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II

Practice-Based Film Education for Children: Teaching and Learning for Creativity, Citizenship, and Participation

Armida de la Garza

The value of practice-based learning, especially in the case of children and young people, has long been acknowledged. It can be traced back to John Dewey (1859–1962),[1] a pioneer in the "learning by doing" and "problem solving" approach that sought to integrate school with society; and to Maria Montessori (1870–1952),[2] who saw independence as the aim of a child's education and realized that to achieve this, the child should take control of at least part of the learning process, with the environment playing a crucial role. And, importantly in Latin America, Paulo Freire (1921–1997) centered his whole model for pedagogy on informed praxis, thereby refusing the split between theory and practice while firmly situating educational activity in the lived experience of participants. The ultimate goal of this pedagogy—initially termed "of the oppressed"[3] and later "of hope"[4]—was to achieve emancipation. Underlying all these approaches is the belief that childhood is a central period of an individual's life, in which the foundations of personality are laid, and that the principles of respect, responsibility, and community are best understood by children through exploration and discovery. Whether we take the view that learning is socially, psychologically, emotionally, or cognitively constructed, practice-based education integrates all these dimensions.[5] Nonetheless, formal education, especially in the realm of film, has often remained subject-centered and teacher-led. It has also tended to have a sharp focus on theory, whether it was aimed at adults or young adults. Only recently has the spread of digital technology, which is affordable and easy to use, made practice-oriented film education for children a real possibility. As a result of such developments, the medium has in various ways been expanded and, indeed, returned to the democratizing potential that Walter Benjamin once thought was inherent in it.

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Practice-oriented film education has been hailed for a number of reasons. Among them, as a means of providing tools for self-expression and as a truly motivating factor for learning; as a method that promotes group work and the practice of social and communication skills while also training children in the use of technology; and as a kind of laboratory for experimentation where in-depth learning can take place as children learn not only the codes and conventions of filmmaking, but also how to deconstruct and challenge them when editing, thereby developing their own creative capacities. Production is, after all, "fundamentally about the way creative work acts as a pivot point through which dialectics of 'doing' and 'analysis' merge."[6] But more importantly, there is an argument that with the central role of visual images in our so-called information society, print literacy is no longer enough. Children must now become competent producers, in addition to critical consumers, of audiovisual content if they are to take part in the global public sphere that is arguably emerging as the digital media become pervasive. In sum, practice-oriented film education offers a means of enriching children's lives through aesthetic experiences, and of promoting more integrated communities at the local level, while also raising in them an awareness of what may be called a cosmopolitan experience of childhood.

Whatever commonalities are shared, however, children come from a variety of ethnic, social, and geographical backgrounds, and the benefits and goals of practice-oriented film education can often be elusive. This paper mainly explores how this challenge is being met in *La Matatena A.C.*, a civil association based in Mexico City, founded by Liset Cotera in 1995;[7] reference is also made to two other schools: *Comunicación Comunitaria A.C.*, which roughly translates as Communication for Community, founded by Irma Avila Pietrasanta in 2002, and *Juguemos a Grabar*, meaning *Let's Play We're Making Films*, founded by Sonia Aburto in 2006 in Morelia City, capital of the western state of Michoacán. *La Matatena A.C.*'s remit is the broadest in that it is the institution behind the organization of the International Film Festival for Children that has been taking place in Mexico City every year since 1995, with the organization's workshops covering both film history and appreciation as well as animation.[8] It caters to younger children, 6 to 12 years old, with older children often mentoring younger ones. It has been argued that "peer-mentoring less experienced media makers can…have a profoundly democratic influence on how children see themselves as the social futures."[9] As we will see below, children's experience at *La Matatena A.C.* seems to support this assertion. Learning here is focused on cinema, with aesthetics absolutely central to *La Matatena A.C.*'s teaching concerns and cinephilia indeed key to its cultural milieu.[10] Beyond learning about art, children learn through art. *Comunicación Comunitaria* on the other hand takes a more instrumental approach to the teaching of video production, rather than cinema, with an agenda focused on community-making at the local level. Important aims, in this case, are to empower groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable children between 8 and 13, to preserve cultural identity, and to promote human rights, and democratization. The children are slightly older, as they need to be able to read and write and to tell fact from fiction when they join. *Juguemos a Grabar* is conceived within the framework of policies for the development of cultural

industries, as part of a program for urban regeneration around cultural clustering. Clearly concerned with the population of the Michoacán area, *Juguemos a Grabar* dramatizes the tenet that "life is global, living is local,"[11] and focuses on locality—that is, on people's behavior (rather than community, which emphasizes people's feelings of attachment, as in *Comunicación Comunitaria*).

Below I introduce the background to all three institutions, before providing an overview of the way *La Matatena A.C.* and *Comunicación Comunitaria* run their workshops.

