Focus group interview at school “A” – 24.04.06

R: I would like to know, do you think Film Study it is important in today’s society?

I1: Absolutely. We live in a visual age, the children are surrounded by visuals all the time and they understand that probably better than words. And they need to actually... be able understand what is being communicated through the visuals. So I think it’s important.

R: Um...do you feel the department is um...well, making enough resources available regarding film studies, at the moment?

I1: The department itself.

R: Yes.

I1: Well I am going to speak from an FET point of view. Um... we haven’t received anything regarding Film Study in the documents that we’ve received. There’s nothing on Film Study. But um, with regards, you know I have a lot of stuff I can draw on all the time. But um...from the department we haven’t received anything for if FET this year. I stand to be corrected, I may be wrong but
from what I’ve come across in the, what do you call it? The National Curriculum Statements (nodding head no) that there’s nothing there on Film Study.

I3: I echo what I1 has said um with teaching matric, we’ve had that same set work for so long. And I don’t mind as I1 actually teaches it (referring to Grade 12) as enjoys teaching it. But when you talk about the department supplying, well there is no option really matric you are stuck with that it. And we tend to teach it in Grade 11 because um the Grade 12 year has become so short, so in actual fact between grade eleven and twelve they are only doing one set work movie. But Grades 8, 9 and 10 at ****** (high school’s name) as you know, they are exposed to Film Study. Well they have been over the years extensively and to all sorts of background notes and things to enable them to become literate and to know the terminology and language of film. And as I1 says feel that because they are exposed to it as their own choice, they can read books if they want to read books, but they don’t. So we must then move with them and then try to have a balance and teach them what is good film and what is bad film. Because they see film and they think all film is acceptable. And also it’s done so subtly they fix on emotions. That they need to be conscious of it and then it becomes subconscious later and they know where they’re being manipulated and where they are not.

R: So do you think there is a need for development in Film Study, from the department’s side?

I2: Definitely, I think so. We need to have support in that. Because they want us to teach film studies but we don’t have the support or the resources to do that.

I1: Also to diversify and not just look at a film as such but possibly…sitcoms or different genres of visual communication. You know we look at cartoons, in language and visual literacy and we discuss body language, and that kind of thing. But, um…there are also other genres, other than just teaching a film. And we’ve never tapped into that at all. You know you can use say a sitcom, if you
teaching a theme or something and they’re say dealing with family issues you can use it but not actually looking at television. Maybe reality T.V. that kind of thing, there’s a whole lot of new stuff. I mean reality T.V. on its own is worth studying. (everyone laughs) It’s not really reality anyway.

I3: Exactly

I2: And I think also to add to that, with the visual side to all these kind of things. With advertisements, we’re being doing advertisements but we’re only focusing on magazines…

I3: Pictures.

I2: Ja, pictures, and there’s a whole world there, um that you can look at and discuss and see how they’ve done these things. So we really need help in that area.

R: Now, on this DVD there was the director’s commentary feature, where he did go through the movie and explain certain things that were happening. Did you find this of any benefit or did you find it a waste of time would viewing it?

I1: Well… if I was say teaching Miss Congeniality, I wouldn’t simply just put the film on and let the director just comment on everything because obviously it’s not enough detail. But I think you know he gives us a lot of you know. Because he has directed the film he’s put his artistic touch on this section of the film or he puts it on the whole film, but, um, he gives reasons why he chose to do this and he gives little antidotes and that kind of thing. So it does make it a lot clearer. I would definitely use it. But I wouldn’t only rely on it, obviously. But I’ddd, ja, I actually enjoyed it I must admit. (everyone laughs)
I2: Yes and all, the notes he makes about actors and how he’s chosen them. And what I find interesting is, specifically with now with Miss Congeniality, how they tried to change Sandra Bullock from first being unglamorous and had this kind of look and that they, how they used the lights and so forth (others are agreeing). That was I found it very interesting. Because you will not notice it because you are not the director. And then how they used color and light again at the end to make sure that she is glamorous and she looks now like this beauty queen. So I find it very interesting what, what, they have to say. But sometime with other commentary…um… it’s more a personal thing, if it’s the actors, they talk, they will see other kind of things and in the movie and try to amuse you in a way. But the director’s more serious and you know very professional and it’s the craft of directing that he is focusing on. (the whole time the others were agreeing).

R: He approaches it more from the analytical aspect?

