Film Education and Media Literacy: An English Perspective

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Abstract

This paper is in three sections. Firstly, it unpicks the term "media literacy" and the ways it has been deployed in Anglophone culture; secondly it presents an argument for the place of film education within a wider educational agenda, and thirdly it describes an approach to film education that I've been associated with in England, which is intended to illustrate and underpin the other two topics.

Media Literacy

Most of us tend to be quite properly polite and humble in our approach to other languages. We tend to believe that these foreigners must know what they are talking about and that the meaning of what they say can be explained, objectively and logically. So when I am asked to explain why the term "media literacy" has come into fashion I think it's assumed that I will be able to explain how the term can illuminate the field and take our thinking forward; in other words to show that there are good reasons for using the term "media literacy" and that when we use it, we know what we mean.

Unfortunately, however, media literacy has been, on the whole, an unhelpful term: it's confusing, obfuscatory and, very often, marginalising in its effects.

Before I go into an account of how this has happened, I need to provide a bit of linguistic background. The word "literacy" itself does not translate easily from English into other languages. This is because, in English, the noun "literacy" and the adjective "literate" can both be used in two ways: on the one hand to denote a basic functional competence in reading and writing, and, on the other hand, to denote a high level of general cultural understanding and communicative skill. In German you would use the term "Kompetenz" for the first meaning and "Bildung" for the second. In French, they use "alphabétisation" for the first meaning, and, interestingly enough, they can never seem to agree on how to translate the second meaning.

Obviously these two meanings are not neutral. Each has its own ideological baggage, related in each case to underlying beliefs about why literacy is important and what it is for. Are we talking about the basic competence of being able to read simple instructions and write a basic sentence or two? Conservatives may see that as quite sufficient for working people because they would assume that such people have no need for access to the kinds of text that might give them unsuitable notions of their own importance – things like radical newspapers or maybe even the Bible. Or are we talking about literacy as a key element of emancipation: as a means for people to lift themselves out of drudgery and oppression, and to participate fully in social, cultural and political life? Historically, the idea of universal literacy in this sense has always been a key theme in radical politics, and, historically, conservatives have usually been opposed to universal literacy as a dangerous, destabilising proposition.

More recently however, the term "literacy" has also been sadly devalued and has lost much of its power to stir up debate. In the USA, there is a long-established tradition of using the term "literacy" as a sort of campaigning tag. By adding the term "literacy" pretty much any topic, it's assumed that you can provide it with a claim to entitlement: if it's a literacy, then it's important and everyone ought to have it. So for example we have had scientific literacy, health literacy, visual literacy, digital literacy, emotional literacy, information literacy, game literacy and media literacy, to name but a few.

So what have been the effects of starting to use the term "media literacy" as a policy headline?

I will describe this from the UK point of view. We have quite a long tradition of media education, dating from at least as far back as the 1930s.[i] Since the 1970s, the best-known aspect of media education in the UK has been the fact that we have a number of specialist Media Studies and Film Studies courses for 14-18 year olds, leading to qualifications that can help students to gain access to university. However, these courses are all optional, and, although they are taken by over 100,000 candidates annually, this is in fact only about 7% of the age group. More recently, it's increasingly been argued that media education is more important than that: it ought to be available to everyone, and it ought to start with much younger children, and some progress has been made in establishing this principle: for example, there are small elements of media education in the mainstream school curricula of all four UK nations, although this is not supported by teacher training or assessment and the quality of work is very uneven.

At whatever level media education takes place in the UK, it's generally agreed that it ought to include the study of all media. So film, television, radio, press, magazines and popular music have all been taught as part of media education, and the tradition continues with the inclusion of computer games, websites and social networking in media teaching today. There was an older tradition of film education in the UK until the 70s, when a more heavily theorised version of media education began to emerge, in which film was seen as part of popular culture.

But when the new Labour Government under Tony Blair came to power in 1997, film and other media began to be treated rather differently in the policy arena, and this has now begun to affect the development of media education.

One of the first decisions by the new Government was to invest generously in film. It set up the UK Film Council to fund and promote British film, and this new bureaucracy behaved as bureaucracies always do, creating whole slew of new film organisations around the UK. It also took over the funding of the British Film Institute. Later on, Gordon Brown also gave £11 million directly to set up another new and completely separate organisation to run after-school film clubs for schoolchildren. The impulse behind all this – to try and improve the cultural status of film in the UK – is admirable, but the execution of the plan has been muddled and the failure to consult intelligently with those who were already teaching about film and other media in schools, was unfortunate.

