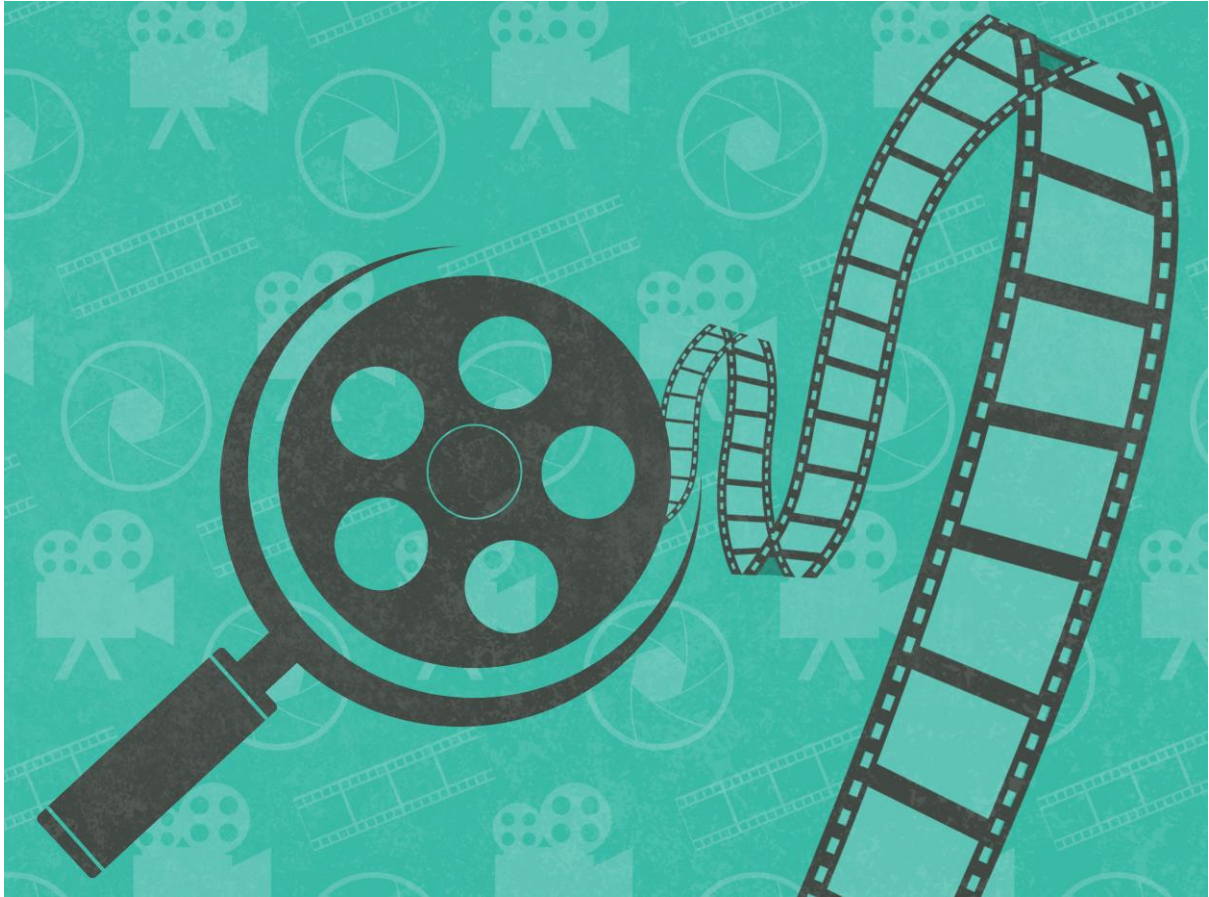


Film Explorers

A project to develop young people's interest in film through a programme of watching, making and talking about movies



Report prepared by Katherine Anderson, February 2015

Introduction

In February and March 2015, ARC ran *Film Explorers*, a project designed to engage up to 10 young people aged 13 – 17 with film through a rounded programme of appreciation, understanding, watching and making.

The aim of the project was to develop ARC's participatory activity for young people and to begin to establish a connection between film participation projects and the film screening programme at ARC.

The aim of the project was to:

- Provide opportunities for young people to be actively creative as artists and producers
- Develop ARC's participatory film offer for young people
- Introduce young people to key aspects of film theory and help them to develop skills in textual analysis
- Begin to establish a greater connection between film participation projects and the film screening programme at ARC
- Encourage young people to engage with a wider range of film material, beyond the Hollywood mainstream

The project was supported by Bridge North East, through Tyneside Cinema's Youth Participation in Film Fund.

