

A PROPOSAL FOR THE INITIATION
OF A STUDENT FILM MAKING COURSE

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B. S., Kansas State University, 1969

613-8301

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1973

Approved by:


Major Professor

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express his thanks to Dr. Fred Teague for his advice and guidance in the preparation of this report. The author also wishes to acknowledge the patience and support of his wife, Margaret.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The student film making movement became apparent in February, 1967, when the first Young Filmmakers Conference ever held was organized by the National Film Study Project in New York City. Over 1,200 people jammed into a room designed for 600, and 740 of them were student film makers or students interested in making films. With only 90 days notice, the students submitted 120 films for consideration for showing. Famous directors, actors, and educators came to look, listen, and act as consultants. Most were amazed.¹

There is little need for amazement when one realizes that the upper middle class high school student watches some 15,000 hours of television before he graduates and sees about 500 movies in theaters.² In an age when sight and sound have become the basic modes of mass communication, young people have no desire to remain passive receivers. Film making has offered an avenue for entering into a working relationship with the environment. It is a liberating form of dialogue.

It is becoming increasingly evident that film and the motion picture industry have a great deal to offer humanistic education. Yet, film's vast potentiality is surpassed only by formal education's seeming

¹ Henry E. Putsch, "Student Filmmaking," Films Deliver, eds. Anthony Schillaci and John M. Culkin (New York: Citation Press, 1970), p. 189.

² Rodney E. Sheratsky, "Film: the Reality of Being," (Newark: New Jersey Association of Teachers of English, 1969), p. 10.

incapacity to deal with it in any original fashion or to benefit from its immense power. Unfortunately, many teachers regard film as a competitor.

Socrates objected very much to the emergence of the written word because he felt it would weaken man's power of memory. Now, certain educators are afraid that films will lure youth away from reading and writing and weaken their powers of verbal expression.

We live in a total-information culture, which is being increasingly dominated by the image, both moving and static. Intelligent living within such an environment calls for the development of habits of perception, analysis, judgment, and selectivity that are capable of processing the relentless input of visual data. What better way to teach such habits than through an active participation with the film medium? Our schools must agree that to be liberally educated is to be "cinemate" as well as literate.³

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to create a detailed description of a course in student film making, including a rationale, behavioral objectives, a course syllabus, recommendations for the purchase of basic equipment, and a list of teaching resources.

An Overview of the Report

Chapter 2: With the aid of various indices (e.g., Education Index, Research in Education) a survey was made of recent trends in film curricula. Professional education journals, professional media publications, research

³John M. Culkin, "Films Deliver," Films Deliver--Teaching Creatively With Film, eds. Anthony Schillaci and John M. Culkin, (New York: Citation Press, 1970), p. 19.

abstracts and pertinent books were consulted in order to determine the basic outlines of the film appreciation and film making courses being offered, the extent to which such courses are being offered, and the methods and results of evaluations that are being employed.

Chapter 3: Based on the findings in the literature and upon personal teaching experience, a basic course in student film making was proposed. A rationale for the creation of such a course was offered and behavioral objectives were formulated to serve as a guide for planning the details of the course. A general outline of the proposed course was presented. A projected syllabus, including discussion topics, student activities, scheduled films and field trips was presented for the entire course of study.

Chapter 4: Reference was made to books, consumer reports, and professional photography journals in order to determine what basic items of equipment should be purchased. Recommendations were made as to basic features that should be available in cameras, tripods, projectors, and editors.

Chapter 5: Media selection aids such as Library Journal, Booklist, Choice, and Media and Methods were consulted in order to compile a basic list of teacher references. Books, pamphlets, periodicals, and films concerning film making were listed.

Definition of Terms

The term film making as it is used in this report refers to the production of any motion sequence that involves the use of 8mm or 16mm film.

A stimulus film, as opposed to an instructional film, is any film used to inspire creativity in the students.

Chapter 2

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The enthusiasm for film making is contagious. It is no respecter of age, ability level, or economic status. A survey of recent literature revealed that instruction in film making has pervaded all levels of education, and, in several instances, has escaped the confines of the classroom to become a dynamic force within the community.