The Government approached other media in a different way. In 2003, they set up a new regulator for broadcasting, telephony and the internet, called Ofcom. Amongst other responsibilities allocated to Ofcom was the duty “to work with others to promote media literacy”. The idea of creating a statutory responsibility for media literacy, and of giving it to a regulator, emerged from one of those periodic and perhaps particularly Anglo-Saxon moral panics about media influences, particularly on the young, and particularly in respect of sex and violence in the media: encouraging media literacy was seen by policy-makers as a handy way of keeping the child protection lobby at bay, by saying “it’s very difficult to stop children watching this stuff but we can provide them with the critical skills to resist it”. From the outset therefore, media literacy in the UK was distorted in three ways: firstly it was perceived as being simply an aspect of child protection, secondly, it was seen as having nothing to do with studying film or the press, as these industries are not regulated by Ofcom; and thirdly, it seemed to have little to do with the UK’s long-established traditions of teaching and learning about all the media, which has always been known as “media education”.

There was no opportunity for open debate about what media literacy might mean, so the industries who were regulated by Ofcom got the impression that media literacy was something new and different, and something that they were best placed to undertake. They saw the opportunity for repackaging their own products and services in the guise of media. So an exciting glimpse behind the scenes of a TV production became media literacy, as does the need to upgrade your digital skills so that you can buy a new generation mobile phone, or subscribe to faster broadband. I should emphasise here that none of this was Ofcom’s fault: in fact Ofcom has done its best to negotiate a difficult position and has supported some important media education initiatives. The problem lies in the Government’s original decision to give the responsibility for media literacy to a regulator – and for choosing the term “media literacy” in the first place.

This explanation has probably not helped to clarify media literacy, or explained the position of film education within it. Media literacy – so far – is a muddle. It is ill thought-out, it's resistant to translation, it's ambiguous and it's vague. But in a sense, this is intentional. It is the function of a big umbrella term like media literacy to set aside the squabbling and bickering that has gone on between different sectors of media education. It's an understandable policy response in a context where many rivalries, conflicting dogmas and divergent practices have grown up over the years. Inevitably, then, most statements about media literacy are designed to win consensus, which means that they are so vague and generalised in their concern not to offend anyone, that they can be interpreted in any way you like when it comes to actual practice.

However, I do not argue that film educators should therefore ignore media literacy and just get on with their own activities. This is for two reasons. The first is that media literacy is not going to go away. It's established in European policy, and is gaining ground in national policies. It's hard to know how it will develop, because it is still early days: we've had policy statements and calls for research[ii], and some well-directed research and project funding might generate more coherent and purposeful media literacy programmes.

Film education and media literacy

But the second reason for arguing that film educators should not turn their backs on media literacy is much, much more important. It is that from the learner's point of view media literacy is nothing without film education, and I believe that it is learners' needs that really matter. This is where I want to make the case for film education as part of media literacy, not because it suits the policy-makers or the educational managers or the corporate interests, but because it suits the child. And I do want to focus on very young children, because learning starts at a very young age, and in any educational enterprise we need to think about what children may have learned before they come to us.

By the time they start school, most children will have been watching TV and films for at least five years. 59% of children have started watching TV by the age of six months; over 70% of children can turn on the TV by themselves by age 2, and by age 5 most children have their own DVD collections and keep replaying their favourite bits.[iii] We can't really know what's going on when they do this, but we can infer that they are learning something when they are doing it, because curiosity and learning are what drives everything a toddler does.

Figure 5: Age at which child first watched TV (n=1,808)