What we did

ARC's arts and cultural offer for young people focusses on providing an opportunity to develop and be respected as young artists and producers.

To date, the programme of moving image activity has featured one-off filmmaking days, vlogging and opportunities for young people to work with film practitioners to create short trailers for their performances and events. The positive response to this activity has indicated that there is an interest in film-making amongst young people, which ARC has been keen to develop. At the same time, the regular age of the venue's cinema audience (18+) means that the programme rarely features age relevant films for younger people, outside of the Saturday family film offer, creating a disconnect between the cinema and participation programmes, which results in less opportunity for film participation to feel rounded, connected and grow roots.

The Film Explorers project was designed to test out a new way of engaging young people with film and the cinema programme at ARC. Activity was split into three main elements

- 3 half day workshops introducing key aspects of film theory, helping young people to understand the codes and conventions of film makers, directors and embed their own learning and interest in film
- 3 days intensive film making activity, during which young people recreate and rework scenes from films making them relevant to themselves and their current world, sharing those scenes with peers in ARC's cinema

- A follow-up programme inviting the participants to choose films from ARC's regular cinema programme to watch and discuss, along with their tutor and, if possible, to choose one or two age-appropriate titles for ARC to screen

ARC worked closely with local film practitioner John Kirkbride, to develop and deliver the project. A professional filmmaker and tutor, John's significant experience of working creatively with young people in the target age group and his professional background in filmmaking meant that he was ideally placed to lead the group through both the critical and practical elements of the project.

Shaping the project: the original and reworked plans

The original project design was scheduled to take place over a three month period, consisting of 3 weekly half-day critical/analytical workshops, followed by 3 separate practical workshop filming days.

In practice, this shape was revisited because of a delay in the confirmation of funding. In discussion with the practitioner, the project was reshaped into half-term intensive, with follow-up screening and programming activity, which allowed the project to take place within the target time-frame (activity ending at the end of March 2015).

The change to the shape of the project plan also meant revisiting the pricing structure for the activity. The original plan included charging participants to take part in the Film Explorer workshops, to allow ARC to test interest in more frequent film making activity and to assess the longer term sustainability of a model with participants contributing to activity.

The final price reflected of £20 for the programme reflected the change in shape from a series of one-off activities (priced individually) in favour of a longer-term project. However, to make the project as accessible as possible, 100% bursaries were offered to young people who may otherwise have not been able to take part in the programme. The ticket price included the intensive week of activity, attendance at a free follow-up premiere screening and entry to up to two film screenings from ARC's regular cinema programme.

As an added incentive, and as part of the development activity to create a group of interested younger filmgoers, those taking part were also given an ARC Film Explorers card, giving them reduced prices on selected future screenings.



Spreading the Word

With an updated project shape agreed, a marketing plan was created to raise awareness of the programme amongst young people in the target age group. Using some of the enhanced marketing and communications approaches informed by ARC's work with young people during ENGAGE¹, the opportunity was promoted through social media; direct contact with schools, colleges and young participants and through a dedicated print campaign, which also featured in ARC's 5,000 cinema programmes.

Building on the success of the *Summer at ARC* activities in 2014, the professionally designed Film Explorers print reflected that earlier brand, which had in turn been created in consultation with young people involved in ENGAGE, who had given feedback on images and styles likely to appeal to young people in the target age group.

ARC also engages a young person on a freelance basis, to assist with marketing activities with a specific appeal to younger audiences, with an emphasis on the use of social media and other youth networks and Film Explorers was actively promoted through these contacts.

Working with the Practitioner

The Lead Practitioner designed the project to have a distinct narrative thread, leading the participants from an introduction to reading films through to practical film-making techniques.

After initial presentations and discussions around concepts of film theory and film analysis, the group applied these to a screening of a full film.

As a group, they then agreed to recreate particular scenes from films, as well as storyboarding, scripting and filming a short sequence within a particular genre (the group chose suspense/horror). During filming workshops, the group took turns to act, direct and shoot sequences, before working together to begin editing some of the material, introducing camera and sound effects to create the 'look' of the source material.

Given the group's particular interest in directing and cinematography, a greater degree of time was spent shooting material than editing. For the editing workshop, each of the participants was given an opportunity to try the software, and to make editing choices in collaboration with other members of the group. At the end of the week, the practitioner explained to the group how he would approach the further editing of the filmed sequences, with the group returning to see and analyse the completed sequences, in advance of their screening for family and friends.

