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Cinekyd: Exploring the Origins of Youth Media Production

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Abstract

The youth media movement, which now has a place in countless venues, communities, and scholarly discourses, reflects an evolution of practices pioneered in the 1950s and 1960s as amateur filmmaking increasingly became a reality in American families and schools. In this paper, we examine the films of Robert J. Clark, Jr. as a representative early example of predominant modes of expression within the youth media community. We seek to identify the links between past and present in the continued popularization of youth media practices in schools, after-school learning environments, and camps as an issue of significant importance for archivists and historians, communities, and schools. This paper examines the historical development of a youth media practitioner who worked in both a school and an after-school learning environment for over 25 years, beginning in 1970 and continuing to 2005. We conducted a study of narrative feature-length films created by children ages 9 -17 from a private archive of youth media work collected by the founder of Cinekyd, a for-profit youth media project developed in Philadelphia by Robert J. Clark, Jr. In this paper, we track the evolution of four films created between 1976 – 1982 as both historical film objects and as evidence of learning experiences. Though its amateurishness can often be strange, even off-putting, to wider audiences (one reason why much youth media is rarely showcased and often discarded upon completion), youth media and documentation of its creation also offer insights on the relationship between children and their adult mentors and between youth media authors and their presumed and real audiences.

Keywords: *youth media, children, filmmaking, history, archival, production, film, education, informal learning, out of school*

New technologies have always inspired creative pedagogical approaches to both play and learning. Throughout the 20th century, educators have balanced play and learning in making use of film and video both as objects of study and as tools of expression and communication. Getting that balance right, however, is not always easy. Scholars have only recently begun to chronicle the history of teaching about film and media in the United States. Polan (2007) has examined the development of film instruction in universities during the first decades of the 20th century, using case studies of courses developed at Columbia University to examine the motivation of faculty to develop courses exploring film storytelling, art and production. While creative drama had been a part of the K-12 education system since the turn of the century, during the 1920s, the rise of the film education movement created new opportunities for educators to not only use film as a means to transmit content, but also as a tool for creative expression and communication (Dale, 1938). By 1960, Jerome Bruner and others were promoting a new model of teaching and learning based on the idea of the student as actively involved in the construction of knowledge. According to Bruner, teachers needed to use activities and questions to encourage intellectual curiosity and

promote content mastery. Bruner and his colleagues at the Educational Development Center in Boston, developed *Man: A Course of Study (MACOS),* an experimental curriculum that introduced children to concepts and principles of anthropology to study the human experience, where documentary film was used as a classroom learning tool (Crosby, 1972).

In establishing the field of educational design technology, other scholars were exploring, in a more formal way, the design of learning environments (Gagne, 1965), especially in relation to the development of creative problem-solving (Taylor & Williams, 1966). During the 1960s and 1970s, as the visibility of audio-visual education began to rise in the academy, other educators across the United States were exploring how to use television in education through creating local educational productions (Costello & Gordon, 1961).

By the 1970s, efforts began to focus on giving young people experience with filmmaking as a means to promote personal and civic engagement as well as cultural understanding, including an examination of the cultural environment created by the mass media. Many educators were enamored with Marshall McLuhan who was perhaps the most famous academic scholar in North America at the time. He had developed a high school curriculum to strengthen students' ability to engage in critical analysis of advertising, film and popular culture (Jacobs, 2011). At New York University, Fr. John Culkin had developed a film analysis and production curriculum as part of his doctoral work at Harvard Graduate School of Education. With a grant from the Ford Foundation to the Center for Understanding Media, he inspired a generation of young filmmakers to explore something that today is called media literacy through creative youth media production. Artists and media professionals began to bring in film equipment to schools and work with children and teens (Center for Understanding Media, 1974; Gaffney & Laybourne, 1981; Laybourne, 1978). Many of these experiments thrived in the context of the fresh spirit of educational innovation and experimentation of the time. In Mamaroneck, New York, a group of teachers experimented with drama, film and creative art practices in the elementary and secondary grades (Moody, 1999). Working generally outside of the context of K-12 education, experimental filmmakers also began working in the community with adults in order to bring the power of film (and later, video) to ordinary people, which transformed by the early 1980s into the local cable access movement (Halleck, 2002).

Youth Media: Between Discourses

Increased access to cinema equipment, development, and printing helped film production become more portable and affordable in the second half of the 20th century. In the 1940s and 1950s, 8mm and 16mm film helped individuals and families take filmmaking into their own hands, through both "home movies" and other independent artistic work. The advent of portable synchronous shooting also had implications for various types of professional cinema, from the *direct cinema* and *cinema verite* movements in the United States and France to the rise of low-budget and independent filmmaking on the periphery of Hollywood production (Barnouw, 1974).