Within this chapter several film projects are briefly discussed in order that the reader might have some understanding of the various course objectives and the methods that have been used to achieve those objectives. The discussion is limited to film making projects that have been conducted on the secondary and college levels. Such an approach is not meant to suggest that elementary students have been denied the excitement of creative film making. A quick scan of educational research indices reveals that many innovative elementary instructors have found the student-made film to be a panacea for classroom ills. As a general rule however, the elementary projects have not been organized as formal teaching units. More often, a single, group-produced film has been an outgrowth of a predominantly print oriented lesson.

In accordance with the curriculum proposal that is presented in Chapter 3, the discussion in this chapter will primarily concern formal film making curricula as reported by a cross section of secondary and college instructors. Descriptions of course objectives and procedures will be followed by a section concerning the various course evaluations.

A Survey of Film Making Courses

From 1967 to 1971 the Pilot Communities Program (PCP), a project of the Educational Development Center in Newton, Massachusetts, experimented with several innovative programs in Boston, Bridgeport, and Washington, D.C. At the Lincoln Junior High School in Washington, D.C., a small group of teachers and a PCP consultant joined to create a course in student film making.¹ They were confronted with a school population of fifteen hundred students, most of them black and poor, and most of them reading at least two years below grade level. Progress was at a standstill due to unimaginative and poorly organized teaching of routine courses.

A course in film making appeared to be a common ground of interest. A student survey showed the number of movies viewed to be ten times the number of books read. Teachers, likewise, were excited by the freshness of the film medium. It was agreed that a course in film making would provide an escape from the drudgery of the classroom, and, more importantly, it would create common enthusiasm for a common learning experience.

Preparation for initiation of the course included after school and summer workshops for the teachers conducted by PCP and the American Film Institute, conferences with professional film makers, and visitations to schools with existing film programs. The American Film Institute provided course outlines, resource materials, study guides, bibliographies, and question guides for specific films.

¹Gerrie Jantzen, ". . .And Whatever You Do, Don't Break the Camera . . .A Study in Educational Change" (Newton, Massachusetts: Education Development Center, Inc., 1971), p. 3.

The class, as it was finally established, involved twenty students, meeting twice each week. With four trained teachers available much group work was possible. Each section of five students and one teacher was given a super 8mm camera, a cassette tape recorder and fifteen rolls of super 8mm film. In addition to the in-class projects, the students were encouraged to check out the equipment overnight and on weekends.

The PCP project operated amidst unique conditions, in that only a small number of teachers and students were involved, and substantial funding was provided from outside organizations. In those respects the program was ideal. Other factors, however, caused the outcomes of the program to be less than originally anticipated. The results, both positive and negative, are discussed in the second section of this chapter.

A program, similar in design to the PCP project, was initiated at East Topeka Junior High School by James Hensley in the fall of 1972.² Funding for the course, entitled "Communication Skills Through Filmmaking," was provided by a Title III, ESEA Mini-Grant. East Topeka Junior High, with a predominantly low-income, black population, faced many of the problems typically faced by inner-city schools--racial tensions, mistrust between students and teachers, and a general apathy toward educational involvement.

Hensley conducted the course on a nine-week basis. Each quarter he asked the four other English teachers to choose from their enrollment three students characterized as "not achieving at all." Armed with an inventory of four super 8mm cameras, one projector, one editor, one

²Details supplied by James Hensley, personal interview, March 12, 1973.

splicer, one tripod, one screen, one five hundred watt lamp assembly, and ninety-eight rolls of Kodak Ektachrome 160 movie film, he proceeded to direct the students in basic film making. He reasoned that a class size of twelve was as large a group as one teacher would want to manage. Yet, the expense involved in setting up the course demanded that he reach more than twelve students during the course of a year; thus, the initiation of a nine-week course with a total yearly involvement of forty-eight students.

Hensley made an arrangement with a local film processor to have the exposed film developed and returned to the school within a day. A prompt reinforcement proved important to the under-achieving students. As an added benefit, the film dealer became interested in the project and donated a super 8mm camera and several rolls of film to the school for check-out purposes. As could be expected, his outlay was soon returned as the students became involved with the film medium and found ways to finance their own equipment.

