Case Study 4: Secondary School, Norwich, Norfolk

Schooltoons week: 17th July – 21st July 2006

Key Stage 4

Techniques; Cut Out, Drawn Animation

Cineliteracy

The first day was used to provide the students with an overview of the history of animation, and an introduction to storyboarding and character development. They also learned the rudiments of music composition via a series of simple exercises.

Pupils learn to deconstruct a piece of music into its constituent elements e.g. rhythm, tempo, tonality, timbre etc and explore the effect of different uses of these elements. Games are played to explore rhythm and tempo and to prepare them for the vocal exercises. Games were played in which the students created harmonies for themselves and explored the effect this had on simple melodies. They each sang pitches assigned to them.

Students were introduced to the history of animation by a short simple activity: building a 'bird-cage' thaumatrope

Students make their own thaumatrope

A zoetrope used to demonstrate how we trick the brain into believing that there is a fluid movement and progression between drawings. This is used to introduce pupils to the most primitive form of animation.

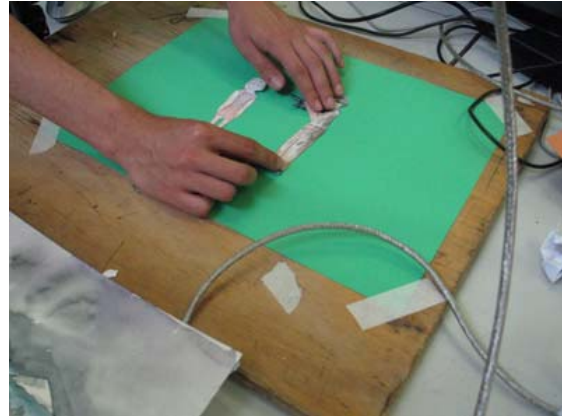Using a personal piece of work, Karina demonstrates storyboard skills

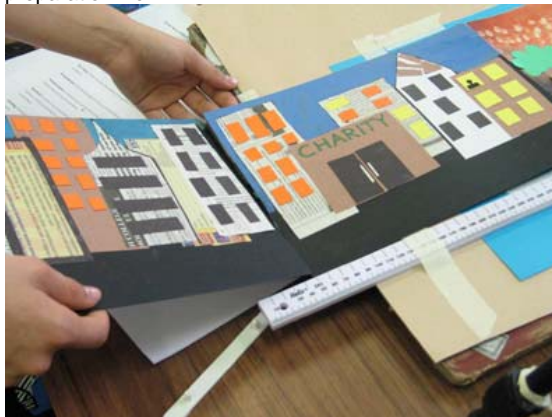Character development board

Assignment

On the second day students were given the task to create a 30 second TV advertisement to support the Arms Control Campaign.

All students are encouraged to draw as part of their preparation work

Students use the green screen technique to combine two images.

Rostrum work. Students enjoyed making their backgrounds from simple newspaper cut-outs.

Once students overcame fear of editing, they really enjoyed the creative process of putting all their work together using Premiere Pro.

Constructive criticism is well received and students communicated well with the artists in residence.

Group discussions are very productive and generate many ideas for refining work. I noticed how positively students react to others' work.

The project demonstrated how effectively animation can support students in fulfilling their ICT requirements for Art and Design. We noted how the processes described above clearly cover these three points.

Art and Design:

ICT STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

- 'Pupils should be given opportunities to apply and develop their ICT capability through the use of ICT tools to support their learning.'
- 'ICT helps pupils learn in art and design by enabling them to develop their creativity and imagination through more sustained activities within the programmes of study.'
- 'ICT makes it possible to include all pupils in visual research and gives them greater autonomy over the creative process. It provides more tools to help pupils learn about visual concepts and visual communication.'

Quotations from evaluation written by participating Head of Art and Design

Context of the Project

The group selected were my GCSE photography class as a suitably small and enthusiastic group, used to working independently, and I invited two 6th formers to join them who were very keen to learn the techniques. The brief was to create a 30 second TV advertisement, on the theme of human rights with a focus on the Control Arms campaign run by Oxfam, IANSA and Amnesty International.

