



Theses and Dissertations

2007-07-11

The Media Production Experience: a Phenomenological Study of Student Media Production in a Secondary Education Environment

Brian N. Saxton
Brigham Young University - Provo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#), and the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Saxton, Brian N., "The Media Production Experience: a Phenomenological Study of Student Media Production in a Secondary Education Environment" (2007). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1014.
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/1014>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

The Media Literacy Production Experience: a Phenomenological Study of Student Media
Production in a Secondary Education Environment

by

Brian Neil Saxton

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Theatre and Media Arts

Brigham Young University

August 2007

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Brian Neil Saxton

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

Date

Amy Petersen Jensen, Chair

Date

Darl Larsen

Date

Jeffrey L. Parkin

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Brian Neil Saxton in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations and bibliographic style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

Date

Amy Petersen Jensen
Chair, Graduate Committee

Accepted for the Department

Date

Rodger Sorensen
Department Chair, Theatre and Media Arts

Accepted for the College

Date

Rory R. Scanlon
Associate Dean, College of Fine Arts and
Communications

ABSTRACT

The Media Literacy Production Experience: a Phenomenological Study of Student Media Production in a Secondary Education Environment

Brian Neil Saxton

Department of Theatre and Media Arts

Master of Arts

Many media education researchers have pointed out the benefits of incorporating a production element into a media literacy program. In fact, the simple use of the word “literacy” alludes to both critical analysis of (“reading”) media and creative expression through (“writing”) media. However, many of those same researchers have found that there are serious difficulties with student media production from a practical standpoint. The lack of equipment, the lack of class time, poor educator training, and the possibility that students may produce school-inappropriate or offensive texts create doubts about whether or not the effort is worth the reward.

This qualitative, phenomenological study seeks to provide an answer to those doubts from the standpoint of secondary education (high school) students who participated in a short film production project. The students were surveyed, interviewed,

observed, and asked to keep journals about their experiences. That experiential data was then analyzed for significant themes or patterns that could illuminate the essence of the students' experiences. The relative value and the difficulties of the project from the perspective of the students are then evaluated.

Table of Contents:

Graduate Committee Approval	ii
Final Reading Approval and Acceptance	iii
Abstract	iv
Chapter One: Introduction and Literature Review	1
Chapter Two: Methodology	9
Chapter Three: Data Analysis	16
Chapter Four: Conclusions and Impact	33
Annotated Bibliography	36
Appendices	
Appendix A: Interview Questions	53
Appendix B: Media Production Experience Questionnaire	56
Appendix C: Lesson Plans and Materials	
Explanation & Disclaimer	57
Outline	58
Lesson One	61
Lesson Two	64
Lesson Three	67
Lesson Four	71
Lesson Five	82
Lesson Six	86
Lesson Seven	96
Lesson Eight	98
Lesson Nine	102
Lesson Ten	104
Lesson Plan Bibliography	107

Brian Neil Saxton

Brigham Young University

June 19, 2007

The Media Literacy Production Experience: a Phenomenological Study of Student Media
Production in a Secondary Education Environment

Chapter One: Introduction and Literature Review

As this is a study of media literacy in practice in an English secondary education classroom, it would make sense to first define what is generally meant by the term “literacy” and how media literacy is an extension of the English curriculum. By literal definition, the word means, “the condition or quality of being literate, especially the ability to read and write” (“Literacy”). In most practical uses, as well, the term refers to the ability to take and create meaning through the use of the printed word. Of course, being literate in one language (say, English) does not guarantee literacy in any language that doesn’t share the same formal elements (say, French). That being the case, then, this study will postulate three things as given: first, that each language has its own literacies; second, that to teach literacy in a given language means to teach the ability to take meaning from and create meaning through the formal elements of that language; and third, that the inseparability of the reading and writing elements of literacy apply to every language that is taught.

Literacy within each language, too, can become varied and complex when taken in the context of all modes of communication. In the English classroom, for example, students are taught several modes of critical reading including functional, informational,

and literary texts as well as oral presentations. They are also taught to write (or create) texts in the same modes. Within each of those modes, there are subordinate modes of literacy complete with separate vocabularies and creative considerations. Within the “literary text” mode, for instance, the instructor may teach students to critically read and write short narrative fiction; but he or she must teach different vocabulary and creative skills for students to critically read or write poetry.

Indeed, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has recognized that with the changes and advances in communication technology, the number and type of modes has increased:

The use of multimodal literacies has expanded the ways we acquire information and understand concepts. Ever since the days of illustrated books and maps, texts have included visual elements for the purpose of imparting information. The contemporary difference is the ease with which we can combine words, images, sound, color, animation, video, and styles of print in projects so that they are part of our everyday lives and, at least by our youngest generation, often taken for granted. (NCTE.org, “Multimodal Literacies”)

In keeping with that expanded multimodal approach to literacy in English, six of the twelve NCTE standards for teachers of English include the incorporation of media literacy modes or non-print texts, visual vocabulary, and media techniques. It is also emphasized that those twelve standards “are not distinct and separable; they are, in fact, interrelated and should be considered as a whole” (NCTE.org, “Standards”).

The implied interrelated nature of traditional English modes and media modes must also suggest that the same definition of literacy as including both critical reading and creative writing components applies to media literacy as well as traditional printed literacy. Many educators and researchers, for example, have found that:

. . . media literacy is not a separate subject, but integrated into the English language arts, social studies, health, and fine arts curricula. Even though some may still consider the phrase to be oxymoronic, media literacy is an expanded conceptualization of literacy. What this means is that the ability to ‘read’ and ‘write’ using the symbol systems of visual and electronic media is deeply connected to reading, writing, speaking, and listening – the traditional literacy skills. (Hobbs, “Semantics” 25)

In fact, definitions of media literacy offered by experts and educators in the field include both reading and production (or writing) aspects: “Media literacy is the skill of experiencing, interpreting, analyzing, and making media products” (Worsnop, media-awareness.ca), “To be [media] literate today, people must be able to decode, understand, evaluate, and write through, and with, all forms of media” (Baron, media-awareness.ca), and, “Media literacy [is] the ability to critically consume and create media” (New Mexico, nmmlp.org). Given those definitions, an educator who undertakes the task of teaching media literacy cannot complete the task without teaching both media “reading” (careful critical analysis of the vocabulary of media texts to determine their meaning and purpose) and media “writing” (the production of media texts using their specific vocabulary).

The consequence of that concept, of course, is that a production experience must be provided to students as an integrated element of any successful media literacy program. The classroom must transform itself into a studio or, “a kind of multimedia readers’/writers’ workshop” (Kist 712-16). Those necessary multimedia workshops are desirable for the students, and they are desirable for the educator as well – as Buckingham, points out:

Practical, hands-on use of media technology [such as media production] frequently offers the most direct, engaging, and effective way of exploring a given topic. It is also the aspect of media education that is most likely to generate enthusiasm from students. Practical work offers a comparatively ‘safe’ space, in which students can explore their emotional investments in the media, and represent their own enthusiasms and concerns. As I have argued, the notion of ‘media literacy’ necessarily implies that ‘reading’ the media and ‘writing’ the media should be inextricably connected. For all these reasons, media production is a central and indispensable aspect of media education. (Buckingham, Culture 82)

A production experience may also be desirable from the standpoint of technological literacy as, “the power of technology is unleashed when the students can use it in their own hands as authors of their own work and use it for critical inquiry, self-reflection, and creative expression” (Goodman 2).

Conversely, the same educators and researchers that point out the benefits of hands-on media literacy have found that there are serious difficulties in actually incorporating media production into the classroom. From a practical perspective, a

production experience can require more expensive equipment, teacher expertise, and class time than can be afforded – thus requiring teachers to ration class time and access to limited technology or rely on the students’ own time and access to equipment (Hobbs, “Seven” 4, Buckingham, Culture 83). From an educational perspective, many critics, parents, and scholars are concerned that most production experiences tend to come down to imitation of mainstream media. If, they ask, students are simply aping the professionals or mimicking what they have seen (the equivalent of writing a pastiche of an existing literary work), what is really being learned, and is it of any value? Are the analytical skills then lost (Buckingham, “Consumer” 314, Hobbs, “Seven” 5, Stafford 71)?

Finally, from a legal and ethical perspective, “production is an arena in which teachers necessarily cede some control to students, and what the students choose to do with that control is not always to the teachers’ [or parents’, or administrations’] liking” (Buckingham, “Consumer” 314). That ceding of control requires a high degree of vigilance and trust on the part of the educator. Video texts are often treated by district policies with an assumption (or at least a suspicion) that they are being used haphazardly (even dangerously) and without curriculum ties. The policies regarding viewing in Alpine School District (the district in which this study took place), for example, state clearly that video in the classroom “shall be weighted against the value of the academic time it consumes,” and that scenes that contain “vulgarity, indecency, nudity, and/or excessive violence are strictly prohibited in the classroom and school” (Alpinedistrict.org, “Motion Pictures”). Previous experience reading student creative writing projects has shown a clear propensity toward that sort of content from many high-school students, and that content puts the educator in a difficult position, legally. If a student creates something

that the instructor deems mild enough to allow the other students to view and critique; but one or two other students in the class deem as vulgar, indecent, or excessively violent (and it is unclear exactly who actually decides on the practical definitions of those terms), the instructor's employment is at risk and the instructor, school, and district may be open to lawsuits.

In addition to legally, the instructor is also ethically/morally responsible for the safety and well-being of the students in her/his charge. There are a thousand "what if" scenarios that could be examined. What if a student decides to film a car chase and is involved in an accident? What if a student decides to film a gunfight with realistic-looking guns, fails to obtain a permit or notify the police, and is shot by a well-meaning officer who was convinced that lives were in danger? What if a student invades another student's (or anyone else's) privacy? Even if scenarios like those don't result in legal action against the school or the educator, they are possibilities that should give an ethical instructor pause. Those prohibitive possibilities, along with the other difficulties outlined above, makes tackling a classroom video production experience fairly daunting.

Further, it should be noted that many teachers, themselves, lack adequate experience in the area of media production. They are left, then, to rely on text sources for practical advice. There are, to be sure, plenty of literature guides and sources such as [Creative Filmmaking from the Inside Out: Five Key Ways of Making Inspired Movies and Television](#) (Dannenbaum), [Filmmaking for Teens: Pulling Off Your Shorts](#) (Lanier), [From Script to Screen](#) (Seeger), [Film Production Theory](#) (Geuens), and more available. These books offer excellent advice to aspiring filmmakers. They are full of ideas that encourage literate and aesthetic production choices (especially the Dannenbaum and

Geuens titles) and simple and practical considerations of time, equipment, format, and technique (the Seger and Lanier titles). However, they are geared toward helping filmmakers create quality products and not toward helping educators deal with the intricate little hiccups that student filmmakers are bound to run into or the vast problem of managing several very different student productions at once. Thus, despite how helpful texts on the subject are, the lack of any real practical experience on the part of the instructor can lead to serious difficulties for both the students and the teacher. Completely unexpected and very specific production problems are almost certain to crop up, and more general books like those listed above may leave teachers less than fully prepared to offer solutions. Much of the equipment and software that would be used in media production requires more than an instruction manual to operate properly as well. An untrained teacher can lead to untrained and less-effective student filmmakers.

Effective student filmmakers may not be the only goal of the production experience, however. To expand on David Buckingham's concept of a more ludic or playful pedagogy outlined in his Harvard Educational Review article, "Media Education and the End of the Critical Consumer," even poor quality production can still offer the students a way to "explore their pleasures and emotional investments in the media in ways that are much more subjective and playful than is the case with critical analysis" (325) through a mainly open-ended and student-driven production experience. That exploration of the media and media production techniques can mean that the quality of the student productions may be secondary to the production experience itself (just as the quality of a child's sculpture may be less valuable than the experience the child had playing with the clay). It can also mean, however, that the production instructor may have

to intervene anyway (to avoid the legal and ethical problems mentioned above) and that the project may not, in fact, lead the students to any broader literacy or understanding of the media. Buckingham points out that “what [students] might be expected to learn from such activities . . . needs to be more clearly identified” (329).

In sum, the difficulties and benefits of production experiences (from an instructor’s point of view) have been regularly identified and discussed by researchers like the ones cited above; but what seem to be missing from all of this discussion are the experiences of the students themselves. The question governing this action research, then, goes beyond the benefits and difficulties involved in teaching the production portion of media literacy and beyond the students’ simple enthusiasm for hands-on projects to ask: what is the experience of a group of students who participate in a production experience in a media literacy class? Specifically within that question, do students perceive the benefits and detriments of the experience (or what, if any, are the benefits and/or detriments of the experience from the students’ perspective)? What impact, if any, do the students perceive the production experience has on their understanding of media vocabulary and form? Is it a program that the students feel is worth incorporating into the media literacy curriculum? How do the students feel about the actual product in the context of exhibiting or measuring their gained media literacies? What is the essence of the experience? Answering those questions requires leaving the instructional and practical difficulties behind and focusing on an in-depth exploration of the production experience from the perspective of the students themselves.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Research Design and Framework

A phenomenological qualitative design for this study seemed most appropriate for the question as the goal was, in essence, to explore or describe a phenomenon from the point of view of those who participate in it. Gathering and analyzing experiential data is not generally (nor often effectively) done in numerical and/or quantitative methods. Qualitative phenomenological research, on the other hand, is “an interpretive, naturalistic approach in which the researcher attempts to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Creswell 15). In more simplistic terms, the purpose in researching this media production experience was to offer a detailed view into the experience of the participants and to explore the commonality or the essence of the experience (Johnson 365).

The framework of such a study is gathering experiential data from participants; probing that data for the significant themes, patterns, or statements; and then inferring or interpreting from those themes, patterns, and statements the common essence of the phenomenon (Johnson 367). Using that framework, this research should culminate in what has been described as the typical phenomenological report:

. . . a rich description of the fundamental structure of the experience, and a discussion of the findings. [The report] might also describe any interesting individual or group differences. [The report] will be highly descriptive of the participants’ experiences of the phenomenon, and it will illicit in the readers a feeling that they will understand what it would be like to experience the phenomenon themselves. (369)

Participants

The media production experience and phenomenological research was conducted in two Film as Literature classes taught at a single high school in a single school district in Orem, Utah. The participants, therefore, were high-school juniors and seniors. Many of the students had had at least some technical media production experience through the school's Career Technology Education (CTE) video production class prior to the start of the research project; however, that class focuses almost solely on the technical operations and not at all on critical analysis, media literacy, or aesthetics. Typically, these students were from lower to upper middle-class homes. Most had at least adequate English literacy skills (as evidenced by State Basic Skills Competency Testing). The overwhelming majority of the students were from a common media background and from religious families that have stringent regulations on the students' media exposure and consumption. Though not the most heterogeneous group, it was hoped that the experiences addressed in the study could influence the way production experiences are perceived or incorporated by our particular school, our district, its educators, and its stakeholders. Thus, the uniform nature of the study group shouldn't have impacted the validity of the study to a great degree.

The enrollment for each of the two classes was between thirty-two and thirty-five students (somewhat variable due to class transfers during the course of the study), which fact offered the overwhelming potential of seventy students' experiences to collect for analysis. To minimize the expenditure of time and resources without invalidating the research, a random sample of six students (from the convenience sample of the two classes) was drawn on whose experiences the research focused. Each student who (and

whose parents) signed a consent/assent form was assigned a number, and a random number generator from “Random.org” (Random) selected the six participants.

To preserve the safety and privacy of the participants, all of the students were offered a consent/assent form (only seven students declined participation in the research) and were asked to participate in the same activities. The six students selected were also kept anonymous in the recording and transcription of data by the use of aliases.

Data Sources

There were three principal sources of data for this study. The first source was direct interviews with the selected participants. The interviews were given to the students at the beginning of the study when the production experience assignment had been introduced, during the experience when the pre-production work had been completed, and following the completion of the entire unit and the evaluation of the final product. The questions for the three separate interviews (see Appendix A) were not necessarily created based on any direct model, but were simply based on the research questions outlined at the end of chapter one and the guidelines for qualitative/phenomenological research data collection found in chapter 12 of Burke Johnson and Larry Christensen’s *Educational Research*. Johnson and Christensen point out that effective interviewers ask participants to “think about [their] specific experience carefully and then describe that experience to [the interviewer],” and that interviewers might find that they “need to prompt the respondent during the interview for greater detail” (367). The interviews, as a result, consisted of questions that asked the students to verbalize their feelings and thoughts about the experience at each stage (i.e. “How happy/unhappy are you with the way your project is going, your ideas, and where you see your project ending up?”),

questions that asked the students to evaluate the experience (i.e. “What do you find enjoyable or frustrating about the project so far and why?”), and questions that were designed to offer insight into the level of engagement the students had with the experience (i.e. “Why have you chosen this cut, camera angle, music, etc?”). Those questions, of course, led to follow-up questions that were answer-dependent. The interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed with the full knowledge of the participant to ensure accurate data for analysis.

