

Lights Camera Action Presentation **by Jacinta Farrugia, Barwon Valley School**

Introduction

This presentation is a case study of a group of Middle /Later years students from Barwon Valley School who participated in a regional Victorian student film festival in 2007. These students were the only Special School which was involved in the festival in our region. The 3 minute movie that they made was a culmination of a wonderful experiential learning journey for the students. It involved them attending regional movie making workshops, learning a range of ICT skills, attending a camp so they could participate in the red carpet screening 150 kms from our school. Throughout the whole process we worked together as a team each developing expertise in a number of areas. Needless to say this program had a very positive impact on the students self esteem. This paper will discuss the student learning and development that occurred through this program and the strategies used to cater and support students with specific learning needs. It is one example of an approach to making a movie with students.

Background

Barwon Valley School

Barwon Valley is a special school in a regional Victoria with a population of 160 students. Students who attend the school have an IQ below 50. The group involved in this project attends our base room at a local secondary college. Their ages range from 13-15 years old. The students had a high level of interest in movies which was developed in 2006 when we were involved in an integrated unit *Lights, Camera and Action* during which they made a series of short films.

Re@ct Film Festival

The Department of Education has been running The React Film Festival since 2003. To participate in the Festival, each school had to produce a 3 minute media production. The students movies are generally of a high quality, innovative and very creative. As part of this year's Festival, and prior to production, small groups of students and a staff member from each school, attended 3 separate workshops over the course of terms 2 & 3. The workshops were developed and presented by Michael Green, a media producer, with a strong background in the education sector and a co-founder of the Re@ct Film Festival. The three workshops involved students in learning pre production, production and post production techniques. Students then went back to school to further refine and extend these skills to make their movie.

Although we followed the Michael Green's process, extensive modifications and scaffolding was needed to cater for our students' specific learning needs.

Pre- production – “Let's make a movie”

Developing the story

Our first workshop was in Pre production and covered:

- Roles involved in filmmaking
- Movie genres
- Developing ideas for movies
- Storyboarding

In some ways I thought this was going to be the most difficult workshop. I chose four students who had a range of strengths to attend this workshop. All had good verbal skills, one had good general knowledge, one had good ICT skills and one student was a good illustrator and expressed ideas beautifully with his quirky drawings. This was the team that I would work with to develop the story.

The first step at the workshop was for students to understand the different roles in making a movie. These included director, script writer, storyboarding, camera operator, editor, actor, makeup and wardrobe. Our students were familiar with many of these roles because of their experience in the *Lights Camera and Action* unit. However, this list was useful to refer to back at school when we brainstormed a simple position description for each role with the other students in the class before each class member was allocated a production role for the movie.

Genre

In the workshop students were asked to brainstorm different types of movies or genre. This was a very abstract concept for our students because they didn't have the language to describe different movie genre, however they actually had a good understanding of it. When they were shown movies from the 2006 [Re@ct](#) Film Festival they were able to use simple labels to identify the genre. Visual prompts also helped them to identify the different genre. These are the genre they identified in the different movies.

- Made up- not real (Make believe or fantasy)
- Scary – horror
- Funny (comedy)
- Exciting (action)

Also by watching these movies at the workshop they not only developed a language for identifying genre this also stimulated ideas.

Developing ideas

Another skill students practiced at the Pre Production workshop was that of using taglines. This involves summarising the whole story into one sentence. This can help students develop a simple broad idea for their story and then build on this idea to expand their story. For our students I used a series of taglines from movies they were familiar with. For example "Lightening McQueen is a red racing car who dreamed all his life of winning the Piston Cup Championship" You could also ask students to then describe in one sentence what a particular movie is

about. This skill of developing taglines was most important when brainstorming ideas for a movie.

It is also important for students to share their experiences in their movie. There are a range of strategies you can use to stimulate ideas for movies. "One way is to use prompts such as providing a topic like Sports Day."¹ Green used another prompt where students were given a nursery rhyme or story and they had to apply a genre to it. In the workshop he gave them the topic, 'Jack and the Bean Stalk'. Their story had to have the same characters but not follow the same story line. Green also introduced the concept of storyboarding their ideas. Students were asked to tell their story using a storyboard of eight pictures.