A cooperative effort involving the Nebraska State Department of Education, a Regional Service Unit, Concordia Teacher College, and a Seward junior high school introduced a film making course to sixty eighth grade students during the last quarter of the 1968-1969 school term.³ Two student teachers from Concordia's Teacher College and two instructors from the Seward junior high school designed an eight-week unit in film making with the purpose of helping young people to learn to "read and write visually using super 8mm cameras." The instructors met

³Jack Middendorf, "From Ballpoint to Instamatic," Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide, Vol. 49, (May, 1970), p. 8.

daily with each class for one hour and incorporated various film making activities as supplements to the regular English and social studies curricula.

During the spring semester of 1969, Jeannette Hanke began a film making project in her Advanced Placement English 12 class at Kirkwood High School in Kirkwood, Missouri.⁴ The instructor had seen numerous movies, had read extensively concerning film making and had attended two film workshops. Her interest in film making was conveyed to the students, and what began as a group of nineteen students soon grew to a crew of forty-two when the Honors class begged to be included.

The Kirkwood inventory included on 16mm camera and several projectors. A bake sale and parent donations netted enough money to buy film. Working as a large group, the students chose to film an impressionistic interpretation of a T. S. Eliot poem. The students worked after school and during vacations in order to edit and complete the film.

When classes resumed in the fall of 1969, the Kirkwood students came demanding a repeat of the film unit. Again money was raised and filming was begun using a super 8mm camera. Each student wrote a scenario which included his own choice of images, the instructor compiled the lists of images, and the class voted in order to choose the most effective group of visuals possible. Production committees were established, and each student served in several capacities.

Gerald Baltimore described a project initiated at Parkdale Senior

⁴Jeannette J. Hanke, "Filmmaking--Some Experiences With the Gifted," English Journal, Vol. 60, (January, 1971), pp. 121-125.

High School in Riverdale, Maryland, in which students were encouraged to work independently with several different media.⁵ As an art instructor Baltimore guided his students in experimenting with photographic images. The creativeness of the students prompted the administration to consider a media production center.

In the fall of 1969 Baltimore was asked to become the coordinator of a newly formed production facility within the school. Through his planning a policy was established whereby students could make arrangements with their teachers to come to the production center for independent work. The term paper concept was expanded to include slide-tape presentations, multi-media kits, and super 8mm movies. All planning, production and presentation was carried out by the students with Baltimore acting as a technical advisor.

With the establishment of the production center, the Board of Education also approved a new course entitled "Creative Film Graphics." Equipment was purchased to allow the production of animated films and still-scene sequential animation of color slides.

Sister Bede Sullivan reported a successful group film making project that was conducted at Lillis High School in Kansas City, Missouri in 1964.⁶ Film appreciation was made a part of the traditional English class by reserving each Monday for the screening of films. After seven Mondays of viewing films the students were well versed in the terminology of the motion picture. A joint meeting of students, teachers, administrators,

⁵Gerald Baltimore, "Student-Made Communications Films are Popular at Parkdale High," Audiovisual Instruction, Vol. 15, (November, 1970), pp. 32-33.

⁶Sister Bede Sullivan, O. S. B., "Making Movies in High School," English Journal, Vol. 54, (May, 1965), pp. 433-35.

and parents revealed that thirty-two cameras were available among the seventy-six class members. Two parents owned editing machines and were willing to lend them to the school.

The class was divided into teams, with each team comprised of three to five students. Following the choice of a topic by the class, each team was responsible for submitting a script and fifty feet of exposed 8mm film. When all of the film had been processed and returned, it was edited by the team that had submitted the best script.

A complete course outline for "Exploring the Language of Films" was prepared by George E. Roller in 1971.⁷ Although no grade level was indicated, the course contents appeared to be geared to the secondary student. A part of the Language Arts series, the course had been authorized by the Dade County Board of Public Instruction, Miami, Florida, for its Quinmester Program.

As outlined in Roller's report the course included investigations of "the language of pictures (distance shots, angle shots, color, lighting), the language of motion (camera movement, subject movement), and the language of sound (dialogue, narration, music, silence)." Also included was an introduction to the optical and mechanical principles of motion picture operation.