I2: Yes (other’s agree)

R: And did he discuss, for example, elements with regard to film, you mentioned the lighting but other shots maybe why he used this wide angles or why he zoomed in here, did he cover any of those aspects that could be of benefit?

I2: I can remember some of it, he did speak about the camera angles and the shots. He specifically mentioned some of them.

R: Um…so if I can reiterate what you said, you do feel that it will be to your benefit in the classroom. Do you, can you think of any disadvantages associated with the DVD the use of the director’s commentary, cause this is seen as a resource for the teacher to use. So the teacher will be viewing it and it will help her teaching, but could you think of any disadvantages actually associated with using the DVD director’s commentary feature?
I2: I, I just think, what I1 said earlier, that we should not only focus on that. You should still have your resources and your background notes and that is just helping you, um, it's an extra tool to analyze this movie. But it should not be the only thing you focus on, but it can definitely help.

I1: Ja, by just providing some support to what you have taught, the children. And, and, and I found if you taught the film, for example and then you show, you would show them the director's commentary, then they also from a teachers' point of view see we're not talking rubbish. Cause they often in film, they say “how did you know that? How can you say that they've used a close up there and that it symbolizes x y and z?” They can't see it, we're making it up so, I think it would help us with that. Help make the learners believe what we actually saying.

R: And when you teach Film Study how do you generally approach it, do you let the children watch the movie first or do you explain it as it goes or…?

I2: Well it depends if it’s like the first time they are taught Film Study. I personally think that you should first introduce them to the genre of film and just explain what is a basic camera shot and so forth and then they can watch the movie first. We do that because we want them to first get the plot, the storyline and get to know the characters before they need to focus on specific things and analyze the work and the characters. So they need to do that first. But, um, I think it depends on one teacher to another. But it is very important to have a background and scope, a view on things, first.

I1: I also think it depends on the level, you know grade 8 and 9 you need more discussion where as with the grade 11s by that stage they should know what a long shot is and they have been exposed to film work. So what I do is I show them the films first. I don’t discuss a thing with them and then after that I go back and I do my teaching. I don’t know how…(gesturing to the another teacher).
I3: No I also do the researcher will know (researcher was a learner at the school). I show the film first and then have a general discussion on it before we go to the terminology and technology and just get their interest in the issues that are raised. Especially if they are relevant to them and get them involved. So that they really enjoy the film itself and then start. Because otherwise they think that you’re just breaking it down all the time and they really need to have a personal involvement before you start making it education and teach them the different techniques of film and the use of sound and music and all those kind of things. Which they enjoy, but I think the storyline is still important the issues that are raised. And how you can compare how issues that are relevant to life today with teenagers are done differently in books to films. You know I always like to compare if there is particularly a book on the same film. To say the strengths and weaknesses of both, because otherwise they just don’t even know, they don’t read books. So they don’t know that you are having your imagination manipulated, in a film you have no imagination. Whereas a book you rely totally on your imagination. So it’s really killing imagination, film. But because they look at it, we try to teach them to appreciate and know the good and bad. Perhaps we should use it to engender further interest in films, ur…in reading books.

I1: You’re really seeing the director’s imagination in a film.

I3: Ja and what…how he sees the character. And you read a book and you picture yourself, well as I’ve said to the children, you read a book and if I ask you to draw a picture of one of the characters say, in Gatsby or whatever and say now you draw a picture. Every single child will have a different picture. But once they see the film they are not allowed to, film does not allow them to. Because they have a preconceived idea of what that person looks like. I think it really cramps and stifles the imagination. But um... (gesturing, don’t know...).

R: Now the different levels was mentioned, of the children grade 8 and 9, whatever, would you say that as, grade 11, well 10, 11 and 12, you need to go
into a lot more detail and therefore you need to have more Film Study knowledge?
Do the children demand it more or…?

I1: Are you saying rather than if I were a grade 8 teacher I don’t need that amount of knowledge?

R: (Nods yes).

I1: Well you would go into more detail. Obviously you’re teaching it on a deeper level. So yes you would need more knowledge. But I would think that a grade 8 teacher would have as much knowledge knowing where you are going with this. (other notion yes).

R: And also on levels. In the classroom you have children who have been exposed to Film Study and you have children who haven’t been. Um, how do you bridge that gap? Is there a way to go about it or is it just through your teaching?

I1: Well I can’t answer that because children that I, we’ve taught Film Study from grade 8 so by the time they get to grade 10 then they do have that knowledge.