The second data sources were students’ daily production journals. The participants were asked to keep a detailed journal of the activities and progress made during each day of the project. The journals were fairly freeform and allowed the students to express not only the timeline and physical steps of the process, but anything else that the students felt was pertinent. The students were warned that the journals would be read by the instructor, and the journals were examined periodically (once a week) so that comments and clarification could be made. The journals culminated in an essay evaluation of each student’s own final project and overall evaluation of the experience.

The third primary sources of data were anonymous surveys/questionnaires that were distributed to all students after the final project evaluation (see Appendix B). Though these surveys asked for much the same information as the interviews, it seemed appropriate to allow the students to express their feelings and experiences in a forum that offered complete anonymity. The data from the surveys was then compared to the data collected from the interviews with the sample group to help triangulate the results for analysis.

Secondary sources of data included all assignments and drafts that were created or completed by the students, the final projects themselves, lesson plans, instructor field notes and observations, and any aberrant or noteworthy experiences or comments from students other than those in the sample group. These data sources were used to provide context and perspective to the primary data.

Procedure

Each student was to create a three-minute narrative film over an eight week period. The project was to include a lengthy pre-production element that incorporated instruction on visual vocabulary and technique, concept and treatment creation, and screenwriting. The project was designed to require the students to spend most of the actual production time (the actual shooting and editing of the film) outside of class. It was also designed to ignore the fact that the class had no camera or editing equipment available for students to use. Due to the fairly financially comfortable local demographic and an informal survey of the students enrolled in the class, it was assumed that most students would have some access to video cameras of some kind (even if it were a cell phones) and computers (most of which come with editing software like Windows Movie Maker or iMovie). The idea was to incorporate this production experience into the class without having to sacrifice too much of the already limited class time or too much of the virtually non-existent class budget. Since the class was already designed to incorporate lessons on cinematographic principles and screenwriting, having the students film and edit as homework on their own time enabled the class to incorporate the production experience without drastically changing the existing curriculum. Thus, the project intended to side-step two of the obstacles to media production experiences discussed in

chapter one (the lack of technology or equipment and the loss of curriculum time) while still providing the students with an effective film “writing” experience.

The actual classroom procedure began on October 30th, 2006 with a pre-production discussion of the term “literacy” as it applies to film. Here the idea of writing with a visual vocabulary was introduced to the students. Until this point, the class had consisted mainly of critical reading or analysis of film. So, the students had become fairly literate film readers, and the idea of becoming literate film writers dove-tailed into the curriculum nicely. On November 1st, as the students were to create narrative film, the students were given a review or overview of narrative structure (events comprising a story arc or plot rather than just a sequence of events or visuals). This discussion helped the students to more solidly link the upcoming project to the traditional literacies with which they were already familiar.

From that point, and the upcoming production experience was explained in detail (see Lesson Plan Three in Appendix C) and production planning lessons progressed according to the following framework: example short films were used to incite discussion about narrative style and visual vocabulary; basic cinematographic elements and terms were discussed with accompanying clips and examples; the writing process began with the students’ concepts; the students received training on writing treatments, screenplays, and shooting scripts; non-examples were viewed and discussed to allow students to avoid common gaffes; and final planning, peer review, and revisions were completed.

On November 30th, the students’ projects entered the filming phase during which the classroom instruction turned partially to other matters (a unit on animation that included a review the visual vocabulary and narrative element concepts) with a segment

of class time each day devoted to production progress reports, questions, and clarification. Students were expected to organize and shoot their films on their own time and using their own resources; but instructor help and advice was always available.

The post-production phase began on December 12th. It was expected that the students would complete their shooting by this date and be ready to start the editing process. Due to time limits and the small scope of the unit, however, only one class period was actually devoted to a theoretical discussion of editing and polishing (this would become an issue later). The classroom instruction once again turned to other matters (a unit on documentary film which helped to contrast the narrative scope of the production project and allowed for a discussion of how visual vocabulary is similar/different in non-fiction film) until the holiday break with, once again, time each day devoted to production problems and discussion. The students were expected to edit and finish their films by the time classes resumed on January 3rd. Here, because school was not in session, the students were left completely without the aid of the instructor (this, too, became an issue).

Finally, from January 3rd through the 9th, the students exhibited their final products for the class in a festival environment. The students were asked to introduce their films and to take questions following the viewings. There were many suggestions that the films should be adjudicated and awards presented; but that was deemed to be unnecessary and, in fact, counter-productive to the purpose of the unit.

Chapter Three: Data Analysis

Researcher Stance and Bias

As this is a qualitative study being researched and analyzed by a single individual, it is apposite to examine that individual's background. I am a thirty-six year old white male. I have been teaching English and Film as Literature for eleven years at the same high school. I am a member of the Alliance for a Media Literate America (AMLA), and I have participated in many media literacy promotional activities (such as presenting media literacy in-service courses on a school and district level). During the period that the research took place, I was participating in a media education graduate program as well as teaching high school full time. I have a positive bias toward most forms of mass media, and I tend to believe that education is the key to successfully navigating and enjoying the media-saturated society in which we find ourselves.

Method of Analysis

The goal of the data analysis was to build a clear descriptive summary of the experience that could be generalized to all the students who participated in the project and that could be used to generate theories about media literacy production experiences for future study (Johnson 521). More precisely, the collected data was broken down and clearly organized, then put back together to form an image of the experience that could satisfactorily answer the question at hand *and* exposed aspects of the experience that would warrant further research.

Toward that end, student responses and data were transcribed, segmented, and coded into categories such as "learning moments," "self-evaluation," "production difficulties," "frustrations," et cetera. Inductive coding produced other categories that

were added as analysis progressed. These categories were then be examined for recurring themes, patterns, trends, or key statements that could illuminate the emic perspective (the insider's attitudes and views) of the participating students (Johnson 374). Finally, the data was re-examined for ambiguities or openings for further investigation.

In order to keep the experiential data comprehensible, it is presented here in chronological fashion. The trends and major themes from all sources are combined into generalized descriptions of the students' experiences. Direct quotes are used where they are representative of the students' comments as a whole or where they represent the atypical or minority comments. Instructor observations and field notes, comments from students' journals, and examples from student assignments are given for contextual and descriptive purposes.

Pre-Production Data

When the students were first introduced to the production project, there was a combination of excitement and reservation. Up until this point, the class had been relatively homework-light (as compared to what it was about to become), and the students seemed to immediately smell a great deal more work than usual coming their way. Most of the students' early production journal entries contained phrases like, "I hope I can actually get this done on time," and, "This is gonna be a lot of work." Likewise, all but one of the six members of the interviewed sample group expressed trepidation at what they saw as an almost unachievable task: "I'm worried about getting it done on time. I mean, you're giving us a lot of time; but I'm a student and we have other classes (I'm not saying you're not considering that – that's why you're giving us so much time). I'm just worried about getting it done."

The one student that didn't express that concern still touched on one possible reason for the anxiety: "This is like going somewhere you've never been or doing something you're not used to doing. You're just not sure what to do or what to expect." Helping to triangulate this experiential data, the anonymous surveys (given to all participating students at the end of the experience) consistently contained comments like, "this wasn't as hard as I thought it was going to be," and, "It doesn't seem like as big a deal now as it did at the beginning."

Interestingly, the unfamiliarity with the assignment wasn't the only (or apparently the main) reason for the student's early anxiety. Consistent across the interviews, the journal entries, and even the conversations between the students as they began the project was the concern that they would not be able to create something in which they could take pride. Responding to the interview prompt to describe how they felt about the upcoming project, for example, the sample group was almost unanimous: "I'm kinda nervous because things never work out when I do them. I mean, I want it to be nice; but I don't know if it will be," "I'm worried about it going to crap and not working out," "I'm pretty excited, but I'm scared it might not live up to my expectations of what I want it to be," "My biggest worry is having it suck at the end. Like, getting all of it – putting in all the time and effort, and it's just nothing like what I wanted it to be," "I'm worried that I won't be able to get the story, as I have it in my head, to – that it'll kinda be a disappointment compared to how I've imagined it," and, "My biggest worry is that I'm gonna fail. I just . . . I want to make it good." This was a serious worry for the majority of the class which seemed to be less about peer response or looking foolish and inept in front of classmates, and more about a personal sense of accomplishment. It is very much

the same difficulty found by English teachers in their students who care about a short story or a poem they are writing. It seemed these students were engaged in the project and honestly cared about producing something of quality.

That level of engagement could, then, help explain the sense of excitement and anticipation the students expressed in spite of their anxiety. As the students left class on the day the project was introduced, there were bright eyes, smiles, and animated conversations about each others' ideas. In the first interviews with the sample group, there were many comments like, "It sounds fun to, like, actually make a movie and have a hands-on experience;" and in the early entries in students' production journals, there were numerous notes detailing ideas, visuals, and connections to students' favorite films (i.e. "I picture this kinda like that scene from . . .").

Also, a principle factor in measuring the level of engagement or excitement over the unit was a slight shift in attendance early in the project. Absenteeism, and especially tardiness, decreased. In fact, the students seemed to be arriving earlier and earlier on each successive day. As soon as they entered the classroom, the conversations would immediately turn to the production project. The "hands-on" nature of the project seemed to be the main draw, and many students wrote in their journals that they "want[ed] to get started," or that they'd "like to get filming and editing."

The eagerness to get their hands busy on the project, though, was apparently not out of context with the purpose of the project (not based solely on the novelty of the experience, in other words). When asked why they thought the project was being included as part of the class, the sample group responded with some interesting insight. The justification for the experience seemed obvious to them: "If you just showed us

movies, that wouldn't give us the hands-on experience. It wouldn't be . . . like, we wouldn't get as much education about it if we weren't doing it hands-on – if we were just watching movies,” and, “it offers us an opportunity to actually experience filmmaking – ‘cause there’s only so much you can learn from . . . learning about it. There’s a point where you have to experience it for yourself to understand it.” Only one student from the sample group seemed to have missed the reasoning behind the project. She assumed, “you’re assigning this project to get us thinking and to actually get us to do some work. I mean, because we’ve been watching movies and stuff (I’m not saying that’s not work) but we haven’t been – you haven’t really given us tons of homework in this class and this is our first really big assignment for us to do and, like, take you and this class seriously.”

With that dichotomous mix of apprehension and anticipation, the students began formulating their ideas. There was an instant and observable sense of camaraderie in each of the two classes. Understanding somehow that they were all experiencing similar concerns and facing similar challenges, the students were suddenly unified. Students that did not normally associate were asking each other for opinions and offering help and suggestions – even offering each other equipment or advice on how to use equipment.

Production Data

As work on the actual production project started in earnest, much of the energized enthusiasm began to wane. This was especially noticeable after the original concept assignments were returned to the students with instructor comments. Many students had quite unrealistically grandiose plans for their films, and the reality check that comments like, “how are you going to get a black hawk helicopter to show up for your film shoot?” and, “I don’t know if you’re aware of this, but you can’t actually bring a gun (or anything

that looks like a gun) into the school – even to film a movie. They’ll expel you at best, and shoot you at worst. Don’t do it,” put a damper on some of the giddy excitement.

There were a surprising number of students who chose subject matter that was less than completely appropriate for school (even quite a bit of class time had been spent admonishing them about that very thing. One student, for example, had written a rather graphic rape and murder into her concept. Another student had written a concept that read like a public service announcement advertising suicide as a way to solve problems. “I understand where you’re going with this, but please remember that this is an assignment for class. Perhaps you could save this idea as a film you make on your own,” was a very common instructor note. For some, this denial of freedom took some of the pleasure out of the experience. Most of the students who were forced to change their concepts noted in their film journals that they weren’t as excited about their new ideas. Though this frustration was understandable, the students also noted that they understood that, given the stringent policies of the school and the district and the need to ensure the safety of every student in the class, the changes were necessary.

Another source of the students’ diminishing excitement seemed to be the realization of just how much work the production of even a short film could be. As the students began work writing their screenplays, many noted in their production journals that the assignment “was harder than they thought it would be.” A few students changed their ideas mid-screenplay because their original idea was “just too hard to write.” The interviews with the sample group also illustrated this. Comments like, “Writing the screenplay has been the hardest part so far just because it’s hard to get the ideas from your head down onto paper the way you want them,” “The screenplay was really hard for

me just because, again, I didn't think my story was very good," and, "The biggest challenge so far was writing the screenplay down: actually getting those ideas – images and ideas – from my head onto paper," were consistent across the group.

Looking past the screenplay to the actual shoot, the students seemed to see light ("The easiest part will be the actual filming," "Filming it should be fun," "I think it will be fun when I start filming," and, "The filming will be pretty easy now 'cause I've got it all storyboarded out and planned. Up 'til now, it's been kind of complicated."), and a little of the earlier excitement crept back in. Then equipment trouble, volunteer cast and crew unreliability, and the unexpected time consumption of the filming process began lifting the stress level again. The journals entries were full of frustrated venting (one student even going so far as to write, "Screw this! I'll just take the zero!"). Many seemed to have reached some sort of epiphany: "I've realized that a lot of time, effort, and thought have to be put into it. It can't be just thrown together. Everything has to be carefully planned, and you really have to put some thought into it. It's harder than it appears," and, "Wow, this is a lot harder than I ever thought it would be. No wonder movies cost millions."

Most students, though, also wrote that they were learning a lot and still having fun. The classroom unity, in fact, seemed stronger than ever with intense and vigorous discussions over production problems and possible solutions. The students seemed focused. They were spending hours after school and on weekends mooching for equipment, costumes, props, and locations; and they were showing obvious pride in the filming that was getting done. When the sample group was asked if the amount of homework was excessive or whether they thought more class time should have been

devoted to the project, they responded with comments like, “I think the time and the homework are pretty fair. It’s pretty fair,” “I think the class time use is about right. I mean, a lot of the stuff we’re doing as homework really couldn’t be done in class, and the stuff we’re doing as homework is necessary for the production,” and, “I think we have enough time to get this done, and the homework isn’t too bad unless you totally procrastinate. As long as you stay on top of it, it’s not too bad.”

After being asked how they felt about the progress of their productions, the sample group was, again, almost unanimous. From the very enthusiastic: “I am kind of happy with the way my project is going. By the end of the Christmas break it should be completely finished, and I’m pretty sure I’m going to be very happy with the outcome,” to the more modest: “I’m pretty happy with it. It’s going as well as I could hope. There’s no major problems so far, and all seems to be going smoothly,” the group seemed to be doing well. Only one student offered a negative assessment:

I have to say I’m pretty unhappy because usually I’m really good at, like, deciding what my topic is gonna be, and this time I struggled with it. So the story I came up with, I’m not happy with. I know I can do better so it’s bugging me. I might think of more stuff as I go through filming, but in the back of my mind I’m gonna know I could’ve done better. So, I think I’ll end up liking it a little bit; but not as much as I would have if I had had more time to think about it.

There were some similarly negative comments in the production journals that echoed that I-know-I-could-be-doing-better sentiment; but the easy majority of the other students

seemed pleased with their projects' progress despite (or perhaps because of) the extensive effort.

Another nearly unanimous trend found in both the production journals and the interviews was the expressed respect the students claimed to have gained for professional filmmakers. These comments were all strikingly similar, and are best summed up by one member of the interview group who said, "When I watch movies now, I kinda – you have a lot more respect for the people who make them now. You're just, like, 'Wow, I can't believe they went through all these processes.' Before, you assumed it was a lot of work; but you really didn't know about it. You didn't know how hard it is. A lot of planning went into it."