¹ ENGAGE was a project run in 2014 by ARC with support from Bridge North East. ENGAGE was designed to improve how ARC communicates with and reaches young people and focused on developing youth networks, providing an opportunity to build on ARC's current youth network and understand how to improve the organisation's thinking around engaging young people. The ENGAGE evaluation report is available on ARC's website, in the Creative Learning Archive section,

<https://arconline.co.uk/sites/default/files/images/ENGAGE.pdf>



Capturing Evidence and Feedback

“I can’t wait to start making my own films”

Film Explorers participant

Throughout the planning process, consideration was also given about how best to capture staff reflections on the project and feedback from the participants. As the timing of the project coincided with a Teesside University Graduate Intern’s placement at ARC, a monitoring plan was devised in collaboration with the intern, who was responsible for the design and execution of the participants’ feedback.

Participant feedback was designed as a series of daily ‘flash cards’, which together formed a flip book, covering the activities during the week. The graduate intern explains how the idea evolved, below:

“As the project involved film & media, my first thought was Polaroid pictures, which then lead to the idea of a postcard to journal thoughts and feedback. The fact that Film Explorers is held during the half term brought the idea of holidays and so postcards. The initial idea was a portrait postcard with a Polaroid picture front so each student could have an image on the front – possibly a still from their own films made during the week of Film Explorers.

After discussions, the single page of feedback turned into a little flipbook, which would develop during the course of the week, with the idea that at the end of each day the students are given a page and are asked to answer a few questions.

Each page of questions was tailored towards the contents of the day. Questions were aimed at the student’s personal film ability as well as their thoughts on the Film Explorers course. The flip-book contained

- Reflective questions
- Questions asking what participants had learned
- Questions asking what participants had enjoyed, what they would like to achieve and what they would change

Each of the flip-books was personalised, with a still from each of the participant's favourite films²



As well as the participants' own feedback, the practitioner and the graduate intern kept notes throughout the week-long workshops, evaluating the participants' engagement with the different elements of the project,

Successes

Though the enrolment levels on the project as a whole were lower than we would have wished, the level of commitment to the programme shown by the participants who did engage was positive. All of the young people successfully completed the week-long intensive workshops, returned to present the short films they had made to an audience of family and friends and, at the time of producing the report, were excited about returning to ARC to continue to meet informally as a young film 'club'

In their feedback, the participants highlighted the following as their highlights:

"Analysing *Ocean's Eleven*"

"learning how to make a fight scene without making contact"

"learning the camera shots"

Film Explorers participants

Four of the five participants said that they had **"loved"** the Film Explorers experience, with one saying it was **"very good"**. Everyone agreed that there was **"nothing"** that they hadn't enjoyed.

² See Appendix 1 for an example of the flip-book information



ARC was also able to work directly with a local secondary school, to promote the activity to pupils participating in the Bronze Duke of Edinburgh scheme. Two of the school's pupils attended the activity as a result of this direct contact. Both of these young people were new to activities at ARC.

Staff involved in the project were impressed by the group's willingness to work together as a team and their generosity with one another's ideas. Throughout the week, the group showed a great grasp of theories and concepts, demonstrated confidence in speaking up in the group and were actively engaged in both analytical and practical tasks. They were also very supportive of one another, offering positive hints and tips to one another throughout the filmmaking process.

As well as their interest in the practicalities of filmmaking, the practitioner's dual background in film and drama meant that he was able to introduce the group to some techniques for safe stage combat, which they used during one of their filmed sequences. Each of the participants was equally willing to be involved in front of, as well as behind, the camera.

We received a significant amount of positive feedback from the participants and their parents about the whole experience.

"This was awesome, no improvement needed"

"I found it fun and amazing"

Film Explorers participants



Each member of the group said that they felt more confident about the various theories and techniques introduced in the course by the end of the week, and there was a unanimous request to keep a 'film club' of some kind going in the longer term. As an ongoing element of the project, ARC will be continuing to work with the group, promoting opportunities for them to become more engaged with the screening programme and to investigate the possibility of them forming a regular discussion group. All of the young people said that they were more excited by film and media studies as a result of having taken part.

Reshaping the project lent it greater coherence and momentum. The lead practitioner reported that the reworked plan had been rigorous enough to engage the young people, but had enough variety to keep them engaged, as the structure moved from theoretical, to analytical, to practical tasks just at the right points for participants' concentration levels to remain high.