In discussing the techniques and history of the film, short film documentaries and feature films were to be viewed and analyzed. Each student was to be involved in several creative activities including the production of an individual film. Roller's detailed course outline

⁷George E. Roller, "Exploring the Language of Films," (Miami: Dade County Board of Public Instruction, 1971), pp. 1-19.

included performance objectives and strategies for attaining them, a rationale for the course, and a list of resources, including books and films.

Many teacher/authors reported that film making activities in one class often diffused throughout the entire school to become an inter-departmental project. One such program was described by David J. Beal.⁸ An instructor in the English department of Newmains Secondary School in Lanarkshire, Scotland, Beal detected a dead spot in his curriculum and sought an alternative to the conventional drama period. What resulted was a group-produced fiction film. The popular unit quickly became a vital part of every school year.

The fiction project, initiated by the English department, provided ample opportunities for promoting linguistic skills through the writing of stories, scripts, captions, film credits, publicity articles, and letters. Related skills such as library research, spoken film narration and editing became increasingly relevant. The ultimate involvement of the whole school was necessary to provide actors, artists, camera and lighting technicians, costume makers, property and set teams, and sound effects specialists.

The American Film Institute's Guide to College Film Courses, 1971-72, listed 427 American colleges and universities that offered courses in film appreciation, film history, and film making.⁹ Ninety-six of those schools offered extensive programs and enrolled several students as

⁸David J. Beal, "Film-Making as a School Activity," CITE Newsletter, Vol. 2, (May, 1969), pp. 3-7.

⁹Dorothy I. Weil (ed.), The American Film Institute's Guide to College Film Courses 1971-72 (3rd ed.; Chicago: American Library Association, 1971), p. i.

film majors. On many of these campuses, film making became an inter-departmental venture with the end products being used as teaching aids and for public relations.

During the 1970-71 school year the Colorado State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education cooperated with the mass communications department at the University of Denver to produce a documentary film concerning the junior colleges of Colorado.¹⁰ The students in the fall semester course, "Creative Writing for Film," researched the project and compiled a script. During the winter quarter thirteen students in the "Film Production" course devoted full time to filming and editing. They traveled over two thousand miles throughout Colorado shooting footage. While earning fifteen credit hours, these students gained practical experience in all phases of professional film production. Prints of the completed film were distributed throughout the state.

Some of the most exciting film projects have sprung up outside the schools as integral parts of community development. A grant, designated as "Film-making as an educational experience for male Negro high school dropouts," was the impetus for what later became the 12th and Oxford Street Film-Makers Corporation.¹¹ In eight months a warring Negro street gang in North Philadelphia became a competent movie crew. Under the guidance of Harold Haskins, a community planner at Temple University, and with the technical advice of Phil Galligan, a professional cameraman, the

¹⁰H. T. Spetnagel, F. D. Lillie, and Bill Neff, "A Cooperative Film Effort in Colorado," *Junior College Journal*, Vol. 42, (February, 1972), pp. 20-21.

¹¹Jean Marie Ackermann, "The Jungle. . .Like It Is, Man," Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide, Vol. 47, (October, 1968), p. 16.

young warriors produced a movie entitled The Jungle. The film won professional praise and was purchased for distribution by Churchill Films. With a new outlook on survival, the youths expanded their facilities and engaged in further film making enterprises.

Realizing that film making could not absorb all the members of the gang, the corporation invented other projects to upgrade the neighborhood. A laundromat was planned; Westinghouse and the Philadelphia Gas Company offered equipment. A drycleaning shop opened with machines from Westinghouse Corporation, and General Electric Company helped the group set up a neighborhood information center. The City of Philadelphia turned over two tenements; corporation members painted, cleaned, repaired and collected the rent. The income was used to further their film making efforts.

The one project referred to most often in the literature was the New York City FILM CLUB managed by Rodger Larson. In 1963 Larson worked with a group of teen-agers in the Summer Theatre Arts Program at the Mosholu-Montefiore Community Center in the Bronx, New York. Film making emerged as the most vital part of the summer program. A year later Larson abandoned his job as an art teacher and went from place to place trying to convince various organizations that film making meant more to many teen-agers than any of the creative arts then being offered them. He finally found a temporary base of operations at the 92nd Street YM-YWHA in New York City. His book, entitled Young Filmmakers,¹² recounts several of the successes and failures of the students at the 92nd Street

¹² Rodger Larson with Ellen Meade, Young Filmmakers, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1969), p. 13.

