



LEEDS YOUNG FILM: WHAT'S AROUND YOU?

Life can often prevent us from indulging in the simple act of discovery, but the practice of filmmaking, like all creative arts, forces us to slow down, observe and consider. To take in the minutiae of our surroundings and translate them into something meaningful. This process has held the team at Leeds Young Film (LYF) in great stead during the periods of UK lockdown, where they've had to examine their practice as creative educators and embrace their natural resourcefulness.

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WE WENT TO AND FRO TO MAKE THIS WORK, BUT WE FELT THAT WE'D RATHER MAKE SURE THAT THE KIDS GOT THE BEST RESOURCES FOR THE MONEY WE HAD.

When doors closed and uncertainty was everywhere, it transpired that the project of bringing together Creativity Kits for their students was just what was needed as a jumping off point for the difficult year they were about to navigate. Programme Manager, Martin Grund immediately recognised the long-term value of a “practical” kit that could be “something they would be able to make use of in school and out of school. We didn't want it to just be a set of prompts and activities, we wanted something with some longevity that they could adapt and use as they wanted.” It was this foundational approach, combined with a heavy splash of tenacity that saw Martin sourcing tools with a lifespan far beyond one project, but within the budget of a single deliverable – creating what can only be described as a ‘guerrilla filmmaking kit’, replete with tripods and selfie sticks, as well as a pack of sixty story prompts that use emojis to illustrate characters, places, objects and transport. “The challenge,” Martin laughs, “is that we couldn't actually get them in packs of sixty, so we had to have them printed individually, so we had sixty boxes with a thousand cards each in.”

The very fact that the kits required so much focus in both sourcing the contents and packing the bags for delivery made them central to the wider activity. “We knew they would improve and elevate their filmmaking,” says Martin. “Even though we knew they'd be using some of their own devices, we still wanted to be able to show how you could frame

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WE WANTED TO REFLECT BACK THAT ENERGY AND COMMITMENT TO THE PROJECT.

a shot, and how you could use these items to help you learn more about the filmmaking process.”

At the time of writing, all but 200 kits have been delivered and Dixons Academy have taken the decision to use them independently. However, Leeds Young Film have also been able to play an active role in delivering lessons to a school that is new to Burberry Inspire, thanks to the innovative approach of their artists, Rad Miller and Luke Shoesmith. At Cockburn John Charles Academy, the Head of ICT enthusiastically embraced the programme and worked with Leeds Young Film to develop a new way for them to ‘enter’ the classroom. For five weeks, a scheme of work created around the Creativity Kits was taken to Year 9 via the IT suite – with LYF broadcast on a big screen and their teachers sharing the work of the students via hand-held webcam. It was a determined and innovative approach, but not without its bumps in the road. “We had a mixture of success and challenges,” Martin explains. “On the one hand, the fact that it was a live lesson was really positive. We could respond in real-time and actually see what was happening. But equally it was a bit chaotic in the fact that we were using one webcam.” And while the space was superb for their IT needs, the fixed desks and computers were limiting for a team that were used to open spaces for freely developing ideas.



However, they were able to have weekly reviews with the school, allowing them to tweak what worked and what didn't. Head of Leeds Young Film and part of Leeds City Council, Deborah Maturi was excited to have this relationship, even though it was something of a departure from the way the organisation usually works with schools. “We struck lucky because Jaz [Head of ICT] is really into film and understands the basic concepts,” she says. “He's really got his head around the value of it, so we joint sculpted the work.” This ‘joint sculpting’ meant that their work was able to form part of Jaz's teaching, something that they, as an organisation, largely avoid. “When

there's so much pressure on the teachers, but we're really reliant on them, we felt it [working towards curriculum learning objectives] was the only option to get through.” However, both Martin and Debbie agree that even though the structure and delivery are different, the programme is a really good one as a result.

Martin explains further; “We've tried to incorporate some elements of technology and ICT into each of the modules. But it still runs through the filmmaking process – pre-production, filmmaking, post-production and then the exhibition, where they present and show the work that they've made.” Each lesson lasts fifty minutes, with around twenty-five minutes of teaching time before the students work on their activities. The beauty of this modular approach, says Martin, is that “each one is stand alone, so you could actually pick one off the shelf and do it without the others, but as a scheme of work it then creates one overall project.” Debbie agrees, “it's been an investment. But now it's all logged and packaged up, ready to be delivered online.”

Amongst the pivoting and learning new ways to work and think on their feet, has emerged a terrific sense of camaraderie among everyone involved. There's a true sense of commitment, determination and enthusiasm at Leeds Young Film for whatever twists and turns come their way. From the “production line” of unpacking and boxes and filling bags (“it was fine for the first three or four hours, but it does get a bit repetitive,” laughs Debbie), to the dive into working by webcam, Martin, Debbie and the team have embraced the challenge. “Even though we've not been in school, we've probably put more hours in coming up with solutions for this situation, than we would if it had been a normal year,” says Martin. “As a result, we've got materials and new ways of working that we would never have considered previously, so it's actually been a great opportunity for us.” Debbie agrees, and adds, “when people are on board it's great. You're working towards a positive goal you don't mind at all. It's part of the project.”

They acknowledge the importance of the freedom and flexibility they've been afforded in what has been a very difficult year for so many. It's made a marked difference in their ability to change direction quickly and shape-shift to fit the needs of Cockburn John Charles Academy. “Burberry and the Ideas Foundation have given us that opportunity. There's been a lot of trial and error, but they've been really supportive of us continuing. So, we've reached a situation where we have something that works.”