Portability and accessibility of the filmmaking process also allowed educators to enroll students in film production with adult supervision. Unlike amateur community documentary of the era, which often drew on the techniques and semiotics of well-known American direct cinema and other documentary works,[1] school-based media production more often aimed to foster academic and professional standards that aligned with broader curriculum goals of instructors, administrators, and school districts (Dale, 1938). Meaningful enrichment was often tied to other school subject matter, including re-enactment of historical events, drama and theater, and American literature.

[1] Community-based media, in contrast, relied on expressed political and social interests relevant to a particular group, and often enrolled adult community members in a collaborative film process—a feature of collaborative documentaries dating as far back as Inuit involvement in the production of Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1929) (Winston, 1998). In the late 1960s, the National Film Board of Canada funded the *Challenge for Change* series, in which documentary filmmakers collaborated with local communities to create political films from the perspective of the community. For instance, in *You Are On Indian Land!* (1969), Stoney collaborated with local activists of the native Mohawk community in Ontario to spontaneously document a protest against police infringement on reservation land. Stoney's work in educational media in the 1950s and collaborative filmmaking in the 1960s to some extent resembles the trajectory of youth media from the 1960s (the introduction of educational media via filmstrips and visual slides) to the 1970s (the enrollment of students as media producers). Stoney's *All My Babies* (1953), a candid film about midwifery, was an attempt to realize the educative potential that Grierson saw in documentary films. Educational media of the 1960s was often modeled on Griersonian expositional documentary (Nichols, 2000), with an omniscient narrator describing action via alternately framing a narrative and conveying factual information.

Youth media of this period did not achieve a status of discursive coherence, because the wider audience for youth media work was often limited to family, friends, and small local communities. Major institutional collaboration from private and state sources provided a key support and distribution network for community documentary and other independent filmmaking projects; with rare exceptions, these funding and distribution networks were, and are still, largely missing in most academic and enrichment-based media production.

There is also a philosophical divergence between youth-produced media and collaborative community filmmaking. Unlike adults, children are in a zone of proximal development where their interactions with teachers, parents and peers influence their abilities and interests (Vygotsky, 1978). While community filmmaking enables adults to develop expressions of their passions, interests and predilections, young people's engagement with film and video production begin with the more personal and intimate process of discovering that they have something to say. Hence, youth media exists in a liminal discursive space between the kinds of *professional* work valued by mainstream media discourses and amateur (or radical) work valued by experimental, activist, and other community-based discourses.

Youth media is often neither professional nor intentionally experimental; it is neither a discipline nor a discourse. It is, instead, a semi-professional and semi-amateur enterprise that exists in a nebulous space between professional and amateur discourse communities in documentary, experimental, independent, and personal or "home movie" filmmaking. On the one hand, youth media may imitate professional media production. On the other hand, some youth media may also enact an idiosyncratic film language that takes some cues from existing semiotic structures of film genres, but does not cohere into a product that is fully understandable to those outside of the immediate project. Many of us have found the experience of viewing some youth media projects to be painful; other work can be described as simply unwatchable. These illegible projects are usually due to the specific combination of talent, experience, imagination, budget, and developmental ability of the participants, as well as the many logistical and contextual constraints of the production process.

Youth media projects that are more legible often rely on imitation to accomplish their informative, persuasive or entertainment goals. Many readers will have seen youth media work designed as music videos, broadcast news packages, public service announcements, narrative shorts, or documentaries. While in other art disciplines, imitation is understood as a tool for learning, media educators have a more ambivalent stance toward the practice of young people using the familiar genres of Hollywood and Madison Avenue. Imitative youth media productions are sometimes seen as a mere approximation of professional techniques, attempting but failing to meet recognizable standards set by professional media. Some youth media educators have concerns that imitating conventional Hollywood genres may limit the creativity and imagination of young people and encourage them to focus on the mastery of technical competence in shot composition, lighting, sound, and editing, contributing to what Masterman (1985, p. 23) has called the *technicist trap*, a fear that educators neglect critical textual analysis of works when they are highly trained in the arts of audio visual production and emphasize the technical aspects of media production. In articulating a core pedagogical feature of media literacy education, he urged the creation of explicit instructional links between practical work and analytical activities and insisted that these cannot be assumed but need "to be consciously forged by the teacher" (p. 24). Masterman was concerned that children's own "cheaply-made student radio, television or newspapers may actively increase media mystification, where beginners compare their own halting efforts with the polished products of media professionals" (p. 24).

In our experiences facilitating, viewing, and judging youth media, youth media productions are sometimes positioned as communicative works for an identifiable audience or community, but often they are designed as more personal artistic and reflective works that address issues of identity and human development, and are not designed to speak legibly to broader audiences. For this reason, school districts often have a fleeting relationship with any youth media production program that does not have ties to an institutional partner or a visiting artist; when students are *playing* with video production, the academic value of such work may be unclear for both students and, perhaps more importantly, for school leaders who often aim to showcase youth media productions for communities, funders, or wider audiences.