In fact, some real learning did seem to be taking place – especially as it concerned using visual and audio vocabulary to communicate ideas. The film terminology and visual vocabulary had entered the students' vernacular. Students were carefully considering their choices of color, camera, music, and editing to convey tone. One member of the sample group offered this example:

Like, I'm trying to use color and camera to tell about the characters – like, who the audience is supposed to like. 'Cause my short film is about a basketball game, and the one character is going to be wearing all, like, dark colors, and he's going to enter the court with the camera at a low angle and the sun behind him. And the other character is going to be in light colors, and the camera is going to show a close-up of his face – lots of close-ups on him. It's going to be like an old-west dual – a good guy and a bad guy. Plus, I want to make sure that the court has those chains on

the baskets ‘cause I really like the sound that makes, and I think it will sound cool in the film – like more *serious* than nets. And I want the film to be, like, fast then slow then fast – like the cuts. You know that ‘We Will Rock You’ song by *Queen*? I want the cuts in the game to be like that short-short-long rhythm. I think that will be intense.

Though not many of the students’ comments were that detailed, the comment is still quite representative of most of the other students’ planning process.

Indeed, the students themselves seemed to be sensing that they were learning from the experience. Toward answering one of the principal questions of this study, the sample group of students was asked if they felt that the project was something valuable that should be continued in the next semester and subsequent years. The responses were not only positive; they expressed a definite appreciation for practical or applied learning. One student enthusiastically expressed, “Oh, I think the project’s awesome ‘cause it gives you hands-on experience with, like, the film world. Like, instead of being taught this stuff (well, we get to apply the stuff we’ve been taught which helps you remember it longer) we get to, like, learn by doing.” Another student responded, “I think I would’ve learned different things if we had just kept watching and studying different kinds of films. But, the actual making of films is something you should experience when you’re learning about film. I think I learned more by doing this than I could’ve just by watching.” One student linked the project to its language value: “I think this is a good project and you should keep doing it. It’s not just a lot of little homework assignments that don’t really serve a purpose. You do this entire project in parts so we learn about the process of making a film as a way of expressing language – like *writing* film. I mean, it’s an English

credit class, and I think this fits in with that.” Even the one aberrant member of the sample group (that had continually been the exception) aligned with the rest of the group on this question: “I think you should keep doing it. It was good. I think it would’ve been fun if we had just kept watching films, ‘cause I like watching movies; but I’m glad that we took the time to actually learn more about how films are made. I think it’ll change the way I watch movies now.”

Though stress levels remained rather high through the filming process, there was a noticeable sense of anticipation building. The students began noting in their production journals how keen they were to see what the other students had come up with and how eager they were to exhibit their own films. “I can hardly wait to . . .” followed by either “see” or “show” was a popular phrase throughout the journals leading up to the holiday break that would mark the line between production and post-production. Interestingly (and, perhaps, exaggeratedly), the students seemed to be looking forward to the end of the holiday break almost as much as they were looking forward to the break itself.

Following the break on the next check of the journals, however, a serious problem had emerged. Many students had planned to edit and polish their films during the time they had off for the holiday. They had had instruction on some of the basic tenets of editing (more theoretical than practical), and they had been shown where to find access to simple editing software. On the other hand, they had had absolutely no instruction on how to actually use the editing software that was available. It was, unfortunately, assumed that the software in question was simple enough (or user-friendly enough) that the normally tech-savvy teenagers would have little trouble importing, editing, and finishing their films on their own. For most, this was not the case. The production

journals were full of frustrations and complaints. The most common complaint was the fact that there was no instructor help available during the edit. The students had become accustomed to coming to the classroom before school, after school, and during lunch to ask questions or get suggestions about every other stage of the process. Left completely on their own for the editing process, the students' struggles with the software were compounded.

Many students turned to their parents for help only to find that their parents were also less than adept at using the software. Some students were able to contact and work with their peers, and these students were able to overcome their frustration; but the majority of the students were left to the time-consuming task of learning the software on their own through trial and error. Five students (from both classes combined) actually gave up completely and left their films unfinished. Their particular frustrations remained unnoted as they also stopped recording their thoughts in their production journals. Most students who continued recording their thoughts ended their production journals with comments like, "Wow! I'm glad that's over." Still, the overwhelming majority returned to class excited to watch and exhibit their films.

Post-Production Data

As the classes began viewing the films, a transformation occurred. All of the earlier stress and frustrations were replaced by smiles, laughing, and solidarity. Each student wanted their class to enjoy their film. Each student wanted to enjoy the other students' films. Everyone seemed to want everyone to be successful. The hard work, disappointment, and strain seemed to have made the climax of the experience that much more satisfying.

As each student introduced their film, they mentioned their original concept, the problems they had encountered, and the changes or adjustments they had made to resolve those problems. These introductions were invariably met with chuckles and nods of agreement and understanding. Each film was met with enthusiastic applause (even those films which had obviously missed their mark – i.e. meant to be funny or sad or scary, but not); and each filmmaker, though often self-effacing, had an observable sense of pride. They had completed a film, after all; and despite the fact that their film may not have been everything they hoped it might be, it was there – evidence of their learning and their effort.

After each film, there was a short post-mortem critique from the other members of the class. Not surprisingly, most of this criticism was completely positive (or had an acutely positive spin). Most comments began with, “I really liked the way you . . .” or, “It was cool when . . .” followed by some noticed camera movement, well-framed shot, sound choice, or edit. The students seemed to realize that, the project being finished, there was no need for constructive negativity. These class periods ended reminiscent of the way the early class periods had begun: the students talked excitedly about their projects.

Following the viewings, the students turned in their final essays (the culminating entry of their production journals). They had been asked to write evaluations of each of their own final projects, their experience with the project, and the project as a whole. These essays proved quite valuable in triangulating the data that had previously been collected from the journals, interviews, and observations. With very few exceptions, the students’ wrote that they were fairly pleased with the way their films had turned out; but

there were a lot of things they would have done differently if they could have gone back. They wrote that they had spent a lot of time on the project, but it would have been better if they had spent more (or had more to spend).

As far as their experience with the project, they echoed precisely what had been stated in their journals and in the earlier interviews: it was a very difficult and stressful project, but it was actually enjoyable, too. Specifically, nearly every student expressed fairly intense dissatisfaction with the editing process, and most observed that some demonstrations would have surely been helpful. They wrote that they found concept-through-screenplay planning process fun, and they felt that they had learned a lot. Most held that most rewarding part of the experience was showing their film to the class and viewing their classmates' films.

Beyond their enjoyment or irritation, the students' evaluations of the project as a whole were overwhelmingly positive. Surprisingly, even the students who offered the most insistent complaints about stress and frustration they experienced had luminous comments about the project itself: "This was one of the coolest things I've ever gotten to do in school," "The project was awesome. I think I'll remember this for a long time," and, "This project was the best part of the class. I mean, the rest of the class was cool, but I think I learned more from this than anything else we did." Still, amidst the glowing praise, there were many comments that alluded to what the students saw as missing from the experience. Most of these comments began with "I wish," as in, "I wish we'd had more time to work on finishing our films after the break," or, "I wish we had equipment like cameras and, like, computers and stuff available for us to use at the school." These "I wish" comments did, in fact, center on the editing and polishing portion of the project

(which was, by this point, certainly not unexpected). That particular issue had emerged as the single largest flaw, from the students' point of view, in the entire project.

The final set of interviews with the sample group and the anonymous surveys yielded parallel results. The best things about the project, according to these sources, were the planning, the filming, and the final viewings while the worst things were the editing and the amount of stress. For example, one student explained:

I really enjoyed making a movie of my own. I'd never done that before, and it was an enjoyable experience just to see it, have other people see it, and see what they thought about it. But, I was frustrated by the fact that it took so long and was so hard. I just got to the point where I didn't want to do it anymore. I think it was the editing more than anything else – the software. I just didn't understand how to use it.

Similarly, when asked what they would do differently if they were to do the project again, the significant majority said they would spend more time on (or plan their work so that they would have more time for) the edit. When asked what should be changed about the project in the future, the bulk of the students responded with comments like, “. . . have some class time where you show us how to use the editing software. Like, you could edit something for us and explain how the programs work,” and, “You should probably help them [future students] more in the editing. Like, spend more time on how to edit. Maybe, like, demonstrate a couple of software things.”

The interviews and surveys asked the students, as well, for their opinions on the value of the project and the use of class time. Strongly positive comments made up the preponderance of their responses. In their view, apparently, the experience had been quite

a bit more than merely “worth it.” What the students seemed to value most was the tactile, practical nature of the learning experience and the sense that they had actually *done* something with what they had learned:

I think it was valuable. I mean, you can learn from watching movies; but I think you learn a lot more by actually doing it. I liked the way you explained it and showed us lots of examples. It all seemed important. It’s not like how some teachers just go on forever about writing a paper and then make you do it like fifty times. This felt like it had an end in mind. Like, we knew when we were done, and we felt like we had accomplished something. This was one of the best experiences I’ve had, like, in school.

Another student went into more detail:

Yes, I think this was a valuable use of class time. I loved it because throughout the semester we were watching films and learning stuff about film; and then this gave us hands-on experience, and we got to put what we learned into use. I know it will stick in my mind a lot more now than if it were just, ‘Oh, look, I took some notes, and I’m gonna throw them away after this class is over.’ The project was cool because we had to use *everything* that we learned. The enjoyable thing was that I learned a *whole* lot from this project, and I got to try and do something that I’d never done before. I don’t think we could have learned what we learned any other way because, I mean, this is something that needs to be hand done to learn it. I mean, filmmaking is something that I think you learn from mistakes. You can learn from others’ mistakes (which I think you *should* do), but you

sometimes need to make your own mistakes to really learn something. I think this project was awesome. It was fun, but it wasn't just an entertainment class. [. . .] This is something new to a lot of people who just see film as entertainment, so they need this class.

That level of zeal and insight (though the above comments were, perhaps, exaggerated by the fact that those students were talking directly to the instructor), was astonishingly widespread and ostensibly sincere. Further, the anonymous survey responses, while more concise, echoed the same level of affirmation of the project's value. Representative comments from the surveys included, "I think that it was a valuable use of class time. I learned a lot from it – a lot more than just what we learned in class. There was a lot of learning on your own because you got to actually do it," and, "I thought it was a valuable use of class time – more valuable than when we were just watching and studying movies and stuff. I would definitely do it again. It was a challenge; but it was also really amazingly fun. I wish you had another film class."

Five students (of the fifty-nine that participated in the anonymous survey) offered the negative point of view. Their comments went sharply against what had been so enthusiastically declared by the majority of their peers. Two of the five were fairly politic: "I didn't really like it. It was too hard, and I didn't really see the point. We should have watched more movies," and, "I guess it was okay; but I wouldn't want to do it again. It was harder than I thought it would be. It was too much work." The other three were a little more direct with comments like, "This sucked. I thought the whole thing was stupid. I liked this class until we started the film production stuff. It ruined it for me," "This class sucked. I'm gonna get an 'F' now, probably, because I didn't do this stupid project," and finally, "I'd say that this project was a pain in the ass."

Chapter Four: Conclusions and Impact

With all of the data collected and examined, some conclusions can be drawn about the project from the perspective of the participating students. There were, of course, many variables that couldn't be controlled or accounted for (the students' previous experience and relationship with the researcher, for example); and the limited scope of the study hinders its external validity and (to some degree) its replicability. Nonetheless, the principal research questions can be addressed adequately for the purposes of improving instruction in the researcher's classroom and providing support for the incorporation of media production into other classrooms or schools.

What was the experience of students who participated in the production experience?

Generalizing from the collected data, the novelty of the project offered the students early excitement. Expectations were quite high, and the students were eager to begin. They earnestly wanted to make their own films and became instantly engaged in the task. However, most were not fully prepared for the amount of time and work the project would entail (verbal warnings and explanation aside); and though their interest in the project and level of engagement didn't diminish, their enthusiasm certainly did. Technical difficulties and lack of adequate instructor help during the editing process made the experience far more taxing than it should have been. Also, the students weren't able to create quite what they had envisioned which led to a certain level of disappointment. Still, the sense of empowerment and accomplishment that the students felt upon completing their films and exhibiting to the class was ultimately satisfying. For the vast majority of the students who participated, then, the production project was the most meaningful experience that the class had to offer.

What were the benefits and detriments of the experience from the students' perspective?

Clearly, the students perceived the major benefits of the project were the learning they felt they had done and the sense of achievement they had earned. The applied, practical nature of the project was also seen as a major benefit, and much of the learning that the students felt had taken place was attributed to the hands-on work.

The perceived detriments, notably, did not include the class time that could have been spent on other activities nor the risk of personal embarrassment due to the exhibition of the students' work. Rather, they centered, once again, around the lack of adequate instruction on editing and the use of equipment. Most of the students felt that they could have been significantly happier with their experience (and with their results) if they had had the benefit of classroom equipment and example demonstrations. The omission of those perceived necessities detracted from the students' ability to produce what they had envisioned. In reality their ability to express themselves through the media form was hampered causing them stress and frustration. For a small minority, these detriments proved insurmountable.

What impact did the students perceive the production experience had on their understanding of film?

Evidently, the students believed that the production experience offered them a broader understanding of film and the filming process. Most expressed a new-found respect for filmmakers and a profound understanding of the constructed nature of the medium. They were able to see more clearly not just *which* choices were made in a given film but *why* those choices were made. Many stated that they would never be able to watch films the same way they had before they went through this production unit. They

had, they claimed, learned far more about filmed media from this experience than they had from any other portion of the class, and that their new awareness and appreciation would not be forgotten.

Was this a program that the students felt was worth incorporating into the curriculum?

Greater than ninety-one percent of the students who participated in the anonymous survey offered an unambiguous affirmative to this question. Many felt that it was, as pointed out above, the single most valuable aspect of the class' curriculum. Even when offered the choice between the hard work and stress associated with the short film production and the relative ease and entertainment of watching and analyzing films, the students chose the former. They sensed the value of the creative process and felt themselves more literate and more educated because of it.

Impact

Perhaps the largest impact that this research will have is on the practices and performance in the classroom in which it was conducted. Certainly, though this film production project can be seen as a largely successful teaching activity, the research pointed out that there were improvements that could have been made to the way the program was taught and structured (not the least of which is more explicit instruction on editing and polishing including practical examples and software training). Even so, it is clear that the incorporation of a media production element was a better use of classroom resources than anything that had been done previously. So, then, this research could conceivably prompt other educators, administrators, and districts to embark on similar action research projects with their own students and within their own curricula. The evidence gathered here seems to indicate that it would be worth the effort.

WORKS CITED

- Alpinedistrict.org. "Motion Pictures (Video) in the Classroom." Alpine School District. 29 May 2007. <http://alpinedistrict.org/policy/rule_6165.pdf>. This online document outlines the official rules and policies governing the use of motion picture material in Alpine School District in Utah County, Utah. The research described in this paper was conducted at Timpanogos High School in this district.
- Baron, Maureen. "What is Media Literacy?" Media Awareness Network. 09 Aug. 2006 <http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/teachers/media_literacy/what_is_media_literacy.cfm>. This is a quote defining media literacy. This source was used to promote the idea that "literacy" in media refers to the ability to critically read and functionally create media texts. The tie to traditional literacy is clear: reading and writing are both important.
- Buckingham, David. "Media Education and the End of the Critical Consumer." Harvard Educational Review. 73.3 (2003): 314-29. Buckingham illustrates some of the difficulties teachers may experience when allowing their students to produce media texts. There are legal and ethical issues which must be addressed, especially the issue of content control. This is a valuable article for this sort of research project as it points out some of the pitfalls that educators encounter. It also discusses the need to move students beyond the role of "consumer" and into the role of critical producer.
- - - . Media Education: Literacy, Learning, and Contemporary Culture. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003. 82-3. This excellent book again argues for the incorporation of

media production experiences into literacy education programs. It also warns of some of the more common difficulties that educators may face in the process.

Buckingham, however, argues the point that media instruction is far less valuable as a simple critical review exercise, and (even with the challenges) production experiences are necessary to developing a student's full media literacy.

Creswell, J. W. Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998. 15. As this research is qualitative and based on certain traditional concepts of research, it was necessary to evaluate the methodology and research structure. Creswell's book offers several insights into the design of effective qualitative research and offers examples and theory that were useful in designing this project. The phenomenological research described in the book fits perfectly with what information about my students' experiences within the production project was hoped for.

Dannenbaum, Jed, Carroll Hodge, and Doe Mayer. Creative Filmmaking from the Inside Out: Five Key Ways of Making Inspired Movies and Television. New York: Fireside, 2003. This excellent work discusses ways of creating the needed introspection or self-evaluation while creating film texts. The book addresses concerns about formulaic writing and stereotype promotion. It offers advice to filmmakers about keeping their productions original and honest. Several concepts from this book were used during preparation for this research project.

