Research article

Co-creating film education: moments of divergence and convergence on Queen Margaret University's Introduction to Film Education course

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Abstract

This case study reflects on the first iteration of a new course in film education, titled Introduction to Film Education, which ran for the first time at Queen Margaret University in Scotland in 2021. It considers the upskilling of both teachers and film education practitioners in film education, while reflecting upon the co-creation of a film education curriculum through the course's collaborative, peer-driven nature. Finally, it wonders whether any settled film education curriculum is possible, or even desirable.

Keywords Scotland; curriculum; teacher training; co-creation; film practice

Introduction

This article explores the development and first iteration of a new course in film education, collaboratively developed by academics, teachers, film-makers and Scotland's national screen agency, Screen Scotland. Introduction to Film Education, an entirely online course, delivered both synchronously and asynchronously, is designed to bring together teachers with previous experience of using film in the

classroom, and film education practitioners (hereafter FEPs; typically film-makers working in classroom and other education settings on a self-employed basis) into one shared space, shaped by peer-learning and reflexive discussion. It aims to consider the practice of film education in a variety of learning contexts, and to come to a broad consensual agreement, through dialogue, about the key constitutive elements of a quality film education curriculum for young people in Scotland. Funding for the development of the course was provided by Screen Scotland, and the course was organised and delivered by myself in 2021, and again in 2022 and 2023, although only the 2021 version of the course is under consideration here.

The Introduction to Film Education course offers a significant early foray into finding ways to embed film more centrally in the practice of teachers, while also beginning to pull together the disparate styles and approaches of FEPs to collectively develop a coherent and consistent film education praxis. I begin by explaining the context in which the course was created, and the rationale behind the development of the course, as well as outlining (broadly, and retaining requisite confidentiality) who the participants were, the course content and the assessment format. I then reflect on the contribution of participants on the course via their discursive and written contributions on their approach to teaching film, finding significant points of divergence in the practice of film education and the terminology used depending upon the participants' working context. I then explore points of convergence, and outline what barriers and opportunities seem to remain for the provision of a more consistent, high-quality film education for young people in Scotland. Finally, I consider the extent to which there can ever be a 'settled' curriculum for teaching film in educational settings, and where the tensions lie between vocational and theoretical approaches, traditional assessment methods and the constraints of the requirements imposed by qualifications authorities, in reaching towards a film and screen curriculum (and educator qualification) that embraces a more liberating pedagogical approach.

Background, development and syllabus

To teach music, drama or art in a secondary school (roughly ages 12 to 16 or 18) in Scotland, teachers must have a relevant degree in the subject, usually an undergraduate degree, and have completed a one-year Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), generally focused upon pedagogy, curriculum development and placement-based experience, rather than upon subject-specific content. Applicants to PGDE programmes in music, drama and art will also, generally, be expected to have demonstrated some relevant work experience, such as youth work, volunteering or previous engagement with schools and young people in a professional capacity. As has been outlined previously within the *Film Education Journal* (Abercrombie and Chambers, 2021; Chambers, 2022; Daly et al., 2020), film remains in a liminal space in the secondary curriculum in Scotland, primarily as part of media studies, for which no formal teaching qualification is required. Generally speaking, teachers of media studies move from teaching English or drama into this space, which often results in a lack of teacher confidence regarding their existing knowledge and skill set. As Abercrombie and Chambers (2021: 98) note, media studies is often seen as an 'easy option', taken as a 'crash Higher' by Scottish secondary students needing an additional Higher grade in their final year at school to support an application to university.

Scotland's media curriculum at secondary school level is dominated by an exam-led focus, driven by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). While film is (anecdotally, at least) the dominant medium of interest for media studies students in schools, the approach to film that must be taken to satisfy the SQA's criteria remains somewhat circumscribed. The final written Higher level exam asks questions pertaining to seven key aspects (categories, narrative, language, representation, audience, institutions and society), while also requiring a reflective account from students regarding a piece of media production. Often, this is a film trailer, seemingly preferred by teachers as it meets some of the criteria of the SQA's exam (for example, the focus on audiences, genre and industrial concerns), while not requiring the development of a complete story. Teachers also discussed on our course the fact that students rarely watch short films, and how, with the limited time available to develop film-making skills in the classroom (and, often, the lack of

confidence, skills and knowledge of teachers in the practice of film-making), it becomes simpler to make a film trailer, using iMovie's built-in features. The quality of the production is not assessed by the SQA, unlike the portfolio of work required in music, for example, so there is no significant emphasis on the aesthetic qualities of film-making, such as composition, lighting, camera movement, sound design and editing.

The place of film within Scotland's primary school (generally ages 5 to 12) curriculum is less constrained. Here, the broad, interdisciplinary nature of the curriculum means that there is no requirement for teachers to specialise in a single subject (although often teachers complete an undergraduate degree in another subject before undertaking a postgraduate teaching degree in primary education). However, the same issue – a lack of experience in, and knowledge of, film – remains present. Without the pressure of exams and qualifications, and within a looser timetable, there is more space for a 'free play' approach to film and the moving image, both in terms of young people's analysis of film texts and in terms of their tentative attempts at film-making, which often take the form of animation (Munro and Charles, 2021). What unites the integration of film into the curriculum at primary and secondary school level is, however, a lack of consistency in delivery, a lack of opportunities for in-depth teacher development and the lack of a national framework for teaching film. This is despite the efforts of a variety of stakeholders, chief among them Screen Scotland's Screen Education team, who support a variety of schemes and organisations to provide film experiences for young people and educators, and who have recently announced a pilot Screen Educators in Residence programme for a national Film and Screen Curriculum for young people (Screen Scotland, 2022).

