CREATIVITY AND DIGITAL VIDEO

Tom Barrance, Director, Media Education Wales

My presentation at the conference included a description of the Becta DV Pilot Project and a summary of the lessons learned from this and subsequent initiatives such as the Creativity in Digital Media Awards.

BECTA DV PILOT

This research project took place between October 2001 and March 2002. It aimed to explore how digital video could support creativity within the curriculum. Schools from around Britain applied to take part by describing how they intended to use DV, and fifty were chosen. These included primary, secondary, special and specialist schools.

Each school received an Apple iMac DV with iMovie 2 editing software, a Canon digital video camera, and ten licences for QuickTime Pro. The teachers also had in-service training at day sessions around England and in Scotland. An online support and discussion forum was also set up.

My first involvement in the project was the training: I provided an introduction to film language and how to teach it to students, and then took participants through a two-hour filmmaking activity which included planning, storyboarding, filming and editing. David Baugh from Denbighshire LEA provided training on curriculum applications of DV.

The research process included observation visits, semi-structured interviews, some filming, and the completion by teachers of creativity monitoring forms. Becta staff, *bfi* Education staff and myself undertook the research visits.

WHAT CAME NEXT?

A number of initiatives followed the original DV Pilot Project:

- *bfi* Education produced an evaluation report, written by Mark Reid, David Parker and Andrew Burn
- Becta produced a CD-ROM – Teaching and Learning with Digital Video – for which I wrote material
- A similar DV project took place in Northern Ireland as part of the C2K initiative: again, David Baugh and I provided training
- A DV Assets project was set up, involving the South West and East of England broadband consortia. This project explored how schools could use archive moving image material with DV. Again, we were involved in the initial training days
- Becta set up the Creativity in Digital Media (formerly Creativity in Digital Video) Awards. I have been involved in steering, short listing and judging this annual competition

Examples from the DV Pilot

In my presentation I showed a number of clips of children working on DV which I filmed during my research visits. These included:

- A group of Year 2 and 3 children being taught how to edit video by their teacher
- A gifted and talented Year 6 group teaching a Year 4 group to edit
- A primary teacher helping her Key Stage 2 class to define the brief and to plan a film which would record a science experiment
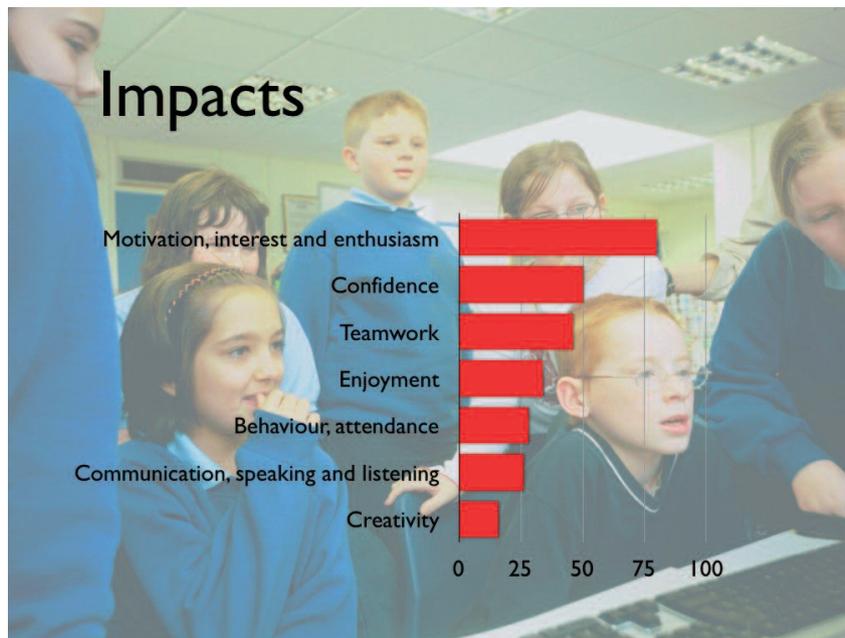
I also showed two examples which showed how much focused speaking and listening goes on during the editing process. These were a Year 2/3 class doing a simple sequencing activity, and a Key Stage 3 group discussing the text of Macbeth as they edited a scene from the play.