Comunicación Comunitaria

Comunicación Comunitaria was created with the explicit aim of enabling children to engage critically with the media, to become producers rather than simply consumers of audiovisual material, and this in a project of active citizenship construction that enlisted both family and school. Practice-oriented education was regarded as strategically important in that the assumption is that the more active, critical, and media literate a child is, the freer he or she will become. Culturally relevant material was also deemed essential, as racist or classist representations or media representations in which the ethnic and social backgrounds of the children are absent, have a negative impact on their self-esteem. Avila believes that while the state in Mexico, and Latin America more generally, has prioritized access to technology as key to the modernization of education, quality content has not been prioritized in the same way.[12] Further, she believes in a producer-led market in which works can eventually find—or perhaps forge—their audiences. Also, since audience development is crucial to the creation of a dynamic, competitive, and sustainable film industry, she is aware of the role that film education for children has to play in this regard.

Mostly funded by a variety of local government institutions, *Comunicación Comunitaria* has played a very important role in introducing children to the preservation of cultural heritage, and to issues of identity and memory. A remarkable instance in this regard is its *Manitas Mágicas* ("Magical Little Hands") series of videos, funded by the Fondo Nacional para el Fomento de las Artesanías (FONART), the fund for the support and promotion of local and regional arts and handcrafts, in which children learn documentary making in order to preserve the history, meaning, and production techniques of a number of crafts. Examples include toy-making and the use of forged iron, copper, and clay to craft cutlery and silverware, with the documentaries frequently involving the interviewing of the children's families and other members of the community. In this sense, *Comunicación Comunitaria* follows what might be called a peripatetic approach to teaching, in that they visit the various communities. Also worth mentioning is the introduction the children have received to the life and work of Mexican visual artists. In 2011, two groups of children, all of whom live in the district where one of the museums devoted to painter Frida Kahlo (the Anahuacalli) is located, learned about her work through practice-based film education. The older children produced a documentary for which they interviewed the museum caretaker

and curator. The younger children produced a two-minute cutout animation that succinctly and pithily manages to convey all key aspects of her life and work while also providing commentary on the meaning and function of visual art.

Built around a drawing by Kahlo entitled "What do I need feet for, if I have wings to fly?" (1953), which she drew shortly after the amputation of her right leg, the video depicts Kahlo in bed, painting a picture of a foot, which then becomes animated, leaps out of the canvass, and leaves the room flying through the window. A voice wondering where it might be going is heard, and then the bed itself becomes animated and Frida in her now-flying bed follows her foot through the window, trying to get it back. Her bed travels above the exhibition of her paintings at the gallery—the children were impressed when they learned she had been taken to the inaugural ceremony in her bed—and then goes into a black "universe" where there are "worlds" (actually circles) of some of the most iconic images in her paintings, such as the world of eyebrows, and the world of monkeys. Throughout her search, whispers can be heard saying "You are free, we are free." She finally finds her foot, floating about, and when she gets hold of it to bring it back to the painting, wings grow out of her back and she is herself able to fly, at which point a voice can be heard declaring "What do I need feet for, if I have wings to fly." The allegory of Kahlo grappling with all sorts of constraints—including an unfixed identity permanently under construction—and of her painting her way out of pain and toward emancipation is given further detail through the animated foot, which takes the shape of a "miracle." That is, the video features a small metallic devotional object in the shape of a foot, similar to those that the grateful faithful in Mexico place near statues or paintings of saints they believe have granted them a miracle. The video thus achieves an extremely original film/portrait of Kahlo, one in which the emancipatory potential of art is highlighted, both for the artist and for the audience, as the audience here is also constituted as a community of reception, artistically responding to the stimulus provided by the paintings by making their own animated video. Jacques Rancière contends the "emancipated community" is one "of narrators and translators."[13] I would argue the children here have precisely taken that role, "translating" and appropriating the paintings, narrating the Kahlo story in their own visual way through the practice-based education they receive at *Comunicación Comunitaria*. Beyond being an audience, that is, a community bound by the shared consumption of a cultural background circulated by the media, they are now also bound through the shared production of their own appropriations and reinterpretations of this cultural background. The project, it is clear, enabled the children not only to learn the techniques of animation but also about art, and about their community of belonging.

La Matatena A.C.

Internationalism has been at the heart of *La Matatena A.C.* from the very beginning. Cotera's idea was born out of a trip to Montreal in 1987, during which she was introduced to the International Centre of Films for Children and Youth (*CIFEJ, Centre International de Film pour l'Enfance et la Jeunesse*) and, in her

words, fell in love with their project.[14] Also, her aim in the first instance was to widen children's access to cultural diversity in a Latin American environment overwhelmingly dominated by Hollywood, where a film policy for children was all but absent. In this sense, her project was also about laying the foundations for the international festival. Cotera believes that what children all over the world share is their situation of dependence upon the adults around them. She explains: "Unlike the cinema made by adults in which children are addressed for profit, as consumers only—a cinema which I don't deny may also have value as part of the popular culture we all grow up with—I aimed to introduce children to a cinema in which they are protagonists. Camera shots are taken from the perspective of children, and, more importantly, the cinema in question speaks to issues that children face and *can thus be enjoyed by children in other countries* (emphasis mine), for many of the children's concerns, inasmuch as they are dependent on the adults around them, are in fact cross-cultural."[15]