Rationale for the Current Study

Educators who help children and young people create videos know that there are substantial limitations in screening the actual videos produced by children in the program. Many youth-produced videos are developmental, created as the result of a process of exploration. Others may be informal rehearsals of sorts.

In our own prior work with children and young people in the Powerful Voices for Kids program, only a few of the hundreds of short videos produced were carefully designed and edited creative works, designed for a real audience and with a real purpose in mind (Hobbs & Moore, 2013). Indeed, youth-produced videos may have limited value as artifacts of student learning as they do not reveal any of the pre-production processes, the planning or collaborative dimensions of the learning experience, or the "aha" moments where students experienced some meaningful growth as a result of a conflict, a challenge or a problem to be solved. It may be difficult to assess the true nature of youth filmmaking as a learning experience without more careful video documentation of the production practices themselves.

But even when we don't know how a youth media film was created, we can make some inferences about the pedagogy of a youth media program by looking at the works produced. Both the content and the format of a production offer clues about how media-making is conceptualized by the instructors and how students engage with the production process. For example, for all their limitations, the works students created in our Powerful Voices for Kids program do reflect our values of experimentation, exploration, improvisation, and play.

So we wonder: What can we learn about the instructional practices of youth media by analyzing the film artifacts themselves? Because only a few early pioneers carefully documented their work, as yet, there is no comprehensive review of media literacy or youth media in the history of American education. Fortunately, some of these educational pioneers have maintained a collection of their work and also wrote about their instructional practices as well.

This paper examines four films produced by Robert J. Clark, Jr. a educator who worked in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, a small community 14 miles north of Philadelphia, a region that was rapidly transforming from a rural community to a suburban one in the decades after World War II. From 1970 to 1975, he worked as the leader of an academic enrichment program supported by the Upper Moreland School District (UMSD). In 1976, he developed Cinekyd, a youth media program as a small business, where parents paid a fee to enroll their children in an afterschool or summer film production program. The latter program lasted for more than 20 years, reaching thousands of children across the community. Regionally, Clark was widely recognized as a media education leader throughout the 1990s but his career ended abruptly in the early 2000s.[2]

In this paper, we identify two distinctive modes of media production pedagogy at an early stage of the field's development in both in-school and out-of-school enrichment environments. We analyze four films made between 1975 and 1982, given to us by Clark from his personal archive, that reveal the articulation of play and learning as it was conceptualized and refined over time by one educator working with children and teens using the new technology of super 8mm film.

Context and Background: Audiovisual Education in the Suburbs

Sociocultural contexts inflect the particular shape and design of work in youth media. In 1969, after nine years as an English teacher, Clark was appointed to become the first-ever Director of Instructional Media at Upper Moreland School District (UMSD). When the community of Willow Grove, Pennsylvania built its new junior high school in 1970, it included the latest technology, with all classrooms equipped with screens for viewing filmstrips and motion pictures as well as an overhead projector with additional portable AV equipment in department units spread across the school. A closed-circuit television system enabled educational television programs, 16 mm or 8mm films, or slides to be broadcast to all classrooms. A library media center was the heart of the school, stocked with print and nonprint materials including carrels with loop projectors, filmstrip previewers, controlled-reading devices, tachistoscopes, cassette pacers, and programmed reading devices. When the school opened, four channels of educational audio programs were broadcast throughout the learning center. Students could check out a wireless headset at the call desk and request a particular program; six other classroom areas were wired for "live" educational broadcasting (Clark, 1971).

Like many teachers coming of age in the 1960s, Clark was a film aficionado and especially interested in the new portable photo and film equipment that was

[2] Renee Hobbs met Robert Clark within a year after he faced a humiliating challenge to his career at age 62, when in 2003, he faced allegations of child abuse. Eight teen boys ages 10 – 15 testified that Clark had spanked them with their pants down as part of a birthday tradition. After extensive investigation, all charges were dropped and Clark was vindicated as innocent of charges of child abuse and endangerment of minors.

becoming ever more affordable and easy to use. As early as 1968, he had helped bring visual source material into the district by creating a library of 8,500 transparencies for the district's 25 overhead projectors (American School Board Journal, 1969). But Clark's approach to educational media included a significant investment in hardware resources for students to create their own films. In one 1968 project, students filmed "commercials" for games they had created, using six Smith Victor reflectors and stands, a stereo tape recorder, tripods, an Atlas baby boom microphone, a Shure mike, Kodak M-7 and M-9 Instamatic cameras and a Kodak M-100 super 8 projector. Students shot on Kodachrome II film and a local photo and hobby shop processed the film and added a magnetic sound track (Clark, 1970). Later, sound was recorded on a "borrowed mixer" that could capture low-quality synchronous sound (Clark, 1975, p. 25).