Geuens, Jean Pierre. Film Production Theory. New York: State University of New York Press, 2000. This book is more of a primer for an educator than something that would actually be used for students. Geuens, in a sense, peels film production

stereotypes and suppositions back and discusses what is going on in the heads of filmmakers beyond their technique. The book has gives, in fact, a different view of films and the filmmaking process which can be used to promote literate choices in the productions of students. The book is rather long, but the insights are worth the read.

Goodman, S. “Media, Technology, and Educational Reform: Searching for Redemption in the Digital Age.” Video and Learning. Fall/Winter (1996): 2. Goodman’s article discusses the importance of technology in the education and in the lives of student in modern times. The principle impact the article has on this research is the issue of using technology to promote learning. The idea that technology is a powerful tool for education when students are allowed to use it as a conduit for creative expression is an excellent tie between traditional language arts literacy (where writing is used for the same purpose and, hopefully, the same effect) and technology or media literacy. The more ways in which the students can express their knowledge and creativity, the more useful their educational experience will be.

Hobbs, Renee. “Media Literacy, General Semantics, and K-12 Education.” et Cetera. 61.1 (2004): 25. In this article, Hobbs provides a strong case for the connection between traditional literacy (in the language arts) and the concept of media literacy. She discusses media education as an expansion of the idea of literacy and implies that, in our changing and hyper-mediated society, the concept of functional literacy has to change to include critical media “reading” and “writing” skills. Hobbs central argument is that the media literacy is inseparably connected

to the skills and framework of traditional literacy; and the only real difference is the semantics and syntax used.

--- . “The Seven Great Debates in the Media Literacy Movement.” Journal of Communication. 48.1 (1998): 4-5. This article is an interesting and insightful discussion of media literacy issues and the disparate opinions and standpoints that many educators have in regard to media education’s validity and practicality. Hobbs discusses both sides (though with some evident bias) of each argument in rather concise terms. The interesting issue is the relative value of media production experiences when weighed against the class time, resources, and energy such experiences require.

Johnson, Burke and Larry Christensen. Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches. 2nd Ed. Boston: Pearson Education Inc., 2004. 365-521.

This book provides most of the framework, structure, and methodology for conducting this research project. The book is, at its heart, an instruction manual for aspiring educational researchers. It offers terminology and practical instruction on completing effective and valid research. Successfully completing an action research project (especially a qualitative design) without a source such as this one would be very difficult – if not impossible.

Kist, William. “Beginning to Create the New Literacy Classroom: What Does the New Literacy Look Like?” Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy. 43.8 (2000): 710-18. Kist’s principle argument in this article is that students need to be given some autonomy in their experiences with literacy-building education. He suggests that the most successful literacy programs would include a “studio-like” environment

where students would be producing multiple types of texts on multiple subjects, and the teacher would serve mainly as a guide and supervisor. The central connection of the article to this research is that “studio-like” ideal. Though the researched project was not as free-form as Kist seems to suggest, the production experience was meant, in part, to allow the students some autonomy and creativity in their media creation.

Lanier, Troy and Clay Nichols. Filmmaking for Teens: Pulling Off Your Shorts. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2005. Though desperately trying to be “hip” in their language, Lanier and Nichols offer excellent advice and instruction on how to produce amateur film text. They discuss equipment, casting, funding, and many other concerns. Most importantly, however, the book offers planning and step-by-step scheduling advice. This would make a fine class text for students.

“Literacy.” The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. New College Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996. A definition was needed of the term “literacy” as including both a critical understanding element (reading) and a creation element (writing) in a given language. The dictionary definition of the word was most helpful.

NCTE.org. “Multimodal Literacies.” National Council of Teachers of English. 29 May 2007. <<http://www.ncte.org/edpolicy/multimodal/resources/123213.htm>>. This website offers guidelines for incorporating and defining multimodal literacies in the English classroom. The guidelines presented are based on research done by the National Council of Teachers of English and others.

--- . “Standards for the English Language Arts.” National Council of Teachers of English. 29 May 2007. < <http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm>>. This website outlines the standards for teaching the English language arts suggested by the National Council of Teachers of English. The standards are based on enabling students to develop language and communication skills in order to achieve life goals.

New Mexico Media Literacy Project. 09 Aug. 2006

<http://www.nmmlp.org/media_literacy/index.html>. This website was valuable in helping not only to define “media literacy”, but also in helping to justify the production aspect of media education. There are several discussions of media literacy terms and ideas that have been helpful in examining the state of media education. The site is a little protectionist, but it makes for an excellent window into media education agendas.

Seger, Linda, and Edward J. Whetmore. From Script to Screen: The Collaborative Art of Filmmaking. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1994. Basically, this book is a play by play description of how films go from concept to release. Each aspect of a film’s production and each artist or craftsperson that contributes is discussed in excellent detail. The book is an superb primer for students who are interested in the way films are produced beyond the simple individual independent projects. The book also offers a glimpse into some new possibilities for student production.

Stafford, R. “Redefining Creativity: Extended Project Work in GCSE Media Studies.”

Media Education: an Introduction. Eds. M. Alvarado and O. Boyd-Barrett.

London: British Film Institute, 1992. 71. This work discusses some of the dangers

of media production projects. Principally, it discusses the tendency of students to simply mimic what they have seen professionals do (a sort of audio-visual pastiche) rather than creating independent works of their own. This is a difficulty that must be considered by educators who want the students to imitate the professionals to some degree (to help them become literate in film) but also to flex their own creativity and create truly original works.

Worsnop, Chris. "Screening Images: Ideas for Media Education." 1994. Media

Awareness Network. 09 Aug. 2006

<http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/teachers/media_literacy/what_is_media_literacy.cfm>. This essay is helpful in defining media literacy as a creative hands-on experience rather than simply a way of critically analyzing and reading media texts. As important as reading and writing are to traditional literacy, criticism and creation are to media literacy. Worsnop discusses the idea that media literacy must include the creation of media products.

WORKS CONSULTED

AMLainfo.org. 2005. Alliance for a Media Literate America. 10 Oct. 2006.

<<http://www.amlainfo.org/>>. Providing information and resources for media educators, this site is valuable in forming an understanding of media literacy and the importance of offering media education to children. The site defines and discusses media literacy as an extension of traditional literacy and as a needed program of study for full participation in our increasingly media-based society. The site favors education and participation rather than protectionism and paranoia.

Buckingham, David. "Media Education in the UK: Moving Beyond Protectionism."

Journal of Communication. 48.1 (1998): 33-44. In this article, Buckingham points to the issue of traditional media education's focus on "protectionism" (or "how to stay safe from the media's nefarious influence). Buckingham responds with the assertion that knowledge and awareness are key instructional goals to helping students cope intelligently with their media surroundings. Protectionism goes only so far, and it ignores the beneficial elements of media culture. Buckingham's claims help to justify the incorporation of production elements into a media education curriculum. Allowing students to, in effect, play with the media (and experience it's advantages and disadvantages first hand) increases their understanding and moves beyond "shielding the eyes."

Daniell, Beth. "Narratives of Literacy: Connecting Composition to Culture." College Composition and Communication. 50.3 (1999): 393-410. This is a rather

interesting read about the connection culture has to compositional literacy and how the culture of an individual is represented in that individual's composition. An obvious connection is made between literacy and composition or creation of texts. The article also discusses how individual acts of writing (audio-visual texts for my purposes) are connected to larger historical, social, and political systems.

Dart, Peter. "Student Film Production and Communication." The English Journal. 57.1 (1968): 96-99. Though this article is quite old (mentioning technical concerns like the fact that, "a simple eight millimeter camera costs less than \$20"), it still offers an excellent philosophical basis for student film production. It holds that production helps students become introspective and circumspective about film; and, therefore, become more aware of both the medium and themselves. It also suggests that the instructors (possibly – probably – not production experts themselves) can learn along with the students.

Denzin, Norman K., and Yvonna S. Lincoln. The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005. This is a very thorough look at the function and form of qualitative research. It covers many different styles (not phenomenology specifically), and there is an excellent section on the ethics and politics involved in qualitative exploration. It contains good advice on how to formulate research and how to analyze data in such a way as to keep the subjects and the researcher safe.

Goodlad, John I., Roger Soder, and Kenneth A. Sirotnik, eds. The Moral Dimensions of Teaching. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990. In order to justify this project and action research itself, it must be illustrated how the research would benefit

students and the field of education. This book does that through a discussion of the ethical considerations of teaching, and also the moral responsibility of educators to constantly and consistently work toward best practices in education. In a professional community, each professional must take some responsibility for the enhancement and progress of the profession. The book's discussion not only justifies action research, it insists upon it.

Hammersley, Martyn. "The Relevance of Qualitative Research." Oxford Review of Education. 26.3/4 (2000): 393-405. Hammersley defends educational qualitative research as a tool for policymaking and improving practice against attacks on its validity. Several examples are offered which illustrate how qualitative design research has been particularly successful in leading to needed educational changes and reform. The justification for doing a qualitative/phenomenological research study is quite clear.

Hobbs, Renee. "Improving Reading Comprehension by Using Media Literacy Activities." Voices From the Middle. 8.4 (2001): 44-50. This article discusses the traditional literacy/media literacy link at some length. Hobbs addresses those who harbor negative prejudices against media education with a discussion of how media literacy can actually improve traditional literacy.

Kist, William. New Literacies in Action: Teaching and Learning in Multiple Media. Williston, VT: Teachers College Press, 2004. This book's ideas for expanding the literacies of students in regular curriculum environments are excellent, but they focus less on an actual filmic production experience and more on individual media literacies. However, there are some valuable insights into planning and

incorporating media (film) production units into more traditional classes. There is also a clear justification for media literacy experiences. Students who are given methods and means of learning that they find exciting are far more likely to perform well.

Lyne, Lawrence S., ed. A Cross Section of Educational Research: Journal Articles for Discussion and Evaluation. 3rd Ed. Glendale: Pyczak Publishing, 2006. This compilation of educational research projects has been a valuable asset in formulating and structuring this research. Though none of the research projects presented in the book are intrinsically like those in this project, there are several qualitative studies and even a few phenomenological studies from which examples can be drawn. The reference sections of the research articles have also been valuable in pointing out sources of information of which may not have otherwise been found.

The Media Triangle. The Media Literacy Clearinghouse. 28 Sep. 2006.

<<http://www.frankwbaker.com/mediatriangle.htm>>. This is a simple model that was originally developed by Eddie Dick to discuss the relationships among the actual film (media) text, its production, and its audience. There are some simple and valuable questions posed that will help student understand how production choices are based on audience considerations and textual needs, and how those production choices will effect a film's audience as well as the film itself.

McQuade, Donald and Christine McQuade. Seeing and Writing 2. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2003. This is intended as a media literacy text for young adults.

However, it is also a very useful text for illustrating media literacy principles to

educators. This text was consulted mainly for its connections between visual and media text and the creative process of writing (writing inspired by media). The critical media reading skills presented are always linked to a writing or creative experience. The media reading and media writing connection is at the heart of this research.

Postman, Neil. "The Shaky Tripod Curriculum." The English Journal (High School Edition). 94.2 (2004): 27 This is a very short essay on the idea of the ineffectiveness of traditional literacy curriculum. The basic thrust of the article is to dispel the notion that the study of literature must also include the study of composition and the study of syntax. However, Postman also argues that a more practical form of literacy instruction would be more beneficial to students.

Random Integer Generator. 2006. Random.org. 27 Oct. 2006.

<<http://www.random.org/integers/>> This simple random number generator was used to select the students used in the sample group. It can generate several random integers at the same time from within a selected range, which made it perfect for the purpose of randomly selecting six students from a large group of about seventy.

Rabiger, Michael. Developing Story Ideas. Woburn, MA: Focal Press, 2000. This is a short book with some excellent insights on writing for film. The suggestions are actually interested in preserving the integrity of the final work rather than increasing the marketability of the final product. So, the suggestions are very useful for teaching and evaluating artistic film concepts. The other nice thing about Rabiger's suggestions is that they apply to regular literary writing as well as

writing for the screen. Thus, the book helps to tie traditional writing elements to media production elements.

Scribner, Sylvia. "Literacy in Three Metaphors." *American Journal of Education*. 93.1 (1984): 6-21. An excellent essay on the defining of literacy, this work points out that literacy has no inherent and concrete definition. It is, Scribner suggests, a constantly changing notion that is defined mainly by whatever society to which an individual belongs. Literacy, therefore, is not an individual issue, but a social issue for which society must take some responsibility. There are interesting issues raised about the evolving state of literacy and what it means to individuals in disparate societies. This essay points to a decidedly sharper understanding of the implication and impact of literacy instruction.

Semali, Ladislaus M. "The Communication Media in Postliteracy Education: New Dimensions of Literacy." *International Review of Education*. 39.3 (1993): 193-206. This is a discussion of the use of media literacy to help retain traditional literacy in adults. Though it has very little to do with this actual research project, it did provide valuable background insight into the educational and post-educational uses of media texts. Evidently, literacy rates tend to drop in adults who have completed literacy training but have then allowed their gained literacies to fall into disuse. Media (in this case, mass media) provides a lifelong learning option and a chance to use gained literacy skills.

--- . Literacy in Multimedia America: Integrating Media Education Across the Curriculum. New York: Falmer Press, 2000. This book is an excellent collection of student and teacher vignettes dealing with the incorporation of audio-visual

media into different classroom curriculums. Semali offers very clear strategies (in effect, a sort of map) to teachers who wish to offer multimedia educational experiences to their students. The book, though, focuses itself mainly on the critical reading of media texts and not on the creation or production of multimedia materials.

Semali, Ladislaus M., and Ann Watts Pailliotet. Intermediality: The Teacher's Handbook of Critical Media Literacy. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998. Involving a more literature based approach to critical media literacy, this handbook is an excellent look at how to read media texts on a deeper level than simple decoding or semantics. The book offers ideas on getting students to look for large themes and motives as they would (hopefully) in a more traditional literary text. Again, though, there is almost no emphasis on creative media writing – just on critical reading strategies and skills. It is books such as this one that have identified a gap for further research.

Shamas, Laura. Playwriting for Theatre, Film, and Television. Crozet, VA: Betterway Publications, 1991. This book was used as a basis for instruction on properly formatting a screenplay for production. Shamas has also included excellent advice on making sure a screenplay is simply a textual representation of an audio-visual work. Students, in traditional literacy programs, have developed the habit of thinking about the words they write rather than the pictures. The concepts in this book help writers break that habit.

Smith, M. Cecil. "What Will Be the Demands of Literacy in the Workplace in the Next Millennium?" Reading Research Quarterly. 35.3 (2000): 378-83. Smith discusses

the trends in workplace literacy requirements and where they seem to be headed.

The emphasis on technological and visual literacy is apparent and works to justify an expansion of the term “literacy” to include the ability to comprehend and produce myriad media texts through the use of technology. The practical basis of all media literacy programs can be put partially here.

Stephens, Kate. “A Critical Discussion of the ‘New Literacy Studies.’” British Journal of Educational Studies. 48.1 (2000): 10-23. The intriguing thing about this article is the arguments against those who claim that literacy is not tied to cognitive development. Stephens disagrees, however, with practical, non-contextualized literacy programs in favor of an educational theory approach that emphasizes instruction over investigation.

Thoman, Elizabeth. “Media Literacy: a Guided Tour of Selected Resources for Teaching.” The English Journal. 87.1 (1998): 34-7. This article is really more like an annotated bibliography of media literacy sources. Thoman lists several organizations and websites that offer information, teaching helps, and political activism in the field. This article has been instrumental in finding many sources for this research project.

--- . “Screen-agers and the Decline of the ‘Wasteland’.” Federal Communications Law Journal. 55.3 (2003): 601. Thoman makes the argument that the public interest is best served when teachers and students have the freedom and societal support to examine the mediation of their culture. This article is much like the Buckingham piece about moving past protectionism, and it offers further arguments in favor of a more realistic and inclusive examination of media texts from the standpoint of

literacy and understanding. Media education is the key to students being able to make a conscious decision about internalizing the media they are exposed to.

Tomasulo, Frank P. "Teaching the Introductory Cinema Studies Course: Some Strategies and Resources." Cinema Journal. 34.4 (1995): 72-8. This article provided some insight into the ineffectiveness of a film program that does not include a production element. Tomasulo describes a basic cinema studies program that includes a great deal of critical reading and evaluation. However, it all seems repetitive, flat, and stale. The incorporation of a production element, it seems, would enhance every concept.