R: So in grade 8 a good foundation is laid at least?

I2: Mmm, but if there’s a problem, let’s say we have a new child, that comes from a school that hasn’t done it, I mean they do receive notes that also includes the basic terminology …

I3: Background.

I2: Background. So it’s actually up to them to make sure that they understand. But through the teaching, I mean you emphasize these things and you repeat
things the whole time anyway. Even though you expect them to know. Cause then they forgot (everyone laughs). And you have anyway got to go through it again.

I1: It's true they do they, forget very quickly from year to year.

I3: Day to day.

R: Um...Did you feel that the DVD's commentary, um, had a good balance between say the theoretical aspect of Film Study and of applying it practically. Cause now you can see, you know, what elements have been applied, cause he went over, as you said, the lighting. And you can physically see what he was talking about and understand it. Did that help at all?

I2: Mmm (notions yes, busy eating, notions to wait). I'm eating now…

I1: It just formalizes things for you.

I3: Reinforces

I1: Yes.

I3: Whether you've actually assessed it correctly yourself.

I2: What I've picked up with Film Study is people do not notice things. And when I started with Film Study for the first time I realized that, I mean you hear the music. And that's why I, it's good to watch the movie two to three times, for something like Film Study. Because you do not, at the beginning you cannot take in everything. You first worry about the storyline. So you first want to know who is the characters and the plot and then you start to realize that music that they use now actually helps, with setting the scene and the mood, um, the lightening that
they’ve used, the angle that they’ve used, so all those things comes later and with the director’s commentary you get to see those things immediately then. You notice them, because you’re informed of it. And it helps you then as a teacher, because let’s say you’re not going to show the director’s commentary because we don’t have time, because we always play with time. But now you’ve learnt from the director’s commentary and now you can also apply that in the classroom and get your children to notice them.

I1: It’s also about um…the subconscious messages or that you are receiving the whole time and you don’t even know you’re receiving them, the children don’t know. So when the director comes in and comments then you realize, oh hold on, I’m thinking about that, that’s what’s happening there. Sorry my dog is just barking. She feels let out.

I3: She has her views on film.

I1: Yes.

R: Do you feel that the use of the director’s commentary will alleviate some frustrations with regard to Film Study. I know for example that you’ve all have experience, but say for example a new teacher came in and didn’t quite know what was going on, would this contribute and help her or his knowledge?

I1: Director’s commentary?

R: Yes.

I3: For sure it would.

I1: Absolutely!
I2: Ja, definitely. Well it depends from film to film…

I3: That's true.

I2: Not all directors comment on specific things. But it will help you if you don't know. Even if you don't understand the storyline and why they chose to use this character, or why they chose to use these costumes, anything like that. You can get some insight into what the director's saying. So it will help you.

R: And then lastly, I'd like to know, how would, if you would you it, how would you use the director's commentary in teaching of Film Study in your classroom, would you use it as a research, er, resource or how would you use it exactly?

I1: I would use it as reinforcement with the children. Obviously I, for me I would, I would, view it and use it and take what he said and incorporate it into my teaching of the film. And then after I've taught the film, just show them the film again and with the director's commentary just to, like revision.

I3: Sum up and reinforce and reaffirm.

I1: Ja.

I3: I would agree with that.

R: Are there any other comments you would like to make about the use of the director’s commentary feature in film studies or film studies?

...  

I3: I must confess I've never used it with doing Strictly Ballroom there was no, well you can get hold of it but actually I've never used it.
I2: Um, yes, I used it last year when I taught Strictly Ballroom, I used the DVD and it really to the children they enjoyed it so much. And after, they also had like a making of the movie and where they spoke to the character in their real…you know, um…, real life…

I3: Clothing

I2: Ja clothing and Liz you know, with not blonde hair but brown hair, it looked much better on her, but um… and then they could in a way realise oh they are only actors, cause they get so involved in the story. And um and I could see that it contributed to them as well to understand the movie. It’s very helpful.

R: So then the general idea is that you would think the director’s commentary could be a resource that used with other information could benefit and aid to the teaching of film studies.

I1: Absolutely. I think it’s the future of Film Study. It’s going to form part of the future of Film Study. And it’s easy, it’s accessible, if you have a DVD player and a t.v, how easy is that to get hold of a resource? You get the film plus the resource on one disc…

I2: Yes, for one price.

(everyone laughs)