Editorial

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND FILM

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Philip French, who retired as film critic for The Observer in 2013 after fifty years of insightful and informative reviews, described cinema as ‘the great art form of the 20th century’ and suggested that ‘this century is continuing the same way’ (4 May 2013). Cinema continues to enjoy a popular status in our cultural lives despite the multitude of digital and online access points for games, movies and television. We still enjoy the social activity of cinema-going and the opportunity to view films on the big screen. Given its capacity as a conveyor of knowledge, images, messages and issues to a large, international audience, film has immense importance to development education practitioners yet according to Lewis at al. remains an ‘under-studied medium for development knowledge’ (2013: 20). The development education sector has arguably yet to fully explore the potential of film as an educational medium with target audiences or as a mainspring for debate between practitioners. Moreover, the accessibility of digital technology has potentially brought the filmmaking process itself within the compass of development organisations as evidenced in the article by Michael Brown and Katrina Collins in this issue of Policy and Practice.

This issue explores some examples of good practice within the development education sector involving the development of a film-based resource and the showcasing of cinema from the global South, which rarely finds its way into our local multiplexes. It also considers the important role of film training in shaping the practice of filmmakers of the future. There are significant possibilities attached to enhanced development education inputs into the content and methodologies used in the delivery of film training, particularly the cultivation of a more challenging cinema addressing issues central to the lives of people in the global South. But, perhaps the most traditional association between film and development education is in the use of the former as an educational medium feeding ideas and perspectives on global issues that can support debate and inspire action. Like development education, the
medium of film has a flexibility that extends across education sectors, age groups and subject boundaries to enrich learning on a stand-alone basis or by complementing other activities. Monika Kruesmann considers in this issue, for example, the value of film as an educational medium in schools, but similar benefits exist in other traditional development education sectors too such as youth, third level and the community/voluntary sector.

This editorial argues that film contains significant potential for development educators in promoting cultural and development awareness but can also be a source of disquieting cultural homogenisation, particularly through the market dominance of United States’ (US) films around the world (United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, 2004: 86). The challenge for development education is to champion an alternative cinema that respects diversity, protects regional and national identities and promotes cultural rights. The article cites the documentary feature film as an example of a genre that continues to thrive despite the limited cultural spaces available to showcase work outside the mainstream Hollywood fare. It concludes with an introduction to the thematic contributions to this issue of the journal, which suggest some of the possibilities that exist for aligning development education with film.

The global picture for film
Globalisation has been a mixed blessing for the film industry and consumers. It has resulted in shrinking spaces between people, cultures and ideas through the rapid development of new digital technologies that facilitate instant communication and a mushrooming of electronic access points for film, television and games that include laptops, tablets and smart phones. The number of terrestrial and cable television channels has proliferated, but has this signalled greater choice for the consumer? An infographic from Business Insider suggests that the level of consolidation in the media sector in the US has resulted in just six corporations controlling 90 percent of the market (Lutz, 2012). The consolidation process has seen these media giants accrue multiple interests that include news media, publishing, music, television, games and film. A total of fifty companies controlled 90 percent of the sector in 1983 but have been consolidated to the point today that ‘232 media executives control the information diet of 277 million Americans’ (ibid). In terms of movies, the big six earned box office returns in 2010 of $7 billion which was double the
combined income of the next 140 studios (ibid). According to the UNDP, the
global share of movie box office receipts earned by US productions a decade ago
was 85 percent and completely out-muscled the European film industry which it
described as being ‘in decline over the past three decades’ (2004: 86).