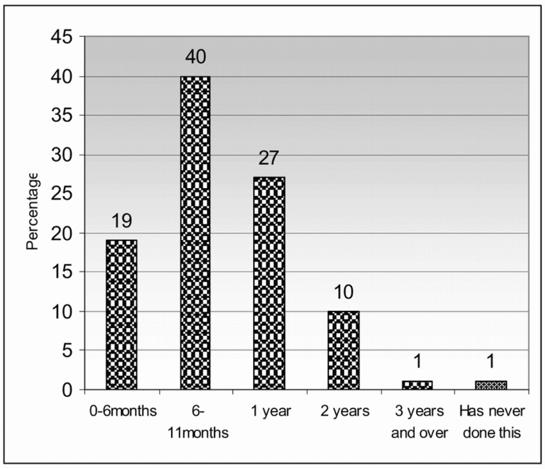
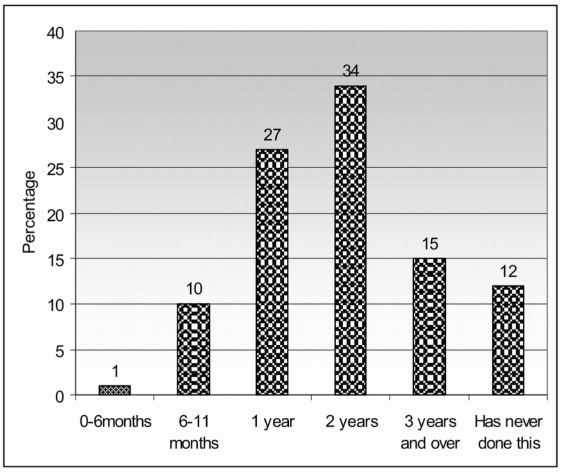


Figure 6: Age at which child first turned TV on by her/himself (n=1,819)



Marsh, Jackie / Brooks, Greg / Hughes, Jane / Ritchie, Louise / Roberts, Samuel / Wright, Katie (2004/05): Digital beginnings: Young children's use of popular culture, media and new technologies. Funded by BBC Worldwide/Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, S.25. Online: http://www.digitalbeginnings.shef.ac.uk/final-report.htm (Abruf: 05.08.2010.)

So it doesn't make a lot of sense to be too purist about 'film' when we are discussing pre-school children. At this age, children are accessing a range of moving image material in their homes, either on TV or on computers or both. Some of it will be film; some won't. So from here on I'll be using the term "moving image media" as much or more than I use the term "film" because I want to keep reminding you that film is only part of children's overall moving image experience.

Discussion about what children learn from TV and other moving image media is usually limited to the content: the information and stories they're getting. Obviously this is important. But there has to be another dimension to this learning, because otherwise they wouldn't be able to make sense of these media. Children must be learning and internalising the rhetoric of moving images: devices such as framing, shot/reverse shot, cutaways, transitions and non-diegetic sound. Just because toddlers can't articulate terms like these, doesn't mean they haven't learned to understand these conventions – after all, they are quite easy to learn. We tend not to think of them as learned conventions because they seem so obvious and natural, but of course they are all strategies that have been invented over the years by filmmakers and they are meaningful: they are used for specific purposes in all moving image media.

But there is another dimension to children's pre-school media learning. They unconsciously acquire some of the key concepts that we all use when interpreting either print or moving image, such as narrative, genre, character iconography. Being able to spot and interpret these strategies is what enables us to enjoy reading a book or watching a film. We need to know how to make inferences and predictions from a text**,** and experiencing the pleasure of having our inferences and predictions confirmed – or contradicted – is one of the pleasures of textual encounters.

So how significant is it that children may be acquiring these kinds of skill – if only in relation to films and TV – from a very early age? The popular view is that it is very significant – but as a problem. The folk wisdom tells us that it's the time spent watching TV that turns children off reading books: they get used to certain kinds of story-telling (often characterised as "easy" and "obvious") which means that they can't cope with the more sophisticated demands of reading print.

The effect of this "folk wisdom" point of view is that mother tongue teachers of young children are likely to be highly suspicious of TV and film. If they are persuaded that these media might be of some importance in children's lives, they tend to accept them only as tools to support the “real” literacy of reading and writing. In this scenario, these media have no importance in their own right: their quality doesn’t matter. It’s on these grounds that many countries have built film education into their mother tongue curricula in schools, and many people will argue that this is fine because it provides film education with a “foot in the door” to the mainstream curriculum.

I think this is dangerous and wrong. Like all the other attempts to try and “prove” the usefulness of various art forms to the school curriculum, it locks us into a fatal compromise. If we argue that children should study drama in order to learn how to behave better, or music in order to be better at maths, we forget why we gave our allegiance to these cultural forms in the first place. We allow film education to be fatally marginalised.

However, I do not therefore argue that film education needs to be a separate subject in the curriculum. Arguing for an endless catalogue of “new subjects” in the curriculum is a hopelessly outmoded approach to education, one that’s rooted in 19th century models of pedagogy. Across the world you will see progressive education policies abandoning the idea of an old-fashioned subject-based curriculum – certainly in the primary school. We’re even talking about it in England! In public consultations on the new primary curriculum, UK media educators have argued for film education to be part of “understanding English, communication and languages” – and in fact there has been some acceptance of that proposition by our curriculum management body, the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency.