Though the actual recruitment into the project did not achieve the targeted numbers, there was initial interest in the project from a number of individuals, and particularly schools and colleges, suggesting that there may potentially be some useful discussions to have with these groups in the future.

Challenges

Despite a comprehensive marketing campaign, recruitment levels for Film Explorers were lower than had been anticipated. The project was designed on the basis of up to 10 young people taking part – in practice, 5 participants enrolled. Though the reshaping of the project into a week-long intensive in the February half-term meant that the project could still be completed by the required March end-date, this structure may have meant that fewer young people in the target age-group were able to take part, as we discovered that mock examinations were timed to take place after the half-term in some education settings.

The impact of the shorter lead-in time between the confirmation of project funding and the required project end-date, which resulted in the reshaping of the project, may also have affected levels of recruitment, as many of the young people who expressed an initial interest in taking part weren't able to participate across every day of a week, and therefore did not enrol.

The lead practitioner was aware that the project involved introducing complex film theory to young people in a way which was accessible and engaging. Though one of the aims of the project was to introduce the young people to a wide range of film material, using films which spoke to the group's interests (e.g. action films, ghost stories) as source material helped to keep them engaged with the subject matter. At the same time, the trust built up between the group and the leader meant that, as the project progressed, it was possible to introduce the idea of the group watching outside of their normal 'comfort zone'.

What we learnt

Working on the project has given us the opportunity to learn a great deal about running similar activities in the future. Amongst the lessons learned were the following:

- There appears to be a definite interest in filmmaking and, interestingly, in film theory, amongst young people, and young men in particular. The challenge remains how to both engage young people and encourage them to engage in turn with a wider range of film material.
- The design of the Film Explorers project contained several elements (film theory workshops, filmmaking workshops, visits to the cinema, choosing films to screen at ARC) and the full range of opportunities was featured in the publicity created for the project. For future projects of a similar nature, it may help to begin with a simpler message ('watch and make films'), introducing the other aspects of the project as time goes on.
- Creating a strong narrative thread within a project can help to keep young people engaged, as the development of activities and the ways in which they relate to one another are clear and consistent.
- Recruitment into creative projects can be challenging and lead-in times and methods for interesting young people in a project should be carefully considered and costed at the project design stage. Organisations should remember to be mindful of the rhythms of the academic year and how these can affect enrolment levels.
- Though project design needs to be rigorous and achievable, it is important to retain some flexibility, to respond to changing demands. For example, this flexibility could allow for project staff to react and respond to levels of interest by altering the ways in which the opportunity is communicated to young people, or to reshape elements of the project in response to time constraints, whilst still delivering against the initial aims and objectives.

Appendix 1 – Feedback flip-books

The image shows a vertical rectangular template for a feedback flip-book. It has a dark green background. In the top-left corner, there is a white circular hole punch. Below the hole punch is a white rectangular box containing the text **FILM EXPLORERS** in bold, black, uppercase letters. The central part of the template is a large, empty rectangular area with a light green-to-white gradient, intended for writing. At the bottom, there is a white rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a final comment or signature.

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Day 1 First Name: _____

Q: What do you hope to learn at Film Explorers?

Q: Do you have any questions about film/media you would like to be answered during Film Explorers?

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Day 2 First Name: _____

Q: What did you enjoy the most about today?

Q: What did you learn today that you didn't know before coming to Film Explorers?

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Day 3 First Name: _____

Q: What have you found most interesting about the sessions?

Q: Is there anything you haven't enjoyed so far? Why?

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Day 4 First Name: _____

Q: What tips have you learnt at Film Explorers that will enhance future films?


Q: Now that you have experienced Film Explorers, are you more excited about media studies?

Yes No




Can you give an example – in what way?



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 **Day 5** First Name: _____

Q: How much did you enjoy Film Explorers?
Not A Lot Was OK V Good LOVE!

Q: How glad are you that you attended Film Explorers?
  

Q: Do you now feel more confident using the various media techniques taught at Film Explorers?
 

Q: Is there anything else you would have liked to learn at Film Explorers?

Q: What new filmmaking techniques have you learnt while being at Film Explorers?

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 **Day 5** First Name: _____

Comments/ Suggestions:

Please tell us your thoughts about the week as a whole. Are there any improvements we could make to future film activities?

Are there any other film activities you would like to see us offer?

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FILM EXPLORERS

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