Students really liked that they could do all this because it made the final product look really professional; but it was during the editing process that some really interesting aspects came into play.

As an observer it was difficult to determine exactly what was happening; one could see what pupils were doing, but it was difficult to try and work out what was happening internally. As observation time mounted up however, several things were coming to light.

Initially after working with the 10Y group I believed that an important factor in editing was group work: the negotiation, compromise, merge of ideas and leadership skills needed to create the end product. Every group observed had a leader – or an editing leader, not necessarily the same leader who decided things at the planning stage. It was they who tended to do most of the editing with input from the rest of the group. Louise who became the leader of Philip's group said that editing was not really a 'multi-person task,' she thought it

should be a maximum of two, possibly because in her case it seemed that she and Eleanor did most of it; the others tending to be observers who chipped in an idea now and then. Louise had a point; she said that there was a conflict in the individual vision of what the final film needed to look like, and the group vision. Had she been alone she could have just 'gone for it,' whereas in a group there had to be constant negotiation.

Negotiation as communication is very important in a group situation. In Louise's case she and Eleanor, in the boys' absence, had downloaded the scenes onto the Avio from two different cameras. Because the boys had no input here, when they came to edit they did not have half the things they wanted as the girls had not bothered to download them – they had not communicated their part of the vision – they ended up opting out of the editing process, this being one of the reasons, they did not feel they had enough ownership of the film.

Nevertheless, after observing the 10Y group I did believe that working as a group was a very important factor in digital video editing in the classroom; that editing as a group developed communication and group skills; that unless groups could compromise, there was no final outcome.

When I got to observe the 10X group however, specifically Paisley's group, I had to question this belief. Paisley very quickly became not just the leader of the group, but a dictator – the final film was down to her and her alone – she was in control all the time. When editing, the mouse was constantly in her

possession. On occasions when others in the group would try to suggest something, she would argue her case to get her own way. If she did not get her own way then she would often move on without a decision being made to the next clip or task.

When Simon tried to influence the editing he was mostly ignored and would give up. However when Leitza repeated and supported Simon's suggestions Paisley would then take it up and give it a try. These occasions were few and far between though; it was largely Paisley's product:

Leitza: I think you should let Simon have a go.

Paisley: Yeah... but I know what I'm doing now... I will mess it up if I give it to Simon.

The use of the pronoun 'I' is very interesting here, how can 'she' mess it up if Simon is doing it? She means that if Simon does the editing it will mess up what she wants and it will not be her vision of the film – in her head it has become her film and she wants total control. After this input she carried on editing and the rest of the group – perhaps seeing they had not got a chance – began to talk about something else. They were completely off the task.

Throughout, the talk indicated the activity of the group: silence tended to be Paisley editing and the others watching as silent observers – this tended to be the same in all groups; discussion, ranging from quiet, calm discussion to sometimes very heated, indicated coping with the group dynamic or trying to

get it 'right'. Often there would be 'near' silence – a kind of half speech by the editing 'leader' described by the Russian linguist and psychologist Vygotsky as:

'The very individualized activity of 'inner' (private) speech is characterised by abbreviation and the condensation of meaning, the use of idioms and predicates which appear, in comparison to 'external' (public) speech, 'disconnected and incomplete'.
(*'Assessing Achievement in the Arts'* by Ross *et al.* OU. P 60.)

To the observer and the group it did not make sense, but we understood it for what it was; it was merely the editing 'leader' talking to herself with her inner voice filling in the gaps – to her the talk made sense.

Common to all groups was the rapid acquisition and usage of the necessary technical language, 'language that adapts itself to the particularities of the object addressed' (*'Assessing Achievement in the Arts'* by Ross *et al.* OU. P 61.) As editing time passed students became more confident and thus proficient, in using the correct technical terminology. Hearing words like 'splice' and 'trim' became commonplace; and by the time students came to write their GCSE assignment they had fully taken on board the terminology. I felt they had taken it on board much easier and more quickly in doing a

practical task, than when I had previously taught classes to analyse film in the absence of practical experience.

What did I learn?

The biggest impact for me was to learn that perhaps editing is an individual activity. When Louise had said that editing is not really a 'multi-person task,' that it should be a maximum of two, she had a point; she said that there was a conflict in the individual vision of what the final film needed to look like, and the group vision. In Paisley's group this was proven to be true. Louise had said that had she been alone she could have just 'gone for it' whereas in a group there had to be constant negotiation. Louise however is a very accommodating, passive personality; a confident, strong personality like Paisley had no qualms whatsoever about 'going for it' – she did not want negotiation as it was *her* film.

(When offered a suggestion) "No... I know what I'm doing... I know what I'm doing!" (said with much force.)

It is interesting that before observing Paisley's group it had been easy to believe that group work was an important feature – it had seemed that groups were having to negotiate and compromise to create the end product. There would be discussion about where to trim scenes to best effect and how to go about sequencing them. Within this group the final product belonged to Paisley – to the extent that towards the end of the process the rest of the

group gave up and Paisley came along to the classroom to finish it off by herself, reinforcing the opinion of Philip, 'You can only have one editor.' Revisiting original observation tapes and notes it could be seen that in fact few of the groups really produced a 'group' film; that there tended to be a dominant character who took control most of the time with other group members chipping in ideas now and again that either would or would not be acted upon.

If this is the case, that it is not a valid group activity or one that increased communication skills, the question I had to ask myself was 'is it a valid learning experience at all?' What types of learning *are* taking place when students edit film?

It seems that it is experimental learning, students were learning by doing. In 'Multimodal Discourse' by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen (Arnold, 2001) they state that 'production:'

'Refers to the organisation of the expression, to the actual material articulation of the semiotic event or the actual material production of the semiotic artefact. A whole other set of skills is involved here: technical skills, skills of the hand and the eye, skills related not to semiotic modes, but to semiotic *media*.' (P6.)