Clark launched his first summer youth media program, called Communications Media, in the school district in 1970. In coordination with his supervisor, Rodger Dombrow, the superintendent, they hatched a plan for a summer program to accommodate the growing number of children and young people enrolled in the district. According to Clark (1971, p. 19), "there were a number of boys and girls in our secondary schools who were not being challenged by our course offerings." Clark developed a three-week summer film production program, open to young people for no fee.

Many youth media programs are initiated by creative people who engage children and young people working as apprentices on projects of the adult's own design. As Clark planned the program's curriculum, he decided to produce a simple dramatic narrative, having been inspired by the soundtrack from the film *Gone with the Wind* (1939). During the spring semester before the program began, he wrote a simple script which featured two intertwined stories: in one, a group of children visit the historic battlefield and one boy, initially unimpressed with what he sees, gradually becomes absorbed in the buildings pockmarked with bullet holes and the story of the battle.

In another story, *Incident at Gettysburg* (1971), we meet a boy living in Gettysburg in 1863 and tell the events of the battle through his eyes, as he searches for his father who has been summoned into battle to protect his home. As the school district was located only two hours from Gettysburg, Clark reached out to the Department of the Interior administrators at the park to arrange for the students to do some shooting at the park. He then wrote the script strategically so that it would involve only a minimal number of characters and costumes: only one child was involved as an actor, with the other parts played by adults and older teens. With this project, the production model was born: creative costume drama, written and directed by adults, with children playing all the acting and production roles.

By 1976, as Clark was losing support from school administrators who were disenchanted with the value of creative drama projects using film in the wake of enrollment drops. He felt the need to create Cinekyd, a small business enterprise offering creative drama and film experiences to children and young people. "I felt bad for a dozen or so kids who didn't have anything else," Clark recalled to a *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter for a 10-year anniversary article in 1987. "So I planned to have them come to my house once a week." Students met at Clark's house in the beginning but within two weeks, he had more kids than he could handle. Eventually, Clark began to pick up volunteers, and Cinekyd became a bona fide nonprofit organization. In 1977, the upstart operation outgrew Clark's basement and moved to a location in a warehouse near a strip mall. Over the course of 20 years, the program grew substantially, tapping into a need for after-school creative arts programs in an era when arts programs were declining in American public schools.[3]

Demonstrating Academic Value with Student-Produced Educational Media

The final film that Clark created in his capacity as Director of Instructional Media at the UMSD was *The Secret of the Stone House* (1975), a series of dramatic costumed re-enactments that told the stories of Keith Mansion, residence of Sir William Keith, first governor of Pennsylvania. The project received institutional cooperation from the Pennsylvania Historic Society and the Union Library at Hatboro, as well as the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which owned the Keith estate. The film opens with nighttime exterior long shot of three boys in a muddy field, dressed in dirty overalls without undershirts like extras in a *Huckleberry Finn* adaptation.[4] They observe a strange light emanating

[3] By 1987, Clark had amassed more than $300,000 worth of cameras, audio and video equipment, and other items of the entertainment trade, using fund-raising efforts featuring celebrities as NBC's Today Show weatherman Willard Scott; Mae Questel, the voice of Olive Oyl; Ray Murray, host of KYW-TV Evening Magazine, and WCAU-TV anchorman Larry Kane (Ellis, 1987).

[4] Had the Communication Media program at Upper Moreland School District continued until 1977, Clark intended to produce "a mini-series of four or five programs dealing, in the Alistair Cooke or Sir Kenneth Clark style, with the life and

from a nearby mansion and run away in fear. A paternal adult narrator then describes the events in the house through which Elizabeth Graeme, Sir Keith's granddaughter, was courted by, and eventually married, Hugh Henry Ferguson. The romance of these two characters comprises most scenes in the film's plot. Graeme Ferguson's ghost, it is implied, is what the young boys saw during the opening pre-credit sequence.

The film was shot in silent 8mm film with the collaboration of "approximately one hundred 5th through 12th graders [who] shared the experience, including fifty actors and two dozen sets" (Clark, 2005). Because of the shooting method and the particularly large "ensemble"—which included students participating in the final offering of the Communications Media summer course for UMSD under Clark—the script, written by Clark, is read aloud as a coherent narrative to structure reenactments of uneven legibility. Many scenes are entirely silent aside from their narration; for other scenes, a small group of students recorded and edited a rudimentary sound design from location "wild sound" and dubbed dialogue, which was added via magnetic stripe in post-production after the edited film was completed.

Beyond the impressive technical feat of competently shooting an hour-long film on relatively inexpensive equipment in a matter of weeks,[5] all elements of *mise en scene* are meticulously realized, including period costumes, make-up, and the mansion "set" itself, which was used over the course of two months with the permission of the Commonwealth. Throughout the production, students had studied classic Hollywood cinema of the 1930's and 1940's before viewing their daily rushes (printed at a local photo developer) in Clark's home basement. As they shot on location, they found novel ways to film old staircases, hallways, and period furniture according to the tone and plot of the script.