Linked to *La Matatena A.C.*'s festival work is the metaphor of film as travelling or facilitating a kind of journey: not only do the films travel within the countries where they are from, and to other countries, they also open up fictional worlds for viewers. As Marina Stavenhagen, director of the Mexican Film Institute but not directly related to *La Matatena A.C.*, puts it, the aim of the festival is "to allow children's minds and imaginations to feed on images and tales, on stories from abroad, of characters who inhabit other worlds, of animals and stars…images that move them and allow their minds to discover other worlds."[16] In highlighting the chance to explore other worlds that cinema provides as a key reason why cinema is valuable, *La Matatena A.C.* puts internationalism at the heart of the learning experience, while also emphasizing the personal and unique nature of children's engagement with cinema.[17] Also, at the level of infrastructure, running the festival has allowed *La Matatena A.C.* to become a key node in the international network of producers, distributors, and consumers of films for children.

The International Film Festival for Children in Mexico City became the cornerstone on which *La Matatena A.C.*'s practice-oriented film education started. The rationale and phases were as follows: the more films children watch, the more they become conversant with a visual language that they can then draw on and bring into play in their own creations; because of the need to have a qualified jury, consisting entirely of children, workshops focusing on film history and film appreciation were mounted; these were followed by animation and documentary workshops when some of the children took a deeper interest in cinema. Cotera's ultimate aim is to have films made by children featuring prominently in the festival's program. To date, *La Matatena A.C.* has shown 66 feature films from 58 countries and 114 films made by children in their workshops[18] to an audience of 100,000 children.[19] Every year there is a guest workshop leader from one of the institutions participating in the festival. In 2011, when this research took place, this was Joris Van Dael, founder and director of *Kidscam*, a practice-oriented film school for children in Belgium. During his stay in Mexico, Van Dael helped *La Matatena A.C.* run the cutouts animation workshop for street children.

By 2011, 17 editions of the festival had been held, and the workshops were in their twelfth year. *La Matatena A.C.* is clearly beginning to have an impact on

the Mexican film industry.[20] The festival has proven a key way in which new filmmakers working on films for children, especially those working on animation, both get in touch with likeminded colleagues from elsewhere and introduce their work to local audiences. *La Revolución de Juan Escopeta* (*Juan Escopeta's Revolution*; dir. Jorge A. Estrada, 2011) was, for example, presented in a screening attended by the director, followed by a question-and-answer session with the children. In addition, a number of round table discussions take place during the festival itself. For instance, the 2011 edition featured exchanges about what might constitute artistic cinema for children and whether cinema can indeed be regarded as a "total artwork," as well as a comparison between the ways in which the three pioneering film schools for children in Mexico work, as compared with the Belgian *Kidscam*. The discussion was taped and is available for consultation at the Mexican Film Library. Also, with the first cohort of students who took the animation workshop now about to start university, it was good to learn that two of them have chosen media-related careers. The older one was working at the Film Library and was also volunteering every year to help with the organization of the festival, which is put together with a tight budget and largely depends on such voluntary contributions to run. In short, *La Matatena A.C.*'s festival has proven to be a key forum where Mexican cinema for children is nurtured and enjoyed.

The Workshops

Comunicación Comunitaria's and *La Matatena A.C.*'s video production workshops broadly follow the same pattern. *Comunicación Comunitaria*'s workshop is structured around five key topics: violence, gender inequality, consumption, human rights, and cultural identity. As it is not solely devoted to cinema but also to the media more generally, the workshop comprises 15 issue-awareness and critical reflection sessions. Drawing on a constructivist approach, these all start with a question and proceed by way of dialogue, with games, role play, and contests. The aim in using such methods is to make children aware of the crucial role that the media play in constructing, rather than merely reflecting, reality. These sessions are followed by six video production, and three closing sessions, each lasting three hours. At *La Matatena A.C.* there are eight sessions with classes starting at 10 a.m. every day and finishing at 2 p.m., with a break for lunch at 12 p.m. All topics for the videos come from the children themselves, although *La Matatena A.C.* also runs a separate program focused on human rights, in which topics are provided rather than elicited. A healthy lunch is provided on the site.

What follows is a summary of my own experience at the two workshops run by *La Matatena A.C.* in 2011. The first one was aimed at 14 children from a middle- and upper-middle-class background, hereinafter referred to as group A, whose parents each paid 4,000 MXN (equivalent to some US$309.91). These children went to the cinema on a regular basis, and, indeed, a couple of them were from families working in the film or TV industries. Others heard about the workshops at the festival, and in some cases came from far away, supported by their parents

who highly value the development of creativity in their children. They had never met before and were keen to make new friends. They were also thrilled about coming to the workshop or had at least exercised some agency in the course of enrolling in it. The second group, B, comprised ten street children, all girls, in the process of reintegrating into their families. They had rarely, if at all, been to the cinema, and the decision to enroll was made by the institution where they were living at the time, which meant they were already acquainted with each other. The workshop was offered at no cost in their case.[21] The first group worked with a workshop leader and two monitors, both final year pedagogy students working on dissertations on practice-based education for children. The guest workshop leader from Belgium joined them for the second workshop. Each one of these groups posed its own challenges and rewards.

