



Ankit Pogula

Like most who have been to school, I felt I was assimilating so much of information every second that the word cramming seemed appropriate! What was troubling was not just the high intake, but not being able to express what ‘I’ thought, felt or understood.

How did we as young people see the world – did it seem happy, confusing or conflicting; what did we give importance to; what we liked/disliked vis-à-vis what others would want us to like? What did I think about happiness, family, success, school and friends? Despite writing several examinations and having filled up tonnes of answer sheets for 12 years, these were questions we never talked about till way beyond school. Some of these questions perhaps can only be addressed in an open space, where one gets time to engage with one self and can feel free to express.

Every child or individual has a natural desire to express oneself. The process of education seems incomplete without facilitating this expression. Expression isn’t just an extra-curricular activity but a curricular-activity, which can enhance the intake of a child. This is where Art plays such an important role. It gives an individual a creative vent of what’s going on within. Be it painting, performing arts or filmmaking, art is the window through which a child engages in being imaginative, creative and expressing his/her interpretation of the world!

### Why ‘Film in Education’

I have been facilitating filmmaking workshops and showing various kinds of films around the country to children, youth and adults from all backgrounds and spaces. It’s been spectacular to observe how

everyone responds to the fascinating medium of film. But why films? Why are they so captivating? Apart from building skills of camerawork and editing, what role can it play for a student?

We humans are extremely visual creatures and love the use of our senses in communicating. We are constantly forming images to words, sounds and emotions. For instance, the moment we read the words ‘Mountains in the background, lush green fields and a stream running by,’ it immediately prompts off a series of images in our mind. A lot of our interpretation of the world is in this form. Success, happiness, fun, art - we have images associated with all of these. Music or sound can enhance or give a new dimension to these images. Put together, films create the possibility of maximum communication and evocation.

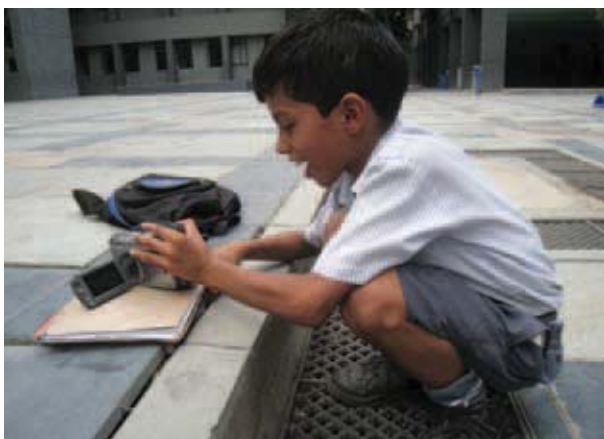
With the intense advent of information and visuals in the last decade, children today are exposed to a vast variety of audio-visuals through newspapers, television, advertisements and films. They are well informed and aware of a world even though it physically lies far beyond their daily routine of school, home and friends. A child today is able to think in a





multi-dimensional and a non-linear way much faster than ever before. As a result, there is definitely a more imaginative and challenging mind to engage.

The visual medium has the ability to captivate and satiate a child's (or every individual's) imagination. There are times when educators struggle to engage children on different subjects but I have seen how utilising the visual medium through short films and documentaries as part of education has jumpstarted a child's curiosity even on the most complex subjects like urbanisation, climate change, etc. This makes it even more essential for us as educators to use a medium like film to help engage such creative minds.



### Child: An Observer and A Creative Storyteller

For the first few years of my exposure to films, documentaries etc. I often saw a lot of films on children and youth made by adult filmmakers. The children were the subjects of intrigue, of observation, of figuring out their minds to see what the future holds! I often wondered how would it be to have the subject (the child) as the observer and observe the world. In this process, I found the camera to be an empowering tool. With a camera in hand, one can see a diminishing need of words, sentences and structures to communicate. A child is able to pick and choose what

he/she wants to show, give different or new meaning to that and communicate perhaps a lot more clearly.

Nearly a decade of working in the field of education and being a video trainer, I myself have been surprised by how much I had 'assumed' of a child's creativity and the sense they can make of the world. In the course of facilitating scripting and visualisation in filmmaking workshops, I was startled to see the variety of perspectives individuals held, and how creatively they visualised things around them. And often these perspectives came from individuals who could not articulate so clearly in words as much as they effortlessly did with the camera and films.