I also showed some students' films from the project:

- A short drama scene made by students from a special school. This was a simple story which had been carefully planned to make the narrative clear to the audience through appropriate framing and editing
- A film made by students from a primary school which used humour effectively to explain the principles of air resistance
- An excerpt from a science fiction film from the same special school which had subsequently won a Creativity in Digital Video Award

IMPACTS

Part of the research asked teachers to describe the impacts which they had observed from the use of DV by their students. This chart summarises the key impacts which teachers mentioned.

Half of the teachers reported that students had voluntarily given up their own time, including working through break times or lunchtimes.

While 'behaviour' was only mentioned by a small number of teachers, there were some striking examples. One teacher reported on a Key Stage 3 student who had been on the verge of being excluded. He was accustomed to failing with traditional literacy, but filmmaking gave him a chance to show expertise which other students recognised. He took a leading role in the filmmaking team, and the sense of being valued by his peers had 'transformed' his behaviour.

Creativity itself was only mentioned by a small number of teachers. It's not clear whether this is because teachers took it as a given, or because they were unsure how to define it, as the *bfi* research report suggested.

TECHNOLOGY ISSUES

A number of issues related to technology became apparent during the DV Pilot Project, and from common faults in entries to the Creativity in Digital Media Awards.

- Sound is often poor in children's films. One way of improving it is to use a separate microphone, rather than the built-in one, but some cheaper cameras don't have microphone sockets. Tie clip microphones, costing £20-£30, are a good investment
- Tripods are important. They prevent camera shake and they make students slow down and think about their framing
- Small cameras can be fiddly. Some of the schools on the pilot project received larger semi-professional ('prosumer') cameras. The controls on these are easier to handle, the cameras themselves are more robust, and image quality is much better, particularly in poor light
- Lighting is difficult to manage. School lighting tends to be poor, but artificial lights are difficult to set up and a major health and safety issue. It's worth investing in a camera that will perform well in low light
- iMovie 2 (which is what the Pilot schools used) is easy to use, but limited. However, the current version – iMovie HD – has many more features and many schools find it adequate even for Media Studies coursework. A bigger problem is that schools tend to be wary of Macs because of unfamiliarity
- DV takes up a lot of disc space so storage can be a problem: plenty of hard disc space, and a strategy for archiving and managing media, is important

TEACHING ISSUES

On two research visits it appeared that teachers were underestimating children's ability with DV. (This isn't uncommon: on more than one occasion I've seen some perfectly good filming in a children's film, followed by a shot which makes elementary mistakes. It has then turned out that the teacher filmed that particular shot because he didn't trust the children to do it!)

This can lead to situations where the students don't have 'ownership' of their films. In one secondary school example a technician had done all the filming (of the students acting) and was doing the editing with the students watching him. In another case, I watched a teacher constantly telling Year 6 students what to do and correcting them while they were filming a scene, giving them no opportunity to take creative decisions themselves.

Judging the Creativity in Digital Media Awards has also been useful in identifying common problems. It's usually obvious if children haven't been taught about film language. Some people think that this is unnecessary because children are so familiar with moving images: but even though most students can 'read' films, this is not the same as being able to identify and use the techniques which create meaning in film.

Other common faults are related to lack of organisation and discipline in the filmmaking process. These include setting too vague a brief or failing to define a brief, devoting too little time to planning (e.g. scripting and storyboarding), allowing students to shoot too much material, and not getting them to be selective with their material during the editing process.