During the first session, to begin with, the children are asked what they expect from the course. "Sharing," "learning," and indeed "experiencing" are some of the most frequently cited expectations. Then they are asked whether they have been to the cinema and, if so, what the film was about. They are introduced to the concept of a story, plot, structure, and characters, and asked to find interesting stories as their homework, by interviewing their friends and families or just creating them themselves. The second half of the session is devoted to the viewing of various short films illustrating a variety of animation techniques. Children are then asked to reflect upon the meaning of the word *animation* (to bring into life), the responsibility it thus brings, and the pride animators feel at "creating a world" (as the workshop leader described it). Some of the short films, all of them selected by the children, are viewed a second time. This time the children are asked to pay attention to scenery construction, especially the materials used.

During the second session the children share their stories with their classmates, with the workshop leader writing titles down on the blackboard as they go along. Various children from group A had indeed been to the cinema recently and many proposed to remake the stories they had seen, nearly all of them from Disney. This resonates with the argument sometimes made against media production classes that children tend to reproduce the racialized or otherwise stereotyped identities they are familiar with from commercial media, the very representations they were meant to challenge.[22] The counter argument is that "creative practices place youth in conversation with others and with the sedimented social discourses and cultural practices that shape our experiences."[23] Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, in which our own voices are understood as being formed in and through the voices of others, Elizabeth Soep argues that children "inevitably weave various utterances into their own … as they prepare their own creative projects."[24] At *La Matatena A.C.* they do this guided by the workshop leader, who explained the value of originality in story-telling. Similarly, Mr. Reyes, the plasticine instructor played an important role convincing the children that what creativity really means is "to think, improve, and then make anew." Children in group B on the other had not been to the cinema, but had extremely interesting stories to tell, ranging from their own, sometimes heart wrenching experiences that had led them to abandon their families and into street life, to fables or stories about intergenerational communication. These stories were staged in a shadow

play, to make the children aware that such devices lie at the origins of cinema, but also to prompt their reflection on the challenges that telling that particular story in a visual way entails.

At this point, it is worth opening a parenthesis to emphasize the therapeutic, and even healing power that practice-based film education can offer to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. As Rosemary Althouse et al. have observed in their work on story-telling in the education of children, the postmodern climate "values narrative and dialogue,"[25] especially framing and reframing, as strategies that can change the meaning ascribed to events. In other words, children learn that the meaning of events is not fixed and immutable, but depends on how these are understood, and that what might seem like the sad ending of a story might as well become the hopeful beginning of a new story. Visual storytelling, and specifically video making, has proven instrumental in the recovery process of victims of traumatic events. The work of *Vision Machine*, a collective of filmmakers, theorists, and activists based in Canada who use digital media in a therapeutic context, is worth describing in some detail. They employ a method that involves first interviewing a person who has experienced the traumatic event in question, asking him or her to narrate the event, and also to stage it. The interview is then viewed and commented upon, and this is videotaped. It is subsequently shown to participants who tell "the other side" of the story and who also comment on the events, and this second interview and staging is also videotaped. Finally, the footage from both these interviews and staging processes is mixed with footage from news and other sources related to the event, to make up an original, multilayered piece that presents the event "in an archaeological fashion."

Some of *Vision Machine*'s most important findings so far include the discovery that "genre inflects the memories and imaginaries of those who were [tragedy's] historical actors," since "what happened was itself already staged and scripted."[26] For instance, a killer staged his part as a Kung Fu film. In the words of the researchers, "each screening is a mnemo-technique thriller-trigger, that allows survivors to imaginatively infiltrate the history from which they have been excluded." And they add, "Perhaps it is a first stage towards justice."[27] The implications this has for the possibilities that training in video making holds for giving vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, such as street children, a sense that they can gain back some control over their lives, are thus enormous. But let us now return to the next stage of the workshop under discussion, conducted by *La Matatena A.C.*

During the third session, each story proposed by the children is assessed for strengths and weaknesses in terms of being told with animation. At *Comunicación Comunitaria* there is a choice of techniques, depending on the story, the children, and workshop leader's interests and skills. [28] *La Matatena A.C.* specializes in plasticine animation and cutout. Advice from the workshop leader is that stories with only a few characters, and in which there is a change of sorts, will be easier to make. Having heard the arguments about what makes a particular story more or less suitable for animation, children vote for the story that best meets the requirements—or for their favorite story, regardless. Voting was not compulsory, and it was pretty much a straightforward process in group A, with children raising their hand to vote for any story they liked with no restriction as

to the number of votes they could cast, the story with the most votes winning. Group B had a different dynamic. Three of the older children started an intense lobbying campaign among their fellow classmates, whom they wanted to vote for their story. Thus some of the younger children requested that the voting process take place via secret ballot! Also, a few children were absent for this session and there was some discussion as to whether other children should be allowed to hold two votes, one for themselves and the other for an absent friend. This irregular attendance pattern became the norm in group B, and a source of disruption for the workshop. Eventually it was decided that voting would take place in several rounds, with one story being eliminated each time. With this method, the older girls' story, about a teenager who gets in trouble with her parents on account of the way she dresses, but is able to "escape" with the help of an imaginary friend, a fantastic, colorful dragon, lost very narrowly: by one vote.

