



Video library

Video production

Is a screenplay necessary?

Normally, a film is either based on a fictional story or true events. In either case, the stories have a time dimension, a plot with a beginning and an end. As a result, a natural sense of suspense is created for the audience, who would like to know how the story finishes.

Even documentaries resort to certain historical or technical sequences occurring on a time axis, explaining to the audience how something came about and what end it took.

The COMCULT Film on “Shared Values” was faced – in contrast to the potential offered by other types of film – with very great drawbacks from the outset:

- No storyline of any sort was available before production began.
- The subject matter to be depicted cinematically was in the main of a conceptual or abstract nature, such as: democracy, pluralism or justice.
- The film was intended, as far as at all possible, to be the product of schoolchildren, i.e., adult standards should be accorded only secondary consideration.
- Work on the film project would have to be made to fit circumstances of time and place given within a school context and its limitations.

All these conditions worked against the realization of ideas considered in the previous chapter dealing with “Possible COMCULT Film Sequences”.

Composing one standard decentralized screenplay – at schools involving ten different countries of Europe – proved to be unfeasible. Nevertheless, some partner schools managed to develop short sequences of video lasting several minutes and which had a distinct plot creating a certain build-up of tension between beginning and end and which kept to a planned succession of scenes. The following serves as an example:

Draft screenplay: Communication as a Value

	Scenes	People involved
1	Exterior shooting - street scenes - shop selling mobile phones - journey on tram to MWS	A pair (1 Partner)
2	School's logo + “No mobiles!” sign	
3	Shots in school building - during a lesson (under desks SMS messages sent and received) - mobile call being made in break (beneath “No mobiles!” sign) with symbols faded in/superimposed - written exam being taken in class (mobiles on desk at front) a handy goes off - teacher takes the call and converses with caller with symbols faded in/superimposed - silence	WGE1 Pair WGE1 Teacher + Pair (1 Partner)
4	Bills are presented - bill for mobile calls - poor marks in the examination	other partners of pair

Day of filming

Friday, 7.10.2005: periods 4 – 7

After the shots were edited, the final product ended up different from what was originally planned.

By the close of 2005 quite a number of such “mini videos” were produced, all built up around kernels illustrating particular values. But simply joining up and juxtaposing various “mini videos” would not have produced a film that put all its scenes to the service of a common idea or that followed a coherent theme throughout, taking the audience on a journey from beginning to end and, if possible, even providing them with an educational message.

At the beginning of 2006 some teachers and pupils in Freiburg attempted to create a video sequence to function as a frame story linking other “mini videos” in such a way as to produce a fuller-length film.

During the 6th Transnational Conference of the COMCULT Network in Freiburg, the delegates from the partner schools voted to adopt and apply this approach to the COMCULT video film.

There now came into being – with united forces – and as it were, with the wisdom of hindsight, a “screenplay” by means of which the individual mini videos of the partner schools were moulded into a fresh succession of scenes, whereby the criteria determining the actual order had less to do with logical presentational sequencing or scales of values than cinematic considerations.

Focal screenplay, yes or no?

In general, any film intended to grip its audience needs a pivotal idea or plot connecting the individual scenes into a coherent whole. But what shape an idea takes is a specific individual creative act, as a rule, sometimes resulting from discussion with others, which leads to the exclusion of particular lines of thought or to their consolidation through approval.

Such an act of creativity would have been imaginable at the onset of cooperation within the COMCULT network, but it would have resulted on the basis of purely theoretical debate among members of teaching staff.

It is highly doubtful whether a screenplay that had come about in such a manner would have achieved a better result. For the entire productive work the film entailed would have rested on parameters that at the beginning of the project defied exact definition and which were subject to constant amendment in the actual course of events.

As became evident, decentralized production of the mini videos secured intense commitment on the part of the pupils both in terms of hitting upon ideas to use and in the manner of their filmed portrayal. Judging against the backdrop of such personal experience, pupils in the Film Forum made either sympathetic appraisals of the videos made in other partner countries, or were at times quite critical of the efforts.

However, after some two-thirds of the time available for the production work had elapsed, it became clear that any advance in the direction of a joint COMCULT video film would only be achieved if agreement were reached on a central scheme or a screenplay to provide the complete film with a sense of direction.