In other words they are not just articulating, but it is 'hands-on' learning. They had a quick 'lesson' on how to use the Avio, but they were learning all the

time how the machine worked and constantly experimenting with it. Paisley with her hand ever on the mouse would move between clips, to special effects, preview them, select the best one, then add to the sequence of the film. For her, and the other editors to a certain extent, it was an extremely creative process. In what is largely a sequencing activity – putting things in order until it makes sense; like a jigsaw puzzle, it works in the right order to tell a story – it is a case of developing the most creative sequence.

There was a feeling that they were really learning, really thinking, really gaining knowledge. Dewey in 'Democracy in Education' (1966) puts forward the theory that knowledge 'results from the creative power of the individual' that 'thinking and doing are intimately related,' (Hilary Radnor 'Across the Curriculum' Cassell 1994. P12 and 13.) Watching students edit was this in action.

For some: Paisley and Louise, they created structure from non-chronological material - they *really* experienced the editing process. Yet because students start with what has been downloaded it is creativity in a very disciplined way. Philip found this constraining. Comparing it to writing he said that when you write you have the ideas in your head and a blank sheet of paper, you can put anything down, there are no constraints; but the editing process is like playing with Lego, you are constrained by the shape of the blocks, there are some things you cannot do – which is like editing, you are constrained by what you have got on film. To use his comparison to writing, it is like trying to write a story after having been given the words: there are still infinite possibilities, but you are under some constraint. Philip found it frustrating 'you get lots of things buzzing around in your head, and then you find out you can't do them!' At one point his plaintive rang out in class 'I'm allergic to editing!'

Yet Louise got a lot from this, 'it can be very haphazard, you don't have to start at the beginning.' She felt that the process gave her a lot of freedom. On the one hand 'it is a very simple, repetitive task,' but on the other, 'when you are sitting in front of the machine there is always something different you can do.' When asked to elaborate on that she offered: 'you can cut the scene

there, or there, or there; and sequence it differently; in general if you aim for the perfection that is in your head it's always ok.'

Which is clearly what Paisley did. She had the 'vision' from the start and when the material did not match up to the vision then, as Louise had said, she worked out another way of doing it so that it made sense. It is about adapting to circumstances, working with what you have got and can do rather than what you *wish* you had and *could* do. In 'The Power of Mindful Learning' (Addison Wesley 1997) Ellen Langer states:

'In a mindful state, we implicitly recognize that no one perspective optimally explains a situation. Therefore, we do not seek to select the one response that corresponds to the situation, but we recognize that there is more than one perspective on the information given and we choose from among these.' (P108.)

Paisley worked hard with the machine to make sure that her final product was as good as it could be. And this is where the whole process comes into its own. As Langer says, there are many possibilities, and if students go with what they can do and what they have, this is a very valuable experience for them. That it is in fact a classroom activity, a learning strategy, that encourages students to take risks and work things out for themselves; it is that 'time' that Hilary Radnor as previously mentioned feels will help a student 'operate in real situations.'

Of course, within the English classroom the whole point of the students partaking of this exercise was to produce GCSE English coursework. The GCSE syllabus dictates that this has to be in the form of moving image analysis, so practical work that students did would not go towards their GCSE grade. However, the marks that these students gained for these analyses after spending time making and editing film was significantly improved compared to marks previous students had gained who had not taken part in

practical activity. Their usage of the technical language was more fluent; they were more at ease with it, and having spent time being 'directors' and 'editors' themselves they had more of an understanding of and sympathy with what the film directors and editors they were working with were trying to achieve. As a teacher of media studies within the GCSE curriculum I could see the value of spending time with students on practical digital film editing; and will certainly ensure that future GCSE students will get this input.

As far as using the data to offer GCSE Media Studies within its own right, I have to be more inventive. Time cannot be found to offer this as an option within our Key Stage 4 curriculum so I am looking into having pupils opt for Media Studies instead of English Literature if they so wish. Would I have done this had I not done the research? I cannot answer that, but I know the research has made me determined to find a way to offer Media Studies to students as they clearly enjoy it so much, and get such a lot from it.

And is there a benefit that can be transferred into other curriculum areas? Can I use this to convince teachers of other subjects that using film in the classroom has benefits? I think there is and I can. As digital editing seems to be an individual activity and therefore not a valid group activity, or encourage communication skills, there are other things that I think benefit the wider curriculum. This idea of digital video editing as a learning strategy that can help individuals manage more 'successfully in everyday life' (Radnor P11) must be transferable. This unique version of creativity must also reap benefits in other curriculum areas; I guess to prove these things further research needs to be undertaken. The one thing I can be sure of that is most definitely transferable to all other areas of not only the curriculum but also their life is the boost in confidence that these students received. They all produced something that looked like a real film, something they were proud to take ownership of; seeing the smiles and pride upon their faces when seeing their name on the credits and hearing their peers applaud was one of the greatest gains of undertaking this research.

Finally, something came up that I really did not expect and that is the benefit to my own professional development as a teacher. This past year I have been working in a way that I have not experienced for a long time. Spending seminar time discussing educational theory with fellow professionals, reading the kind of texts I have been reading, and getting back into writing educational papers has made me determined to do more. Our last seminar left me feeling incredibly sad that it was almost over and I realised just how much I have enjoyed being a part of it. I have since embarked upon work within my school designed to research and share good practice with a view to improving standards across the board; doing this research has I believe given me the confidence to do that. I am also looking to embark upon an MA programme; again, without this experience I am not sure that would have happened.

So, I set out to ensure my students had a 'damn good time.' They did. And unexpectedly, so did I.

Gill Clayton

8.10.02

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