# Training Teachers
# in the Videomuseums project:
# analysing film for teachers,
# educationalists and their students

**Sabine Westerhoff-Schroer**



*Screening of students' films, Frankfurt, 9/2011*

## From process to product – the value of film analysis

A documentary lives off the claim that it shows a part of reality. A documentary is therefore a voyage of discovery. It takes viewers to places that they would not visit otherwise or to worlds of thought that are unfamiliar to them, or it allows them to make observations they would not make otherwise. For children and adolescents, however, it is often hard to distinguish which of the many film and television formats that purport to be "real" do in fact represent reality. This method of analysis is intended to enable them to recognise the difference between a fictional film and a real documentary and to teach them to take a critical view of their production and stylistic approach. Examples of descriptive documentaries: presenting the Deutsche Bibliothek (National Library of Germany) by tracing the path of a book before it lands on a shelf, animal documentaries, travel accounts, the series 37 Grad (37 Degrees) broadcast on Germany's ZDF public television channel. Examples of rousing documentaries, which aim to raise public awareness of a poor state of affairs in a varyingly radical form, are contrasting documentaries. An example could be the cultivation of hybrid plants and its impacts, both positive and negative, on our nutrition, or a documentary describing the failure of the government six months after Fukushima.

## Film analysis in the classroom

As a method taken from the study of film, film analysis is the scientific examination of a film with the aid of specific tools. Breaking the film down into its components can show students a manageable path towards its analysis and interpretation. They can thus be taught how to understand film in a fun and age-appropriate manner.

Examples for use in lessons are currently being developed in Hesse. MOK Offenbach/Frankfurt[1] has already been applying the method to television news (from year 5) and television adverts (from year 3) and short film (from year 5). When applied to the Comenius-Regio programme it would surely enable an interesting comparative analysis of Greek and German news or television adverts. In order to avoid linguistic obstacles, both partner countries could also include English news in addition to news in their own language. In 2012, we decided that the Videomuseums from the students (most of them documentary clips) of both countries could enhance an interesting comparative analysis.

In particular, the method can be used to analyse the Videomuseums that have been produced in the Comenius-Regio programme in 2011 and 2012:

Examples of the video clips from the two countries on www.Videomuseums.eu:

▶ *Topic Friendship*: *Freundschaftsbändchen* (*Friendship Bracelets* – training clip, Germany 2011), *As long as There are Friends* (Greece 2012), *Citydreams* (Germany 2012) and *Geld macht nicht glücklich* [*Money Doesn't Make You Happy*] (Germany 2012)

▶ *Topic Music*: *Music is Life* (Germany 2011), *Our Base* (Greece 2011), *Mad Villagers* (Greece 2012), *Mine and*



*Teachers and students' training, Frankfurt, 9/2011*

*Yours* (Germany and Greece 2011)

▶ *Topic Media*: *Computer vs Environment* (Greece 2011), *Turn off Screen* (Greece 2012)

▶ *Topic Youth and Style*: *The way I am* (Greece 2011), *Machen Kleider Leute?* [*Do Clothes Make People?*] (Germany 2012)

The method can be used to train teachers as well as to train students.

### Target group

Educationalists and social educators can move away from the teacher-centred approach by using media in different subjects (language, politics, history, art and many others). In this way, teachers obtain practical, modern access to the areas of structure, analysis and functional mechanisms of documentary film. In addition to content, students gain an insight into the composition, structure and workings of such films.

### Objective

The focus is on students' critical examination of the film genre. Ideally, short documentary films, short films and trailers are more suitable for use in lessons than long films because they show all formal information contained in long films. Aspects of film structure, image editing strategies, film reality (what happens in the film?) and its impact on the viewer are captured more quickly in documentaries, enabling results to be obtained in a double lesson.

The analysis can be used as preparation for an in-class practical project. Ideally, the lesson would be followed by a screenplay workshop of around two hours. It enables the group to develop ideas of their own. In this way, the basic dramaturgical structure (introduction, main part, conclusion), possible moments of tension (conflicts, enigmas, apparent solutions) and characters can be considered. A practical project can be carried out with support from professional filmmakers in 3 to 5 days during which the students shoot a short film of their own, complete with editing and soundtrack.

Lessons are prepared using six different worksheets to work in six groups (each group consists of 3 - 4 students), as described below and with an appendix of definitions.

| Worksheet 1 | Film 1 | Film 2 |
|---|---|---|
| 1. *Content*<br>▸ What is shown? Try to capture as much as possible.<br>▸ Is there an introduction, main part and conclusion?<br>▸ What characters are acting?<br>▸ What does the viewer have to deduce because it is outside the field of view? | | |

| Worksheet 2 | Film 1 | Film 2 |
|---|---|---|
| 2. *Emotional and rhetorical design*<br>▸ What is the effect of the clip?<br>▸ Are there sudden turning points, climax or suspense?<br>▸ What kind of story is told? | | |

| Worksheet 3 | Film 1 | Film 2 |
|---|---|---|
| 3. *Editing/Cut*<br>▸ Time, beat (fast or slow cuts)?<br>▸ Are there visible/invisible cuts?<br>▸ Rhythm? | | |

| Worksheet 4 | Film 1 | Film 2 |
|---|---|---|
| 4. *Camera*<br>▸ Camera field sizes (see below – appendix)<br>▸ Is the camera moving or still?<br>▸ Special perspective views (bird's eye view, worm's eye view) | | |

| Worksheet 5 | Film 1 | Film 2 |
|---|---|---|
| 5. *Picture (This person closes his/her ears!)*<br>▸ Relation between information/emotion?<br>▸ Texture: is the information written?<br>▸ Visual effects?<br>▸ Additional graphics? | | |

| Worksheet 6 | Film 1 | Film 2 |
|---|---|---|
| 6. *Sound* (*This person closes his/her eyes!)*<br>▸ Original sound of speech or off-screen speaker used?<br>▸ Volume, audio effects, sound cuts?<br>▸ What kind of music is used?<br>▸ Relation between information/emotion? | | |

***Tools/ technical equipment:*** 6 Worksheets, 1 sheet of paper of results, Smartboard (if available), PC, video projector and Internet connection.