The film is a blend of narrative and non-fiction techniques, with a heavy reliance on basic narrative shot composition and structure—shot-reverse patterns; varying long shots and close-ups of actions; continuity editing—to provide visualizations of the stylized non-fiction story being told in the voiceover. Optical effects transform a photograph of the Keith Mansion into an illustration used for a title sequence. The voiceover's tone strikes a balance between romance storytelling and an educational filmstrip, with historical details provided amid stories of courtship. In its blending of young people's creativity (in art, storytelling, and emerging competence in narrative cinema), the film hearkens back to the first UMSD production, *Incident at Gettysburg*, which similarly unraveled a mystery that also engages young people in local history. These connections to local historical and curricular interests were nonetheless inadequate for continued funding and support from the school district, and *The Secret of the Stone House* was the final production in Clark's Communications Media course.

The Transition to Cinekyd: *White Feather*

White Feather (1976) was the first major production of Clark's new company, Cinekyd, which he founded after the UMSD youth media program at the district was discontinued. *White Feather* represents a transition between some of the more academic film exercises completed through UMSD's Communications Media course and later productions of Cinekyd that mine the territory of genre and B-movies, at the expense of the more "school-friendly" material of earlier UMSD films. The production was of a comparable scale to the school district films and involved more than 50 children, aged 7 to 17. However, *White Feather* also introduces us directly to Clark himself, who is shown seated behind a large desk in an impressive office. This opening sequence is used in several of the Cinekyd productions to explain that the film has been made by children enrolled in the Cinekyd program. The shot recalls the style of *Walt Disney Presents* (1958), where Walt Disney is directly addressing the television audience from his office in Hollywood. Here, the implicit authorship decisions that Clark made as an educator are transformed into *auteur*-ship; Clark presents Cinekyd as a project with his own indelible stamp, and indeed it is Clark's own archiving of Cinekyd material that has made it accessible today.

A costume drama set in the 19th century, *White Feather* explores the efforts of settlers and Native Americans to rescue their lost children from the grip of a mysterious spirit that inhabits the local forest and who has stolen their children. Like previous silent UMSD productions, the one-hour film uses voiceover narrative while children on-screen act out key scenes, a technique that serves to address the challenges of 8mm sync-sound film production. We hear the voice of the narrator explaining the story during scenes where characters are

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times of Mark Twain. Each segment of his life story would include short dramatizations from his works" (Clark, 1975, p. 25).

5 The quality of shooting is difficult to gauge presently because the prints have been degraded over time and in their conversion to a digital format, but careful measurements ensured proper focus along with obvious composition considerations (Clark, 1975).

presumably talking. The film is soundtracked by a dramatic Hollywood orchestra score, which was reused in other Cinekyd productions. Child voices underneath, recorded imperfectly on location, can be heard in only the barest of whispering.

The film follows narrative conventions to tell the story of Yul-a-Ten, a mysterious Native-American spirit dressed in white. There is a long credit sequence including production credits for acting, film production, costume, animation, advertising, assistant instructors and still photography. The film opens on action told through strong imagery and parallel editing: children are being chased through a forest, and a subsequent sequence uses a cross-cutting pattern to show the efforts of both the white settlers and the native people to find their children. The plot then develops through narration: The mother of a lost boy prays for her son, summoning someone who claims to be the spirit Yul-a-Ten. A montage shows us the many tests and challenges the stranger is given to test his claim, including archery, arm wrestling and finally, the "prison of ropes," where the boy is wrapped in ropes and yet mysteriously escapes. Capture and release is a repeated trope in the film as we see white settlers, native men and children captured and bound in different ways and then rescued repeatedly throughout the narrative.

The film also relies on simple special effects. Students begin to explore stop-motion and other animation techniques, which eventually become a common feature of future Cinekyd films. When Yul-a-Ten rescues the white settlers, an animation shows the magic spirit creating a pool of water for the men to drink. He also mystically releases the captured natives from their bonds. Other special effects are inventive camera tricks, as when a shaky camera is used to represent a magic earthquake that Yul-a-Ten creates to disrupt his enemies. Three children with their arms painted blue act as the group of zombie-like enemy spirits. Students experiment with choreography in a fight scene, while using various frame rates to speed up or slow down key action. Jump cuts and stop motion are used to portray spirits being "killed"—the actors' bodies are gradually encased in a white flour-like substance, after which they disappear from the frame on a jump cut. After a series of dramatic fight scenes, Yul-a-Ten encounters a witch and her henchmen who have captured the lost children. The witch tricks Yul-a-Ten by pretending to be his mother, but Yul-a-Ten is not fooled and kills her, leading to a conventional happy ending in which families are reunited.