With the outcome of the vote decided, the workshop leader then ensured that as many ideas/characters/situations/suggestions from the losing stories as possible were incorporated into the winning one, or that children whose stories got the fewest votes were given decision-making power over the winning story. It is not uncommon for children from disadvantaged backgrounds whose story fails to get votes to lose interest, or to suggest changes such as the main character getting killed or dying early on in the story. In fact, Mimi Orner and others have made the point that self-expression can be a limiting or disempowering act, since "celebrating student voice can backfire, by positing a fully egalitarian environment where none exists."[29] Children are, however, guided throughout the process. It takes a very experienced and caring instructor, such as Ricardo Zentella from *La Matatena A.C.*, to be able to restore their self-esteem while once again getting them involved in the filmmaking. In the 2011 summer workshop, the winning story in group B, proposed by the younger children, was about tolerance and respect. It told the story of a squirrel that other animals in the woods rejected because of her upper-class accent, but whom they learned to like when they knew her better, since sharing life in the woods enabled them to see she was a very kind animal. This is in sharp contrast with the story that had been championed by the older girls, in which the dragon recalled the carnivalesque dimension Bakhtin understood as "an expression of agency, a transgressive challenge" that has historically been important among those with little power.[30] Nevertheless, the girls introduced grotesque and "excessive" characters to the story, such as an eagle that briefly kidnapped the squirrel.

The fourth stage of the workshop typically involves the production of a screenplay and a storyboard. It is, in other words, a matter of translating the sentences that were used to tell the story into images, which are then put together and hung on the classroom's walls, where they remain as a reference for the rest of the production work. Any audio that is envisaged in connection with a given scene is also noted. Children naturally communicate with drawings and the children in both groups were extremely good at the storyboard construction. During an initial stage they simply drew "emotions" and experimented with various colors, before finally illustrating the sentences from the screenplay. There was a general sense of accomplishment by the end of this session.



Figures 11.1 and 11.2 Puppets and scenery made by children at *La Matatena A.C.*



Figures 11.2

On completion of this stage the next few sessions are devoted to making the scenery and characters that will be needed. These tasks are completed before the actual animation work begins, the animation being done entirely by the children, frame by frame. Scenery for the first story involved the creation of igloos, a sea of raft paper strips, plasticine boats, and penguins. Children worked in small groups, with the workshop leader and the monitors helping as needed and frequently circulating among the tables, where children in group A could already be heard playing, as they used their newly made dolls as characters in other stories of their own, which they invented on the spot to engage their neighbors. The room was teeming with stories. For group B, the story required the making of a wooded area with two rivers and an island, a family of squirrels, two eagles, and other characters.

All in all, the children in this group worked in a quieter and more orderly manner, and it took them much longer to finish this phase.

The animation and filming process is extremely hard work, as both activities require considerable patience. Children took turns placing the characters where they should be for each shot, and operating the video camera. The lighting was controlled by the workshop leader who oversaw the whole process. In the meantime, children who were not animating or recording were either still working on scenery production, or playing. The audio was recorded during the last session, mostly with sounds made by the children themselves and library music, and this proved to be a lot of fun.

In 2011, the presence of Joris Van Dael provided a useful counterpoint, enabling *La Matatena A.C.* to compare workflow and assess the strengths and weaknesses of the methods of instruction of both institutions. A TV actor and theater director, Van Dael founded *Kidscam* in Belgium in 2003. With the support of the Flemish government, the *Kidscam* team visits primary and secondary schools to run three day cutout animation workshops, five hours per day. The key differences found between the European school and its Mexican counterparts were related to the use of technology, as the *Kidscam* workshop relies almost exclusively on computer animation. Also, the extent to which the activities were standardized and systematized was different. *Kidscam* did not use script comparisons to check for strengths and weaknesses, and there was no shadow play among its activities.[31] Indeed, the *Kidscam* scripts tend to be very loose, sometimes entailing very little narrative, and with an apparent emphasis instead on playful, ludic experimentations with color and texture. A typical video from *Kidscam, De ijsprinses* (*Ice Princess*, 2011), screened during the international festival, shows an ice skater spotted by death, whose scythe cracks the ice so the skater falls into the lake and dies. But as she is trying to keep afloat, death takes a close look at the girl for the first time, falls in love with her and saves her, the video ending with both death and the girl skating together. Van Dael's presence at *La Matatena A.C.*'s workshop B proved an engaging stimulus for a group of children whose motivation at times lagged, with the Belgian filmmaker clearly enlivening the sessions.