- - - . "Theory to Practice." Cinema Journal. 36.3 (1997): 113-17. Though this article is addressing graduate film programs, it makes an applicable point about any film-studies experience: the ultimate goal of the theory is the practice. In other words, a critical understanding of film is not as valuable without experience in the actual production of film. Tomasulo suggests that it is just as important to raise practical production concerns in theory classes as it is to raise theoretical concerns in production classes. The two elements are inseparable.

Van Sijll, Jennifer. Setting Up Your Story Cinematically: The 100 Most Powerful Film Conventions Every Writer Should Know. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2005. Like the Lanier and Nichols book, this is an excellent practical guide to visual story-telling convention. It has outstanding, down-to-earth advice and tips to help young writers create treatments and screenplays that center on visual story-telling (let the images tell the story).

Wiggins, Grant and Jay McTighe. Understanding by Design. Alexandria, VA:

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1998. The instructional bases for this research project were largely based on the principles examined in this text. In short, the authors discuss a method of teaching preparation which focuses on the desired results rather than on each individual lesson. In effect, then, the teacher plans backward from the end result to the first lesson that will lead to that result.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

First Interview: This interview will take place at the beginning of the project following the instruction on media production but before the actual production stage. Clarifying and follow-up questions were also asked in conjunction with each of the following questions depending on student response.

- Describe your feelings about the upcoming project.
- What do you think will be the easiest part?
- What do you think will be the biggest challenge?
- What about the project, if anything, sounds fun or boring?
- What topics/genres/styles are you considering and why?
- What is going to be your first step and why?
- In your opinion, why am I assigning this production experience?
- What do you think the benefits and detriments will be?
- What, if anything, about this project do you feel that you do not understand?
- What is your biggest concern or worry about this project?
- Do you have any opinion about this project you would like to add?

Second Interview: This interview took place about halfway through the production process. As above, clarifying and follow-up questions were asked in conjunction with each of the following questions depending on student response.

- How happy/unhappy are you with the way your project is going, your ideas, and where you see your project ending up?

- What has been the easiest part so far and what do you think will be the easiest part about finishing your project?
- What has been the biggest challenge so far and what do you foresee will be the biggest challenge in finishing your project?
- What do you find enjoyable or frustrating about the project so far and why?
- Describe the steps you've taken to get your project to where it is now?
- What, if anything, have you learned about media production from your project?
- Describe your decision-making process (e.g. why have you chosen this cut, camera angle, music, transition, narrative, style, etc)?
- What is your opinion about our use of class time on this project versus the amount of homework? Which do you find more useful and why?
- Do you have any opinion about this project you would like to add?

Final Interview: This interview took place a few days after the conclusion of the project and the presentation of the media. As above, clarifying and follow-up questions were asked in conjunction with each of the following questions depending on student response.

- What do you see as the benefits and detriments of this experience?
- How do you feel about your final product? Do you think it demonstrates what you've learned about media production and principles? Why or why not?
- What about your project turned out how you planned and what changed from your original plan?
- Describe your decision-making process (e.g. why have you chosen this cut, camera angle, music, transition, narrative, style, etc)?

- What did you find most enjoyable and most frustrating about the project and why?
- Reflect on the steps you went through. What would you change and what would you do the same if you were to do this again?
- Do you feel that the production experience was a valuable use of class time? Why or why not?
- Do you think you could have learned the same things in a different way? How?
- What should stay the same and what should change if I were to do this project again next semester with my next class?
- If you had to describe this whole experience to someone in just a few sentences, what would you say? In other words, what is the essence of this experience?
- Would you do this again? Why or why not?
- Do you have any opinion about this project you would like to add?

Appendix B: Media Production Experience Questionnaire

Instructions: Do not put your name on this paper. Answer all of the questions as honestly, as accurately, and as briefly as you can. There is a space at the end for your comments. **Please print** your answers and comments. Use the back of this sheet or a separate piece of paper if necessary.

1. What was the best thing about this project?
2. What was the worst thing about this project?
3. Rate how pleased you are with your final product on a scale of one to ten. (Ten being best.)
4. Do you feel your final product is a good representation of what you have learned about media production? Why or why not?
5. What percentage of you project would you estimate is the way you originally planned it?
6. What was the easiest part of the whole experience?
7. What was the most challenging part of the whole experience?
8. What would you change and what would you do the same if you were to do this again?
9. Do you feel that the production experience was a valuable use of class time? Why or why not?
10. Do you think you could have learned the same principles by looking at examples and discussing them or do you think the “hands on” approach made a difference?
11. What should stay the same and what should change if I were to do this project again next semester with my next class?
12. Would you do this again? Why or why not?

Please add any additional comments about the production experience that you would like to make. You should use the back of the page. Remember to **print** your comments.

Appendix C: Lesson Plans and Materials

Explanation and Disclaimer:

These lesson plans represent a simple reformatting of the actual lesson plans I used to teach this unit in my Film as Literature classes. As such, they may seem sparse and lacking in concrete detail. For example, a direction may read, “show low angle example clip” without offering a title or description of the clip. Or, a direction may read, “discuss the effect of extreme close-up” without offering any discussion. One must remember, though, that I have been teaching these film classes for over ten years, have a high degree of familiarity with my materials, and no longer find much need for a great deal of specificity or definitions of terms in my lesson plans.

These lessons are offered here merely as a record of the instruction used as the background for this action research. What works for me and my teaching style and organization certainly may not for everyone. So, anyone embarking on a similar unit of instruction, or wishing to replicate this type of production experience, could use these lessons as a basic framework or an organizational template. They should, however, do so with the understanding that these lessons are not designed to educate educators. Thus, production-inclined teachers must educate themselves on film production terminology and theory elsewhere.

It is assumed that the instructor has access to video screening equipment (such as a VHS or DVD player, speakers, and a large television or, preferably, an LCD projector and screen). These items are **not** listed in the “Materials Needed” section of the lessons.

It is worth noting here, as well, that “DRSL” is an acronym for Desired Result for Student Learning.

Outline:

Pre-Project Lessons –**I. Literacy and Language**

- (DRSL): Students will be able to define and explain the concept of “film literacy” and the incorporation of a film “writing” component into the class.
- This lesson provides the students with the conceptual justification for the production experience as well as a basic overview of the concept of a visual vocabulary.

II. Narrative

- (DRSL): Students will be able to identify and define the elements of a narrative. Students will be able to compose a basic narrative using those elements.
- This lesson is intended as a review of narrative structure in preparation for the production of narrative short films.

III. Visual Analysis

- (DRSL): Students will be able analyze the use of visual vocabulary and narrative elements in several short films (of the kind they will be asked to produce).
- This lesson is an opportunity for students to explore the visual vocabulary in film and their understanding of visual story telling. Several short films will be offered and discussed.

Project Lessons –**IV. Cinematography in Story Telling**

- (DRSL): Students will be able to define and explain the use of basic photographic elements to tell or enhance a story in film.

- This lesson provides a basic background for the rest of the production experience. Covering two full class periods, it offers the students lecture instruction with examples from film and demonstration.

V. The Concept

- (DRSL): Students will be able to write a concept for a short film in the form of a pitch. They will envision their concept with an eye toward what is feasible in the time frame given and with the limited equipment available.
- This lesson is an opportunity for students to begin conceptualizing their productions. Story ideas are incorporated into some pre-visualizations. Example concepts are discussed.

VI. Treatments, Screenplays, and Shooting Scripts

- (DRSL): Students will be able to create a treatment, a screenplay, and a shooting script from their short film concepts.
- This lesson is intended mainly to teach the format and reasoning behind the above-named writing forms. The students should be forced, at this point, to begin making specific production choices about their films.

VII. Quality vs. Crap

- (DRSL): Students will be able to determine the elements of production and screenwriting that have been misused in a non-example. Students will be able to identify the effects of poor production and screenwriting on a film.
- This lesson includes an examination of a poorly made film and student evaluations of that film based on previous lessons. The students should be able to use this experience to avoid similar mistakes in their own productions

VIII. Production Planning and Storyboarding

- (DRSL): Students will be able to create a plan for production and a storyboard from their shooting scripts.
- The focus of this lesson is on the practical realities of production. Time and assistance planning (as well as time-conserving techniques are discussed).

IX. Screenplay Peer Review

- (DRSL): Students will be able to evaluate and offer constructive criticism on other students' screenplays prior to production. Students will be able to evaluate their own work through the eyes of their audience.
- Students will submit their screenplays for peer review. Criticism will be discussed and accepted or rejected.

X. Editing and Polishing

- (DRSL): Students will be able to explain some basic tenets of editing and finishing a film. Students will be able to explain the basic effect of audio on a visual image.
- This lesson should cap the actual production portion of the project. The students will then be left to finish their films before final screening.

Lesson Plan One

Author: Brian N. Saxton

Lesson Title: Literacy and Film Language

Subject: Film as Literature

Age Group: High School (12th Grade)

Objective (DRSL): Students will be able to define and explain the concept of “film literacy” and the incorporation of a film “writing” component into the class.

Lesson Overview:

This lesson is intended to be an introduction into the production project. It is designed to take one 80 minute class period. It includes a basic definition of literacy as well as some basic information about language, but it relies heavily on the teacher’s ability to coordinate and control a classroom discussion. The students should supply most of the information (as they are already pretty media savvy and just need to be reminded of what they already know and fed the right vocabulary and structure).

Materials Needed:

- ✓ A dictionary as well as any other sources for the definition of the words “literate” and “language”
- ✓ Short film clips that indicate emotion without using dialogue

Preliminary Activity:

Explain to the students that the title of the class is “Film as Literature” and ask them what that means as to what we’ve covered in class so far. The students should offer answers to the effect that we have been looking at films as literary texts and analyzing them in much the same way as one would analyze a written text (with some obvious

additions as far as sound and visuals are concerned). Ask the students what they think is missing from the class that would help them be more film literate. Answers here will be varied. Try to guide the discussion toward a definition of the term “literate.” Write the words “literate” and “language” on the board. Ask the students to define the words for you orally. As the students start to agree on a definition, write their definitions on the board (paraphrasing if necessary).

Pull out the dictionary and ask a student to look up the word “literate”. They should come up with something like: “able to read and write in a given language.” Ask a different student to look up the word “language,” and one of the definitions should be something like: “any method of communicating ideas, as by a system of signs, symbols, gestures, or the like.” Write those definitions on the board and discuss how close the students’ definitions are to the dictionary’s.

Ask the students to explain the connection between these two words and what we have left out of the class so far. If they struggle here, let them work at it a while. Eventually, they should come up with the concept that we have been learning how to read film (and some of its language); but we would need to learn to write in the language of film in order to consider ourselves film literate.

Main Activities:

Explain to the students that there is a difference between the vocabulary we’ve been using to talk about film and the vocabulary that film uses to talk to us. For example, have the students list as many film terms as they can remember from prior class discussion (like genre names, analysis techniques, and literary/film terms) and then ask them if they could make a film using those things. Explain that film speaks to audiences

in images, sounds, and music. Certain images (with certain lighting, framing, and composition) mean certain things to an audience member in the same way that words have both denotative and connotative definitions. Certain sound effects and certain types of music can carry meaning in the same way a sentence does.

Show short “sad” example film clip with no dialogue. Ask the students for what the film clip was communicating. Then ask them what the film used to communicate that idea (answers should include certain lighting, colors, camera distances, camera angles, camera movements, and the music). Repeat with short “scary” clip, short “romantic” clip, and etc. Make sure the students notice what is similar and what is different in the way the film communicates among the clips.

Extension Activity:

Ask the students to think about scenes from films that they have seen that communicate emotions without using dialogue. Ask for some volunteers to explain a scene to the class and how the film communicated that emotion to them.

Assignment:

The students should write up a very detailed description of the audio/visual vocabulary in a two minute clip from a favorite film. They may not know all of the terminology yet, but they should just describe in as much detail as possible what they see and hear. They should then explain what they feel the film was trying to communicate to them.

Lesson Plan Two

Author: Brian N. Saxton

Lesson Title: Narrative

Subject: Film as Literature

Age Group: High School (12th Grade)

Objective (DRSL): Students will be able to identify and define the elements of a narrative. Students will be able to describe a basic narrative film using those elements.

Lesson Overview:

This lesson is intended as a review of narrative structure in preparation for the production of narrative short films. It is designed to take one 80 minute class period. It includes a basic review of terms and how elements of narrative work together to create meaning. It also discusses how those concepts apply similarly in film.

Materials Needed:

- ✓ A very short story that contains a classic narrative arc
- ✓ A short film that contains a classic narrative arc

Preliminary Activity:

Distribute copies of the short story to the class and ask the students to read it quickly. Ask the students what kind of writing it is (they will identify it as a short story). Ask them how they know. Answers should include some of the elements of narrative fiction including character (perhaps antagonist and protagonist), setting, conflict, exposition, and plot (inciting incident, rising action, climax, dénouement, and resolution). Once those elements have been listed, have the students define them and give examples

of where they are found in the story (where character info can be found, how the setting is explained, etc.).

Main Activities:

Explain to the students that narrative fiction film contains the same elements, but they usually have to be presented to the audience using the film vocabulary elements as discussed last time. For example, most films won't have narration that says things like, "Howard was still suffering the scars of his little brother's drowning that dark day at Kidney Lake when Howard was twelve. Sometimes, just before he went to sleep, he would still hear six-year-old Ronnie calling to him for help." Instead, the film would likely show a close-up of Howard's face or his eyes as he lay in bed. We would hear a young boy's voice calling for help and splashing that would start soft and get louder as the camera got closer to Howard's eyes. When Howard's eyes filled the screen, they would morph into Young Howard's eyes, and the camera would pull back to show anxious Young Howard standing helplessly on the shore of the lake. Dark music would begin. The camera would then cut to a reverse shot of Ronnie drowning near an overturned canoe.

Show the students the short narrative film. Stop the film at examples of how the film incorporates or exhibits a narrative element. Discuss with the students how the film is using its vocabulary to create the story arc.

Extension Activity:

Have the students think back to films that they have watched so far this semester. Have them choose one that they feel had a classic narrative arc and discuss how that fed its audience the narrative elements. Have the students try to think of a narrative film that

does not follow the classical narrative story arc. Have them explain how that film adjusts the narrative elements to serve its unique purposes. You may want to offer some examples that the students may have seen. Note that these films usually still contain all of the narrative elements, but they are arranged in an unusual way.

Assignment:

The students should take the original short story offered at the beginning of class and write a description of what that story would be like if it were filmed. In other words, they will describe how the narrative elements would be communicated through the use of images and sound. Narration (voice-over) is not allowed.

Lesson Plan Three

Author: Brian N. Saxton

Lesson Title: Visual Analysis

Subject: Film as Literature

Age Group: High School (12th Grade)

<p>Objective (DRSL): Students will be able analyze the use of visual vocabulary and narrative elements in several short films (of the kind they will be asked to produce).</p>

Lesson Overview:

This lesson is an opportunity for students to explore the visual vocabulary in film and their understanding of visual story telling. Several short films will be offered and discussed. It is designed to take one 80 minute class period. As this lesson relies heavily on student comments, the teacher must be able to lead an effective discussion. This lesson is also to be used as an assessment of student understanding from the previous two lessons. This lesson ends with the actual production project assignment and requirements.

Materials Needed:

- ✓ Several short narrative films of the style the students will be asked to create
(Previous student-made films can be used if available)

Preliminary Activity:

Remind the students of the visual language and narrative structure discussion from the past two class periods. Explain that they will be given several short film examples to watch and discuss. They should try and pull out specifically how these films create meaning and narrative structure. They should also consider what it would take for them to create a similar text.

Main Activities:

Show a short film and guide the students in a discussion of how the film was constructed using film vocabulary and narrative elements to transmit meaning. The first film should be something very straightforward, like “Geri’s Game” or “The Chubb-chubbs.” Subsequently, show more complex or unusual shorts, like “In Absentia.” Perhaps even “La Jettée” or “Copy Shop” (which use very unusual vocabulary and narrative structure) could be used depending on how well the students are handling the more basic films. Each film should be followed by discussion and comparison/contrast.

Extension Activity:

Explain to the students that the purpose of this unit is for them to use visual vocabulary and narrative structure to create a film (like the ones just shown) of their own. In other words, they will be “writing” in the language of film to become more film literate. Distribute the assignment requirements handout and discuss it with the students.

Assignment:

See handout beginning on the following page.