The film's techniques and structure are borrowed from classic boys' adventure tales in literature, film, radio, and television. The stop motion and special effects in particular recall the famous Harryhausen animations that brought iconic adventure film characters like the giant ape and dinosaur of *King Kong* (1933), fantastical creatures of *The Thief of Baghdad* (1940), and the skeleton army of *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) to the screen. Neo-auteur director Wes Anderson has reclaimed the nostalgic and camp value of these effects in his films *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004) and *The Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009); in the context of the mid-1970s, however, such animations were relatively out of fashion, except in low-budget horror and science fiction films of the period.

In *White Feather*, we see some of the filmmaking constraints of shooting in silent 8mm dictating key storytelling decisions. The impact is a transitional filmmaking style that is not quite educational media (as in *The Battle of Gettysburg* and *The Secret of the Stone House*) but also not quite a genre picture. In its own way, *White Feather* presages the advent of what is now called *digital storytelling*, in which students narrate planned or spontaneous stories and use slideshows, video, and other forms of imagery to construct image/sound relationships.

Tipping the Scales Toward Fun: *Whiplash* and *Gargantua*

By the 1980s, Cinekyd had abandoned any connections it once had to academic material appropriate for a history or social studies course, or even a media-rich English course. Instead, many productions focused on staples of low-budget filmmaking in the vein of the Hollywood B-movie: spaghetti westerns, science fiction, and other "pulp" genre films drawn increasingly straight from children's adventure stories, comic books, and radio and television serials.

Whiplash (1980) is an instructive example. In its set design and costumes, *Whiplash* uses signifiers of colonial identity and combines the *mise en scene* of the Hollywood and Italian spaghetti western genre. Students filmed at a historical ghost town and used outdoor settings in the blazing July sun to create a feature-length film that resembles the John Wayne vehicle *The Searchers* (1956) while drawing on caricatures from B-movie and spaghetti westerns. The story revolves around the son of a mother and father who are senselessly murdered after a Mexican gang ransack their house and are unsatisfied with the payload. Throughout his journey, the boy meets his true love, teams up with a local sheriff, and warns other young people away from a life of violence before exacting his revenge in a traditional shoot-out.

Unlike previous films, *Whiplash* is entirely sync-sound. Though quiet and often obscured from the

hum of the nearby recording equipment, dialogue is not only intelligible, but crucial to understanding the plot. All narration is diagetic; in one powerful sequence, a boy describes a childhood of learning how to draw his weapon as quickly as possible. A simple blur effect around the edges of the frame delineates current action from remembered flashback.

Students also clearly put careful thought into fight sequences, shoot-outs, staging, and other aesthetic elements of the film. It is by far the closest to a genuine Hollywood-indebted film. Older students portray adults throughout, while younger participants portray children their own age. The villain of the film closely resembles the stereotypical Mexican antagonists of films like *The Treasure of the Sierre Madre* (1948) or any number of Leone spaghetti westerns. Mexican characters like *The Good*, *The Bad*, and *The Ugly*. Mexicans in the film perpetuate uncomfortable stereotypes; young actors affect a thick Mexican accent, replacing "v" sounds with "b" sounds (e.g., "bery good!") and speaking in a pinched, menacing tone.

It is possible that, in transitioning between a school-based youth media program and a private, enrichment-based youth media program, Cinekyd reacted to pressure to increase the amount of demonstrable *fun* involved in productions, in the same way that earlier UMSD productions seemed to react to pressure to demonstrate valuable academic learning. In the trade-off between fun and learning, films of the early 1980s also move away from some of the more inventive and strange choices of the early films, whose genre was often somewhat ambiguous, and toward the imitation of narrative films.

The resulting transition to filmmaking enrichment led to films like *Whiplash* and *Gargantua* (1981), a science fiction tale about how an isolated and ostracized boy, David, transforms his teddy bear into a giant, stop-motion-animated beast after accidentally stealing a secret chemical developed by scientists. The film is a commonly-parodied form of science fiction, using blasé laboratory sets as the stage for tedious exposition from white-labcoated scientists, tough investigations from spunky reporters in the Rosalind Russell mold, and of course the teddy bear of the title, who is filmed at low angles and made to move via stop-motion animation. The resulting film is self-consciously campy (at its midway point it introduces a pair of mischievous elves who obstruct bad-guy scientists from reclaiming their formula) and would be at home on 1990s comedy show *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, where sarcastic puppets mocked the amateurishness of B-movies and independent narrative films of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s.