A more recent estimation of US global market share suggested that it
had dropped to 63 percent largely as a result of a 15 percent growth ($10.4
billion) in the market share of the Asia Pacific region and, in particular, China’s
overtaking of Japan to become the largest market outside the US (Hoad, 2013b).
Indeed, Ernst and Young has estimated that China’s film market will surpass
that of the US by 2020 based on growth of 17 percent per annum (Child,
2012). Despite this rapidly emerging challenge to US market dominance of the
global film industry it appears that Hollywood films will continue to populate
 cinemas across the world in significant numbers. The US itself remains the
world’s largest film market, earning $10.8 billion domestically in 2012, an
increase of 6 percent on 2011 (Kerowski, 2013). Moreover, China’s domestic
film industry lags well behind imported movies despite the Chinese government
imposing a quota of 34 foreign films per year (ibid). While the number of
Chinese cinema-goers is on the rise, Chinese films are not threatening the
market dominance of the US and finding it difficult to ward off competition
from Hollywood.

The consequences of this dominance include the possibility of
deteriorating industry standards as the high stakes of Hollywood finance
demand a healthy enough return to absorb the costs of pre-production, principal
photography, post-production and a hefty promotional budget. Film studios are
less inclined to greenlight projects that take risks or stray too far from proven
profit-making templates; hence the proliferation of movie sequels and high
output of profitable genre films like those in the Marvel franchise. However, a
more significant outcome of Hollywood’s output and market share for
development educators is the influence of film on culture, values and lifestyles
which is considered in the next section.

**Film, culture and identity**

Given its pervasiveness and global reach, film has a considerable influence on
youth lifestyles, attitudes and values. In summarising the effect of globalisation
on culture, the UNDP suggests that, on the one hand ‘Globalisation has increased contacts between people and their values, ideas and ways of life in unprecedented ways’ but, on the other hand, the fear exists that values are being lost as ‘modern communications invade every corner of the world, displacing local culture’ (2004: 85). The UNDP argues that this fear is most pronounced in indigenous societies and suggests that:

“Indigenous people see globalization as a threat to their cultural identities, their control over territory and their centuries-old traditions of knowledge and artistic expression. They fear the cultural significance of their territories and knowledge will go unrecognized – or that they will receive inadequate compensation for these cultural assets” (2004: 91).

Film can play its part in this displacement of cultural identity and expression through the cultural hegemony that attends the dominance of a narrow set of values, attitudes and lifestyles promulgated in US output. As Lozada (2013) suggests ‘Due to liberalization of trade among countries and the ease in ability to export and import, more foreign cultures have been exposed to American film’. While the increased market share of Hollywood has been facilitated by strident globalisation since the end of the Cold War, Lozada suggests that the extent to which this represents a form of ‘cultural imperialism’ or has impacted on local cultures ‘is an issue of debate among cultural and media theorists’.

What is not in debate are what the UNDP describes as the ‘asymmetries in flows of ideas and goods’ which need to be addressed so that ‘some cultures do not dominate others because of their economic power’ (2004: 90). Measures proposed by the UNDP that could address the asymmetries in the exchanges of film include specialised taxation incentives to encourage independent filmmakers and specialised distributors to make more films; new international legal frameworks to allow better and more balanced exchanges, expanding national production capacities; and enhancing access to more digital production technologies (98). As an example of a country which has implemented longstanding protective measures to nurture its indigenous film industry, France performed quite well against US imports in 2012 with local films accounting for 40.3 percent of admissions compared to 42.7 percent for
US films, 13.3 percent for other European films and 3.7 percent in the ‘other’ category (Barnes, 2013). By contrast, UK films accounted for 32 percent of market share in their domestic market in 2012 (BFI, 2013: 10) and Mexico had just a 6.1 percent share of the local film revenues in 2010 which were dominated by Hollywood films (Hoad, 2013a). In 2010, the British government abolished the UK Film Council, which had issued grant and lottery funds to new develop new films, thus withdrawing a major arm of state support to the industry (New Statesman, 26 July 2010).