To begin to fill the gap in provision for teacher development in film education, I approached Screen Scotland in 2019 with an idea for a short course that could offer an opportunity to upskill both teachers wishing to use film in the classroom and film-makers wishing to work with young people in formal or informal education settings. In conversation with Screen Scotland, I sought to develop a course which offered the space and critical reflexivity that I felt was lacking in many of the opportunities for teacher upskilling in this area, mostly provided by third sector organisations, delivering career-long professional learning workshops to teachers, in half-day or evening sessions. Our aim was to allow a mix of educators to come together in an open and discursive space to consider approaches to the teaching of film from a diversity of perspectives, that is, those more oriented towards vocational skills, in the form of practical film production, and those oriented towards theoretical and intellectual development in the form of film literacy and analysis. I should emphasise at this point that I do not believe that these are incompatible perspectives. However, as discussed below, the way in which film has traditionally been taught to young people in Scotland has tended to cleave these aspects apart and to focus on one over the other. This speaks to a historical tendency in media studies and film studies more broadly across tertiary education settings, as well as in primary and secondary education. Connolly (2020) notes that there are several complex factors at play here, including public perceptions of media studies – as also noted by Abercrombie and Chambers (2021) – as an 'easy' or 'soft' option. Connolly (2020: 7) observes that the separation between practice and theory in media education results in a different kind of teaching and learning, depending on the orientation towards either film and media production, or film and media studies. Connolly (2020) further asks whether one approach is better suited than the other to preparing young people for work in the creative industries (if indeed that is, or should be, the goal of film and media education). The Introduction to Film Education course, funded and designed in collaboration with Screen Scotland – a national screen agency understandably interested in skills and talent development 'pipelines' to try and sustain and safeguard film and screen production in the country – was therefore inevitably engaged with such concerns.

The development of the course was undertaken by myself, a lecturer in film and media at Queen Margaret University in Musselburgh, Scotland, with prior experience in working in film education, alongside Scott Donaldson (then Head of Education at Screen Scotland) and Gail Robertson from Screen Scotland's Education team, as well as two FEPs and one media teacher from a Scottish secondary school. The latter three were paid for their participation in helping us design a course which was, from the beginning, intended to be formed through dialogue and consensus, with the aim of synthesising a

variety of perspectives upon what should be the central focus of film education. Allied to the pragmatics of supporting teacher professional development – our teaching colleague told us that our course would be viewed as a 'joke' if we did not feature the kind of narrative theory central to the SQA's curriculum – and to our own individual (often strongly held) views on what the important elements of an introductory film education should be, we alighted on a syllabus structured around three key blocks: (1) film studies (story and style); (2) film production; and (3) creativity and social justice.

The course was organised to be delivered completely online, allowing for remote participation across Scotland, while remaining within the Covid-19 restrictions in place during spring 2021. The three blocks noted above were structured in two-weekly phases, as follows:

(1) Day 1–13: Pre-recorded lecture available on a virtual learning environment, alongside links to key readings. Discussion board topics and questions were posted and conversation facilitated by the tutor among participants.

(2) Day 14: Live online workshop, every second Saturday, between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., where the tutor facilitated an in-depth discussion on the topic, using breakout groups and whole-class dialogue to tease out perspectives on the topic and prior experiences (if any) in teaching the topic.

The mix of synchronous and asynchronous activities served to keep participants motivated and focused, while allowing participants to dip in and out of the work at times best suited to them (particularly as most attended the course while also working full time or as freelancers balancing a number of responsibilities). Usage of the discussion boards was mixed: some participants frequently commented and discussed, while others did not participate at all. The mixed approach of the course allowed for some participants who perhaps felt less comfortable using the discussion boards (or did not have time to use them) to attend the Saturday sessions and engage in conversation with their peers.

The course had an intake of 14 participants, which, through no specific design, comprised 7 teachers and 7 FEPs. None of our participating teachers were primary school teachers, however, something which future iterations of the course will have to work harder to address. As detailed in the introduction, the positioning of film within media studies (in the broader context of Scotland's national qualifications system) means it is likely to be a more focal concern for teachers running media classes in secondary schools. Some of the teachers involved had significant experience in using film in their classrooms, having taught media studies for some years, and several were also already involved with third sector film education schemes, such as Into Film and Glasgow Film. Others had been asked to teach media for the first time, or were teaching on the newer, more practice-focused National Progression Award in Film and Media. Our FEPs had a similarly wide range of experience, and working contexts, from education and outreach as part of cinema exhibition, to freelance film-makers specialising in animation and documentary, to those employed by charities specialising in youth work and film-making.

Most of the seven teachers on the course came from the central belt of Scotland (from East Lothian to Renfrewshire), with one from Aberdeenshire. The FEPs were similarly primarily based in the central belt, with one in the Dundee area. In this group of FEPs, two of Scotland's primary film education organisations, Screen Education Edinburgh and GMAC Film, were represented. Also present were four freelance film-makers and arts practitioners, and one participant from the education and outreach department of Glasgow Film. All participants consented for their views to be shared as part of this research.