Discussion

Participating in a meaningful creative activity can change your life. During the 1960s, when educators examined the role of audio-visual media as it might affect the creative process, there was a sense that media production activities might have just the right balance of creative freedom and structure to promote creativity. There was considerable optimism that "teaching machines" and other technologies could promote creativity. Writing in a 1962 issue of *Educational Leadership*, Claude Taylor pointed out that too much classroom instruction was oriented around brief one-off assignments where students complete, without revision, a small piecemeal task. To promote creativity, Taylor suggested:

> Students should have some practice in getting deeply involved, in giving long sustained effort on one sufficiently difficult activity – possibly during school hours, since it might be more difficult to hope to attain such involvement after school in the many home environments. Students need to be able to sustain intensive effort and to experience the feeling of mastery and of attaining closure on longer and more complex problems (p. 458).

The sustained effort involved in creating educational films like *The Secret of the Stone House*, transitional or generically ambiguous films like *White Feather*, and even genre films like *Whiplash* or *Gargantua* could be seen as an opportunity to be part of a significant creative work where long hours of effort are rewarded with a sense of mastery, plus some measure of genuine appreciation from family and peers. Often students involved in sustained youth media productions take on experience *a state of flow*—the sustained cognitive effort that becomes not only possible, but pleasurable in certain contexts (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It is possible that activating flow is a benefit in itself, as few school activities can speak to children's interests in a way that encourages them to exert cognitive effort for a prolonged period of time outside of school itself.

However, some contemporary media literacy educators may regard the narrative youth media of Cinekyd as anachronistic. Youth media practitioners and scholars today are informed by a conscious or explicit link to media literacy, incorporating some aspects of demystification into production activity so that children and teens understand how media texts are constructed. Clark discusses the screening opportunities,

storyboarding, and other planning and analysis components of his film programs with UMSD and Cinekyd; however, given the extensive work involved in both production and post-production, the focus on completion of a project may have overshadowed formal learning, analysis, and reflection on other media. Clark is more exhaustive in documenting the production process itself than he is in describing more academic or analytical activities that accompanied this process.

At some periods in time within the media education community, there has been considerable suspicion about the value of production for production's sake. When it comes to narrative youth media production in the tradition of *let's put on a show*, the design of the learning environment necessarily involves the assignment of roles as a key structural feature of the pedagogy. Individuals are assigned to roles and contribute to the production in relation to their assignments. Some are writers; some are camera operators; some are talent, etc. This approach requires creativity and time management skills to ensure that learners are kept engaged across the pre-production, production, and post-production process. In the Cinekyd model, one or two committed students would act as "student directors," while Clark himself retained sole executive writing and directorial control; only a small corps of Cinekyd participants had any exposure to the arduous editing process in which thousands of feet of 8mm were spliced into a coherent narrative.

Just as students imitate media that is most familiar to them—particularly the narrative tropes of fiction film and television—professionals and artist-educators may encourage imitation of the hierarchical structure of production roles. Clark admits that many autocratic decisions, including writing scripts with little to no student input and retaining some level of creative control himself, were the result of the need to simply get the project completed at all. Collaborative projects that empower students as co-equal creators sometimes fail to be completed (Hobbs, 2011). Because the documentation of the learning process is so uneven and is usually not standardized—and thus often unattractive to school districts and other academic institutions—the finished product may be the only obviously useful outcome of the youth media creation process. Such expectations often lead naturally to apprenticeship models in which a "master teacher" is responsible for a completed projects, while students participate at various levels (from "script supervisor" to "director") depending on their interests, competences, and abilities.

The popularity of such apprenticeship models may emerge from three powerful factors. First, adults involved in youth media have their own creative needs and preferences as media makers and their passions and aesthetic interests may shape their choice of genre. Clark exhibits a dual interest in classic Hollywood of the 1930s and 1940s and explicitly educational media. Secondly, youth media educators have explicit goals and motivations that may vary widely. Some teachers want to help children develop confidence and self-expression, while others want them to develop career skills, and still others want to promote critical perspectives about media culture and values. Research into motivations of media education and media literacy teaching illustrates a variety of approaches to work with children (Hobbs, Berger, Boos, & Grafe, 2011). Finally, there are inevitable constraints resulting from the student-to-teacher ratio, limited time and budget, and other factors related to institutional context. All of these factors may contribute to the choice of instructional strategies that educators use in helping children and young people participate in creative media and technology production activities.

The Present and Future of Youth Media

The work of Robert J. Clark and Cinekyd is useful in understanding not only the roots of the youth media movement through the 1970s and 1980s, but also in understanding frameworks, tensions, and questions that remain about youth media production today, even in an age of YouTube (which receives two days worth of mostly amateur media every hour), omnipresent digital cameras, and accessible digital editing. Although there are more practitioners and, certainly, more youth actually creating their own media than ever before in history (Jenkins, 2009), many issues that arise in attempting to analyze, archive, and otherwise make sense of the youth media produced in Willow Grove, PA in the 1970s and 1980s are as relevant to new forms of youth media creation as they were in the beginning of youth filmmaking.