***Duration time of analysis (3 hours):***

▶ Welcome and presentation of topic.

▶ Viewing and listening task: Find an appropriate, fitting catchword for each of the 6 topic areas of the 6 worksheets (Content, Emotional and rhetorical design, Editing, Camera, Picture, Sound). Check if it has been understood.

▶ Hand out analysis sheets in 6 small groups of students or teachers (with 18 people, the first three sitting next to each other receive worksheet 1, the second three worksheet 2, etc., see tools below) and explain them.

▶ Clarify concepts (field sizes, angles, definitions).

▶ Watch film.

▶ Discussion round in small groups for a few minutes.

▶ 6 group speakers present the result of the 6 groups.

▶ The results are compiled and interpreted using a summary paper of all six topics. The results are put together graphically in the jointly produced picture, allowing them to be interpreted. Applying them to several documentary films allows illustrative comparisons to be made or differences to be worked out.

Pupils from the groups present the results in the following worksheet. The ensuing discussion of the results enables an interpretation to be made on the basis of the fundamental principles of film production.



*Students during a video shooting, Frankfurt, 2011*



*Students' meeting, Frankfurt, 2010*

The following worksheet can be used to collect conclusions for comparisons:

| Worksheet of results | Film 1 | Film 2 |
|---|---|---|
| 1. *Content*:<br><br>Which Content? Characters?<br>What does the viewer imagine<br>that is outside the scene? | | |
| 2. *Emotional and rhetorical design*:<br><br>Are there sudden turning points,<br>climax or suspense?<br>What kind of story is told? | | |
| 3. *Camera*:<br><br>Perspective (bird, frog)<br>Moving camera, still camera?<br>Are there close ups...? | | |
| 4. *Editing*:<br><br>Time, beat (fast, slow cut)<br>Are there visible/invisible cuts?<br>Rhythm? | | |
| 5. *Picture shot – closed ears*:<br><br>Is there anything written?<br>Are there graphics or<br>visual effects? | | |
| 6. *Sound – closed eyes*:<br><br>Relation between information and emotion?<br>Are there sound-cuts or audio effects? | | |
| 7. *Find a sentence to describe the aim of the two films*: | | |

The analysis task is very well suited as preparation for a project week or practical project. Participants are already familiar with the genre-specific terminology and are able to come up with specific ideas of their own for the plot. It also encourages them to look closely and critically at the individual contents instead of merely consuming them. The intent of the film can thus be described in one sentence in the plenary (class) session. This analysis method can be used to synthesise, compare and assess the core message of films, providing new, creative content for film ideas of their own.

## Eight camera field sizes



1. *Extreme long shot*: Shows persons or landscapes in a panoramic view.



2. *Long shot*: Presents the location and action.



3. *Medium long shot*: Shows the whole person, suitable for introducing new characters.



4. *Medium close shot*: Focuses the interest on one particular actor.
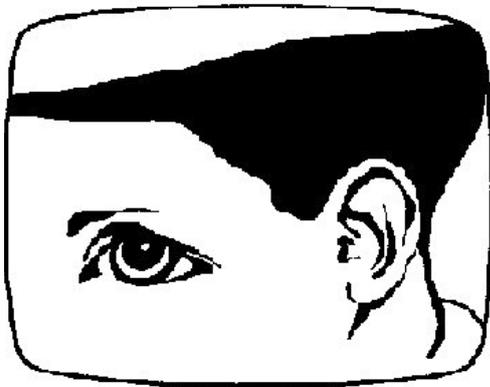


5. *Close-up*: Mostly used in dialogues.



6. *Head*: Shot between close-up and extreme close up.

7. **Extreme close-up**: Particularly used in emotional scenes.



2. **Bird's eye view**: Can show the viewer's superiority.



8. **Detail**: Detail shots are used to show that the viewer may be very close to the theme or situation.

## Notes

1. MOK stands for Medienprojektzentrum Offener Kanal (Media Project Centre – Open Channels).

## Bibliography

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## Camera Perspectives



1. **View from the bottom to the top, worm's eye view**: Makes the viewer feel like the underdog or frightened.

**Sabine Westerhoff-Schroer** studied musicology, education and social science (MA) at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität in Münster (University of Münster) in Germany. From 1992 to 1997, she was in charge of music programmes and local news at local radio stations in Western Germany. From 1997 to 2001, she worked as a media coach. Since 2001, she has been a media educationalist at the Media Project Centre of the local television station Open Channel (MOK) Offenbach/Frankfurt. Her primary task is to develop and practise media concepts for primary to high schools including classical media and new media. She has been planning, developing and implementing practical further training courses in media for multipliers (educationalists, social educators) in youth work, in and outside schools. She gives consultancy for implementation of practical projects with children and adolescents between the ages of 3 and 18. She works on the development and testing of new options for competence-oriented teaching involving the use of new media. She is married and has two children (aged 8 and 11).