Some of the pitfalls and also major gains of the week were those associated with group work. There were 3 existing strong pairs of pupils who frequently work together and had prepared ideas together. The other students were the less motivated ones and they found it harder to progress in teams. All the groups overcame these issues by the end of the week and one of the major gains was the growth in personal confidence and motivation shown by 2 of the weaker students.

The last week of the school year was probably the only time I could have been allowed to take myself and the students off timetable for a whole week. There were some problems with this timing however ..This led to considerable difficulties in preparing them for the project and communication generally.

In spite of working through a heat wave in the last week of the school year, the students all said they enjoyed working intensively at one thing and they all soon appreciated the need to

meet a deadline and how difficult that can be unless all work positively together and stay on task.

The method of teaching during the week was geared towards the individual approach and time allowance suitable for GCSE and A' level. We did the equivalent of a term's work during one week. A simpler approach would be needed for key stage 3 unless it was an enrichment activity for a small group and even then it would be hard to replicate a whole week's work.

The examples of animation shown and the variety of techniques we employed ourselves, all combined to stimulate our imaginations to see how animation could be used both as a teaching aid in the preparation of lesson material if desired and by pupils themselves in any subject. A moving image is very compelling and we were shown how animations could be produced using drawings, photos, cut-outs and real objects, though we stuck to 2D.

We all thought that the process of image capture would be harder. We also however learned there is a world of difference between just doing something and doing it really well to produce a professional result. We also gained understanding of just how time consuming a professional piece is and why.

I can see that it is a very expressive medium and that the language of movement itself is powerful and individual akin to dance perhaps, but sharing the language of framing and composition with photography and painting. Our awareness of the relationship between sound and image was raised by Jonathon's contribution which demonstrated how the mood created by a piece of text could be vastly altered by the addition of different sounds and rhythms.

Certainly this was a superb enrichment activity. It was fun but hard work and the students had to think and work creatively in a short time to produce a result. The weaker students in particular produced much more creative and imaginative work than they normally do.

As a teacher, I was really excited by the possibilities and hope to make this part of my long term plan to extend the photography course into film and video as allowed by the Edexcel GCSE Art and design, endorsed Photography syllabus.

One of the hard things to make students understand is that photography at GCSE must go beyond mere recording and therefore I think that the stimulus given to their creativity from this project will feedback into their photography. It will be possible for them to enter their projects for their GCSE coursework. They have kept work journals and have been given instructions for further research. If possible I would like them to make their own animation now with a free choice of subject matter, but using the techniques they have learned. Their next project is photomontage and I will look into ways in which small parts of that project could involve animation eg. metamorphosis.

One of the main reasons I have always enjoyed working with real artists is that they model commitment and motivation and inspire us with something imaginative, creative and unique. Students learn that the skills and ideas so freely shared with them have taken years of slog, and hard work, disappointment and persistence to get to. This knowledge is something they need to grow up in their own art and life generally as there is a popular notion that art is easy if you have talent. The need to present their ongoing work to others on camera was useful in developing confident language skills.

The project created opportunities for pupils to explore the value of animation as part of the creative industry. Pupils were questioned about the current contexts and uses of animation in the media and we were led to recognise just how widespread it is, and how varied in style. The different kinds of animation were briefly discussed and throughout the week lovely examples of different kinds of work were screened. This method of interspersing practical work with screening and discussion worked really well and introduced students to the lesser known styles and to other students' films as well as professional work. Early examples of animation and children's toys were explored and students made their own spinning toy.

- Students gained awareness of the language of animation and learned specialist terms to do with storyboarding filming and editing
- They learned a huge amount from seeing Karina's drawings, storyboards, character studies and mood boards.
- They learned a little about the difficulties of getting work in a highly competitive field
- Student's awareness of copyright issues was raised when they were refused permission to reuse an existing song as a soundtrack

Learning took place through doing with help given as required, by demonstration and by example from Karina's own work.

- Students learned the importance of storyboarding and the idea that you might have to draw for someone else to carry out your idea
- Students were introduced to image capturing software and shown how to set up an animation rostrum
- They used either Pinnacle or Adobe Premiere to edit the film and add the sound created using Acid

The students seemed to cope well with this aspect of the work which seemed daunting to me; however I wonder whether they gained enough experience to be able to do it again by themselves. We hope to be able to reinforce the learning by carrying on next year. For myself I would have been more useful had I had my training before the Schooltoons week, as I couldn't help the students with any difficulties that arose or prepare them sufficiently well beforehand. This could not be helped but in an ideal world the teacher training should come first, at least for a taster session.

