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Introduction

Media Studies has developed in the time I have been teaching it from a minority, rather disparaged subject in a small embattled corner of the secondary curriculum to a major contributor in many students creative, practical, aesthetic and intellectual learning. Despite the popularity of the subject and the vocational successes of students who take it, it is still in the corner as far as quite a few administrators and senior educational decision makers are concerned, still fairly sensitively positioned in the timetable and a Cinderella to its ugly siblings of Art & Business Studies. However, the mood is shifting, very slowly but seemingly inevitably.

More evidence accrues to the value and benefits that a good media education has, and in many schools and colleges, the curriculum has been increasingly adapted by teachers to develop media based elements. In my own college, I undertook a mapping exercise to investigate if and how media elements were being incorporated into the curriculum. I discovered widespread use of film, TV and printed media in use in many subjects in the classroom, and significantly as targets for study rather than merely as support material.

Nowadays, most would expect some sort of media education in English, but in Maths and Science I found in the mapping exercise the study of the media, a welcome and to me a surprising development. Issues of representation of Scientific ideas and developments in the media, for example, has been an area that more focussed and dynamic science teachers have begun to incorporate in their teaching over the last few years. From the mapping exercise, the sense seems that science is not just about discovery and technology but also about society and ideas. As an easy example I suppose if we think of Science Fiction Films we see how science and the media are closely interrelated. We see also that the government wants science teaching to be more dynamic, using the press and TV news to examine the scares about GM foods and cloning of animals.

It was interesting to note the use of extracts of Bladerunner, with its dystopian future urban sprawl, being used as a support for a debate about development in a geography lesson.

In maths, it was delightful to note exercises in close comparative analysis of the structure and organisation of tabloid and broadsheet newspapers forming part of the Year 10 scheme of work. Not exactly riveting stuff, perhaps, given that it was an exercise in counting, measuring and percentages, but a welcome use of media in the classroom in an area that might not seem easily given to it.

Units of media based work in Psychology, Modern Languages, Business Studies, Art and Sports Studies were noted as well. In many ways, then, Media Education has become firmly embedded in the schemers of work and examination syllabuses throughout the secondary curriculum.

In my discussions and through the survey, it was clear that a many alert and innovative teachers subscribe to the view that media education gives students the confidence and understanding to be fuller citizens in a media dominated society.

As such, an understanding of how moving image texts are built through editing seems to me to be a key skill and knowledge that all students should develop.

My own experience as a teacher of the media, taught in its own subject area, is that it has proved for students an important vehicle in the development of knowledge about ideologies, skills in organisation of thinking, interpretation and literacy skills. It is amongst the most valuable subjects in the curriculum in terms of transferable skills and knowledge, as well as equipping students with finely tuned critical awareness that will stay with them forever.

Moreover, without doubt, media education is important. The average television in the UK is on for five hours a day. It is becoming widely recognised that critical understanding of film, video and television is becoming an integral part of literacy, and the moving image is a language of global importance in an increasingly media saturated world.

Cineliteracy

Our lives are shaped by the moving image. It is with us on a daily basis, and is perhaps the single most important form of communication in allowing us to know about the world, about people, events and to take part in and share cultures. That the moving image is mediated, that is shaped by technology, by institutions, by individuals and by the processes involved in filming and editing is a factor that we are aware of but we tend to subcept.

A key part of understanding the moving image is related to the awareness we have of editing. When we watch the edited, moving image, the process of perception is sophisticated and we are barely aware of the cognitive processes that we engage in. Two examples will suffice. A simple piece of editing such as match cutting on action is more closely related to our understanding of narrative in the spoken and written word than our actual, perceived experience. Match cutting was amongst the earliest inventions of the editing process, after continuity, but it still takes a leap of imagination and suspension of disbelief when we really think about 'Rescued by Rover' rather than just watch it. Matchcutting in this sense is an equivalent of the concept 'then', implying a continuous flow of movement and action that takes place over three-dimensional space. What we as the audience may know but leave as a subception is the process that has taken place in joining shots together that were filmed separately, from different positions and over a period of time.

More sophisticated editing, such as cross cut editing, is actually something that audiences have understood since 'The Great Train Robbery' of 1903, just eight years after the first public cinema show. In the fourteen scenes of the Great Train Robbery, several take place synchronologically over different locations. The telegraph office and the dance sequence and then the posse and the outlaws both demonstrate the power in the filmmakers editing vocabulary that such leaps of space and suspension of time can engender.

