

Who I was, Where I am, What I want to be

Methods in focus: Collaborative Film Making

Introduction

Debates about the use and productions of film in research projects are well-worn in the social sciences. Particularly within anthropology, where there is a great deal of writing which attends to the creation of ethnographic films in order to represent research findings. Traditionally, many of these films were created within a realist framework – with researchers working hard to maintain the distinctions they thought existed between art and science (e.g. not using close ups, not editing them heavily, focusing on a whole cultural group rather than an individual) and working in a relatively objective manner to ensure that the films reflected and represented the reality of the situation. Many of these films were also produced by the researcher and with very little collaboration from the participants.

However, many have suggested that alongside the so-called ‘crisis of representation’ that occurred in the social sciences in relation to written authorship (where people began to question the ways in which research had been traditionally written up and represented to a wider audience), came a renewed and rather different interest in using images to visually represent research data. Sarah Pink (2006), for example, has argued that there has been a move away from these realist approaches, towards those that are more reflexive.

As evidence of these claims Pink (2006) points to the work of researchers like MacDougall and Ruby, who she believes developed new approaches to ethnographic film making. Their approach was one that was concerned with recognising and revealing the processes through which their research films were being created. In this sense, the process of creating the final film representation was seen as something that was an important aspect to explore; as a form of research data itself and as a form of reflexive engagement with the research context.

The collaborative film created as part of the WWW research project (a study which focused on the social and educational experiences of young people in elite schooling, their investments in this system and their perceptions of the associated risks) was developed in line with this more reflexive thinking. The film method was one that was chosen by the young people participating in the project at an early stage in the proceedings. The aim was to collaboratively create a film which represented their experiences and some of the themes and ideas that had developed during the research project. The young people met together on regular occasions to discuss how they would produce the film and they eventually shot the footage and edited it with the help of a professional film maker.

From the very beginning of the project it had been decided (by the researcher) that the film would not just be an end product for the research and that it would not just be valued as a singular form of data (i.e. in terms of the film content). This was due to the fact that the researcher believed that the form of data representation has a real effect on how data is generated during a project; that it inevitably informs how researchers approach a project (e.g. in decisions about the technology used, the relationships developed with informants and the knowledge produced). In addition, the researcher also viewed the process of creating the film as a way of exploring these young people’s experiences further; as an intensive engagement with the data and a means of creating further knowledge about their lives, experiences and identities. The researcher followed a particular process to create the film with these participants. This is outlined on the following page on a step-by-step basis.



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Taking photographs and discussing them in interviews

The film making process began by the participants taking their own still photographic images to represent their lives and experiences. These were discussed in photo narrative interviews with the researcher.



Creating photo essays or photomatics

The participants then shared their images with the group. They also began to put their images together and to create storylines to link them together. This was done by developing photo essays (which aimed to tell a story with the photographs) and photomatics (which involved editing images together to create a moving image with a story behind it).



Drawing story boards and creating individual films

The young people then moved onto experiment with the digital camcorder provided as part of the project. They created their own short films on topics that interested them. Before they started filming they also produced story boards to help them plan out the ways in which they would shoot their footage.



Script writing and production plans

The young people then began discussing the story line and genre that they wanted to use in the film. Some of the participants wrote a script and the others developed a plan for the shooting of images on the day (including decisions on sound, lighting and location).



Meeting the professional film maker

During the next stage the young people met with the professional film maker. The film maker helped them to realise whether their aims were realistic or not and to develop a strong shooting schedule.



Creating the footage

The young people then went out on location and shot the footage for the film. They were assisted by the film maker in this process. But they took it in turns to act, direct and shoot the film. They also used their own equipment (a digital stills camera).



Editing the footage

With the assistance of the film maker the footage was then edited into the final version of the film. The participants decided on the footage to be used, the accompanying soundtrack and the order that it should be put in. The film was then shown in a viewing event.

Links and References

- Pink, S (2006) *Doing Visual Ethnography*. London: Sage Publications.
- Heath et al (2010) *Video in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Lunch, N. And Lunch, C. (2006) *Insights into Participatory Video* (available online)

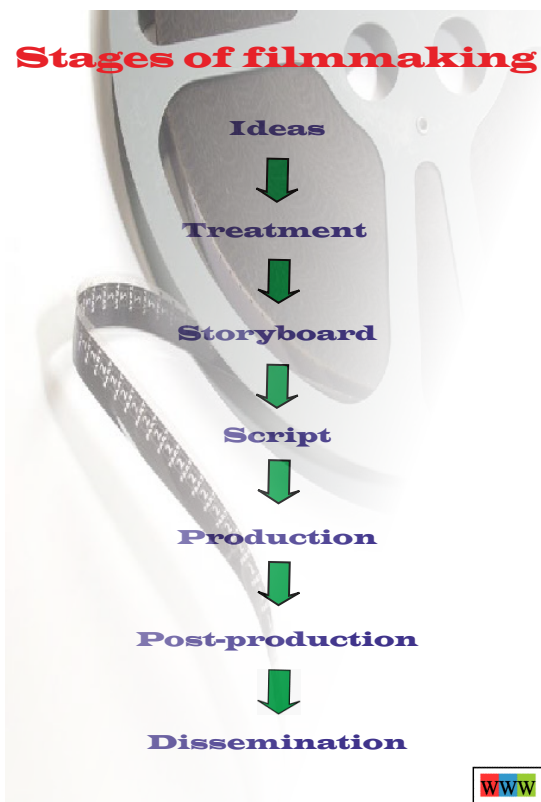
For further information about the project please see the website:
www.wwwresearchproject.org.uk

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Examples of the resources used during the WWW
film collaboration research process

Stages of filmmaking



Using photographs to create films



An example taken from the BBC series 'Shallow Grave'

Storyboards

Storyboards are essentially like a large comic strip of a film or a section of a film which help the director to visualise scenes and to work out filming problems in advance. They provide a visual layout of events as they are to be seen through the camera lens.

Storyboards are used for a number of reasons but largely to aid the planning process and to ensure that the filming goes to plan. They also help to develop the focus of the film and allow for experimentation.

Photo Essays

Photo essays consist of a set or a series of photos that are intended to tell a story or to address a certain issue. The photo essay takes the same storytelling techniques as the normal essay but uses visual images to tell the story rather than relying solely on words.

Photo essays can just contain images or they may be accompanied by captions or longer sections of text.

Some photographic essays are sequentially ordered, others are not ordered meaning that they can be viewed at once or in an order chosen by the viewer.



Shooting Schedule



Time	Scene No	Location Name	One line Description of Scene	Crew	Cast	Equipment needed
10.30am	1					
11.30am	2					
11.45am	3					
12pm	4					
1pm	LUNCH					
2pm	5					
2.30pm	6					
3pm	7					
3.15pm	8					
3.30pm	9					
3.45pm	10					
4pm	11					
4.30-5.30pm						