Writing the story and Story boarding

Back at school, with this background knowledge, the four workshop participants began the process of brainstorming ideas for our movie. We firstly talked about some of the student movies they viewed and the ones they liked. Their favourite movie was the "Killer Soccer Balls" and from this movie they took on the concept of an inanimate object coming alive but instead of making a scary movie they actually used this concept to develop a "funny" movie.

One of the most important things to remember in movie making is to let the pictures do the talking, that is, show as opposed to tell the story. During the scripting process it is important to give some thought to the production process because what is scripted will impact on production. For example my students are not able to remember lines, so reducing the dialogue in the script meant that filming would be easier, but also that we'd have to add voiceover in post production. Thinking about location also can make filming easier. Filming in a school for example, has many benefits including control of lighting and the elimination of travel and transport of gear.

Normally a storyboard is done after a script has been written, but because our students rely on visual prompts to help them reinforce their learning, we combined the two processes. With the workshop group we brainstormed broad ideas for the script text into a storyboard format and asked a student to draw the pictures for the text. We dispensed with shot specifics such as long, mid, etc., as this would have been too difficult a process for our students. Interestingly the student drawing the pictures naturally incorporated some of these shots within his pictures. I then wrote a script using a table format with fields for shot number, vision and audio. This was useful to help staff keep track of the filming. Throughout the filming we made modifications to the script where needed.

Production- Roll tape... action!

¹ RollerMache website Accessed at www.abc.net.au/rollercaoster/storytelling

A group of students with a keen interest in using a camera attended the next workshop which focused on production skills. They were taught basics such as using simple function buttons on the camera, filming with and without a tripod and the different types of shots e.g. close up (CU), medium close up MCU, wide shot (WS). These skills and techniques were practiced when we returned to school. The workshop also highlighted a number of common production mistakes to avoid such as not allowing enough time between hitting record and starting action, using camera zoom which can create out of focus shots, camera shake, over exposure and not being aware of extraneous noise. To reduce some of these problems when we started filming at our school we : started the camera rolling before action began, kept the camera wide and for close ups got close to the subject, used a tripod to reduce camera shake, avoided filming on windy days and always checked for ambient noise before filming.

Animation was used in a number of ways in our movie. "Animation is the illusion of movement created by quickly showing a series of images each slightly different to the last."² A simple way to teach animation is to make a flip book. Alternatively you can use a PowerPoint slide show and view changes in the side sorter view to show how an animation works. Art work can be scanned or drawn in simple software packages like *Paint* or for more advanced students, *Photoshop*, and these images can be used to create an animation using a free download software such as *Monkey Jam*.

Post production - Cutting it

Our base room school hosted the final workshop which focused on teaching students editing skills and some basic animation techniques. There are many different editing software packages available, however it is important to choose a software package that is easy for your students to use. If you have a PC, *Moviemaker* is already loaded and although it has limitations in terms of only having one audio track, it is easy for students to use. Alternatively if you have a Mac platform *iMovie* is a similar package but has a number of audio tracks. When editing your movie in *Moviemaker* it is important to firstly sequence and trim all video clips first in your project timeline before adding effects, transitions and finally your music soundtrack.

One should never underestimate how much music or sound effects can enhance the finished movie product. Unfortunately because it is the last layer added to a movie it is often not given a lot of consideration. You can use: commercial music for which you will need copyright permission, free music downloads form the internet or you can compose music yourself. We composed and recorded our own song for our movie.

² RollerMache website Accessed at www.abc.net.au/rollercaoster/storytelling

Showcasing the Product

Once the movie is finished it is important to investigate ways to showcase your movie. In our case we attended The Re@ct Film Festival. Students were involved in making posters to advertise the movie on opening night and in dressing themselves and our star “Stanley” in appropriate attire for the evening. You can explore entering your movies in other student multimedia festivals in your region or organise your own screening. It is important to add value to your movie production by uploading a movie onto portable devices such as iPods so that your students can share their movie with other students.

Outcomes

Our involvement in the React Film Festival was a wonderful journey for our students. It was a real thrill to see their development in terms of skills, knowledge, confidence and self esteem. Students were given opportunities to develop their imaginative and expressive self through story telling, drama, art and music. They also improved their ICT skills in the areas of using a video camera, editing software tools, voice recording software, drawing and animation software.

Our involvement in this project had broad application across all three Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) strands.

Discipline based learning domains	Interdisciplinary learning domains	Physical, personal and social learning domains
English The Arts	Communication Thinking processes Information and communications technology (ICT)	Interpersonal development Personal Learning