But I have a second reason for opposing the idea of film education as a separate subject, which is connected to my concerns about the use of the term “media literacy”. As I argued earlier, using a term like “media literacy” is a guarantee of marginalisation. It labels it as another little requirement to be fitted into the curriculum somehow. The same problem arises if we start pleading for film education to be fitted into the curriculum: it will just get squeezed in somehow, and it will get taught by the people who are interested in it and want to do it, and ignored or taught badly by the rest.

I think we need to be a bit braver and more ambitious about our claims for film education. First of all, we shouldn't be trying to defend film education from the apparent threat of media literacy. We need to demonstrate to the media literacy lobby that film education is a vital and central part of media literacy and that they'd be lost without it. But at the same time, we have to recognise the problems with the term "media literacy" itself. Media literacy is attractive to policy-makers precisely because it enables them to avoid confronting the really big challenge right at the centre of 21st century education, which is, what does it mean to be literate now?

We are still clinging to a 19th century model of what it means to be literate. Studies of educational achievement in different countries include basic, functional literacy in reading and writing as a key element for international comparisons. When agencies like the United Nations and the CIA assess development levels in different countries they use functional literacy as one of their standard levels of measurement, alongside life expectancy, GDP per head of population, and so on. So to try and change our understanding of what "literacy" should consist of, is an enormous challenge. It's not going to happen any time soon, and of course we're never going to deny that reading and writing are immensely important, and do provide one fairly good way of measuring and comparing educational achievement.

But this can't be the only criterion of deciding what it is that children ought to be learning in school. We also have to consider what kind of world they are growing up in, and how we can best help them be ready for what life is going to throw at them. So we must, as it were, have our eyes on that horizon. We must accommodate the long term view that one day, the repertoire of skills that marks an individual as educated, as competent to function in their society and in their culture, is going to have to include knowledge and understanding of media other than print. And foremost amongst these non-print forms are the moving image media of film, television and, increasingly, games.

Despite all the fuss that gets made about digital media and innovations like social networking and the use of mobile devices, the fact remains that if you simply want to identify the actual forms of communication that are used by all these technologies, they are not radically new. All the material that you encounter online or through broadcast media is presented in forms that we have all been familiar with for a long time: writing, still and moving images, visual symbols, voice, music and sound effects. These may often be combined and organised in new ways; we may be using them in different ways, but they are not that new! So a lot of the hysteria and excitement that is driving the media literacy agenda is based on an exaggerated view of the extent to which new types of text really are new.

I like to try and simplify this idea when I am presenting it to educators who are over-excited about the newness of new media. I like to suggest that we actually only deal with two kinds of text: page-based, and time-based.

Page-based texts

- books
- newspapers
- print and poster advertising
- web pages
- graffiti
- SMS messages
- DVD and games menus

Time-based texts

- films
- television programmes
- radio programmes
- podcasts
- games
- recorded music
- visits to virtual worlds

Our educational system is geared to page-based texts. The word “page” doesn’t just refer to paper any more: websites have pages too, and we still expect to be able to print them off if we need to. Pages are things that can be copied and distributed easily – at least in the systems we have currently established. The essential feature of a page-based text is not the technology that carries it, but the fact that it is static: we can look at it for as long as we want. When we encounter a time-based text, on the other hand, we can only look at it for as long as it wants us to. A film or a TV programme has a fixed length, like a piece of music – but more importantly, the duration of even the tiniest components of a time-based text are essential to its meaning. The key creative agency behind a time-based text is not the sound recordist or the cinematographer: it is the editor. Editors work in the medium of time: sequencing and layering sound, visuals, voices, music and silence to create complex, highly multimodal texts that reward detailed analysis. And our education systems are not geared to time-based texts. Teachers are not familiar with them, and even if students were to present assignments in the form of time-based texts, most teachers would find it much harder to handle and assess their work than they do in handling and assessing page-based assignments.

Arguments for media literacy are too often grounded in naïve and crude notions about technologies, and in particular about the supposed risks that technologies present. But technologies are merely enabling: they make possible the texts and the textual practices through which we share our ideas, opinions and stories. Texts matter much more than technologies. By thinking about media in terms of the texts we encounter and use every day, we can arrive at a more coherent and realistic view of what it means to be media literate, and then to recognise that being media literate is simply part of being literate.