The last stage is of course devoted to editing. When the workshop includes older children, they participate in this stage too, and the workshop leader then

does the final rendering so the video is ready for theatrical exhibition. At *La Matatena A.C.* the video that comes out of the workshop process is shown at a gala event during the closing ceremony of the festival, an enormously thrilling occasion for the children and their families, who are among the audience. In 2011, two of the videos made at *Comunicación Comunitaria* that year were also shown at the festival, to wide acclaim. Children who had taken *La Matatena A.C.*'s film history and film appreciation workshops also had a chance to put their knowledge into practice as members of the jury, inasmuch they provided a rationale for their awarding choices during the closing ceremony. Most embassies usually send a representative to collect the prizes awarded by the children, and this was also the case in 2011.

Juguemos a Grabar

In between the cinephile cosmopolitanism of *La Matatena A.C.* and the instrumental communitarianism of *Comunicación Comunitaria, Juguemos a Grabar* has carved out a niche of it own. *Juguemos a Grabar* is inscribed within the "cultural industries" paradigm that seeks to maximize the various social and economic benefits that the arts can bring to a locality, especially in terms of social inclusion, the creation of jobs, and urban regeneration through cultural clustering. *Juguemos a Grabar* first started with the support of the state of Michoacán's Ministry of Culture, the state's Institute for the Welfare of Women, and the government of Morelia city. Together these bodies provided 250,000 MXN in total, some USD$19,377.50 at the time of writing. Yet, its founder and director, Sonia Aburto, who is a real entrepreneur, soon mobilized the support of Cinepolis, one of the largest film theater chains in the country. She also secured backing from the Morelia film festival, with its remit of promoting the national cinema, and from public and private museums, notably *Papalote, Museo del Niño* (*The Kite*, Children's Museum). Aburto believes the best way to further the aims and objectives of practice-based film education is "through a partnership between civil society and the private sector,"[32] and she thus seeks to generate as many synergies between film theaters, museums, and film schools as possible.

Juguemos a Grabar aspires to awaken a deep and enduring interest in film and video in children, offering 40-hour modules delivered on Saturdays over a two-year period to children between 8 and 15. The sessions focus on various aspects of video and filmmaking from makeup and costume to acting and cinematography,[33] and enlist the talent and expertise of professional actors, screenwriters, musicians, and other media experts from the state of Michoacán. In this sense, *Juguemos a Grabar* is more vocational in nature than *La Matatena A.C.* or *Comunicación Comunitaria*, since children who finish all courses receive a more thorough technical training over the two-year period—learning from media professionals from various areas of the industry—than do children at the summer or two-week workshops of the other two schools. They are also trained in skills that cater specifically to the job market,

such as interviewing and lighting a scene, skills not developed when learning animation—although both *La Matatena A.C.* and *Comunicación Comunitaria* have some documentary options—and the children targeted are older here. *Juguemos a Grabar* is especially active in the area of fundraising and public relations campaigns. By way of example, the documentary-making marathon organized for Children's Day in 2009 at Morelia's main square, *La Plaza de Armas*, was extremely successful. A call for proposals was launched a month in advance, with the following seven topics: children's rights, the zoo, security at home and at school, disability and children, children say no to drugs, child labor, and culture and education in Michoacán. A total of 48 proposals were received, and four were selected for video making on the day. The marathon lasted for 12 hours. Four editing booths were placed in each corner of the square, as the aim was to have the documentaries ready for outdoor screening there at 8 p.m., making a public event out of the occasion. Prizes provided by sponsors included video cameras, day tickets to popular theme parks and children's museums, as well as guided tours of the film studios. Yet, *Juguemos a Grabar* does not focus exclusively on documentary filmmaking. Their program entitled *Alas y Raíces a los Niños* (Wings and Roots for Children) is, for example, devoted to fiction film. Far more vocational in nature than L*a Matatena A.C.* and *Comunicación Comunitaria*, *Juguemos a Grabar* is starting to fulfill another important function in the landscape of practice-based film education in Mexico: the need to realize the economic potential that cultural industries such as animation and video production can bring to the regions that host and sustain them.

Conclusion

Western thought, relying on dualisms, characterized human beings from early on as split between "body" and "soul" or "spirit," later "mind." Although pre-Socratic in origin, this division was carried forward in Christianity and in secular thought by Cartesian philosophy, the consequence being that the realm of the mind was elevated and equated with divinity, the realm of the body despised. Worse, as a result of the way in which the pursuit of knowledge was later divided into the abstract and formalized realm of the mind, as opposed to the situated and experiential learning that relies on performing an activity or doing, much of the theory has ended up being alienated from practice. In this sense, the urge to do and to feel at the heart of practice-based film education is a welcome development. The promise that this kind of education holds is enormous, for the relevant practices truly make a difference to the lives of the children, their communities, and, eventually, to the various national film industries where these schools operate.