Many educators today are beginning to recognize the value of *connected learning*, a concept that describes students' informal learning in interest- or friendship-driven activities involving digital media. By hanging out, messing around and geeking out with digital media activities in libraries, museums and afterschool programs, children and young people gain important problem-solving and creative skills (Ito, 2012). Arts educators, in particular, are beginning to explore their role in supporting the digital literacy

competencies of learners. This is a relatively new area of exploration in the context of teacher education.[6]

However, in shifting instructors from media professionals and enthusiasts to amateurs, essential tensions in beginning and completing media work still remain. Often informal learning spaces still partner with institutions—including universities, public broadcasting, and artists—to help them with the inevitable logistical and technical hurdles of modeling a collaborative media production project for children and teens. Many of the contradictory motivations between valuing professionalism and actively critiquing professional media remain, as new stakeholders learn what Robert Clark knew in the 1970s—when the focus must be on an end product, certain concessions may reduce students' possibilities to explore creativity, spontaneity, and experimentation in their work.

Youth media is important as a key feature of media literacy education, and now it is increasingly becoming mainstream as the result of exploding interest in digital tools, technologies and culture. There is much to celebrate about this renewed sense of urgency among educational leaders to focus on connected, student-centered learning that puts young people's creative work at center stage.

But among those who actually develop and implement such programs, a number of important questions and issues arise. Should media production be a means to learn theoretical concepts, develop print and other literacies, and exhibit critical thinking? Or should it focus on the satisfaction of collaboration and completion, possibly at the expense of more school-sanctioned academic goals? Is it possible to critique a hierarchal production system while also necessarily adopting it to finish a project? What can we actually learn from seeing the final projects of youth media, and what usefulness is it to communities of scholars, teachers, and other adults when children and teens themselves cannot necessarily speak to the power of their own semi-professional, semi-amateur and experimental works to these very communities that seem to value them?

There are a variety of pedagogical models for youth media but most are little known, as youth media practitioners rarely write about their instructional methods. In our experience working with children and young people to both analyze and create media, we have focused on the design of learning environments for youth media in seeking to understand how specific characteristics of the instructional practices support student learning. We are also interested in *what types of competencies and skills are required among adult leaders* to support youth media programs. We have explored the range and diversity of roles that adults and young people play in the youth media production process; the relationship between critical analysis of media texts and creative composition; the nature of the relationship between adults and children; the competencies and life skills that young people actually develop as a result of youth media work (Hobbs & Moore, 2013). Working with college-aged students who are interested in becoming filmmakers, we are also curious about the impact of youth media programs on young people's sense of agency, identity and career aspirations. Finally, we wonder about the concept of audience as it relates to youth media. Who views youth media films and videos and why? What does it mean to be an informed consumer of youth media? Are youth media works primarily valuable as a documentation of the learning process or as stand-alone artistic and cultural products in their own right?

Because youth media so often strikes a middle ground between these sorts of dichotomies—professional and amateur, for-fun and for-learning, cultural product and learning process—no consistent audience for this work has been established (Levine, 2008). It might be useful to frame youth media as an intersection between a number of existing discourses, a triangulation between various forms of *amateur media* (home movies, experimental film, collaborative documentary) and *professional media* (journalism, fiction film, theatrical documentary). But it is also apparent that youth media often does not quite fit into either of these camps, hence is not (e.g.) appreciated for

[6] Arts educators have only recently begun to explore the role of digital media and technology. For example, the University of Texas, Austin (June 2012). Theatre and Media Communications II builds on the foundational theatre and technology skills taught in the Theatre and Media Communications I survey course and provides opportunities for students to apply and synthesize knowledge and skills through relevant, real-world projects. Students will explore theatre-related technical professions and components of media production. The course provides hands-on, experiential learning in theatre, including acting, directing, and design integrated with instruction focused on technology applications, media literacy, and 21st century skills. A key focus of the course is on ways to bridge traditional stagecraft with current technology applications to create new media such as animations, digital images, multimedia presentation, digital video, websites, and interactive performances. Students will also develop a deeper understanding of self along with a broader worldview by creating, performing, analyzing, and critiquing dramatic works. Students in this course will document their work during the course in a professional-level digital portfolio.

camp value by cult movie enthusiasts or respected as professional media by journalists or entertainment professionals.

Youth media products can also be treated as an ambiguous document of a production process, one that requires knowledge of a specific context through research and documentation, to make meaningful sense of it. This approach to youth media necessarily diminishes its power as a *cultural product*, and may have implications for the motivations that youth media instructors might need to bring to their own work. However, such a holistic form of understanding might also enhance the value of youth media as a *product of culture*. In this conceptualization, understanding of youth media would necessarily be dependent not only on the media itself, but on a sufficient understanding of the context in which it was produced. Only then could scholars, archivists, and other audiences interested in the past, present, and future of youth filmmaking make sense of work that is both a document of learning and development and a finished text in its own right.

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