

Editing film trailers

In Year 9 and 10, all students at the Parkside Federation edit trailers, working with an entire feature film and its soundtrack album. They work in pairs with Adobe Premiere to make a 2 minute 'theatrical trailer' for the film's notional re-release. It is a highly motivating and absorbing project, in which students' learning is driven by powerful personal and social pleasures.

Creative literacy

Making a coherent, potent trailer out of ninety minutes or so of film can certainly be as testing (and just as developing) of students' creativity, or creative literacy, as the filming and editing of original footage. After all, a glance at emerging modern media forms, such as sampled music, machinima or mash-up video, shows that creativity does not mean starting with nothing:

Popular definitions of creativity, informed historically by the romantic tradition, have tended to emphasise 'imagination', 'self expression' and 'originality'. However, more progressive accounts of creativity tend to emphasise the Vygotskian selection and assembly of pre-existing cultural resources to create something new. Editing a film trailer seems almost to encapsulate this notion of creativity. Students are engaged in just such a process of selection and re-assembly, both of concrete textual resources (the film and its soundtrack) and of more abstract cultural resources (genre iconography, allusions to other texts, and so on.)

However, it would be wrong to play down the role of imagination, self-expression and originality in making film trailers. Students discuss trailers as texts which aim to persuade, inform and - crucially - entertain their audiences. They have to consider the aesthetic and emotive impact not just of the trailer as a whole, but of each, individual editing decision, every juxtaposition of image and music, each transition, and every alteration of mood or pace.

In the classroom, the creative nature of the project is evident in the students' pleasure in making something powerful, original and unique, which they own. It is also mapped in the limitless variety of outcomes from different pairs of students, all making trailers for the same film.

Another aspect of creative literacy is, of course, the ability to select from and to control creative technologies, in this case editing software. Editing trailers tests students' technical skills in an intense way, as they mark, trim and arrange clips, mix music and dialogue, deploy transitions and add layers of graphics and captions, to make, control and communicate meanings.

(In this way, of course, the activity is also developing of the literacy's fourth 'C': **competence**.)

Critical literacy

Editing trailers also demands, develops and tests a range of sophisticated critical understandings. To some extent, these may remain implicit; however, they can also be made explicit in formal and informal discussion during the production process.

Students need to be able to imitate, adapt and subvert the conventional structures of the trailer form itself. They need to be able to understand small-scale textual structures, such as different kinds of transition, some techniques of continuity editing and other principles of 'horizontal' grammar, by which narrative is conveyed, ideas are connected and anticipation or enigma is created. And they also need to grasp the 'vertical' grammar, by which diegetic and non-diegetic sound is layered with images, captions and graphics.

Another important aspect of critical literacy is the ability to evaluate and to express preferences. Editing a trailer is an extended, iterative process, during which students experiment with ideas and techniques, explore multiple possibilities, and are continually required to review, evaluate and refine their work.

Very importantly, students need to understand some theory of genre and of narrative, and how elements of these are signalled within trailers. And they have to understand that trailers themselves offer representations of the world, and carry ideological meanings.

Cultural literacy

In this way, critical literacy overlaps with cultural literacy. But making trailers also draws upon a range of other cultural understandings and awarenesses. Students need to appreciate the industrial, institutional context within which trailers are made and operate. They need to understand how trailers address and are received by specific audiences. Perhaps most importantly, they have to draw and reflect upon their own relationship with trailers, identifying themselves as one audience but then being able to distance themselves from the notional target audience for their own work.

Further reading on trailers as production work

Media Literacy in Schools, by Andrew Burn & James Durran, Sage Press, 2007

'The Rush of Images: a Research Report into Digital Editing and the Moving Image', *English in Education*, Summer 2001, by Andrew Burn et al