The course began with a focus on film story and style, with a section on 'story' exploring basic elements of narrative construction, and some of the ways in which these have been theorised by writers such as Roland Barthes (1975), Tzvetan Todorov (1969) and Vladimir Propp (1968). While this was seen as a necessity for those media teachers participating on the course (as mentioned above), it seemed a little tangential to the work of the FEPs (and, indeed, it proved difficult at times to make this material relevant for this group). This points to a key tension, returned to throughout this article, between the more 'academic', text-oriented approach of the SQA's media studies curriculum on the one hand, and the craft-oriented approach of the FEPs on the other hand. The latter would be significantly less likely to

use the same kind of terminology ('narrative', 'equilibrium', 'disequilibrium' and so on). It also highlighted the very narrow confines that teachers particularly, but also FEPs more broadly, must conform to in their professional settings in order to adhere to whatever discursive norms are dominant.

The section of the course on story was broken down into two categories: (1) film narrative (what happens); and (2) film narration (how it happens). We then simplified these into: (1) what is the story?; and (2) how do you show it? The key readings for this section were Speidel's (2012) 'Film form and narrative' and Branigan's (1992) chapter 'Narration', which discuss the ideas of Barthes, Propp and Todorov and reapply them to film in a clear and accessible manner. We found that while the teachers were comfortable and familiar with these ideas (given their centrality to the media studies curriculum), the FEPs found them convoluted, with one practitioner in particular lamenting the tendency in academic writing and film theory to, in their terms, 'overcomplicate things that can be explained more simply'. For them, these theoretical approaches muddied the waters, and were unlikely to be adopted by FEPs in educational settings when discussing film story, although the underlying principles might be the same. For example, this practitioner shared resources on the subject of developing a story drawn from screenwriting manuals (as was common among the FEPs). Here, the language was different: characters with goals who had obstacles to overcome in achieving these goals. Film narratives were seen to have a 'beginning, middle and end' or, sometimes, a three-act structure. The challenge was to design a syllabus and lesson materials, particularly in this first week, that could speak to both groups and help illuminate common ground, despite the differing discourses and aims of their film education approaches.

From general discussions of narrative (What is the story?), we turned to focus on narration (How is the story told?), exploring films that clearly illustrated the difference between the two, such as Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000). Here, the narrative of the film is quite straightforward: a man suffering from amnesia tries to figure out who killed his wife. However, the film's narration is significantly more complicated, as it uses the lead character's amnesia as a structuring device to create a puzzle for the audience, with half the film taking place chronologically (and in black and white), leading up to the discovery of the murderer, and the other half of the film taking place in reverse (and in colour), leading back from the discovery of the murderer to the murder itself. The 'what' of the story (or the fabula) is simple – man tries to solve wife's murder – while the telling of the story (the 'how' it is told, or the syuzhet) is complex.

We also used our first session to discuss film 'style', where there was a little more common ground regarding the use of terms such as 'mise en scène'. Here again, however, a divergence of focus was apparent between the two groups of professionals: for teachers, use of such terms related to 'reading' a 'text' through these analytical frameworks, whereas for the FEPs, a focus on film style involved teaching young people to appreciate and learn fundamentals of film aesthetics that could be put into practice. I caused a degree of controversy within the group myself when admitting that I disliked terminology that brought to mind the literary, such as film 'grammar', film 'language' and film 'texts', recalling Richard Dyer's (2016) objections to the term 'reading film' in his discussion of the critique of textual analysis. The malleability of film, and its ability as a medium to support a variety of learning in other school subject areas (such as foreign languages and social studies, especially through documentary), has historically resulted in a tendency to see film as either content (the subject of the film is what is important) or as a means to gain access more easily to textual analysis (narrative, character, theme) previously reserved for the literary. Considering film as an aesthetic medium of interest in and of itself has rarely been a priority in school settings – and the extent to which it should or could be has long been a concern within *Film Education Journal* (for example, see Gibbs, 2018).

For this section, readings were suggested from *Film Art: An introduction* by Bordwell and Thompson (2017), in particular those chapters on mise en scène and editing. The recorded material focused on mise en scène (setting, lighting, costume and make-up, staging, blocking and performance), framing, sound and editing. To illuminate the manner in which style is linked to narration (as well as to theme), the lecture focused on the opening of Lynne Ramsay's short film *Gasman* (1998), which shows a family getting ready to go somewhere through a montage of clothes being put on, shoes being polished and a bored young

Figure 1. Still from *Gasman* (Lynne Ramsay, 1998)

boy playing with a toy car. Throughout this sequence, however, the framing deliberately avoids showing us characters' faces, until we see the young girl's face at 2 minutes and 30 seconds in. The opening shots are carefully constructed to give the audience a spatial sense of the small flat in which the family live, as well as the family dynamics through the characters' movement and placement. For example, the second shot uses a left-to-right diagonal line of axis to show us the father polishing his shoes (black) in a dark bottom left corner, to the daughter Lynne running through the flat in circles, disappearing in a haze of bright light into another room in the top right corner (Figure 1).