But the schools face an uphill task. To begin with, at the institutional level there is the lack of a cultural policy that properly takes film, and film for children, into account; second, these organizations operate within a now highly precarious economic environment; their work is on a per-project basis and they

Table 11.1 Table Comparing Training Workshops

	Comunicación Comunitaria	*La Matatena A.C.*	*Juguemos a Grabar*	*Kidscam*
Based in	Mexico City	Mexico City	Morelia	Amberes, Belgium
Time devoted to the workshops	6 five-hour sessions (30)	8 four-hour sessions (32)	Choice of several 40-hour modules delivered weekly over a two-year period	3 sessions, 4 hours each (15)
No. of participants	13	14	12	24
Ages	8–13	6–13	8–15	10
Use of Technology	Low. Animation by hand, only editing and rendering with computer	Low. Animation by hand, only editing and rendering with computer	High. Mostly used for documentary making and fiction film.	High. All animation done with computers
Activities	Standardized	Standardized, but also case by case response	Standardized, but also case by case response	Fully systematized and standardized
Representative work	*Magical Hands* series. Documentaries on the making of traditional handcrafts	*Ya, no fastidien!* Award-winning animation to raise awareness on global pollution	*The Morelia city centre.* Documentary	Playful, ludic cutout shorts

AQ: Tables in Ch 11 and 12 have no in-text citations. Please provide them if necessary.

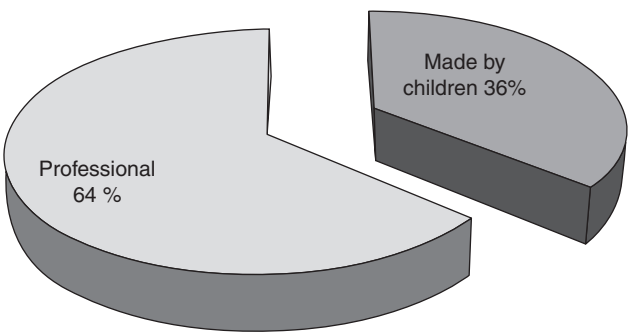


Figure 11.3 International Children's Film Festival, 2011.

are continuously bidding for funds to be able to run their programs; and third, there is the issue of the diverse background of their target population, which often makes the groups extremely challenging to teach. At a more fundamental level, there is also a sense of a very profound crisis, pertaining to both values

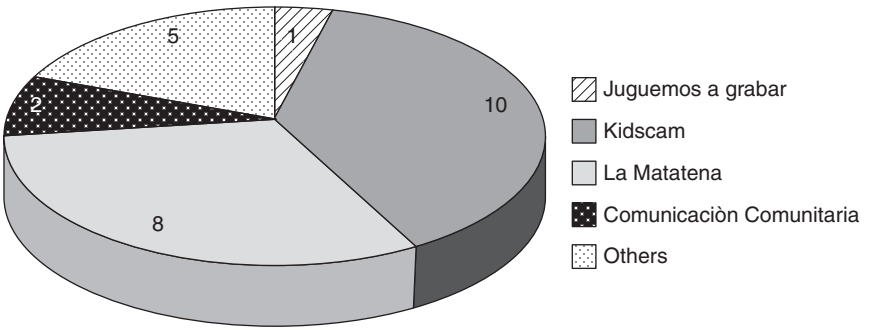


Figure 11.4 Films made by children by school.

and financial matters, in the present context of a so-called flexible accumulation of capital.[34] However, it is precisely the massive nature of the challenges that make their work all the more urgent and necessary. As Maxine Greene puts it:

> Fundamentally, perhaps, I am conscious of the tragic dimension in every human life. Tragedy, however, discloses and challenges; often, it provides images of men and women on the verge. We may have reached a moment in our history when teaching and learning, if they are to happen meaningfully, must happen on the verge. Confronting a void, confronting nothingness, we may be able to empower the young to create and recreate a common world—and, in cherishing it, in renewing it, discover what it signifies to be free.[35]

I contend that in their teaching of practice-based film education, *La Matatena A.C.*, *Comunicación Comunitaria*, and *Juguemos a Grabar* are already training Mexican children in this practice of freedom, at the edge.

Acknowledgments

I am extremely grateful to Liset Cotera and her team at *La Matatena A.C.* This chapter would not have come about without their generous help and support over the research period and beyond. I am similarly grateful to Joris Van Dael, Irma Avila Pietrasanta, Abril Dávila Cabrera, and Sonia Aburto.

Notes

1. John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Touchstone, 1997).
2. Maria Montessori, *Maria Montessori's Own Handbook: A Guide to her Ideas and Materials* (New York: Random House, 1994).
3. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1996).
4. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).