What really is amazing, for me, is that when I first started teaching the equipment that we edited on was essentially the same as Edwin Porter would have used. We did have electricity, but only to illuminate and move the film. Every other aspect of editing was manual. Cutting was really, actually cutting. Match cutting really was holding up bits of film together to the light source and matching them. No wonder not many teachers in secondary education did it. Not surprisingly, we did tend to do more storyboarding and 'photo stories' than actual filmmaking.

Analogue video editing equipment was a giant leap forward for my students and me. At last we could use a sophisticated means of ordering and assembling our work. And nothing cost very much any more. Apart from the initial investment in a video camera and simple editing equipment, the costs were virtually negligible. I even insisted on students bringing their own videotapes to use. Some student's even crash edited their work at home using two videos linked together and using the pause and record button with some dexterity. I still have a wonderful example, 'The Great Banana Skin', that I show students who whinge because the Casablanca is fully booked and they are 'reduced' to using our analogue editing equipment.

It has to be said, the Casablanca Avio editing system has made the most fundamental difference to my teaching and to the process of filmmaking for students since the invention of video. Non-linear editing, in the shape of the Casablanca system, has been a giant stride in the resources of the department. This research paper is in effect an attempt to find out just what that giant stride consists of, and to formalise my experience as a teacher the benefits that seem to accrue from the system.

Research aims

The Casablanca Avio system appears to enable a radically different approach to editing of video material. Non-linear systems have been developing rapidly in the last few years. As a new system it is not yet possible to fully identify the knowledge skills and understanding that students are utilising, constructing, developing or discovering when engaged in the editing process. This first project is designed to uncover the KUS that the students, alongside their tutor, perceive are involved when they do the editing.

As the emphasis is on finding out through interaction the potential of the editing process in the learning context through using Casablanca high achieving, technologically and creatively very able students will assist in this process. The students will be observed using the system to edit their own material and they will

- a) Observe each other if possible,
- b) Be observed by the tutor/researcher
- c) Be interviewed by the tutor/researcher
- d) Keep a reflective journal to write down what they think they are learning immediately after they have been on the system.

As this open-ended investigation allows what emerges to emerge then the students felt, as they should, that all their experiences count and so there is no pre-ordained interview or observation schedule.

Research project details

(a) The Students

My focus in this paper is on a fairly diverse group of students, many of them very high achievers chosen from the sixty students we have in the Lower Sixth studying Media at 'AS' Level, that is, 17 years old, and another younger group from Year 10, that is, 15 years old. Some of them were working solo, some in groups of twos, threes and fours. In all I observed, interviewed and read reports from twenty students, roughly a quarter of the students that I teach in Year 10 and 12.

I was especially interested in those that were using video and editing for the first time – they had no prior experience in the department of using our dearly beloved

analogue system or any other. These students were also new to media studies, and therefore had never done this kind of production work before.

(b) Methods

Our focus here is the Casablanca editing system and its impact on the knowledge, understanding and skills it develops in the upper secondary sector student. Once students had planned their work, scripted and storyboarded it, they moved to filming. As far as possible I encourage them to shoot in the running order. This practice has developed from analogue editing, where if the footage is in the right order creating the EDL (edit decision list) is much more straightforward.

Filming took place in June, with most of the editing done in July. The Year 10 students were engaged in a documentary production, for which a great deal of preliminary teaching had been done in class. The Year 12 students had a freer choice, being at the end of AS Media and just starting out on their A2 course, where briefs for production work are self-initiated.

In order that I could observe the editing process with most of the team editors, I sat with them in the editing room both during and after college hours. This was one method of observation but it was also a core part of the interviewing, forming as it did over ten hours of time with the students as they actually edited, reviewed the results and made adjustments. As a secondary method of recording students ideas and experience, further interviews took place outside the edit room where I sat and asked a range of questions to enable students to reveal their understanding.

Nominated editors existed but most team members seemed to work cooperatively, and contributed to the process by being in the edit room at the same time and making suggestions. This was a wonderful opportunity to listen as their knowledge, understanding and skills developed.

Finally, all students produced written evaluations of the project and I encouraged them to focus on the editing process as well as the other aspects of the project.

(c) Outcomes

Students were given minimal instruction in how to use the Casablanca. The teaching was done individually and in groups of two. Very often, students taught one another. Many of the students at Tavistock College are really helpful and cooperative, and one observation made early on was the way the excitement of using the Casablanca seemed to encourage students to want to demonstrate their skills to other students. Our edit room will comfortably sit four students at a time. Once the students had begun to grasp the essential elements and skills, they were allowed to work by their own lights.