As a group, we discussed the importance of *Gasman*'s style to its story, and how the film-maker had carefully considered the creative choices available to her: Where to place the camera? When to move the camera? How to light the scene? Where to place the characters? How do the characters move? When to cut quickly, and when to hold the shot longer? What sound would be included? The choice of film proved fortuitous, as one of the FEPs regularly uses the film with upper secondary students, and was therefore able to speak eloquently about the ways in which it encouraged young people to think 'cinematically' about story. One of the teachers was so taken by the film that they asked for a copy of *Ratcatcher* (1999), Lynne Ramsay's debut feature, to watch. While it was not a specific aim of the course to place a particular focus upon Scottish film-makers, such a focus emerged organically through our discussions, with many teachers using *The Angels' Share* (Ken Loach, 2012), as a way to engage disaffected students through its use of local vernacular. We discussed how some films and film-makers privilege a directness of story, adopting a seemingly less intrusive style of film-making, whereas other film-makers might allow a story to emerge more ambiguously through a privileging of style; and, of course, the spectrum of films and film-makers working between the two.

The question of how to begin teaching film (whether through practice or through critical film viewing) served to link discussions between the first and second blocks of the course. Do young people learn best by 'doing', or does this 'doing' require an understanding of film craft, in terms of aspects of foundational knowledge for it to rest upon? Perhaps inevitably, the FEPs tended to emphasise the latter, with some (as per the expectations of their employment) teaching film through hands-on practical work focusing upon technical instruction, rather than upon any critical engagement with film history, theory and aesthetics. For most of the FEPs, however, practical hands-on film-making was accompanied with examples from film history about, for example, three-point lighting or continuity editing. Two FEPs from regional film education organisations freely shared resources on the course's discussion boards that they would use in

an introductory session with learners, comprising PowerPoint slides with a mix of practical and technical instruction, along with short clips or screenshots for discussion exemplifying the particular techniques being taught. This was greatly appreciated by the teachers participating in the course, for whom this kind of film-specific knowledge and expertise to utilise in their teaching is rare and highly sought after.

Further, and again perhaps inevitably, none of the course's participating teachers (all of whom were secondary teachers) prioritised film-making, because it does not form a significant component of the SQA's media curriculum. Our participating teachers saw their job as being to support young people to do well in their exams, and to respond to related pressures regarding school attainment levels. One consequence of participating in the course, however, was an apparent shift in approach from some teachers, who began to explore ways of embedding the sort of knowledge required for the SQA's exam-led curriculum within more participatory, or student-led sessions around film production and pre-production.

The opening week of the course was followed with a session on practical film-making. Due to the online nature of the course, this section was self-directed, exploring suggested readings on the respective film education projects at a primary school in Granton, Edinburgh (Donnelly et al., 2018) and a secondary school curriculum from Portugal (Alves and Pereira, 2020). This was followed by a discussion with participants regarding how they approached practical skills in their own teaching contexts. This session was the least satisfying aspect of the course, given that we did not have the resources to engage in any really constructive and meaningful way with practical aspects of film-making. While we were able to discuss possible approaches, the necessity of being online made it difficult to ascertain a sense of participants' practical knowledge and experience. Instead, discussions focused upon the possible pitfalls surrounding practical film-making (particularly for teachers, regarding practical film-making in school settings), and whether or not extra-curricular film-making projects, delivered by FEPs, offered a more substantive film-making experience than that which could be delivered by teachers themselves. The resource-intensive nature of film-making, particularly with regard to time, but also with regard to the significant variations across Scotland in schools' access to film-making equipment, made it impossible to reach a consensus as to what the best approach might be. The most interesting aspect of this discussion centred upon the idea that there were meta-skills developed in film-making projects beyond those fostered by more analytic/intellectual approaches to film and media studies. Exploring the case study presented by Donnelly et al. (2018), we discussed ways in which film-making offered an opportunity for young people to explore sensitive topics and issues (the film discussed in the article, *See You Tomorrow*, deals with racism and bullying) in a creatively fulfilling way, with attendant benefits in self-confidence and educational attainment reported both in the article and anecdotally by teachers on our course.

Both articles provoked a discussion about learner autonomy and agency and, in particular, the question of co-creation between film-maker/teacher and young people. Both articles detail how the films made in schools were ultimately edited by the film tutors rather than by the young people themselves, and both discussed the aforementioned balance between drawing out ideas from young people, and offering guidance and suggestions on approaches. In the case of the Olhar pela Lente project, in particular, Alves and Pereira (2020: 16) discuss 'reigning in' enthusiastic teachers to allow the focus to remain on 'privileging the creative freedom and autonomy of their students'. Chambers' (2019) discussion of the tension in 'co-creation' resonated with the teachers and FEPs, who acknowledged the difficulty of having to make sure 'something works': that the film being made by the young people meets the required brief from the charity or organisation, or that the film trailer made by students made sure to address the curriculum's aims, or that, simply, the film being produced was of an 'appropriate' quality to be shown at a celebration screening, as youth-made films often are. Chambers' (2019: 39) honest appraisal of editing a youth-made film to ensure that it fitted the brief, and adding elements 'shoehorned in awkwardly by me in the latter stages of the film's production in a manner that seems questionable in retrospect, and may be undermining of the students' authorship of the film', spoke eloquently to our participants' evident discomfort in managing film-making projects within their institutional frameworks.