The advantages of having a robust, national, independent film sector include the cultivation of local films that speak to and facilitate debate on issues of national and regional concern. Consider films such as: La Haine (1995) which comments on social unease in Paris’s working-class suburbs; Bamako (2006) which puts the International Monetary Fund and World Bank on trial in Mali’s capital; Gomorrah (2008) which grittily de-romanticises Italy’s mafia past and present; and Even the Rain/También la lluvia (2010), an exploration of contemporary and historical exploitation of indigenous communities and resources in the global South. These films have no place in Hollywood’s canon and were made possible by local/regional enterprise involving collaborators operating within independent film. Without state support in the form of grants and tax incentives, independent filmmakers in the global North and South will struggle to finance their work and create the more challenging films that are likely to support a deeper understanding of development locally and in the global South. But perhaps the film genre with the most successful take-up of development themes and issues is the documentary which is arguably in the midst of a ‘golden age’ and which I turn to next.

The golden age of documentaries

Speaking at a documentary film festival in Sheffield in 2011, the filmmaker Steve James hailed a ‘golden age of documentary film-making’. ‘The quality is incredible’, he said. ‘Before, people used to want to make narrative films, but suddenly people realised what you could do with a documentary’ (Guardian, 6 June 2011). James argues that there has been an attitudinal change among the public concerning documentaries; where they once felt a duty to watch a documentary or felt it was ‘good for you’ they now watch them because ‘they want to’. What perhaps raised the bar and expectations for documentaries was
Michael Moore’s Academy Award winning documentary *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), which questioned the prevalence of the firearm in US society in the aftermath of the ‘Columbine Massacre’ in 1999 when two high school students attending Columbine High School in Jefferson County, Colorado shot dead twelve of their peers and a teacher, injuring twenty-one more. His film related a pervasive fear and anxiety that imbued so much of the US’s media output to the high level of gun ownership in US society. Moore’s documentary struck a chord with a public largely bereft of such critical perspectives and the film grossed $21 million in the US alone, an extraordinary return for a film in the genre. He went on to make *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), which excoriated the presidency of George W Bush for illegally pursuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in the aftermath of the attacks on New York on 9 September 2001. *Fahrenheit 9/11* won the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival and earned just short of $120 million at the US box office.

Moore’s subsequent documentaries *Sicko* (2007) on the US healthcare system and *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2009) on the 2008 financial crisis proved to be less lucrative at the box office but still yielded healthy returns. Moore’s passive-aggressive style of documentary filmmaking, combining an everyman demeanour, humour and anger at the injustices examined by his films, have endeared him to the American public. The success of his movies revealed new possibilities for documentary filmmaking and raised the bar for public expectations from the genre. Documentaries could entertain as well as provoke debate, educate, challenge injustices and mobilise the public. Of course documentaries have long been associated with television output and the canon of the Australian journalist and broadcaster John Pilger for ITV in Britain is an outstanding example of investigative journalism in the area of development, human rights and social justice (http://johnpilger.com/). But Pilger’s films had not been considered cinematic propositions and were largely confined to television; Moore’s success at the box office changed this perception of the documentary.

Documentaries have persisted as a cinematic force since the success of the Michael Moore films, many of which continue to explore development issues with verve, depth, innovation and courage. For example, three of the nominees for ‘best documentary feature’ in the 2014 US Academy Awards, the
apex of the industry’s award season, addressed historical and contemporary issues of human rights and social justice in the global North and South. *Dirty Wars* (2013: Richard Rowley and Jeremy Scahill) exposes covert US military operations in Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen that have resulted in high civilian casualties with little to no accountability. *The Square* (2013: Jehane Noujaim and Karim Amer) documents with raw footage and, at times harrowing detail, the courageous efforts of civil society leaders in Egypt to move the country toward a democratic future. And *The Act of Killing* (2012: Joshua Oppenheimer and Signe Byrge Sørensen), in a macabre and revealing movie, has perpetrators of mass killings during the 1965 coup that overthrew Communist President Sukarno of Indonesia and kill half a million people, re-enact some of their grisly crimes in the style of their favourite movie genres. It is a rare movie that comments on human rights abuses of the past while shining a light on impunity and hidden truths in the present.