Short Film Production Assignment

Film as Literature Mr. Saxton

Basic Requirements:

You must plan, write, film, and edit an original **3-MINUTE NARRATIVE FILM** (no shorter than 2:45 and no longer than 3:15) to be presented to and evaluated by the class. Your film should exhibit what you have learned about film this semester. The short film will be **DUE JANUARY 3rd** (that's right after the holiday break, so be careful).

Pre-production assignments leading up to this film will be completed on a step by step basis and include a **CONCEPT**, a **TREATMENT**, a **SCREENPLAY**, a **SHOOTING SCRIPT**, and **STORYBOARDS**. Though class time will be spent on instruction and production planning, most of this assignment will need to be completed as homework. **You are also responsible to find or have access to your own equipment** (see Mr. Saxton for suggestions – if you don't have access to a video camera, other options such as digital cameras, cell phone cameras, and simple animation software such as Shockwave Flash, Pivot, or The Movies may be used).

You must also keep a **FILM PRODUCTION JOURNAL** that you will write in **daily**. This journal should include what you did that day (even if it's nothing) toward completing this project and any thoughts, feelings, frustrations, or successes relating to the project. The journal will culminate in a **FINAL ESSAY** in which you will evaluate your film, your experience making your film, and the project as a whole.

Rules:

- The film must be narrative and include all narrative elements.
- The film must create meaning principally with audio/visual vocabulary – see the following guidelines:
 - Don't talk too much.
 - If pictures can tell the story, let them.
 - Let dialogue and action work together.
 - Use camera, lighting, editing, sound, and music as storytellers.
- Signed waivers must be obtained from anyone who appears and from location owners.
- The film must be completely school appropriate – Think light PG. (If you are unsure about your content, see Mr. Saxton)

Schedule and Assignment Due Dates:

Nov. 7-9	Cinematography as a Storytelling Element
Nov. 13	Creating a Concept
Nov. 15	Creating a Treatment and Screenplay Writing Form Concept Due.
Nov. 17	Non-Example: <i>Plan 9 from Outer Space</i> (part one) Concept Back (with comments)
Nov. 21	Non-Example: <i>Plan 9</i> (part two) Treatment Due: Treatment Peer Review
Nov. 28	Storyboarding and Shooting Scripts
Nov. 30	Production Planning SCREENPLAY DUE: Screenplay Peer Review
Dec. 4-8	Animation Unit
Dec. 12	Editing and Polishing Screenplay Back (with final comments)
Dec. 12-20	Documentary Film Unit
Jan. 3	FINAL PRODUCT DUE (Final products can't be accepted late.) Includes: Film Production Journal Final Evaluation Essay Concept Treatment Screenplay Shooting Script Storyboards Signed Waivers
Jan. 3-9	SCREENING PARTIES!

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you are planning to be absent on any of these dates, see Mr. Saxton immediately! This project is doable as it is laid out; but if you procrastinate or miss class, it will come back to bite you.

A BIT OF ADVICE: If I were you, I would plan to film and edit between December 13th and 20th. That way, your film will be finished before the holiday break, and Mr. Saxton will be available if you have questions or problems while you film. If you plan to film during the break, you're on your own.

Lesson Plan Four**Author: Brian N. Saxton****Lesson Title: Cinematography in Story Telling****Subject: Film as Literature****Age Group: High School (12th Grade)**

Objective (DRSL): Students will be able to define and explain the use of basic photographic elements to tell or enhance a story in film.

Lesson Overview:

This lesson provides a basic background for the rest of the production experience. Covering two full class periods, it offers the students lecture instruction with examples from film and demonstration. Again, this lesson is designed to take TWO 80 minute class periods. As this lesson relies heavily on instructor knowledge, some research into the psychology of photography may be useful.

Materials Needed:

- ✓ Handout/Lecture Guide (see following pages)
- ✓ Many example film clips containing expert use of cinematographic elements to be discussed
- ✓ Some film clips to be used as non-examples

Preliminary Activity:

Remind the students of the visual language and narrative structure discussion from the past three class periods. Explain that, over the next two class periods, they will be given some specific “video vocabulary” that will help them plan and complete a more effective and successful short film.

Main Activities:

Distribute the lecture guide. Explain to the students that the photography in a film can (and should) be used as a principal story-telling device. The old adage that a picture is worth a thousand words certainly holds true. In effect, when you see a film, you are basically handing over control of your eyeballs to the filmmakers. They decide where you'll look, what you'll look at, and for how long. They can, more importantly, decide what you *won't* look at. Tell the students that the following concepts are some of the methods filmmakers use to control peoples' eyes.

Begin with "Transitions" and explain the definition of each term, how that concept is used, and (most importantly) why that concept is used to help communicate ideas to the audience. Some discussion of the rationale (or psychological reasoning) behind each concept is helpful as well. For example, when discussing "cut," one could define it as the fastest possible transition between images, note that cuts create rhythm (more and faster cuts lend excitement and speed up a film), and note that we tend not to notice cuts because we're used to blinking. Cuts allow the cinematographer to blink for us.

After each concept (allowing the students to take notes on the lecture guide), show one or two very quick film examples and allow students to discuss the effect of that concept on the film and its audience. Move this way through the entire packet. Some concepts that are a little more difficult (like "montage" or "juxtaposition") may require more examples and more discussion. Other concepts (like "angle" or "distance") may be fairly easy for students to understand, and the instructor may choose to move through them rather quickly.

Extension Activity:

Show the students some non-examples (where perhaps the photography could have been more effective) and have them discuss more effective choices. Make sure the students share their reasoning behind their suggestions. (Previous student films may work well here. Also, there is plenty of badly-shot video online.)

Assignment:

Have the students watch a two-minute sequence from one of their favorite films at home. Have them list everything the camera does (or any concept from class discussion that is used) in that two minutes and explain why they think the camera does it. They may need to watch the clip several times to get it all.

EIGHT-PAGE PACKET BEGINS ON NEXT PAGE.

(All illustrations in the following handout are original to the author.)

CINEMATOGRAPHY IN STORY-TELLING: TRANSITIONS

IN:

TO:

OUT:

CUT:

JUMP CUT:

MATCH CUT:

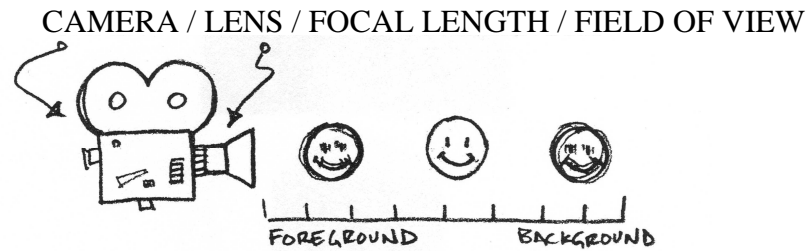
FADE:

DISSOLVE:

SUPERIMPOSE:

WIPE/IRIS/BLUR/ETC.:

CINEMATOGRAPHY IN STORY-TELLING: MOVEMENT



PAN:

TILT:

RISE/DROP:

PULL:

TRUCK/DOLLY:

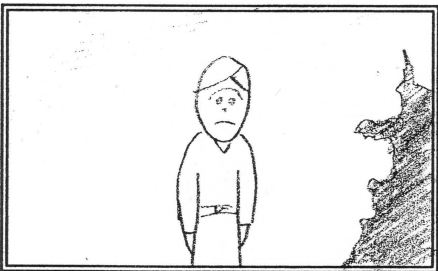
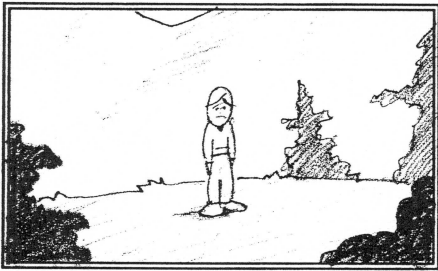
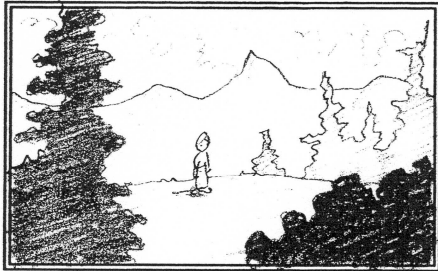
TRACK:

ZOOM:

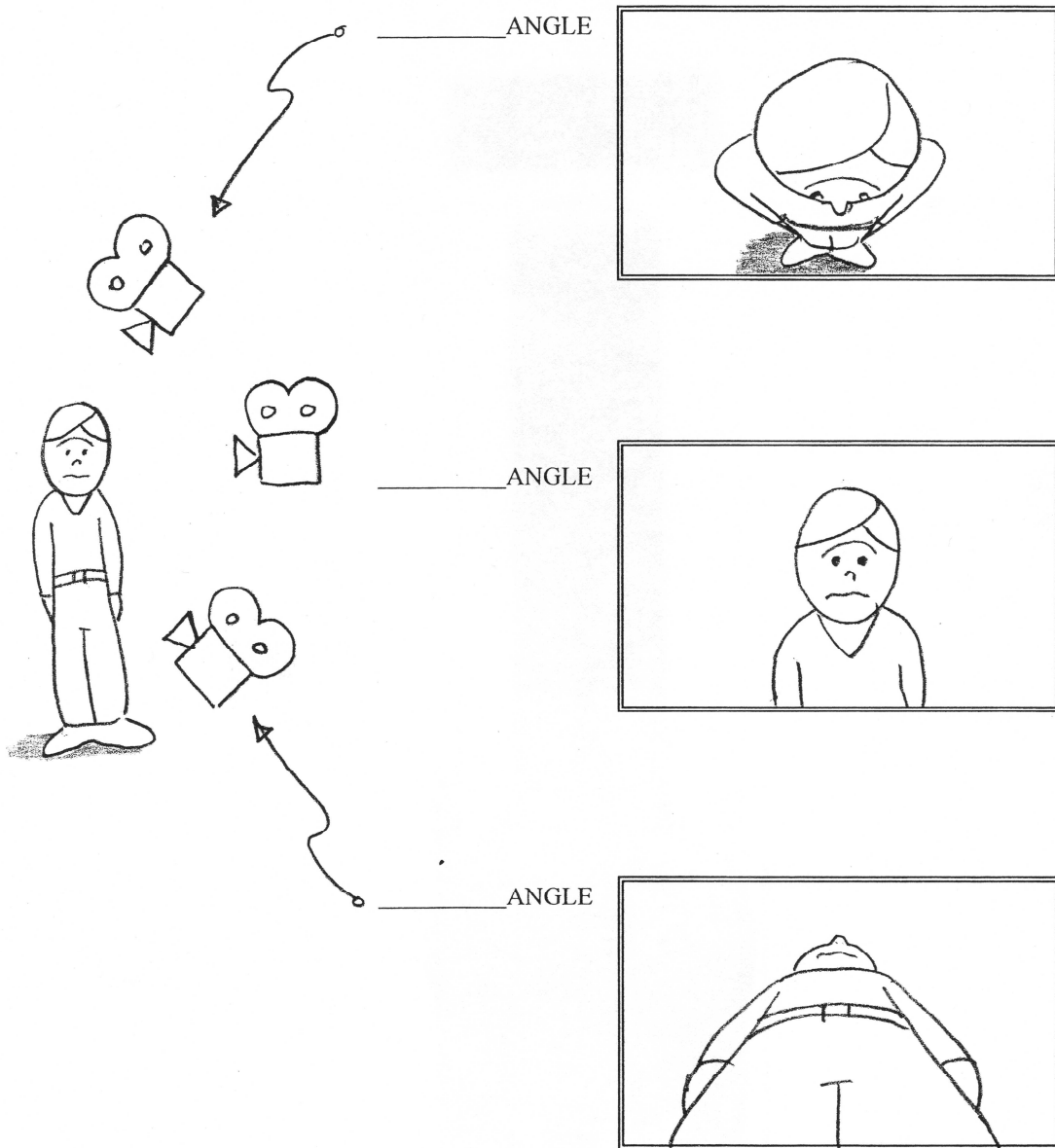
RACK:

FOLLOW:

CINEMATOGRAPHY IN STORY-TELLING: DISTANCE / FIELD OF VIEW

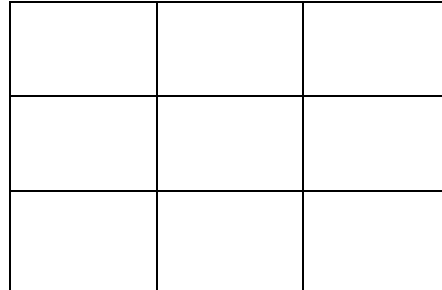


CINEMATOGRAPHY IN STORY-TELLING: ANGLE



CINEMATOGRAPHY IN STORY-TELLING: FRAMING

RULE OF THIRDS:



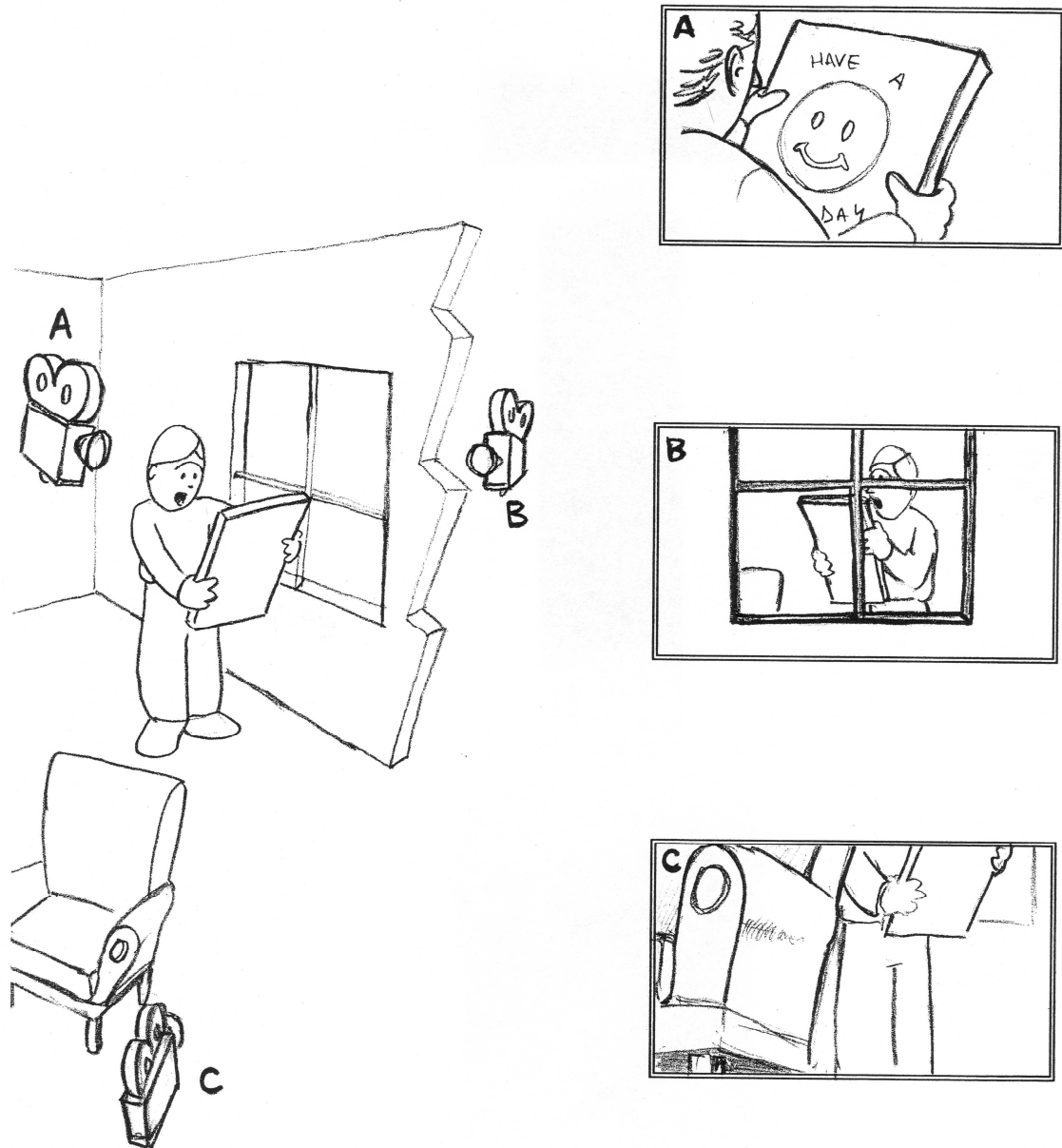
MOTION FRAMING:



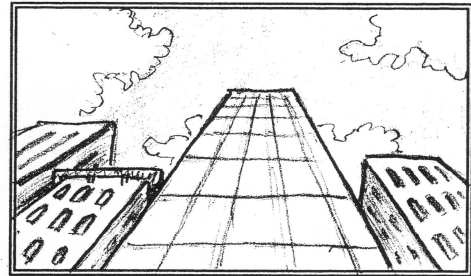
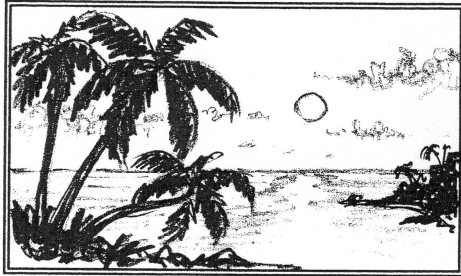
FOCUS FRAMING:



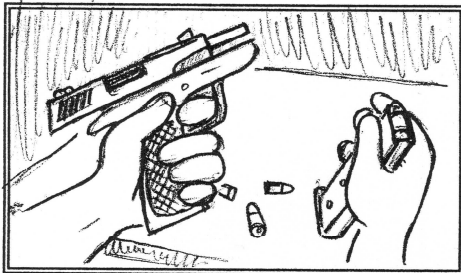
CINEMATOGRAPHY IN STORY-TELLING: POINT OF VIEW (POV)



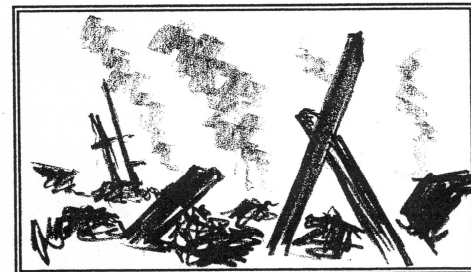
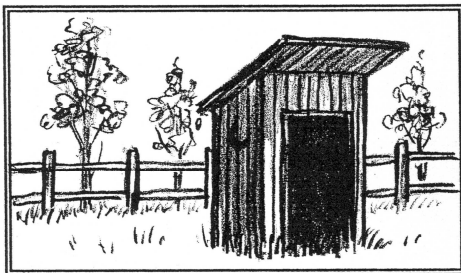
CINEMATOGRAPHY IN STORY-TELLING: JUXTAPOSITION / CONTRAST



MONTAGE



RHYTHM



CINEMATOGRAPHY IN STORY-TELLING: LIGHTING

KEY LIGHT:

BACKLIGHT:

FILL:

SCULPTING:

HIGH KEY:

LOW KEY:

COLOR

SATURATION:

VALUE:

HUE / TINT / TONE / SHADE:

WASH:

IMPACT:

SYMBOLISM:

Lesson Plan Five

Author: Brian N. Saxton

Lesson Title: The Concept

Subject: Film as Literature

Age Group: High School (12th Grade)

Objective (DRSL): Students will be able to write a concept for a short film in the form of a pitch. They will envision their concept with an eye toward what is feasible in the time frame given and with the limited equipment available.

Lesson Overview:

This lesson is an opportunity for students to begin conceptualizing their productions. Story ideas are incorporated into some pre-visualizations. The students will begin by examining what expectations they have for their projects and assessing how realistic those expectations are. Example concepts are discussed. This lesson is designed to take one 80 minute class period.

Materials Needed:

- ✓ Example Concepts (see following pages)
- ✓ Classroom copies of pages 7-13 from Lanier and Nichols' *Filmmaking for Teens*

Preliminary Activity:

Ask the students to divide a piece of paper into three columns. They should label the first column "I Have," the second column "I Can Get," and the last column "I Don't Have or I Don't Know." Explain to them that you are going to be giving them a list of equipment that they could use to make their films. They should list each item in one of the three columns on their paper. Read them the following list:

- **Digital Video Camera or VHS Camcorder**
- **Tripod**
- **PC Computer with Windows Movie Maker or Mac Computer with iMovie**
- **Appropriate Cables to Connect Camera with Computer**
- **Sound Editing Software**
- **Shotgun Microphone for Camera**
- **Bounce Board (Reflector)**
- **Lots of Friends and Family that will Work Very Hard for Free.**

Review and explain the items on the list for the students. Discuss the students' equipment availability. Offer suggestions for students that don't have access to equipment. Now ask the students how many of them have access to a jib arm, lighting kit, camera stabilizer, filter kit, doorway and track dollies, green screen, Final Cut Pro, or Adobe Premiere. Explain to the students that they need to be realistic about their capabilities and what they can accomplish. They should not plan a film that they can't actually film. They should understand that their film may not end up being as polished as what they see in the theatre. Their ideas for films need to take the time they can spend into account as well.

Main Activities:

Explain to the students that they will need to start their production process with an idea. That idea, written down, is called a "concept." The concept should explain the basic premise of their film (not in too much detail) including the general story idea (narrative elements). Explain to the students that their concept is really kind of a pitch for their film. They should try to sell the idea to the instructor.

Pass out the copies from the Lanier and Nichols book (be sure you collect the copies from the students after class and destroy them when you're finished so as not to violate copyright). Read the chapter through "Culling the Herd" on page 13 with the students pointing out particularly the idea of keeping the idea simple and small.

Pass out the example concepts (I used the ones on the following page). Discuss the concepts with the students. Explain to the students that they should begin creating a concept for their film today. They should make sure they consider what is realistic for them to accomplish with the equipment and time they have available.

Extension Activity:

Have the students begin brainstorming their ideas following Lanier and Nichols' advice. Walk around the room and discuss possible ideas with students.

Assignment:

Written concept is due next time.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

I was thinking about a film about a lonely farm kid who desperately wants to be famous. Set maybe in the 80s, the kid watches TV all day. His favorite show is “Star Search” because he can envision himself becoming famous with Ed McMahon introducing him to the world. However, he doesn’t have any talent. He starts looking for other ways to become famous.

A guy wins a huge lottery and decides to change his identity and keep his wealth a secret. He moves into a small town and sets about secretly and anonymously giving large amounts of money to random townsfolk. He means well, but it ends up destroying the town.

While hiking in the woods, a young girl finds a leather satchel containing a letter that looks like it was written and placed under a rock back in the 1890s. The letter, though it contains only her first name, seems to be addressed directly to her. It even has details about her life and some of the problems she’s facing. She begins following the advice on the letter, and her life changes dramatically.

Lesson Plan Six

Author: Brian N. Saxton

Lesson Title: Treatments, Screenplays, and Shooting Scripts

Subject: Film as Literature

Age Group: High School (12th Grade)

<p>Objective (DRSL): Students will be able to create a treatment, a screenplay, and a shooting script from their short film concepts.</p>
--

Lesson Overview:

This lesson is intended mainly to teach the format and reasoning behind the above-named writing forms. The students should be forced, at this point, to begin making specific production choices about their films. This lesson is designed to take one 80 minute class period. Again, this is a lesson that requires a great deal of instructor know-how. Some experience writing in the forms (or at least reading the forms) would be best.

Materials Needed:

- ✓ Example Treatment, Screenplay, and Shooting Script (see following pages)
- ✓ Classroom copies of pages 14-28 from Lanier and Nichols' *Filmmaking for Teens*

Preliminary Activity:

Ask the students to pull out their concepts and look over their ideas. Explain to them that the next step in the process is starting to make specific visual and narrative choices. In other words they need to plan exactly how they will take their idea and express it through film. That planning process is mainly the process of *thinking* in the visual language of film (in other words, watching their movies in their heads) and then translating that language into regular written English.

Main Activities:

Distribute the copies of the Lanier and Nichols book (again, be sure you collect the copies from the students after class and destroy them when you're finished so as not to violate copyright). Read pages 14-16 with the students and explain further the concept of a treatment. Explain that the treatment is really the first visual translation of their ideas. Talk about the essay format and the approximate length. Distribute the example treatment (taken from one of the example concepts) and discuss it with the students.

Explain to the students that, from this point, the format of the visual translation becomes important. Read pages 17-28 from the book with the students and discuss the appropriate screenplay format. Explain the practical reasoning behind elements such as the slug lines, the centered or tabbed dialogue, etc. Distribute the example screenplay (taken from the example concept) and discuss it with the students. Point out features and discuss freeware or trial-ware screenwriting software.

Next, distribute the copies of the example shooting script. Explain to the students that the shooting script represents the most detailed visual translation of the idea. Explain that camera directions and specific visuals are now added in preparation for filming. Discuss the changes between the screenplay and the shooting script. Ask the students if they can visualize the film in their head after reading the sample. That is the goal of the shooting script. Discuss the shooting script's use of cinematographic elements. Discuss whether or not the shooting script follows the visual communication guidelines from the project rules:

- Don't talk too much.
- If pictures can tell the story, let them.
- Let dialogue and action work together.
- Use camera, lighting, editing, sound, and music as storytellers.

Extension Activity:

Have the students begin thinking about how they would present their concepts visually. Remind them of the concepts of visual vocabulary and cinematography previously discussed. Tell them that their screenplays and shooting scripts should demonstrate their understanding of visual vocabulary. The meaning needs to come across primarily through the images. They should jot down a couple of main visual ideas that they would like to include in their film. Explain, though, that they may want to wait until next class period to really start writing their treatment, as they will be getting their concepts back with instructor comments that may be helpful.

Assignments:

Written treatments are due in two class periods. These will be peer-reviewed.

Screenplays are due in four class periods to be peer and instructor reviewed.

Shooting scripts are due with the final film.

EXAMPLE TREATMENT

Treatment – “Star Search”:

Setting: Mort, Kansas – 1983. David is a late-teen farm boy who is slightly mentally challenged. He is bored with his isolated and friendless life and longs to be famous. Contributing to this longing, he watches TV (especially Ed McMahon’s *Star Search*). He envisions himself as a house-hold name, but he doesn’t have any of the talents or abilities he sees people get famous for on the television. He decides that he needs another path to fame. In his school library, he finds a book about famous serial killers and he instantly remembers how many shows and news stories there are on TV about murderers. David believes he’s found his path. He decides to begin with the family of a man he worked for on a neighboring farm. The man had fired David for laziness and inattention. David drives to the man’s house early the next morning. From there, David’s own star search begins. (Don’t worry, he doesn’t do it.)

STAR SEARCH
B. N. Saxton
(Example Screenplay)

1. EXT. – COUNTRY ROAD — NIGHT

We see a rather narrow road which runs very straight through expansive fields. There is a sense of loneliness about the scene. The headlights of an aging blue pick-up can be seen ominously approaching.

2. EXT. – FRONT OF FARM HOUSE – NEAR DAWN

We see the truck arriving at a neat, two-story yellow farm house. The property is obviously owned by someone who takes great care to keep things in order. Absent are the usual piles of clutter that inhabit the yards of most farmhouses in the middle-west. The dirt drive is free from dead leaves, mud-holes, and deserted farm implements. Instead, it is lined with well-maintained flower beds and a few toys that indicate the presence of a young child. There is a freshly painted Barn at the rear of the house and some sort of out-building farther up the lane. There are three large trees (the only ones for miles) in the front yard (one of which supports a tire swing). The only sense we get of the reality of a working farm are the soft animal noises coming from somewhere beyond the barn. The last thing we notice, as the truck turns off its lights and rolls quietly to a stop, is that there doesn't seem to be another farm within sight of this one. The driver's side door swings open silently and a young man in jeans, a blue plaid flannel shirt, and beat-up tennis shoes exits. His hand is wrapped nervously around the hub-cap end of a blue-painted steel tire-iron. The iron is held with the lug wrench socket angling up from its extended end. The blue paint is chipped noticeably as if the iron has been clanging around unused with other tools in a chest. The door closes with only the faintest sound. The man walks around to the back of the truck and retrieves a red plastic gasoline can from the bed. We notice that it is beginning to get light; everything has taken on a pale blue-gray morning tint. The man pauses for a moment and then begins to walk up the drive to the house.

3. INT. – FARM HOUSE MASTER BEDROOM (LOWER LEVEL) — EARLY

Through transparent curtains we can see the front end of the pick-up. The rear of the truck is out of view around the corner of the house. The room is still quite dark, but we can see that it has been decorated nicely in the style of a married woman. There are many photographs on the walls and on the top of a large dresser near the bed. The glowing red numbers of an alarm clock on a night stand read 4:53. In the bed, asleep, is a

Continued 2.

Woman of about 31. Her husband sleeps next to her. He is a rugged, yet sensitive-looking man of about 36. He is clean-shaven and short-haired. He sleepily opens his eyes — then becomes suddenly alert. He sits up quietly, gets to his feet, and moves quickly to the window. He is wearing gray sweat-pants and a white undershirt. As he moves to the window, he pulls a flannel robe from the bed post. Pulling the robe into place he reaches the window and sees the truck parked out front. His face pulls tight and he is about to rush from the room. The awakened woman groggily sits partway up in bed.

WOMAN

(yawning)

Honey? Somethin' wrong?

HUSBAND

(a little surprised and a little too reassuring)

No. Everything's fine. It's okay . . . go back to sleep.

WOMAN

(still a bit confused)

Where're you going? What time is it?

HUSBAND

I'm just going to the kitchen for a drink, and then I'm gonna check on Lizzie. It's still early yet. Go back to sleep.

WOMAN

(lying back down, and not enthusiastically)

Do you want me to make . . . some milk or . . . muffin . . .
(she trails off with a sigh)

The man hurries from the room.

4. INT. – FARM HOUSE DEN — EARLY

In a rush but trying to be quiet, the husband enters the den, nearly trips on a chair, and switches on a small lamp. The den is also well furnished and contains several hunting trophies and a large wood-and-glass gun cabinet. The husband rushes to a large desk and pulls open the top drawer rapidly nearly spilling its contents on the floor. The drawer contains (among other things) a ring with two small keys attached. The husband snatches up the keys, moves to the gun cabinet, and fiddles with the lock.

5. EXT. – FRONT DOOR OF FARM HOUSE — DAWN

The front door pulls open and the husband comes out cautiously. He is carrying a long pump-action shotgun tightly in his hands at waist level. His eyes are fixed on the pick-up. He steps out onto the front porch.

Continued 3.

HUSBAND

(trying to call without waking anyone)

David? . . . David, I've got a gun. . . . Go home, David.

There is no reply except the murmuring of some cattle in the distance. The husband takes several steps out toward the truck.

HUSBAND

(eyes shifting back and forth in a search — we see fear in them)

David?

The husband doesn't see the man hiding in the bushes near the front door. The man slips quietly through the front door and pushes it closed from the inside locking the husband out of the house.

. . . to be continued.

STAR SEARCH
 B. N. Saxton
 (Example Shooting Script)

FADE IN

1. EXT. – COUNTRY ROAD — NIGHT

POV — HIGH ANGLE / LONG We see a rather narrow road which runs very straight through expansive fields. There is a sense of loneliness about the scene. The headlights of an aging blue pick-up can be seen approaching the camera slowly. As the truck draws closer, the CAMERA begins a SLOW DROP DOWN toward the road (keeping the truck centered). The CAMERA reaches ROAD LEVEL just as the whitish grill of the truck fills the view, then obscures it in blackness as we CUT TO

2. EXT. – FRONT OF FARM HOUSE – NEAR DAWN

We see the truck arriving at a neat, two-story yellow farm house. The property is obviously owned by someone who takes great care to keep things in order. Absent are the usual piles of clutter that inhabit the yards of most farmhouses in the middle-west. The dirt drive is free from dead leaves, mud-holes, and deserted farm implements. Instead, it is lined with well-maintained flower beds and a few toys that indicate the presence of a young child. There is a freshly painted Barn at the rear of the house and some sort of out-building farther up the lane. There are three large trees (the only ones for miles) in the front yard (one of which supports a tire swing). The only sense we get of the reality of a working farm are the soft animal noises coming from somewhere beyond the barn. The last thing we notice, as the truck turns off its lights and rolls quietly to a stop, is that there doesn't seem to be another farm within sight of this one. CUT TO POV FLAT ANGLE CLOSE UP as the lower half of the driver's side door swings open silently and a pair of very old tennis shoes swing out followed by two masculine, jean-clad legs. The legs have the movement of someone young and strong. The CAMERA FOLLOWS as the legs move out of the way and the door closes with only the faintest sound. The legs are still for a moment as the CAMERA RISES TO WAIST LEVEL slowly to reveal a large, tan hand wrapped nervously around the hub-cap end of a blue-painted steel tire-iron. The iron is held with the lug wrench socket angling up from its extended end. The blue paint is chipped noticeably as if the iron has been clanging around unused with other tools in a chest. The CAMERA FOLLOWS the tire iron and hand around to the back of the truck. We see the other hand rise and disappear for a moment, then return with a red plastic gasoline can from the bed. We notice that it is beginning to get light; everything has taken on a pale blue-gray morning tint. The tire iron and can pause for a moment and then begin to walk up the drive to the house as we CUT TO

Continued 2.