The next section of the course looked at creativity and social justice, and it was taught by my colleague Patrick Boxall, a lecturer in education. This section of the course allowed the participants to engage with theories of creativity and education in practice. Patrick, himself a former teacher, asked participants to consider the meaning of 'creativity', and how the word has been co-opted in various, often unhelpful, ways. Exploring creative pedagogies, Patrick introduced participants to approaches such as Heathcote's 'Mantle of the Expert', a child-centred approach placing the students as the experts leading an enquiry into a particular topic, through imaginary and creative tasks (Heathcote and Bolton, 1994). (This particular pedagogical approach subsequently featured in a number of the participants' final assessments, as discussed below.) Patrick also drew upon Hempel-Jorgensen's (2015) work, explaining how film offers an opportunity to open up learning in ways that support the development of learner agency precisely through its inherent relationship to 'possibility thinking'. As Craft (2001) has further developed, possibility thinking shifts learning away from the revelation of fixed properties ('What is this thing and what does it do?') to discovering creative uses for things ('What can I do with this thing?'), and, as such, it seeks to foster more complex learner engagement and, ultimately, learner agency. The relationship to film education was discussed among participants, in particular with regard to a dissatisfying form of film education that most felt was often prevalent: a 'fixed properties' approach which offered prescribed meanings and rules for particular aspects of film style (for example, you should use a low-angle shot of the antagonist to make them look intimidating), rather than an approach premised upon 'possibility thinking' (for example, 'What shot would you use to show x?').

At the end of the course, each participant submitted an assessment, which included an outline for 10 hours' worth of film education, example lesson materials (usually in PowerPoint form), and a 2,000-word critical reflection. Flexibility was allowed for the form of the 10-hour outline, depending upon context. For example, an FEP might outline a weekend film-making bootcamp, 5 hours each day for 2 days, while a media teacher might outline how the 10 hours would map on to their 50-minute weekly teaching slots, as part of one unit for the SQA media exam. While I will bring in some participant observation, and discussion of the range of forums in which participants shared their ideas (that is, online discussion boards and the workshop sessions), the majority of the observations found in the remainder of this article are drawn from the assessments, which, I argue, offer the most formalised and thoughtful account of the participants' learning, as reflecting a moment when they had the space and time to synthesise their ideas into a cogently argued piece of work.

Points of divergence and convergence: reflection on the input of participants

Something that became apparent both throughout the course and in the final assessments was the difficulty that some teachers experienced in moving beyond their professional settings, illuminating an inevitable contradiction or tension within the course. Marketed as a professional development opportunity for teachers using film in the classroom (or those who would like to), it was thus incumbent upon the course to provide clear and tangible benefit for the practice of those teachers. As such, the more holistic, philosophical questions of 'What should film education be about?' and 'How do we collaboratively design a flexible, innovative and theoretically informed curriculum', became a little too loose or theoretical for detailed engagement with some participants on the course. When the course is running alongside full-time employment (within an already overworked profession), there is inevitably pressure to offer pick-up-and-go skills and knowledge that will immediately improve professional practice. In our design of the course, we envisaged a thought laboratory where professionals could unpick their own practice and rethink the foundational elements of what 'film education' should be about. While elements of this certainly took place, it became apparent that this can be a very difficult thing for secondary school teachers to do, trapped as they often seem to be by the limitations of benchmarks, guidelines, national curricula and so on. It would seem entirely understandable that this

should be the case; after all, what is the point in giving up precious free time to attend a course which you hope will support your ability to teach film as part of the national qualifications in media, if the course spends the entire time saying: 'Isn't the approach to film in the media curriculum limited? Shouldn't we do it differently?'

While, generally, the teachers themselves were the group most vociferous in their criticisms of existing limitations, they ultimately had to submit assessments that discussed film education within their own learning contexts, and within the relevant frameworks for their professional development as teachers, such as the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), Scotland's national curricular framework. Such observations were not solely limited to the working contexts of teachers: some of the FEPs also work within constraints which hinder their ability to take a step back and design a more idealistic programme of film education. For example: if you are hired by a heritage organisation to run a two-day film workshop with young people to highlight the work of that heritage organisation, you are rarely going to be able to offer a deep dive into film theory and film practice. Instead, in order to earn a living, you need to consider how to teach young people some fundamentals of filming on a mobile phone, so that they can film, edit and export a short film in a very short time.

A similar balance between utility and utopia was evidenced across the resources that the participants shared with each other via the virtual learning environment. These tended to be PowerPoints containing lessons or workshop materials, but in one case, an FEP shared a full programme of their approach to film education, derived from the Understanding Cinema project run through the Centre for the Moving Image, itself an adaptation of the French project Cinéma cent ans de jeunesse. This openness to share, and willingness to learn from each other, was one of the most welcome aspects of the course. For the Film Story and Style session, the participants were asked a range of questions via the online discussion boards about film story (narrative) and film style (aesthetics). Both teachers and FEPs freely shared resources, attaching files to their written responses. Those resources shared by teachers tended to be tightly aligned with the requirements of the SQA exam – for example, the question on the National 5 Media Studies exam paper 'Describe the narrative codes and/or conventions and/or structures in media content you have studied'. In some instances, such resources could be a little 'traditional', in the sense of being a series of slides offering information and description to their students, with some space for student interaction in very highly structured activities.

The resources shared by teachers on narrative all featured the aforementioned theorists (Barthes, Propp, Todorov). Once familiarised with an aspect of theory – for example, Todorov's (1969) equilibrium-disruption model – students were encouraged to apply this to a pre-chosen text, viewed collectively as a class (examples included *Clueless*, *Juno*, *The Lion King*, *Killing Eve*, *Star Wars* and *Inside Out*). This manner of work aligns significantly with the curriculum on non-practice-based film and media studies courses in UK higher education institutions, and this will likely have been a key consideration for the SQA in formatting their media qualification. At times, some of the resources were structured in a way such that the students were encouraged to memorise teachers' interpretations of how to answer the exam question, and sometimes to use the same example films when sitting the exam.