So if we aim for locating film within mother-tongue teaching, not as a supplementary, motivational tool but as a fully recognised mode of expression and communication in its own right, we would at least position it in the right place to start addressing some of the challenges that we ought to be facing if we want to provide children with a literacy education that's relevant and appropriate for the world we live in now.

The long term challenge is an enormous and daunting one. As an example, here are three challenges that we'd need to think about right away if we seriously want to put film education within the mother-tongue curriculum.

1. ‘Print-centred’ assessment may be failing many children

The teachers I work with are regularly amazed by what children can achieve when they work with film. Their expectations about particular children's abilities are almost always confounded. Some children who are struggling with reading and writing may be able to succeed at interpreting, analysing and making moving image texts. Children who 'never write' have discovered new confidence and written great screeds when engaging with a medium with which they feel confident. Children who rarely contribute to discussion become articulate when discussing a film. Children whose concentration is minimal are suddenly absorbed for hours when faced with the challenge of editing a sequence of moving images. This isn't a matter of condescending to less able children, of "allowing" them to work with film because they can't manage more highly valued forms of communication. These are genuine revelations for teachers who suddenly get to see that some of the children they teach are much more able than they thought they were. They start to wonder how much sense it makes to fail children who clearly have communicative talents in areas that are not being assessed. This is exciting and genuinely challenging for some teachers: it becomes something they want to make sense of and explore more; for others, it can be disruptive and alarming.

2. Children's 'film learning' and 'book learning' may be at different levels

Children in their first years of schooling are already seeing films that are more complex and sophisticated than the books they are being offered as beginning readers. This proposition may itself be a hard one for teachers – and even some film educators – to swallow. We tend not to allow for the idea that mainstream Hollywood films like *Toy Story* or *Shrek* or *Monsters Inc* may be complex and sophisticated. But these films aren't just for children – they're designed for adults and children to watch together. There are a lot of verbal gags and esoteric cultural references that go over the children's heads, but bear in mind that they are likely to watch these films in the context of a cinema audience or a family group. So little children experience them as a collectively-consumed text whose 'boring' or 'difficult' bits are nevertheless enjoyed by older children and adults. Thus the very experience of watching the film is potentially aspirational: it encourages children to want to watch it again and understand it more next time. Obviously this is great for marketing, but looked at from the point of view of educators, it's interesting to consider the extent to which cultural practices in families ensure that young children spend a lot of time happily sitting through media texts that they only partly understand. Their capacity to make sense of a story, to recognise clues and make predictions, has been constantly challenged before they even start on trying to make sense of print.

3. Children deserve to have their film knowledge challenged and extended

However, it's a corollary of the family film's commercial success that children go on seeing much the same kind of mainstream entertainment films for most of their childhood. They may get more from them as they get older and learn to enjoy the wisecracking and the irony, but they are still seeing a relatively narrow generic range from what is effectively a single cultural source. This is not – or should not be – a situation we would accept in relation to poetry, stories, music or art. There is therefore no good argument for ignoring it in relation to a medium that children already know well and enjoy. If children may be able to understand and enjoy richer, more complex and thematically 'difficult' films than those they usually encounter, shouldn't schools have a responsibility to ensure provide them? I think it's more effective to make the argument on these grounds, from the point of view of the child's needs, than it is to make it from the point of view of film culture and what it needs. Sure, we all believe that it's important to ensure that children grow up to appreciate our film culture, but we shouldn't shrink from making the argument that children have a right to extend the range and quality of their film experience, because this then becomes an argument that can be deployed to education ministries: aren't schools failing children if they don't take these cultural needs into account? This is an alarming proposition for policy-makers: they don't want to hear about expensive new investments in education and they suspect it will be unpopular with voters.

“Reframing literacy”

For some years, literacy attainment in the UK has been seen as unacceptably low, and the main cause of the UK’s high level of teenage educational failure. There have been a number of government strategies set up to address this. The main initiative was called the Literacy Strategy, which was set up soon after the Labour Government came to power in 1997. It was extremely prescriptive at first. A Literacy Framework was published which specified exactly what children were to learn in every term of their primary schooling. There was even a Literacy Hour, which had to be provided to children every day, in which activities were prescribed minute by minute. This may all sound very authoritarian and reactionary, though it has to be said that it did have some good outcomes in helping teachers to understand literacy better, and to focus on it more clearly.