Once in a film workshop in Delhi, I was facilitating a group of students to come up with a story for a one-minute film on recycling. After much debate of how to visualise a very 'done' thing and steering away from having a film with a lot of statistics, an innovative suggestion was to have a conversation between an old and a relatively-new shirt in a dustbin and how recycling was the lifesaver for the new cloth! The entire exercise and how to shoot the shirts talking was a challenge. Students came up with the idea of faces being painted on shirts worn by students, the chest-part would be the face and the hands would move for expression. It was an innovative script written, shot and edited by students in 5 days. I was surprised with the creativity, ingenuity and the enthusiasm. The same quiet bunch of 20 had turned into a meaningfully engaged, creative and highly charged group!

### Meaning behind the Aesthetics

Expression is an essential part of every individual's existence. It takes various forms such as, music, poetry, writing, dancing, painting, films, etc. As we delve deeper into a particular form, we start excelling in it and become more and more creative with it. Along with form, what's equally important is

the meaning/message behind that form/expression. ‘What’ does one want to say through this medium and why?

As both a filmmaker and an educator, I feel a strong sense of responsibility to work on both aspects with a child – the meaning and the form. In fact, I have always found film to be a great medium to engage students on social and environmental issues and self-exploration. While facilitating workshops with students of Hyderabad and Chandigarh two years ago, through short documentaries and discussions I focused on the relationship the students felt with their cities and if it entailed anything beyond one’s house and school? We watched some films on urbanisation, environment to further explore urban living. Films did what so many years of living in the city couldn’t! They could see many more interconnections of pollution and waste with urban lifestyle.

Once they felt that connection, they were naturally motivated to know the city historically and document it visually. It was amazing to see how there was such a turnaround when students started researching the environmental situation of the city for the film. In due course, we visited drains, sewage canals, filthy backyards; city’s hidden spaces behind malls and multiplexes. It was a thrilling experience and interesting to see how the students captured the same city with their camera - the same city with the same visuals but with such a different perspective!

I feel with clarity within oneself on what one wants to communicate, there is a jump in one’s creativity and artistic ability as well. To me, the clearer the meaning one wants to communicate, the more motivated he/she feels to express it creatively. The more creative he/she is, the larger group of people he/she is able to cater to. Thus, meaning or core content goes hand in hand with creative expression.



### **Borrowed vs. Original Aesthetics – The Challenge**

While I was studying in school, I was part of the debating and dramatics team. But I often felt that what I spoke or performed was not what I wanted to say or how I wanted to perform. It was a lot of what teachers or house captains thought would win us the prize, what kind of speeches or plays were in vogue or would appeal to the audience. It was a lot about what ‘sounds’ or ‘looks good’, not what I felt. It was like mouthing someone else’s words and how to speak – in other words, a borrowed sense of aesthetics.

This did impact and limit my creativity and took me a while to find my own ground with my imagination and my own sense of aesthetics. Why didn’t I perform the way I feel comfortable? Should the teacher have worked on my aesthetics and developed them or asked me to pick up an entirely new sense of aesthetics?

As an educator and a video trainer, I can see how subconsciously we maneuver young people or children towards a message or ‘our’ aesthetic sense. Often, this gets the child to feel that their natural sense of aesthetics isn’t good enough! I feel that for us educators, this is the biggest challenge to work on and if not addressed, can deeply damage a child’s confidence in his/her ability to express and be artistic.



We need to first allow the child to express himself/herself freely and then help facilitate the process towards translating the expression into a film, story or any other art form. Also, the longer and more continuously students are exposed to a medium, the finer they pick up the nuances and get even more creative.

With the onset of digital media and younger and younger students being exposed to computers and

cameras, we have a generation of individuals at home with technology. Simultaneously, there is a need to give them a stimulating and creative engagement with that technology. Filmmaking as part of education offers that engagement. There is tremendous scope not only in expressing oneself creatively and artistically through films but also being able to access one's inner self.



ANKIT POGULA is an independent filmmaker, based out of New Delhi and runs a production company Tuning Fork Films that engages in making documentary films and conducting filmmaking workshops. Having studied Masters in Mass Communication from Jamia Milia Islamia, Delhi, Ankit has been using film as a medium to explore issues of Development, Media & Identity with urban and rural youth across India. He can be contacted at [ankitpogula@gmail.com](mailto:ankitpogula@gmail.com)