This reflection highlighted the continuing divide between rhetoric and reality in Scottish education. The frequent discussion in Scotland around developing a 'progressive' education system arguably remains at odds with a system of examinations at secondary school which prohibits any progressive approach to education, certainly in the arts and humanities. While every teacher on the course made the same point – that Scotland's curriculum system seems designed for its relative bureaucratic ease in terms of marking and administration, rather than because it is the most effective way to assess the learning of young people (and, indeed, many of our workshops descended into criticism of the nature of the qualifications system) – it is worth tempering this analysis with the acknowledgement that many young people would likely greatly appreciate the kind of film and media curriculum that the teachers on our course offered.

At the conclusion of the course, we hosted a feedback session to allow participants to voice their thoughts on the merits and drawbacks of the course. By far the most significant and rewarding aspect

of the course, based on participants' feedback, was the opportunity to engage with fellow professionals from different working contexts, and the challenge this experience sometimes offered in terms of thinking beyond one's comfort zone. One of our FEPs, from a regional film education charity, commented upon how helpful it had been for them to hear first-hand the constraints within which teachers worked. A teacher from Aberdeenshire similarly agreed that the mix of participants had been beneficial, commenting: 'It made me really go in and think "How do I explain this, how do I articulate this to somebody outside of the whole school bubble?", and that was incredibly valuable.'

While this variety of perspectives was viewed positively, there was some concern that the lack of primary school teachers, and the centrality of the demands of the SQA's curriculum, meant that other ways of viewing film education became unintentionally marginalised. A youth engagement officer at a cinema organisation noted that, at times, they felt some of the film education work undertaken via their organisation felt less relevant, as it had no relation to formal school settings, and was underpinned by differing aims, that is, to widen access to a broader range of cinema, to encourage groups who had not attended their cinema before into the building and so on. While acknowledging the benefits of the mix of participants, a teacher from Glasgow agreed that the conversation was at times dominated by exams and formal curricula, noting: 'I felt sometimes, even from a teacher's perspective, I was quite acutely aware that the conversation was really being driven by the NQ [National Qualifications] media courses, and I think it's that teachers like the sound of their own voices, don't they?' Tongue-in-cheek remarks aside, this does serve to summarise how the requirements of teaching inevitably shaped the dialogic environment of the classes. Indeed, this apologetic tone continued into teachers' final written assessments. One begins: 'Like any practitioner in Secondary Education, my daily practice is dictated by the requirements of various institutions and their frameworks: Education Scotland, SQA, GTCS, HMIE, CfE, GIRFEC, NQs, HGIOS. Ours is a world of acronyms, structure and routine.'

On the other hand, the FEPs found that they were having to adapt their work, generally less encumbered by this 'world of acronyms, structure and routine', to make connections to the curricular language used in schools. One FEP noted in the discussion board topic on narrative: 'I realise that I have been exploring story without using the institutional language of film education or a sound knowledge of the theories.' Another wrote: 'I confess I'm not really into formal film studies. My experience of doing it at university was that it was very dry and used opaque language that was just wearisome.' They added:

> … for simplicity, I use the word 'story' rather than 'narrative'. I don't use the term 'narration' at all because my pupils would confuse that with a narrator telling a story either as an audio recording or over a moving image or film … As a filmmaker, you have to consider the emotions of the viewer if you want to engage them in your story and from the start, the children are filmmakers. I always use practical filmmaking exercises in my classes. It's the best way to understand how 'narration' works.

A third FEP, also critical of the language of film studies and film theory, wrote:

> I suppose my main tool for teaching is practical. Learn by doing and allowing people on my courses to critique each other's work. So, in at the deep end, make something and then think about what worked and what didn't.

By contrast, such an approach could not work for the teachers on the course. One noted:

> In Nat 5 and higher, SQA doesn't leave us a lot of room to move about. There is so much content that we need to get through, that to deviate from the script wouldn't work unfortunately … I do think the pupils need the theory first to understand the practical.

A teacher wrote that the FEPs 'have such a valuable perspective that I, as a classroom practitioner, don't have. Maybe because of the rigidity of the system that I'm in?' They later added:

> When teaching Narrative I work from theory to example and then eventually we translate this into the pupils' own production work … I've never tried starting from a practical point and working towards the theory. Mainly because we have so much required content for SQA that it has always just seemed easiest/most efficient to start with the theory.

The early discussion boards offered some of the most rewarding moments of peer learning. While usage inevitably tailed off as the course progressed, the early exchanges between teachers and FEPs, freely sharing resources with each other (including film examples) and taking the care and patience to explain their working contexts, and ask questions of others' working contexts, was one of the respects in which the course felt closest to its aim of co-creating a film education curriculum through constructive dialogue, even if its interlocutors were frequently coming from divergent perspectives.