In the early days of the Strategy in 1999, the organisers asked us at the British Film Institute to set up a seminar to look at the relationship between print and moving image texts, because even they could see that this was a potentially important issue for learners. At that seminar, two important insights emerged: firstly, that teachers needed most help in understanding the higher-level aspects of literacy: concepts like narrative, characters, genre, setting and time. Secondly, that if film were to be used to help develop understanding of these concepts and we agreed it probably could – then it shouldn’t be done through clips but with complete films – so if this work was to be done within the Literacy Hour, it would have to be based on short films, of five minutes or less.

So we started to develop classroom resources that consisted of a compilation of non-mainstream short films and notes to help teachers work with those films as texts in their own right: as a valid way of teaching concepts that are central to literacy. We spent a lot of time on identifying short films that we thought were appropriate, trying them out with teachers and children, and then clearing the rights to republish them on DVD, which we sold to schools – we didn't give them away! The problem was to find films that did not contain material like violent or sexual content or bad language, but which at the same time were rich and complex enough to be worth studying. We ended up obtaining very few films that were actually made for children! The films needed to be stylistically different from what children normally see, and to enable more complex or ambivalent readings, but not to be so arty and weird that they didn't have some immediate appeal on a first viewing.

The teachers' notes didn't offer teachers formulaic ways to work with film: we provided a range of techniques for analysis, which in the hands of confident teachers can become jumping-off points for their own planning in the classroom. For less confident teachers, there are problems. One of the effects of the Literacy Strategy being so authoritarian and centrally directed has been that many teachers have become extremely passive and docile: they expect to be told what to do and to be given simple, measurable learning targets. This is particularly inappropriate with film, of course, given that children already have a lot of expertise with this medium. So first of all we had to get teachers to engage with the films at their own level and to understand them fully – to express their own responses and to go through the kind of analysis we'd want them to do with the children. This was something they weren't used to – the Literacy Strategy has, ironically, destroyed much of teachers' respect for texts! We had to stop them doing things like trying to teach "film vocabulary" as if it were some kind of independent system of worthwhile knowledge. Then we had to get them to change their pedagogy – to listen to children, to avoid giving the impression that there were "right answers", to ask open questions like these:

- Was there anything you liked?
- What caught your attention?
- Was there anything you disliked?
- Was there anything that puzzled you?
- Did you notice any patterns?

- and to ask supplementary questions like “what made you think that?” and “can you tell me some more about that?”

After this we could offer some techniques for approaching the films. So for example with a number of films we suggested that they played a minute or so of the sound track first, and then asked the children to listen to it again with specific questions in mind, which could be allocated to different sections of the class. So for example they’d be asked to listen for evidence in the sound track about

- PLACE – can they hear anything that tells them what sort of place this is happening in?
- TIME – does this seem to be happening in “real time” or “story time” (ie are there some elisions of time)?
- CHARACTER – are there any character(s) (remembering that “character” doesn’t necessarily mean “person”)
- STORY – can they make any inferences about what’s happening or predictions what might be going to happen?

Discussion of these questions could go on for some time and should drive the children back to the sound track again to check what they had really heard. Then once they get to watch the film, the children should be able to approach it with a heightened sense of its constructedness as a text, and a heightened awareness of the importance of detail. Building up their impressions of a character from many tiny clues that could easily pass unremarked was always a fascinating and lengthy process. In many schools this kind of analysis has led to an extended engagement with a film, especially with younger children and through imaginative play, and for older children a heightened sense of text, authorship and intentionality both in film and print texts.

Teachers are used to the idea of using films as a stimulus or to illustrate aspects of learning; they’re much less used to the idea of taking films as the central focus of a lesson. So from 2004 onwards we developed a strategy for reaching wider numbers of teachers and schools. We set up a scheme to train small groups of teachers and local advisers who were nominated by local education authorities to lead the development of moving image media literacy in their schools. Each local authority had to make a commitment to a two or three year, costed action plan for developing moving image education in their schools, and to pay for their nominated “lead practitioners” to attend intensive three-day residential training in how to work effectively with film in the classroom as a part of literacy teaching.

We were pretty pleased with this project. It didn’t cost us anything apart from our own salaries, but we worked with 61 local authorities (42% of total) who produced action plans, participated in training and collectively invested some £800,000 in this work; we trained 150 local leaders, sold over £500,000 worth of resources to schools, and we estimated that it has reached at least a million children so far. It’s been influential in getting more references to film and media in curriculum documents, and it’s generated an interest in finding more non-mainstream films to show to children. Perhaps most importantly, though, it has continued to generate fresh research and thinking in the primary education sector, which is what is most likely to lead to change in the longer term.