*The Act of Killing* has carried all before it in terms of critical acclaim in the 2013-14 awards season, winning a BAFTA award for ‘Best Documentary’ and being voted by *The Guardian* as the film of the year in any genre, a rare feat for a documentary (Bradshaw, 2013). The documentary form therefore appears to be in rude health and has lost none of its power to tackle the controversial or take unconventional approaches to difficult subjects that mainstream conventional narratives would not touch. The documentary is perhaps the closest ally to the development educator of all cinematic forms given its regular trawling of development issues. But there are, of course, challenging and informative movies regularly made in the conventional form that would readily strengthen development education practice. The sector could perhaps do more to bring these movies to wider audiences and offer them a showcase that they are denied in multiplex cinemas. Distribution and promotion is often the biggest challenge faced by filmmakers, particularly in the global South, and development educators could help to champion these films as part of their work. The Galway African Film Festival has managed to do just that and Heike Vornhagen’s article reflects on how the festival organisers were ‘driven by a conviction that feature films could be educational by themselves and contribute to the wider development debate.’
This is a conviction that has underpinned this issue of the journal which seeks to widen the development education sector’s engagement with film and suggest the possibilities that exist for doing this. While corporatism and globalisation challenge cinematic exposure of development issues, the success of many documentaries and independent films in circumventing the challenges of film finance, promotion and distribution show that quality movies will find an audience when they shine a light on truth and social justice. The next section introduces the thematic contributions to this issue of the journal.

**Development education and film**

Young people have an innate sense of social justice and care about what is happening in the world but a survey reported in Monika Kruesmann’s article suggests that a majority of teachers in British schools believe that the schools system is not helping pupils achieve that goal. This is the starting point of the article, which goes on to suggest that film can help to address this problem as ‘an education medium particularly well suited to global teaching and learning’. She suggests that film has a flexibility and familiarity that makes it ideal for use in the classroom particularly when so many young people have an intimate knowledge of new digital technologies. The article argues that two additional and important qualities of film-based learning are cross-cultural connectivity and content density. Cross-cultural connectivity draws upon ‘film’s ability to engage the emotions by bringing together information, narrative, and visual and musical mood’ which affords ‘many opportunities for finding chords of resonance with existing student experience’. Content density addresses the ‘complexity and instability of many global issues’ which often tackle several ‘interlinked components’. It does this through ‘film’s capacity to reference, through its multiple components, many different issues within a very compact series of images and sounds’. At the same time, film can address several components of the schools’ curriculum such as Citizenship, Economics and English.

Kruesmann’s article describes a piloted project ‘involving eighteen schools, in which documentary film clips and accompanying lesson plans, all with explicit links to the national curriculum, were offered to teachers, along with support to implement the plans’. The project is an innovative response to the dearth of film-based resources in British schools and also aims to add ‘to the
growing literature on film as a medium for development education’. Kruessmann makes a persuasive case for film as an effective resource for development education teaching and learning in formal education based on its strong curriculum relevance and capacity to engage pupils.

Rod Stoneman brings considerable experience to his article’s analysis of film training as Director of the Huston School of Film and Digital Media at the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) and former Chief Executive of the Irish Film Board. He has commissioned and produced several movies and has been a champion of cinema in the global South as former Deputy Commissioning Editor at Channel 4 where he provided production finance for over fifty African feature films. Stoneman’s appraisal of current film training methodologies regrets ‘the narrower approaches of most current filmmaking courses’ which ‘often place their emphasis on technical training for the industry and exclude political or critical thinking’. He suggests instead a modern film pedagogy where ‘critical analysis and production be continuously connected and interactive’. Invoking Freire’s concept of shared investigation, Stoneman proposes training rooted in social responsibility and political consciousness that can result in ‘awareness of selfhood, forms of criticism and radicalisation’. Film training that moves outside the purely technical, he suggests, ‘involves nourishing and enlightening new generations, taking them towards a refreshed social and aesthetic function for the moving image’. The article suggests that development education could potentially play an important role in cultivating this new generation of more socially engaged filmmaker.

