LEARNABOUTFILM

CREATIVE FILM IN SCHOOLS

ffilm CYMRU WALES

Noddir gan Lywodraeth Cymru Sponsored by Welsh Government

Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru Arts Council of Wales
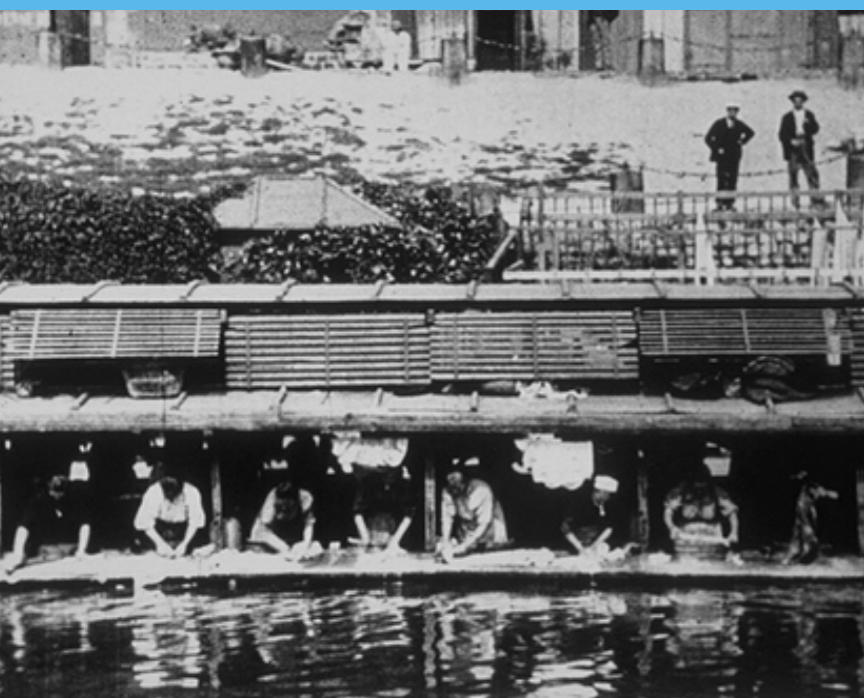
BFI

THIS REPORT DESCRIBES AN INNOVATIVE FILM PROJECT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN SOUTH WALES.

Film and Digital Media is one of the five disciplines in the Expressive Arts area of the new curriculum. So how can Primary school children learn about film and use it creatively?

With the support of Ffilm Cymru Wales and the British Film Institute, Learnaboutfilm piloted a project that involves film viewing and filmmaking.

We based our approach on the long-established international programme Le Cinéma, Cent Ans de Jeunesse (Cinema, 100 Years Young).

This Paris-based project takes one theme each year and builds a structured series of filmmaking activities around it, linked to a curated selection of film clips. Children work through a set of filmmaking 'challenges', then go on to create a 5-10 minute 'film essay'.

The project broadens children's experience of film culture, develops their understanding of film language, and encourages thoughtful, informed filmmaking. Film educators in Europe call this approach the "three C's": cultural, critical and creative.

Written by
Tom Barrance, Learnaboutfilm

Project funded by
Ffilm Cymru Wales
British Film Institute

The schools
Jenner Park Primary School,

St Andrew's Primary School, Newport

Ysgol Ifor Hael, Newport

STARTING THE PROJECT

We worked with schools in Newport and Barry, most with a high level of social deprivation and ethnically diverse catchment areas.

We began the project with a training session for the teachers. I provided introductions to film education principles and practical filmmaking with iPads, and Mark Reid of the BFI introduced the CCAJ project and the clips and activities.

We originally delivered this training face to face, but when we restarted the project after lockdown we provided downloadable pre-recorded videos instead. We also gave the schools a package of PDF resources and Learnaboutfilm's interactive iPad book Making Movies Make Sense.

The theme in 2020-21 was 'Time in Cinema'. Mark Reid put together a ten-week suggested scheme of work for the schools to follow. You can view it here.

To get started, the children looked at the most basic kind of filmmaking: a short, continuous shot with a camera that doesn't move. They watched the Lumière Brothers' Washerwomen on the River, (1897) and talked about how it shows time.