Creative aspects of film literacy in schools

As soon as teachers get confident with critical work on film, the next thing they want to do is always some creative work. The problem here is that they always tend to think in terms of “making a film”, which is a bit like thinking that once children have learned to write, they ought to get on with producing their first novel.

Children do know a lot about film, but their knowledge is usually confined to a quite narrow sector of mainstream product. They are also unused to articulating that knowledge and reflecting upon it. If they have opportunities to see a wide range of film styles and types, and to analyse and discuss them, then they usually make better films themselves. There is no need to try and dress up filmmaking as something glamorous and exciting. Children are quite excited enough about having a go at making films. They don’t need to pretend to be Steven Spielberg as well. And the industrial model of starting with script development, then going out to film, then editing, is the wrong way round for learning purposes.

However, it is often attempted because too often, filmmaking initiatives with children are a rare and usually time-limited activity, taking place within special projects that end with a film showing and a big celebration, and then leave the children with no further opportunities to refine and develop what they have learned. This is a bit like teaching a child to write and then taking the pencil and paper away.

We try to get teachers to think through the writing/filmmaking analogy more fully. When children are learning to write, they undertake some very simple tasks, learning how to spell words, writing simple sentences, creating titles for drawings. Now that digital technologies make it possible, the same kinds of entry-level tasks can be undertaken with moving image media. Children can try ordering two or three shots into different sequences, to see what difference it makes to the meaning. They can try out different musical or spoken sound tracks with the same sequence, again, to see what difference it makes to the meaning. They can try selecting and shortening a selection of clips in order to make a statement more simple and powerful. There’s one key factor in all those tasks: none of them involves filming! They are all computer-based, can be carried out by children working in pairs, and they’re enormously absorbing and fun.

Providing children with ready-filmed material on computers, to play with and manipulate, can be a much better way to introduce creative work with moving images, because the core creative activity of filmmaking is not filming, but editing. This also means that all the children in the class should be able to have a go, not just one or two. Once children have started to see how they can make meaning with images and sounds, then they can go out with their cameras – and their audio recorders – more purposefully. Using simple, open-source software such as Photo Story 3, children can be enabled to make some "filming" decisions through their use of the rostrum camera functions, but can experience all of the basic editorial decisions made by filmmakers – sequence, duration, transitions and sound track – without having to spend time filming and logging their shots. It is then possible for children to move on to second and third attempts at creative, computer-based work, which gives them more opportunities to explore the meaning-making possibilities of film than will getting involved in a class filmmaking project where their real understanding of the actual creative decisions involved may be minimal or zero.

Developing Creative Activity	
PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS
• Making films as a whole-class project • Reverence for industrial models of filmmaking • Lack of links to film viewing and analysis • Few children have opportunities to make real creative choices • Few opportunities to experiment • Few opportunities to develop skills over time	• Computer-based activities by individuals and small groups • Cross-referral between creative and critical work • Experiment with pre-selected images and sound • Focus on editing not camerawork • Use open source software • Provide recursive opportunities to enable children to reflect on what they have done, make mistakes and learn from them

The next and perhaps most important question that needs to be addressed is that of learning progression. If children were to start film education in pre-school, how might we expect their film learning to have developed by the time they're 14? What expectations should we have of older students' capabilities? As yet we have very little evidence about systematic, extended film education, let along how that might fit into literacy learning in the conventional school curriculum. Some research is currently under way[iv] but more is needed. Until we have more and better evidence about the learning outcomes of both film education in particular and media literacy in general, we are in no position to make arguments to policy-makers about where, how and why these ought to be taught in schools.

[i] For an account of this earlier history see Terry Bolas (2009) *Screen education: from film appreciation to media studies*. Bristol: Intellect Books.

[ii] See for example the European Commission's pages on media literacy at http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/index (Retrieved 07/05/10)

[iii] Jackie Marsh et al, *Digital Beginnings* www.digitalbeginnings.shef.ac.uk/final-report.htm (Retrieved 07/05/10)

[iv] See for example a project led by David Buckingham at www.cscym.zerolab.info/research/67-research-projects-current/121-developing-media-literacy-towards-a-model-of-learning-progression. (Retrieved 07/05/10)