Can the use of film in primary school literacy lessons raise attainment in writing?

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Many teachers use films and audio visual material in their lessons, but few chart the effect these have on their students beyond the obvious anecdotal ‘increase in motivation’. In Bradford, UNESCO’s first City of Film, a range of primary school teachers have been working with film as part of literacy lessons since 2011 and my PhD examines the effects of this intervention both in terms of attainment and emotional association. How do children feel about working with film? Do they write better and more if film is involved in literacy activities? And what are the different ways in which the teachers use the medium? These are just some of the questions my work attempts to tackle.

At this year’s BERA conference, I will present initial research outcomes on the topic of attainment. Comparing my work to anecdotal research by Vetrie (2004) Smilanich and Lafreniere (2010) and Hadzigeorgiou et al (2010) I will discuss whether the children of the film literacy groups made greater than average progress in writing over the course of a school year and whether there is a difference between the groups of film literacy students from different schools and of different ages (school year three to five). My findings are based on a quantitative comparison of beginning- and end-of-year grades but also take into consideration qualitative interviews with teachers and children on the topic of perceived progress.

As the first longitudinal investigation of its kind, my PhD will make a substantial contribution to the field of literacy studies, potentially highlighting film’s ability to enhance engagement with skills in written communication. Rather than investigate the social and cultural context of ‘media literacy’ via qualitative means, this thesis will use mainly quantitative data as part of a positivist approach to uncover the benefits of using film- perhaps in an attempt to woo policy makers as well as education professionals.

Bibliography