YM-YWHA and at the Mosholu-Montefiore Community Center. By 1966 Larson had decided that he wanted to teach teen-agers in a permanent film workshop. FILM CLUB evolved from this need. It started out in the kitchen pantry of the University Settlement on New York's Lower East Side. It gradually became a thriving independent unit supported by the Young Filmmaker's Foundation. More than forty films have been produced by the members.

An equally successful venture was the APPALSHOP project begun in October of 1969.¹³ The Office of Economic Opportunity awarded the American Film Institute \$400,000 to start a network of film workshops with the purpose of teaching minority youth how to produce films. One of the five workshops that was equipped was situated in Whitesburg, Kentucky, a rapidly disintegrating Appalachian community. Twenty-nine-year-old William Richardson began the Appalachian shop with a pile of film making equipment in an old tire shop that he rented on Whitesburg's Main Street. He visited with young people on the street and in the journalism classes at the local high school, but most of the time he spent sitting in the shop, waiting for someone to come in.

Little by little, a group of eight, mostly high school seniors, formed the core of the APPALSHOP. Only one had any film experience, and that consisted of running the projector in the local movie theater. But once the young people handled a 16mm camera, they became excited at the prospect of making movies.

Richardson worked the students gradually at their own pace through the art of film production, starting with still photography. He let them go

¹³Betty Murphy, "Creating a Community in the Mountains," Audiovisual Instruction, Vol. 17, (November, 1972), pp. 6-7.

out and take pictures of whatever they wanted until they learned the basics of exposure, focus, light, and composition. Then he sent them out with videotape cameras to pick up movie composition and sound techniques. After two or three months of working with videotapes, the students began shooting with 16mm films. They became seriously committed to film making when they played a couple of their movies before two hundred students at the University of Kentucky in the spring of 1970. The audience's applause made the young film makers realize that what they had to say could be heard by the world.

During the first two years, the Appalcore, as the kids called themselves, produced eight finished 16mm films, all dealing with mountain people, customs, culture, and history. By the time the original government grant had expired, the APPALSHOP project had become well enough known that state and national organizations were contracting the group for production of documentary, educational, and commercial films. APPALSHOP members realized though that a steady income from film contracts could not be guaranteed. What they needed was a viable, self-supporting media center, with motion picture, videotape, still photography, and record production, and a cable TV business, all supported by a national marketing and distribution system. An ambitious project was outlined which included the creation of a brochure on the films available. Information was sent to four thousand individuals and institutions throughout the Appalachian region. Within months, the APPALSHOP was grossing an average of \$500 to \$600 per month, mostly in film rentals.

Many of the original Appalcore members have entered universities on substantial communications scholarships, and have returned during summer vacations to help manage the APPALSHOP. The community of Whitesburg, Kentucky has found a new pride.

Student Response to Film Making Courses

As with any innovative program, there have been questions concerning the accountability of film making courses. Administrators and academic counselors have demanded measurable results. When considering the implementation of such courses into their curriculums, they have asked typical questions. Do ACT or CEEB test results improve? Will interest in the course take valuable study time away from the "hard" (and therefore important) subjects that students must take? Won't there be considerable breakage of expensive equipment by irresponsible students?¹⁴

In response many neophyte film teachers have been left speechless. Deep within they have felt assured that film making activities could offer solutions to many student problems; several of these teachers have gone to great lengths to demonstrate their enthusiasm and support. Yet, in the final analysis, they have lacked the statistical evidence necessary to sway the doubting administration.

Henry Putsch, a long-time advocate of student film making, has addressed himself to the situation:

Somewhere between the "rigor" of behavioral objectives and the feeling of a significant number of teachers that the "proof" of the value of such an activity as filmmaking is implicit in the experience, lies a more reasonable world of human judgement and professional rationale.¹⁵

What Putsch has suggested was borne out in the literature. In very few instances was there mention of statistical measurement,

¹⁴ Paul Carrico, "Student Filmmaking Why & How," Media and Methods, Vol. 6, (November, 1969), p. 41.

¹⁵ Henry Putsch, "Young Filmmaker's Exchange," Media and Methods, Vol. 7, (January, 1970), p. 58.