While much discussion on the course pointed to the inevitable points of divergence between what counted as professional practice in the context of secondary schools compared to that of freelance film and arts practice, the very act of naming these divergent practices and terminologies opened up space for points of discursive, philosophical and moral convergence. This was a hoped-for intended outcome for the course, for, in thinking through pedagogical approaches which move away from the 'banking' system of education (where a teacher deposits information into a student's head, which is then to be withdrawn at appropriate intervals, that is, in exams), we sought to embody the kind of dialogical approach that Paolo Freire (1970) famously calls for in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire (1970: 81) argues for an approach that recognises the dual agency of teacher and student, as teacher-student and student-teacher, where students become 'critical co-investigators with the teacher'. Freire (1970: 81) continues: 'The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own.' This approach inspired one of the course participants, a secondary school teacher in the East of Scotland, who utilised Chambers' (2018) discussion of Alain Bergala and the importance of the 'freedom of the creative gesture' as a launchpad for a highly considered critical reflection on their own practice. This was the same teacher who, above, noted that they had never thought of starting with the practical.

Beginning a discussion of the learning plan they had designed, the teacher noted the divergence, as discussed above, between the two groups of participants:

> Providing learners with the freedom and responsibility of creating is hugely powerful and something that school practitioners are much less comfortable with than those film educators who work in different settings … Those of us in institutional settings shared that we tend to exhibit a more controlling, heavily structured, theoretical approach to film education which I would partly credit to the underlying pedagogies that have been established through years of routine and the requirements of national qualifications. I envied the practical, open nature of the work carried out by these practitioners; the conscious choice to 'fail faster' and learn through trial and error is one that, until now, I would have avoided due to what I perceive as my own inexperience.

The participant, quoting directly from one of our FEPs (in their mention of 'fail faster'), continues to reflect on the terror that allowing young people to pursue the freedom of the creative gesture, and the time and space to fail, causes for those in institutional settings, because 'as a Secondary educator our basic pedagogical approaches train us to remove as much jeopardy as possible for both the learner and for ourselves in order to achieve a particular goal'. This teacher's learning plan involved the students setting themselves up as production companies (using the 'Mantle of the Expert' approach [Heathcote and Bolton, 1994]) that had to pitch, and then film a part of, an idea for an episode of *Inside No. 9* (BBC 2014–), while the teacher acted as a production assistant, thus redressing the traditional hierarchy. This offers a potentially radical mode of implementing the 'freedom of the creative gesture', while retaining the learning experiences and outcomes demanded from Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence.

Similarly, another teacher reflected on their teaching of film as part of media studies qualifications, and similarly expressed a lack of confidence in teaching practical skills, which resulted in a very limited amount of creative freedom for young people. To start to level up the balance between theory and practice, this teacher devised a lesson plan around the topic of representation (a key category in the SQA media exam), which began with a creative film-making task in which the young people had to 'correct' a representation they had chosen individually (outside school time) from film and television that they had found to be unconvincing or problematic. Such an exercise would arguably be a fascinating experiment, from the viewpoint of gathering information about what young people watch (and feel troubled by), but also in terms of problematising the idea of any 'accurate' representation, while considering why some representations appear harmful.

Another approach, this time proposed by a teacher in Aberdeenshire, was to free film from the constraints of the national qualifications system, and instead utilise film discussion and film-making as a method of working through the difficult transition period between primary and secondary school. To achieve this, the teacher proposed screening the Studio Ghibli film *Spirited Away* (Miyazaki, 2001) – about a young girl's venture into a liminal realm between the human and the supernatural, and her attempts to return to the realm of the ordinary – as a prompt to discuss transitions in broad senses, and the feelings of unease, loneliness and uncertainty that they might cause. This teacher proposed watching the film in its entirety before facilitating a discussion on some of its key themes, and in particular the character of Chihiro (the young girl who becomes trapped in a supernatural limbo). After this point, the young people, still in primary school but moving into secondary school soon, would work in groups to make a short film that dealt with hypothetical problem situations, be they real world (such as moving from primary to secondary school or moving house) or imaginative. Such a proposal offers exactly the kind of creative gesture – and the confrontation with the freedom of the creative gesture – discussed above. The teacher acknowledged the potential pitfalls of the idea – for example, whether primary school teachers would feel sufficiently confident in facilitating the making of the short films. However, it was interesting to note that, in both the initial film viewing and in the practice of film-making, the teacher placed the emphasis on emotion, rather than analysis, recalling Bergala's (2016) argument that film needs first to be approached from a place of emotion – from how it makes us feel.

The site of convergence around creativity and the creative gesture also appeared frequently in the writing of the FEPs. One FEP, whose essay questioned whether they were involved in film education at all, noted: 'I have even questioned on a fundamental level if what I do is actually film education or if I offer pupils a wider creative and expressive experience, of which filmmaking and animation are important elements.' This practitioner (whose essay was accompanied by a wonderful 'discomfort break', in which they played with typography, like the late Alasdair Gray might have done, to unburden themselves of aspects of their practice, or the course, that they found uncomfortable) reflected on working in school settings in the past, discussing the unease which some teachers felt about whether film was a worthwhile educational endeavour, and whether they possessed the necessary 'creativity' to teach it. The FEP wrote that 'the teacher was uncomfortable with anything that smacked of uncertainty', recalling one of our previous teacher's comments about removing as much 'jeopardy' from the learning process as possible. Such a proposition seems oxymoronic, as learning is, by its very nature, filled with jeopardy. As Biesta (2013) writes, both creation and education are, and should be, fraught with risk, experimentation and failure. For Biesta (2013), the overriding goal in both creativity and education is the cultivation of a critical subjectivity. (By extension, we might ask, is not creativity composed of processes of learning, and is not all learning enabled through processes of creation?) Biesta (2013: 12) argues that subjectivity is not some inert property waiting to be unlocked within us, or handed to us from external sources, but 'something that can be realized, from time to time, in always new, open, and unpredictable situations of encounter'. Such notions recall again questions of how young people may encounter, or be confronted with, the freedom of the creative gesture, and how film may serve as an expressive art form through which to realise a critical subjectivity.