They soon began to grasp that there was nothing they could do that could not be undone – given they stuck to their own project setting on the Casablanca and they did not lose their original tape.

Whilst I was content to let them get on and make decisions (and mistakes) I did prod them from time to time to try to elicit their thoughts when they were working about how they were approaching certain parts of the editing process.

The students, without exception, quickly gained momentum, confidence and skill. The concepts and knowledge that we had established in lessons had already been

utilised in the filming phase, but in the editing room with the Casablanca they came alive.

The key observation made in the first two hours in each teams editing sessions was the speed with which they went beyond the basic instruction given. They were soon sufficiently confident and adept to experiment with different ideas. Very rapidly they began to go beyond the mechanical process of joining their chosen shots together and began to cut in different ways, experiment with lengths and types of transitions, and to match sound and image in a way I had not been able to exploit before with analogue editing.

By the third or fourth hour session in the editing room, the language they were employing in their discussions was highly sophisticated and well informed. The distinct qualities of non-linear editing quickly became apparent. In order to achieve the results they wanted, and to get it as exactly right as possible, they were in a marvellous position of being able to try out different ways of creating meaning in the editing process through experiment. The investment in time in trying out a different shot in an edit, of cutting it in a different length or in a different order was so short, so lacking in effort, that they could develop a wonderful fluency very rapidly.

All this observation is rather anecdotal, so I tried to focus the inquiry more sharply on key questions and issues. I used observation, face to face interviews, and written evaluations to form my results. The key questions that shaped the inquiry for year 10 students were:

- How easy is it to use the Casablanca editor?
- How are editing decisions made?
- What skills does digital editing develop?
- Is editing a creative process?
- Can editing be a group activity?
- How does digital editing change the text?

With Year 12, I attempted to go further and ask the questions above and then tease out more demanding observations: those of decisions in editing about timing, pace, and rhythm,

Year 10 - five teams of students.

In reporting on the findings from Year 10, I have tried to give each student a voice by keeping their comments together in the same paragraph. No students seemed to broach any new, unexpected ground and by assembling the comments in this way, one can sense the thinking and experience each gained from the editing process.

1. In discussion and debate, one pair of Year 10 girls in the sample struggled hard initially to frame their language with appropriate terminology. Later, with the key questions employed to interview them, they were confident enough to use elaborated codes of language and complex sentence structure to give their ideas form. I observed them talking to one another in this way as well as to me. Debates quickly took on an informed and articulate nature, and I gauged this to be a direct result of their experience with the Casablanca system. As they could quickly experiment when editing with alternative ways of organising their text, the time taken to see what it looks like and be in a position to make an informed judgement was minimal. With analogue editing, such rapidity of experimentation is impossible. The tendency is to follow the initial EDL with little experimentation.

One of the pair said " editing encourages you to be creative and it helps you to be more co-ordinated because you have to think more about what pieces of filming go together and where to put them"

Both were supportive of group editing. Each had worked closely with their partner, and one thought editing "was best done in a group, because you can have different opinions on what should and shouldn't be edited". Asked further, what she meant, she explained how helpful she found sharing opinion in the editing process, especially in shaping the text in "*the best*" way. The other partner wrote similarly "*to get a good result in editing you need more than one persons opinion on things. But not too many people, 2 or 3 are good numbers*"

2. Male participants in a group of four were similarly motivated to communicate their intentions and decisions, but even the most able were quickly given to developing a restricted pattern of speech that reflected a rather charming confidence and assurance. They were calling fade to black '*that black thingy*', they were very quickly developing a form of language that they were comfortable with that did not betray to me a sense of being too 'swottish', as many fifteen year old young men are loath to do. There did seem to be a different feel to this group of boys than from any of the females. Much more clubbish, quick to develop informal language and restricted codes. They spent hours watching the same edited footage over and over again, getting some sort of modest satisfaction in what they had initially achieved but reluctant to push it further and developing its modest content. There was also an apparent reluctance to offer any thoughts that might vaguely be thought to be worth repeating here.