5. Colin Beard, *The Experiential Learning Toolkit: Blending Practice with Concepts* (London: Kogan Page, 2010), 4.
6. Michael Hoechsmann and Stuart R Poyntz, *Media Literacies: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 104.
7. *Matatena* is a word in Nahuatl, the language spoken by indigenous inhabitants of central Mexico, meaning "handful of stones." The game involves throwing five small stones or beans onto a flat surface and then trying to pick them up one by one during the time it takes for a small ball also thrown by the participant to bounce back from the table. The aim is to collect all the stones in the shortest possible time, without touching other stones. It is useful to develop children's motor coordination, and much enjoyed even today.
8. By film history I mean the history of cinema, as children use zoetropes, praxinoscopes, and magic lanterns as toys to learn about the origins of the moving image. They also learn some of the history of animation and of Mexican films for children.
9. Hoechsmann and Poyntz, *Media Literacies*, 131.
10. Referring to the historical context of the 1960s in which art cinema was being institutionalized in Europe, Susan Sontag defined cinephilia as a special love that cinema inspired, which evoked a sense of wonder, "born of a conviction that cinema was an art unlike any other" whereby "people took movies into themselves and felt liberated by the experience of surrender to, of being transported by, what was on the screen." Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema," *The New York Times*, February 25, 1996. Others have argued this love is in fact ahistorical, with cinephilia alive and well in the digital age. Jenna Ng, "Love in the Time of Transcultural Fusion," in *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, ed. Marijke De Valck and Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005). The workshops offered at *La Matatena* can certainly be said to be introducing new generations into the practice of love for the cinema.
11. Meryl Aldridge, *Understanding the Local Media* (Maiden Head: Open University Press, 2007), 5.
12. Irma Avila Pietrasanta, *Apantallad@s: Manual de Comunicación en Radio y Video para Niños* (México D.F.: Comunicación Comunitatria, 2011), 14.
13. Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), 22.
14. Liset Cotera, "interview with, about *La Matatena*: *Origins, Mission, Perspectives*," by Armida de la Garza, July 20, 2011.
15. Liset Cotera, interview.
16. Marina Stavenhagen, "Oasis de Frescura y Diversidad," *Festival Internacional de Cine para Niños (…y no tan niños)* 16 (2011): 3.
17. Indeed Liset Cotera explains how the school name "*La Matatena*" captures this: "Matatena games are highly personal, and unique. Each time a child throws the stones they fall into a different position, and the strategy to pick them up is also different. Cinema is like that too: each film is a unique experience for each one of us, for we all engage with it both collectively and from our own, individual perspective." Liset Cotera, interview.
18. Some of these can be viewed at http://www.lamatatena.org/es/videoteca/animaciones/
19. Liset Cotera, "Altas Dosis de Cine para Niños," *Toma, Revista Mexicana de Cine* May/June (2010): 73.
20. In 2011 the festival featured 72 films from 21 countries. Among these, 6 were feature films, 3 documentaries, 13 were short films, 23 were short animation films, and 25 were short animation films made by children, 8 at *La Matatena A.C.*, 2 at *Comunicación Comunitaria*, and 1 at *Juguemos a Grabar.* Three venues participated: Cineteca Nacional

(the National Film Library), Chapingo University, and the Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Santa Fe Campus.

21. *La Matatena A.C.*'s work regularly includes children from indigenous and minority communities, street children, and children with disabilities, as well as children from government and private schools in Mexico City and the cities of Cuernavaca and Monterrey.
22. See for instance Mimi Orner, "Interrupting the Calls for Student Voice in Liberatory Education: A Feminist Post-structuralist Perspective," in *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy*, ed. Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore (New York: Routledge, 1992).
23. Hoechsmann and Poyntz, *Media Literacies*, 123.
24. Elizabeth Soep, "Beyond Literacy and Voice in Youth Media Education," *McGill Journal of Education* 41, no. 3 (2006): 202.
25. Rosemary Althouse, Margaret H. Johnson, and Sharon T. Mitchell, *The Colours of Learning: Integrating the Visual Arts into the Early Childhood Curriculum* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 9.
26. Michael Uwemedino and Joshua Oppenheimer, "History and Histrionics: Vision Machine's Digital Poetics," in *Fluid Screens, Expanded Cinema*, ed. Janine Marchessault and Susan Lord (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).
27. Uwemedino and Oppenheimer, "History and Histrionics," 184.
28. These are: cutout, animation using objects, puppets, or plasticine models, collage, pixellation, or fiction film with actors. Both C*omunicación Comunitaria* and *La Matatena A.C.* offer documentary filmmaking for older children.
29. Mimi Orner, "Interrupting the Calls for Student Voice." A far more important concern though has been raised by Sarah Bragg, namely that "the call for youth to develop their own voices can mask a more subtle form of regulation" as young people are asked "to become [a] certain kind of enterprising subjects", the subjects of neoliberalism. Bragg has a point, but this would in my view depend on the social context in which the learning takes place. See Sarah Bragg, "'Student Voice' and Governmentability: The Production of Enterprising Subjects?" *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 28, no. 3 (2007): 343.
30. Hoechsmann and Poyntz, *Media Literacies*, 135.
31. Joris Van Dael, interviewed by Armida de la Garza, August 12, 2011.
32. Liliana David, "Corto michoacano, ganador de concurso latinoamericano de cine infantil y juvenil," *La Voz de Michoacán* (2008), 1.
33. The full curriculum comprises: screenwriting, film music, film direction, storyboard, acting, cinematography, editing, make-up, costume, and production.
34. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
35. Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College, 1988), 22.

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