Rod Stoneman’s Huston School of Film and Digital Media was one of the founding organisations involved in setting up the Galway African Film Festival in 2008 together with the Galway Film Society and Galway One World Centre (GOWC). Heike Vornhagen, Co-ordinator of the GOWC, describes the impetus behind the festival which screens around fourteen films per year focusing ‘on contemporary African cinema, highlighting new and emerging talents as well as depicting different stories’. The article argues that by discussing development issues in the context of films from Africa we build a more accurate picture of life on the continent that contrasts sharply with the often skewed perspective offered by mainstream cinema.
Michael Brown and Katrina Collins offer development educators a useful exemplar of how a film-based resource can be developed from the filming process through to the writing, piloting and dissemination stages. Their article reflects the possibilities made available through digital technologies for development educators to develop their own resources tailored to the needs of their audiences. The project was led by Development Media Workshop (DMW) based in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, which created an effective consortium of partner organisations from the disability and development sectors. The article focuses on the development of a film-centred educational learning resource linked to the post-primary school curriculum in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland with funding from the Department for International Development’s (DfID) Mini Grant Scheme. The resource explored the connection between disability and development from a child’s perspective in different contexts around the world. The resource pack includes films from Bolivia, Ethiopia, Haiti, Nepal, Tanzania, Vietnam and Ireland. The films were made by DMW’s Michael Brown who developed the films into seven lessons addressing different aspects of development and directly linked to the schools’ curriculum at post-primary level.

The article describes the writing and piloting of the lessons and extensive dissemination of the resource through teacher and student teacher training programmes. The published pack titled Disability and Development (2011) was very positively evaluated by teachers and pupils alike and was taken up by schools throughout the island of Ireland. The article estimates that between 10,500 and 21,000 pupils have had access to the learning resource and extracts have been used as exemplar case studies on the web site of the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). The article suggests that the success of the project illustrates the effectiveness of using films within educational resources, particularly films ‘shot and edited with minimal narration, allowing the pictures to tell the story and the viewer to interpret things for themselves’.

The final Perspectives article is an interview with Rod Stoneman in which he ‘speaks about his experience of filmmaking in the global South and efforts towards challenging the Western ideological and theoretical conceptions that have historically underpinned the medium of film and the discipline of film
studies’. The interview reflects Stoneman’s passion for film and challenge to geographical, ideological and political configurations of film that assert the domination of one perspective over all others. This means rejecting dominant Western modes of thinking, production, criticism and film practice to create a much more complex and broad model that creates change by doing rather than just talking.

This issue’s Viewpoint article is by broadcaster Peadar King, a producer of documentaries on human rights, poverty and social justice issues including the RTÉ series What in the World? From such an experienced vantage point, King reflects on the decline of public broadcasting, particularly in news coverage which has largely fallen victim to an increasing corporatisation of the media sector. The article offers examples of Chomsky’s assertion that most journalists are conforming to ‘dominant and increasingly right-wing ideological pressures’. In the first Iraq War, for instance, journalists embedded with US armed forces performed what Philip Seib describes as their ‘minuet with the Pentagon’. King draws upon recent research from the Tindall Institute on the news output by the dominant US broadcasters ABC, CBS and NBC which found that ‘key international events and developments have become increasingly marginalised in their coverage’.

Britain and Ireland are not ‘immune to this downward trend in news coverage’ which is diminishing the coverage of the global South as part of television news output. This assessment of television journalism should set alarm bells ringing for development educators as surveys quoted by King indicate that the majority of people in Ireland (and most likely in other countries too) ‘find out what is happening in developing countries through television’. The decline in public broadcasting standards needs to be arrested if the public are to receive a more rounded, in-depth and accurate picture of life in the global South.

References


The films referenced in this article are:


Stephen McCloskey is Director of the Centre for Global Education.