Then the children made their own 'Lumière Minutes' to show time passing. They filmed things like sand flowing through an egg timer, or a paper aeroplane dangling in the wind.
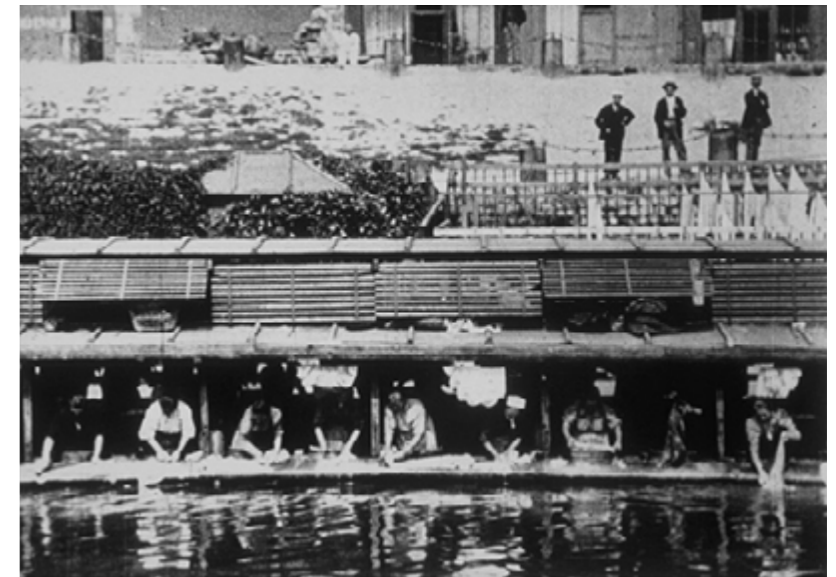
There are at least three kinds of time in this film. The washerwomen experience time differently from the men watching, and the flow of the river is another kind of time.

A Lumière Minute from Jenner Park Primary School.

FILM CHALLENGE 1: THREE SHOTS

The first of the two CCAJ challenges was to film three separate, single shots that would explore how films show the passage of time. These were:

- a single shot that shows time passing (the 'imprint' of time)
- a shot that includes an element of tension or pressure, such as a race against time
- a shot that shows a physical transformation.

© Bill Viola

Bill Viola's video installation, The Dreamers, provided inspiration for the second shot (tension, pressure or a race against time).

Ysgol Ifor Hael used a timelapse to show an ice lolly melting.

FILM CHALLENGE 2: LONG TAKES AND EDITED SEQUENCES

The second challenge asked the children to film one scene or action in two different ways. First they filmed it as a single, continuous 'long take': an unedited shot where the camera can move.

Next, they filmed exactly the same action, but as a series of separate shots. Most films are made like this. They're filmed and edited so the movement seems continuous and seamless.

When I was able to visit the schools I demonstrated this to the children.

First, I got one child to come to the front of the class and act out a simple action. The child walks into the shot, pauses, sees something on the floor, then picks it up.

I filmed this whole action in a continuous long shot (head to foot) from the side.

Then, I got the child to repeat the action several times while other children filmed them. Each time, the shot was different: a mid shot (hips to head) from the front, a closeup of the face and a closeup of the hands. Then the child who was acting filmed the object as a 'point of view' shot.

Then I showed how to edit the five shots together so the sequence seemed to show a single, continuous scene. I did this by 'matching on the action': cutting when the action is at the same point in each shot. I also showed why it was important to film from one side of the action, so the shots made sense when they were edited together.

Then the children worked in groups to film and edit the same action for themselves.

The opening sequence from Orson Welles' 'Touch of Evil' is one of the best-known long takes in cinema history.

THE FILM ESSAY

The final 'Film Essay' asked the children to work together to make a longer film. The CCAJ guidance allowed up to 10 minutes, though we suggested five.

The final film had to include these :

- 'Showing' and 'Telling';
- at least one change of pace;
- sections where the action is set aside, so the viewer experiences the passage of time.

The schools took different approaches to this. One did the film as a whole class, with every child in the class featuring in the final film; another divided it up into groups of five or six, with each group making a different the film.

At the end of the Summer term we arranged an online screening where the children showed and talked about their films.