CLASSROOM ORGANISATION

Teachers on the DV Pilot found a number of different techniques useful:

- Peer tutoring (one teacher on the *bfi*'s Digital Video Editing in Education MA did an action research project and found this to be the most effective way for children to learn iMovie)
- Rotating roles, so that students get a taste of different aspects of filmmaking
- Editing in small groups: pairs are good, though you could have a group size of up to four or even six if your students are very patient and well-behaved
- Offering some opportunities for individual work
- Rotating tasks between gender (so that the boys don't always grab the camera). Single-gender groups can sometimes be best. (Having said this, in one of our own projects I filmed a group of six Year 6 students editing happily with the boys handling the keyboard and mice while the girls sitting at the back made all the decisions!)

GOOD PRACTICE

To summarise, here are what I think are characteristics of good practice in DV work:

■ Emphasising film language more than technology: the technology is just a means for telling a story or communicating information
■ Ensuring that children have a clear sense of audience and purpose
■ Setting manageable projects with clear limits: a film of 30–60 seconds is manageable in terms of the amount of planning and material involved, and short enough for students to structure the narrative themselves and maintain audience interest
■ Following a structured planning process: e.g. defining a brief, writing a script, storyboarding, planning the filming
■ Starting with simple introductory exercises before undertaking a full-scale filmmaking project
■ Offering repeated opportunities to develop skills, rather than just one filmmaking activity a term or year
■ Providing opportunities for progression

TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING FILM LANGUAGE

It's a good idea to use short examples, such as opening sequences, adverts and key scenes. Try these techniques for emphasising different aspects of moving image language:

■ Show a sequence and ask students to guess the number of shots
■ Freeze a frame and get students to describe the image in detail
■ Show the images without the sound
■ Play the sound without the images – get students to describe what they hear, what genre of film it is, what images they would expect to see
■ Play the same sequence with different soundtracks
■ Play a sequence and get students to work out where the camera was positioned for each shot

USEFUL CONSTRAINTS

One important point which the *bfi* report made was that constraints are very important in creative work. For filmmaking, here are some suggested constraints:

■ Limiting the duration of the film
■ Requiring a specific number of shots
■ Requiring specific kinds of shot
■ Filming with no camera movements
■ Requiring use of specific camera positions
■ Telling a story without dialogue
■ 'Mimetic' activities (getting students to recreate a scene from a film)

WIDER QUESTIONS

A number of wider issues arise when we consider the future of DV work in schools:

■ Training provision: it was noticeable when judging the CDMA that many of the most successful entrants had received specific training
■ Access to resources: schools need sufficient filming and editing equipment
■ Curriculum location: where should DV fit?
■ Models of progression: there are suggested models in the *bfi* evaluation report and on the DV in Education site (see links on page 12)
■ Copyright: being able to digitise and re-edit sequences from feature films and TV programmes can be very useful activities, but the legality of this is far from clear
■ Process and product: what is the balance between ensuring that the process has educational value, and ensuring that the students produce an end product that they can be satisfied with?
■ Gender issues: e.g. why are girls generally better at editing than boys?

USEFUL LINKS

Becta
www.becta.org.uk

Becta DV Research Reports
Including the DV Pilot Project, the DV Assets Project, and a summary of research on DV in Education
http://tinyurl.com/4q7jb

bfi Research Reports
Including the DV Pilot Project and teacher-led action projects on DV editing
www.bfi.org.uk/education/research/teachlearn/

DV in Education
Information, discussion forum and training
www.dvined.org.uk

DV in Education Progression Chart
http://tinyurl.com/as55c

Making Movies Make Sense
Media Education Wales' CD-ROM on film language and filmmaking
www.mediaedwales.org.uk/mmms.htm

MediaEd DV page
Gateway to information and links about using DV in schools
www.mediaed.org.uk/dv.html

Media Education Wales
Training, projects, research and consultancy
www.mediaedwales.org.uk

Tom Barrance is Director of Media Education Wales. Tom was involved in training, research and writing for the DV Pilot project, and in steering and judging the Creativity in Digital Media Awards.

Tom Barrance has delivered training in film language and digital video in all four countries of the UK and in Ireland, and is writer of the CD-ROM Making Movies Make Sense: Understanding and Using Film Language.

tom@mediaedwales.org.uk