3. INT. – FARM HOUSE MASTER BEDROOM (LOWER LEVEL) — EARLY

POV — OUT WINDOW Through transparent curtains we can see the front end of the pick-up. The rear of the truck is out of view around the corner of the house. We can see that this window is obviously on the right side of the house. The CAMERA PANS DOWN AND LEFT to reveal the interior of the room. The room is still quite dark, but we can see that it has been decorated nicely in the style of a married woman. There are many photographs on the walls and on the top of a large dresser near the bed. As the pan continues the CAMERA PAUSES momentarily on the glowing red numbers of an alarm clock on a night stand which read 4:53. The CAMERA CONTINUES its pan passing close above the face of a lovely sleeping WOMAN of about 31, then across the bed to the face of her HUSBAND. He is a rugged, yet sensitive-looking man of about 36. He is clean-shaven and short-haired. The CAMERA CENTERS on his face and we see him sleepily open his eyes — then become suddenly alert. The CAMERA PULLS BACK to a MEDIUM SHOT as he sits up quietly, gets to his feet, and moves quickly to the window. He is wearing gray sweat-pants and a white undershirt. As he moves to the window, he pulls a flannel robe from the bed post. Pulling the robe into place he reaches the window and sees the truck parked out front. His face pulls tight and he is about to rush from the room. As the CAMERA FOLLOWS him, we see the WOMAN sitting up in bed groggily.

WOMAN

(yawning)

Honey? Somethin' wrong?

HUSBAND

(a little surprised and a little too reassuring)

No. Everything's fine. It's okay . . . go back to sleep.

WOMAN

(still a bit confused)

Where're you going? What time is it?

HUSBAND

I'm just going to the kitchen for a drink, and then I'm gonna check on Lizzie. It's still early yet. Go back to sleep.

WOMAN

(lying back down, and not enthusiastically)

Do you want me to make . . . some milk or . . . muffin . . .

(she trails off with a sigh)

The man hurries from the room and we CUT TO

Continued 3.

4. INT. – FARM HOUSE DEN — EARLY

POV — FROM INSIDE DEN TOWARD DOOR (FLAT ANGLE) In a rush but trying to be quiet, the HUSBAND enters the den, nearly trips on a chair, and switches on a small lamp. The den is also well furnished and contains several hunting trophies and a large wood-and-glass gun cabinet. The CAMERA FOLLOWS HUSBAND to a large desk. He pulls open the top drawer rapidly, nearly spilling its contents on the floor. We CUT TO CLOSE-UP of the contents of the drawer. It contains several things but the CAMERA CENTERS on a ring with two small keys attached. We CUT TO a MEDIUM SHOT / HIGH ANGLE of the HUSBAND snatching up the keys, moving to the gun cabinet, and fiddling with the lock. CUT TO

5. EXT. – FRONT DOOR OF FARM HOUSE — DAWN

The door pulls open and the HUSBAND comes out cautiously. He is carrying a long pump-action shotgun tightly in his hands at waist level. His eyes are fixed on the pick-up. There are large bushes at either side of the porch. The CAMERA ZOOMS QUICKLY to CLOSE-UP of HUSBAND's face as he says in a near whisper,

HUSBAND

(trying to call without waking anyone)

David? . . . David, I've got a gun. . . . Go home, David.

To which there is no reply except the murmuring of some cattle in the distance. The CAMERA CONTINUES to HOLD CLOSE-UP as the HUSBAND takes several steps out toward the truck.

HUSBAND

(eyes shifting back and forth in a search — we see fear in them)

David?

CUT TO POV HUSBAND as he PANS the quiet yard right to left. He sees nothing but the empty truck. We hear the clicks of the truck's engine cooling. CUT TO CLOSE-UP of the HUSBAND'S confused face. The CAMERA TRACKS LEFT SLIGHTLY to reveal the front door behind the HUSBAND. Over his shoulder, we see the door to the house being pushed slowly shut from the inside.

. . . to be continued.

Lesson Plan Seven

Author: Brian N. Saxton

Lesson Title: Quality vs. Crap

Subject: Film as Literature

Age Group: High School (12th Grade)

Objective (DRSL): Students will be able to determine the elements of production and screenwriting that have been misused in a non-example. Students will be able to identify the effects of poor production and screenwriting on a film.

Lesson Overview:

This lesson includes an examination of a poorly made film and student evaluations of that film based on previous lessons. The students should be able to use this experience to avoid similar mistakes in their own productions. This lesson is designed to take TWO 80 minute class periods due to the length of the film and discussion.

Materials Needed:

- ✓ Non-example film – in this case, Ed Wood’s classic, *Plan 9 from Outer Space*
- ✓ Students’ film concepts with instructor comments to pass back

Preliminary Activity:

Pass back the students’ concepts and allow them a few minutes to read the instructor comments and questions. Answer questions and discuss comments for a few minutes, then remind students about the treatment due date.

Main Activities:

Explain to the students that sometimes it’s easier to learn from someone else’s mistakes than from your own. Tell them that, beginning today, they will be watching and

analyzing what is widely regarded as the worst movie ever made, *Plan 9 from Outer Space*. Explain that the filmmaker behind this anti-masterpiece, Edward Davis Wood Jr., did quite a few things well and even more things badly – very badly. Explain that the film is still very watch-able and actually quite entertaining; but, unfortunately, not in the way Mr. Wood intended it. The film fails, in other words, to communicate. Tell the students that they should keep a film journal as they watch and make note of the visual vocabulary, screenwriting, and narrative mistakes that lead to this miscommunication. Explain that we will be stopping the film on occasion to discuss some of the avoidable mistakes.

Watch the film and stop to discuss miscommunications. Make special note that the bad special effects are not what's wrong with the film. They would actually be quite passable for the time period if the rest of the film were better managed. Also, make note of when the visual vocabulary guidelines are broken (don't talk too much, etc.).

Extension Activity:

When the film is over, during the second class period, divide the class into small groups (three or four) and have the students take turns sharing and commenting on each others' treatments. Make sure the criticism is constructive and centered around the visual storytelling and the feasibility of the story. Walk around the room and check off those students who have their treatments. Participate in the groups' discussions. Answer questions and offer suggestions. Remind the students that, in turning their treatments into screenplays, they should avoid the kind of mistakes made in *Plan 9*.

Assignments:

No new assignments. The students should begin work on their screenplays.

Lesson Plan Eight

Author: Brian N. Saxton

Lesson Title: Production Planning and Storyboarding

Subject: Film as Literature

Age Group: High School (12th Grade)

Objective (DRSL): Students will be able to create a plan for production and a storyboard from their shooting scripts.

Lesson Overview:

The focus of this lesson is on the practical realities of production. Time and assistance planning (as well as time-conserving techniques) are discussed. This lesson also covers the process of storyboarding based on the shooting scripts. This lesson is designed to take one 80 minute class period. Once again, heavy instructor involvement necessitates prior research or experience.

Materials Needed:

- ✓ DVDs with example storyboards as special features
- ✓ Classroom copies of pages 55-64 from Lanier and Nichols' *Filmmaking for Teens*
- ✓ Sample waiver forms (see following pages)

Preliminary Activity:

Distribute the sample waiver forms to the students and explain the importance of protecting the rights of their casts, crews, location owners, and selves. Explain the importance of honesty and appreciation when accepting the help of others. Tell the students that people are much more likely to offer their help if they can tell that the person asking for help is well-planned and well put together. A well-planned and efficient

production is the best way to be courteous to and show appreciation for those who volunteer to be a part of it.

Main Activities:

Distribute and read pages 55-64 from the Lanier/Nichols book (again, be copyright aware). Discuss the considerations pointed out in the book for planning and scheduling the film shoot. Explain that the general thrust is that the better and more carefully planned the shoot is, the better the film is likely to turn out. There will still likely be problems and unexpected glitches; but they will be more easily solved if enough planning has gone into the process earlier.

Explain to the students that one of the best ways to start planning and to finish the translation of your idea from words to pictures is to create a shot board or storyboard. Explain that the basic idea of a storyboard is to make sure that the shooting script's planned shots match what was visualized and to act as an efficient guide while shooting.

Show the students several storyboard sequences from DVD special features. The best examples are those that allow the storyboards to be viewed simultaneously with the screenplay, the soundtrack, or the actual scene from the final film. Explain the elements that should be included and those that can be left out. Discuss the importance of showing motion (with arrows or motion lines). Explain to the students that, just as in the real film business, they don't have to do their own storyboards. If they aren't artistically inclined, they can get someone to draw the storyboards for them (they should supervise); or they could use a digital camera to take stills to use as the storyboard. Remind the students that their storyboards must be turned in with their final product.

Extension Activity:

If time permits, have the students storyboard a few shots from the example shooting script that was distributed with the screenplay lesson.

Assignments:

No new assignments. The students should be finishing their screenplays.

SAMPLE CAST / CREW WAIVER

Waiver:

I have agreed and hereby agree to participate in and in connection with a motion picture _____ (film) being produced by _____ (producer) as part of a student film project for the Timpanogos High School Film as Literature class to be produced or filmed on or about _____ (dates).

I understand that the film will be screened in the class this semester and may be exhibited elsewhere for other audiences at the discretion of the filmmaker and/or the instructor. I hereby agree to voluntarily accept and assume any and all such risks that are in any way associated with my participation and the subsequent exhibition of the footage in any and all media, whether now known or hereafter invented.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

If Signatory is under 18:

I represent and warrant that I am the parent or guardian of the minor whose name appears above, that I have read and approve of the foregoing release, and consent to its execution by my child/ward.

Signature of Parent or Guardian / Printed Name / Date

SAMPLE LOCATION WAIVER

Waiver:

I certify that I am the responsible owner/operator/ manager of the property located at _____ (address) in _____ (city), _____ (state). I hereby agree to allow the use of said property for the purpose of filming or recording the short motion picture _____ (film) being produced by _____ (producer) as part of a student film project for the Timpanogos High School Film as Literature class to be produced or filmed on or about _____ (dates).

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

(Adapted from <http://www.48hourfilm.com/filmmakers/48HFP.LiabilityWaiver.pdf>)

Lesson Plan Nine

Author: Brian N. Saxton

Lesson Title: Screenplay Peer Review

Subject: Film as Literature

Age Group: High School (12th Grade)

Objective (DRSL): Students will be able to evaluate and offer constructive criticism on other students' screenplays prior to production. Students will be able to evaluate their own work through the eyes of their audience.

Lesson Overview:

Students will submit their screenplays for peer review. Criticism will be discussed and accepted or rejected. The peer review should take the form of a reading followed by a Q&A. This lesson is designed to take one 80 minute class period.

Materials Needed:

- ✓ Classroom copies of pages 29-33 from Lanier and Nichols' *Filmmaking for Teens*

Preliminary Activity:

Distribute the copies and read them with the students (again, protect copyright). Discuss the idea of a reading and what can be gained by holding one. Discuss the section entitled "Quiz Show" and have the students think about questions they would like to ask of their peers. Have them write a list of questions.

Main Activities:

Group the students according to screenplay cast size if possible. However, if the cast is more than four, smaller groups with people reading multiple parts may fit the time

better. Have the students decide who will go first. In turn, each student should have the other members of the group read their screenplay aloud (including description and stage directions) while they take notes. Then each writer should quiz the group and write down their suggestions and advice. Walk around and participate in each group making sure that each student is getting positive and constructive criticism of their screenplay. Each student should note possible changes on his or her screenplay before submitting it for instructor review.

Extension Activity:

If time permits, have the students offer general comments to the entire class about what they noticed from the reading and question session. Have the students discuss the changes that they are considering based on peer feedback.

Assignments:

No new assignments. The students should be planning their productions, working on their shooting scripts, and waiting for instructor feedback.

Lesson Plan Ten

Author: Brian N. Saxton

Lesson Title: Editing and Polishing

Subject: Film as Literature

Age Group: High School (12th Grade)

Objective (DRSL): Students will be able to explain some basic tenets of editing and finishing a film. Students will be able to explain the basic effect of audio on a visual image.

Lesson Overview:

This lesson should cap the actual production portion of the project. The students will then be left to finish their films before final screening. This lesson is designed to take one 80 minute class period. Instructor editing experience is a plus.

Materials Needed:

- ✓ Classroom copies of pages 138-140 from Lanier/Nichols' *Filmmaking for Teens*
- ✓ Some short film clips to be used as editing examples
- ✓ Sound clips of different-toned music (preferably instrumental soundtrack clips)
- ✓ Students' screenplays with instructor comments to pass back

Preliminary Activity:

Pass back the students' screenplays and allow them to read the instructor comments. Answer any questions and clarify comments as needed. Tell the students that they are now free to begin filming, editing, and finishing their films. With that in mind, some discussion of editing is required.

Discuss the difference between in-camera editing and editing with the use of a computer and editing software. While one is acceptable and can actually be done with very careful planning, the students will never be able to get the same results in their final films as they could by using even the simplest editing software. Discuss some of the software that is available on home computers and the differences between that software and the expensive, professional suites like Adobe Premiere and Final Cut Pro. The students should be aware that the simple free stuff will work great for their class projects and they shouldn't need to invest in the more pricey professional programs.

Main Activities:

Distribute the copies and read them with the students (again, protect copyright). Discuss the advice suggested in the book with the students. Discuss continuity and remind students of the discussion of transitions from the cinematography lesson. Show the students the example film clips and have them discuss the way the films are edited together. Ask them what the editor has done to create rhythm and flow. Have the students examine the reasons for the editing choices that are made (a lot of instructor input may be required here).

Explain to the students that one of the major concerns they may have when editing is the music or soundtrack they may choose to use. Explain that it's not always (or even often) the best communication choice simply to stick in their favorite song or type of song. Music has a major impact on the audience. Play a dramatic or somber clip of music and ask the students to visualize a scene from a movie that might use that music. Discuss some of the things they visualized. Now, ask the students to try and hold that scene in their heads while you play another clip. This time play something very light and

happy or comic. The students should have trouble not changing the scene to match the music. Discuss the power of music over the tone. Music should be carefully chosen to support or enhance the visuals. Sometimes it can be used for an interesting contrast, but be aware that, in the battle between music and pictures for your emotions, music almost always wins.

Extension Activity:

Allow some time for the students to bring up any final pre-production questions. Discuss the state of their projects and help students work out any scheduling or planning problems that may have arisen. Remind the students of what their final packet needs to include.

Assignments:

Finish the films.

Lesson Plan Bibliography

48 Hour Film Festival Liability Waiver. 2006. 48 Hour Film Project, Inc. 28 Oct. 2006.

<<http://www.48hourfilm.com/filmmakers/48HFP.LiabilityWaiver.pdf> >

“The Chubbchubbs.” Dir. Eric Armstrong. With Bradford Simonsen and Jeff Wolverton.

Sony Pictures Imageworks, 2002.

“Copy Shop.” Virgil Widrich. With Johannes Silberschneider and Elisabeth Ebner-Haid.

Virgil Widrich Filmproduktion, 2001.

“Geri’s Game.” Dir. Jan Pinkava. With Bob Peterson. Pixar Animation Studios, 1997.

“In Absentia.” Dir. Richard Heald and Tom Kibbey. With Toby Knowles and Sarah

Withers. Independent, 2002.

“La Jettée.” Dir. Chris Marker. With Davos Hanich and H  l  ne Chatelain. Argos Films,

1962.

“Language.” The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. New College

Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996.

Lanier, Troy and Clay Nichols. Filmmaking for Teens: Pulling Off Your Shorts. Studio

City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2005. 7-140.

“Literate.” The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. New College

Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996.

Plan 9 from Outer Space. Dir. Edward D. Wood, Jr. With Gregory Walcott and Mona

McKinnon. Reynolds Pictures, 1959.