This film essay, from St Andrew's Primary School, tells the story of a search for a dragon.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

To develop children's understanding of shots, one teacher devised a photo 'scavenger hunt'. She sent children out with an iPad and a crib sheet asking them to film examples of different kinds of shots such as birdseye shot, closeup and extreme closeup.

PROJECT IMPACT AND CHALLENGES

The teachers reported that the film project helped to engage and involve children who were normally reluctant to participate in activities.

The project impacted positively on many different aspects of the curriculum, particularly oracy, teamwork and taking turns, and playing roles within groups. The Lumière minutes provide an opportunity to consider timing and maths.

The children really enjoyed the 'transformation' activities and took the time to plan them carefully.

Some groups got very excited about the project, planning it out of school hours and during playtime.

One girl repeated the 'match on action' activity independently at home. One quiet child really enjoyed acting; another took the role of camera operator very seriously.

There were some challenges. Teachers reported that the children's behaviour and concentration had suffered over lockdown. One teacher said that her pupils found it hard to concentrate on the longer film extracts, and that a more action-based theme would have been more engaging for them.

The CCAJ project model includes training for the teachers, and film education practitioners working directly with the learners. Due to Covid restrictions the training had to take place online, and my visits to the schools didn't take place until they were well advanced with the project.

FILM AND THE CURRICULUM IN WALES

The CCAJ approach maps closely onto the curriculum for the Expressive Arts, which states that

- children should have equitable opportunities relating to the five disciplines, including film and digital media;
- there should be progression in terms of complexity, control, depth and independence;
- children should work independently and collaboratively, and experience "styles, genres and creative texts across all disciplines and spanning people, places, cultures and time".

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE CCAJ APPROACH

If you want to use this approach in your school, these are the key elements.

CULTURAL

Children can learn a lot from films of different cultures, styles and periods. You won't have access to the entire CCAJ film bank, but there are other options.

- Many of the Lumière Brothers films are available online.
- Into Film's Film Clubs (free in Wales) provide access to a wide variety of films.

CRITICAL

Children should develop an understanding of how films tell stories, and the different techniques that filmmakers have used.

CREATIVE

Children's viewing and critical understanding should inform purposeful filmmaking.

TIPS FOR SCHOOL FILMMAKING

BUILD FROM THE BASICS

Start with simple activities - 'Lumiere minutes' or even still photographs - and add activities of increasing complexity.

KEEP IT SHORT

Whatever type of film your learners are making, it should be short. Even a thirty second film takes time to do well.

FILMMAKING WITH IPADS

All the schools on this project used iPads for filming and editing. They're easy to use, and most schools have them, but they have some disadvantages. They aren't great in low light, they can be hard to hold steady, and it can be hard to see the screen when filming outdoors.

APPS

All the schools on this project used iMovie, Apple's editing app. VN Editor is another free app you could consider, which also works on Android devices.

These tips can help you get better results filming with iPads:

- Use a soft cloth to clean the lens. Dirty lenses will give smeary images.
- Make sure there is enough free memory for recording video - school iPads are often full. You can delete unwanted photos and videos. To actually free up space, you'll need to open an album called 'Recently Deleted' to remove them permanently.
- Check that the editing app iMovie is installed. iPads sometime 'offload' apps to save space.
- Use a tripod or clamp, or rest the device on something.
- Get the children to practise holding the device steady while filming.
- Make sure the children film enough: at least ten seconds, or five seconds before and after any action.
- Teach children to film away from the light.
- Teach them to lock the exposure (by touching and holding on the screen), to stop it changing while filming a shot.

CINÉMA, CENT ANS DE JEUNESSE

You can see some of the previous year's projects, suggeted films and activities on the CCAJ website here:

https://www.cinemacentansdejeunesse.org/en/resources/all-the-questions.html

You can view a selection of young people's 'Lumière Minutes' here:

https://www.cinemacentansdejeunesse.org/en/lumiere-minutes.html

and more about the original Lumière Minutes on this page:

https://www.cinemacentansdejeunesse.org/en/programme/first-shots.html

SOME OF THE CHILDREN'S FILMS

LUMIERE MINUTE

Playground

TRANSFORMATIONS

Ice Lolly

Tea

FILM ESSAYS

The Betrayal

The Tail of the Dragon