Recommendations for teacher training in animation

Points to note:

- Ideally teachers should have an introduction to the process before preparing students.
- Teachers will come to the project with different levels of knowledge and fluency with both the art skills and the ICT skills required.
- Like children, teachers have individual learning styles.
- Personally I am reflective and like to have time to absorb and prepare.
- Other people like to get stuck in and do things as quickly as possible and have no problem with short deadlines and therefore may disagree with these recommendations.
- Everybody likes to be shown things so "here's one I made earlier" is always good.

- We go away and prepare our idea around the theme we are developing in our schools.
- We come to the next session with our storyboards and any cut-outs, backgrounds etc ready made.

Quotations from evaluation by Animator in Residence

Taken as a whole I believe that the schooltoons week was an educational success for all parties involved. Clear objectives were set and implemented throughout the week. Pupils, the teacher and I acquired new skills, knowledge and an insight into what can be achieved through schemes such as this.

Personally, I feel that the structure and timescale of the workshop was successful - all the children managed to produce a 30 second animation with a soundtrack. However, I would recommend for future projects that the first day of contact is a theoretical introduction to **both** aspects of animation - *sound* and *image*. A day on sound should then possibly follow, in turn leading onto imagery and the actual making. The reason for this suggestion was that initially

the pupils seemed rather bemused and vague as to what was required of them by the end of the week. They felt obliged to produce a rushed soundtrack before they really knew the boundaries of animation and what they could possibly achieve with the imagery. I feel that this may have restricted their creativity and design of the soundtrack - possibly damaging their result due to their sound and image jarring. A further example of how this could be avoided would be through the school teacher introducing and clarifying the brief and its theme before the workshop takes place.

Providing this service within the school grounds and environment certainly demonstrated animation's use within the curriculum, which may be unsuccessful if taken out of the school context. Working in their classroom allowed the children to be relaxed enough to produce ideas confidently, whilst our presence inspired their creativity. This was achieved through showing them examples of other successful animations. With the correct guidance and recommendation, teachers can easily build up a resource pack of DVD's, videos and handouts with such examples.

Utilising a camera to record the whole workshop and individual interviews with students was one of the methods implemented in order for a profound and accurate evaluation to be made. Furthermore, it was useful to ask the students to write their own written evaluation, which we read and discussed with them. The pupils and teacher picked up a considerable amount of technological knowledge about using the digital video equipment. We provided them with inductions to the equipment and to the software used - reinforced with a written handout. Throughout the workshop students were encouraged to take notes and ask questions to their teacher and to the workshop tutors.

I worked closely with the teacher leading the class and explained all the processes and theoretical background of the project to her. By the end of the week we were having detailed conversations about ideas that she had had regarding exercises and tasks she could initiate in the new term. I do feel that teachers involved needs some individual training other than what can be picked up during a workshop. This would include a session on each of the software programs and setting up and using the rostrum. However, they could refer to a handbook whilst teaching (recommended again). Animation can readily be made accessible to teachers and pupils alike - simply through purchasing a few essential pieces of equipment and approaching it with an open and creative mind. Once again I must state that for the teachers to feel confident with the subject matter, they should really be introduced to the software and have access to practice and play with it themselves. There does not seem to be a problem with the ideas process or the actual drawing and making of the pieces. Perhaps the most pressure is upon the final editing stages. However, the software we used was very simple and I believe that the teachers would pick it up quickly.

Time constraints during the workshop pushed the children to work as hard as they could, and to be organised. Hence, real-life time management was put into practice successfully so that the children felt that they had worked hard and could look back over the week and marvel at just how much they could achieve when they applied themselves. For the older students this eased them into the industry standards that they will be entering.

In summary, what teachers need to learn to survive:

Software: capturing programme, sound software and editing program
Care and setting up of **technical equipment**: rostrum and computers
History and **theory** of animation and simple introductory exercises e.g. zeotrope
An awareness of current and monumental examples of animation, as well as a library of examples