3. One solitary male in Year 10 who by no stretch of the imagination could be called swottish was a most interesting case. As a student with a reputation for disruptive behaviour and lack of concentration, his work with the Casablanca was amazing. Not only did he complete a well finished - if limited - piece, but also he did it twice, the second time because his first edit was wiped by accident from the machine. I really expected him to give up when he found his work missing from the hard drive. He was so motivated by the equipment, however, he reloaded his images and spent three hours without a break reediting his work. I was absolutely astounded at this motivation and with the skill by which he reassembled his work. This was a good example that was the norm - the overwhelming feeling from all students engaged in the editing process was of fun and courage, and this particular student bears this out with bells on.

4. A female interviewee, working in a group of three, was most articulate about the creative nature of editing. She believed that "*editing helps the student develop artistic skills, as they are forced to use their minds when editing down their work*". She continued "*I think that editing is a creative process because it enables the editor to expand their ideas.....editing also cannot be creative if the student doesn't try*".

What she means by 'try' was evident in how the group of three experimented with ways of organising their text just for the sheer pleasure of seeing what the result would be. Technical problems were soon overcome, and the clear pleasure they were experiencing from the editing process developed a true synthesis between the Casablanca and their ideas.

Regarding group work, another comment from this student was very interesting. Whilst allowing that group work could be quote productive, she then went on to say: "*I think it depends on who your group is when editing. If you can work in the group without being distracted then that's good. Otherwise you should work on your own*"

In other words, OK if the group keep quiet and let you get on with it! This student is quietly confident but shy.

Another female student, from a different group, altogether more assertive and dominant in class, was more positive about the benefits of group work: "*its best in a group as then the whole group becomes more creative and you have a wider range of ideas. It also makes it more fun and interesting.*" This student perceptively wrote that editing changes the text "*because you see your text quite differently in the editor and you do change it quite a few times.*" She went on "*editing isn't that creative, it's the filming that is, but it does increase the films creativity*"

Year 12 - three students.

The three students I decided to focus on were chosen for their ability and competence with the system, after using it a second time after my preliminary investigation earlier in the year. By now, they had gone beyond the stage of developing competences and were honing skills in more subtle and sophisticated domains.

Here, I was interested in the finer points of editing as well as those that I concentrated on with the Year 10 students.

Skills

The consensus on the development of skills was that digital editing gives a very good feel for how texts are constructed.

"Editing can transform a piece of footage - it can change the tone, the emphasis and also the meaning. It also helps you plan more efficiently for your next shot"

"It takes patience and focus, I think it also brings out the perfectionist side of people. I think it just enhances your skills in filmmaking because you can see how things knit together and the potential for different shots"

Timing

On timing, the common experience can be represented by the following from a very capable female student:

" This depends on what happens in the shot, it tends to look good if you have a movement that finishes inside one shot (e.g.: the character turns their head and you cut), if you cut when they are still moving it can be jarring. Unless you are cross cutting and keep cutting back to that shot until the movement is finished"

On a different level, one respondent said, "*Timing is highly dependent on the dialogue and any music*"

Creativity

The three students had completed very different sorts of text - documentary, film noir and advertising. In different ways, they had all been creative and inspired by the Casablanca to experiment. Despite my insistence in storyboarding, a very varied range of outcomes emerged very differently from the plans:

"Unless the storyboard is highly planned, editing is highly creative"

"When I made my film I ended up with many shots that were shot on impulse and when finished it looked very different from my original plans - it even had added dialogue"

"Editing is where the different strands of filming come together with music and titles and any effects"

"You need a good sense of rhythm and a creative sense to see what shots should go where, when I had to cut and see how it would work with the music"

One final quote from a highly talented Year 12 female student whose life has been dramatically affected by the experience of digital editing and now intends to change her previous career intentions to working in the media:

"I enjoy editing just as much as filming - if not more, because my work is spread out in front of me and I can piece it together and shape it. I got many completely new ideas when editing that I wouldn't have if someone was editing for me. I like being able to trim each shot until I feel it is perfect and then experimenting with different transitions and relationships to other shots"

Conclusions

The excellence of the Casablanca system shines through the last ten months of work with the students. The main conclusions that I draw relate to student's confidence, to the ability to experiment and to apply theory and desire much more readily to the final production.

- Digital editing processes allow experimentation
- Digital editing further develops knowledge about narrative structures.
- Confidence and success go hand in hand. The Casablanca promotes success through being easy to use, flexible and allowing extensive re edits and speed. Students, in the majority of cases, enjoy using it and are gratified by their success.
- Able students transfer interpretive skills from their experience of media texts to their own work more readily with the Casablanca system. The experience of digital editing feeds back and develops skills and knowledge about camera work and planning.
- The Casablanca promotes ambitious work.

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