Criticality was a central component for the practitioner discussed above, and this reflected a pleasing area of convergence between FEPs and teachers. While it might have been assumed that the FEPs would

primarily focus upon technical aspects of film-making, discussions of hardware and software, and the dreaded 'shot types', almost all the practitioners viewed film-making through a similar lens of privileging the development of criticality and subjectivity, in the same way that the teachers viewed film analysis as the development of criticality in response to film texts. The practitioner discussed above also used the topic of representation, and ideas about social justice, as a vehicle to transport young people between the critical act of viewing and towards the creative act of film-making, arguing that critical viewing means that 'pupils are better equipped to orientate themselves in the world and understand how films as texts position them in that world'. The latter point offers a compelling summation of the potential for young people to develop critical subjectivity that might re-centre the world around their own lived experiences through the practices of critical film viewing and of creative film-making.

Conclusion

Freire's (1970) idealised model of teaching frequently proves a more difficult gesture at undergraduate level, where the 'teacher' is constrained by default in a position of higher authority, and the students unwittingly and automatically approach from a position of greater deference. It takes a significant amount of work (although such work is, of course, worth doing) to dismantle such differences while retaining the sense in which Biesta (2013) has argued that the teacher still has something to teach. In the case of the Introduction to Film Education course, however, there was no automatic hierarchy needing to be dismantled. While I had more knowledge of academic film studies (and, by virtue of being the person facilitating the course and marking the assessments, some level of 'power'), all participants on the course had significantly more knowledge of other areas of film education than me. While this is not to diminish the knowledge and lived experience of an 18-year-old undergraduate film student, the wealth of experience of the teachers and film practitioners in areas in which I have little to no experience (classroom teaching in schools; film practice; working with vulnerable young people) ensured that the playing field was perhaps not level, but significantly varied for all participants on the course.

At the time of writing, in September 2022, film culture is in mourning for one of the twentieth century's leading figures. The death of Jean-Luc Godard on 13 September 2022 led me to rewatch *Le petit soldat* (1960), in which the film's main character, Bruno (Michel Subor), ruminates in voice-over: 'Perhaps asking questions is more important than coming up with answers' (Figure 2). While this seems apt for Godard's vision of cinema, a cinema restlessly asking unanswerable questions, it also seems pertinent for film education as a whole, which remains a praxis forever in a state of becoming, always being remade by those involved.

To the question posed to participants in Queen Margaret University's Introduction to Film Education course, 'What should film education look like in twenty-first-century Scotland?', there is, of course, no

Figure 2. Stills from *Le petit soldat* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963)

Perhaps asking questions is more important than coming up with answers.

right answer. This returns me to one of the course's central tensions: the need to offer participants (mainly teachers) 'off-the-shelf' skills in teaching film in educational settings. Such a task arguably remains a necessary part of the upskilling required if Scotland is to unlock the latent potential of teachers who, in years to come, will be an integral part of any refreshed and progressive film and screen curriculum. If we are to embody the type of learning we want young people to undertake, however, it would seem important to remain wary of the promises of these kinds of 'off-the-shelf' models, which have arguably dominated teacher training career-long professional learning up to this point. The benefits of a dialogic process, closely tied to teachers' and other educators' professional development through enquiry; of an approach to learning comfortable with more questions than answers; of an education system bold enough to dismantle restrictive frameworks and rigid assessment methods; all of these were clear for the participants in the course to see.

Looking ahead, our intention is to extend this short course into a postgraduate certificate in Film and Screen Education, beginning in 2023/4, adding a further two 20-credit modules. The first will focus on film-making, affording participants practical instruction, culminating in the production of a portfolio of work demonstrating technical competency and an awareness of film style and story. The second module will be a reflective module, wherein the participants will put their skills into practice in the educational settings in which they work by, for example, making a short film in a classroom over a number of weeks. These three modules combined, we feel, will offer a crucial first step in providing a recognisable qualification (accredited by the General Teaching Council for Scotland) for teachers and other educators, arguably a necessity to support the development of a specific film and screen qualification in Scotland's school system.

Within this, however, the challenge remains to hold firm to an approach that privileges collaboration, exploration, risk-taking and peer-learning, rather than the creation of another system of measurement for educators and young people which risks neutralising film education's wealth of 'possibility thinking'. The final word here is best left to one of the participants on the course, who eloquently concluded their essay by stating: 'What I have learned is that it is crucial that we, who operate at this point of convergence, have consistent, open dialogue; that we problematise, discuss and share in order to provide the most meaningful and appropriate context for our learners to experience all aspects of film.'

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

The author declares that research ethics approval for this article was provided by Queen Margaret University's ethics board.

Consent for publication statement

The author declares that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author is the Associate Editor for this journal. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

Filmography

The Angels' Share (GB/FR/BE/IT 2012, Ken Loach)
Gasman (GB 1998, Lynne Ramsay)
Inside No. 9 (GB 2014–present, various, BBC)
Memento (US 2000, Christopher Nolan)

Le petit soldat (FR 1963, Jean-Luc Godard)
Ratcatcher (GB/FR 1999, Lynne Ramsay)
Spirited Away (JP 2001, Hayao Miyazaki)

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