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PUBLISHER

Collection Sehen, Editorial Universidad Oberta de Catalunya

VERSION

VoR (Version of Record)

PUBLISHER STATEMENT

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REPOSITORY RECORD

Smith, Mark. 2019. "Artists' Moving Image and Its Impact on Learning in Secondary School Communities". figshare. <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/10033064.v1>.

# Artists' moving image and its impact on learning in secondary school communities

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## Introduction

There is a growing knowledge base about the effects of moving image education within the context of engagement with formal studies, but there is a gap in research regarding AMI, especially research which emanates from an ethnographic perspective. Since the NFER report, *Arts Education in Secondary Schools: Effects and Effectiveness* [1] which suggested that moving image has been under-represented in research into the impact of the arts in schools, significant qualitative research in this area has been intermittent.

In 1961, Marshall McLuhan commented upon the transformation of television 'into an art form [2].' Two years later, this evolution was exemplified by Nam June Paik in his solo show, *Exposition of Music: Electronic Television*. Questioning how this transformation has impacted upon formal art studies was the starting point for my critical pedagogic studies. The foci of the AMI (artists' moving image) *Impact on Learning* research project have been based within formal secondary art, design and media education in England. These foci have included examinations of the following: the state of artists' moving image (AMI) practice as a field of study; the provision of AMI related learning resources; the impact upon students' learning resulting from AMI studies.

My hypothesis is that, over a three year period, I will be able to estimate the development of students' understanding and assimilation of AMI practices. The age of students participating in the *AMI Impact on Learning* research project ranges from eleven to eighteen years old. In addition to collecting data from students, the project is recording the parallel development of pedagogic practices, experienced by participatory teachers.

Within this paper, I shall continue to refer to AMI practices. These modes of work are also labelled variously as artists' film, video art, experimental animation, time-based art and time-based media practices. I have included the latter term within the URL (Internet address) of [www.timebasedmedia.com](http://www.timebasedmedia.com), a learning resource I have constructed and published, as part of my practice-based response to the initial research findings.

We are here in Barcelona to celebrate the life and thoughts of Marshall McLuhan. In 1957, McLuhan postulated that 'we are beginning to realize that the new media are not just mechanical gimmicks for creating worlds of illusion, but new languages with new and unique powers of expression [3].' If artists have been using these 'new and unique powers of expression' for over half a century, then the fundamental questions of where and how AMI practices exist within formal secondary education are long overdue.

## The AMI Impact on Learning Research Project

Participation in the *AMI* research project has been requested of students, teachers, artists, academics, curators, distributors and gallery owners, in an effort to ascertain current thinking about the provision of AMI learning resources and its potential impact on learning in secondary schools in England. Artists' moving image practices were not familiar territory for the majority of teachers and students before their participation in the *AMI* research project. The data collected over the past year and a half has been sufficient enough to help me paint a broad picture, even though the *AMI* project is still very much in its infancy.

In 2010, field research commenced in a London comprehensive secondary school where I had previously taught. Through screenings of AMI works and discussion with Year 12 (sixteen to seventeen year olds) art students, it was ascertained that they were unaware of artists' use of film and video as creative media. Considering additional research sites, and the triangulation of the research programme, the choice of a second school for the location of subsequent field research came about as a result of support from Nikki Counley, a part-time administrative worker at Loughborough University. Nikki promotes the linking of local schools with their higher education neighbour. Although the school is the closest geographically to the university, its reputation has declined in recent years. With a decline in numbers of teenagers in Loughborough requiring local secondary schooling, the school has suffered a decline in enrolments, to the extent that its pupil roll is presently running at half capacity [4].

As this is a school undergoing enforced change, it is positioned it as an establishment which is more likely to actively seek change for the better. One result of this was creating the post of Resources Liaison Officer at the school. Essentially, this member of staff creates and utilises links between the school and local professionals, in order provide experiential opportunities for the students. Many of the children at the school come from under-achieving families with a history of long term unemployment [5] and Andy, the present incumbent of the post, has been instrumental in creating opportunities for students to experience professional working practices within the locality. A retired geography teacher, Andy has a passion for 'making a difference' in young people's lives, including introducing students to the notion that higher education is a potential pathway for them. Andy has encouraged his teaching colleagues at the school to participate in the *AMI* project. Three teachers (representing art, design technology and English) have so far supported the project, thus providing a strong basis for future research at their school.

Another discernible result of the school's reformative attitude has been the award of the Artsmark Gold Standard to the school. Artsmark is Arts Council England's flagship schools programme, 'celebrating commitment and passion for arts education in schools [6].' Moreover, applying for the Artsmark award has a strong impact on 'the range of curriculum activities and experiences available for pupils', creating a 'heightened awareness and capacity for change [7].'

The research project has been designed with the idea of revisiting participants in subsequent years firmly to the fore. As Stephanie Taylor notes, 'the ethnographer makes the enormous personal investment of moving into a community for an extended period [8].' As the triangulated aspect of the *AMI Impact on Learning* project develops, the plan is to include at least one more school in England (probably in Liverpool, via the pedagogic network that spreads out from the newly formed Free University of Liverpool) and one more school located outside of the UK.

So far in the research, it has been ascertained that artists' moving image learning resources are not readily available within the secondary schools under immediate examination; AMI related teaching and learning is not commonplace in the secondary art classroom; there is a reluctance on the part of teachers to embrace artists' moving image works as a predominant factor in contemporary art practices. Overarching this list of negatives is the understanding that artists will always be in the vanguard of experimenting with media, and therefore at the forefront of defining their cultural positioning. As McLuhan pointed out in 1964, 'Artists in various fields are always the first to discover how to enable one medium to use or to release the power of another [9].'

A month of school-based field research, with an emphasis on artists' moving imagery (AMI), was completed in April 2011. The engagement of Year 7 (eleven to twelve years old) secondary school students with learning has been documented within the praxis of participative and elicited video ethnography. That is, as much visual data as possible was recorded by the students with video camcorders, with as little intervention on my part as possible. My role as an actor within the classroom was as a temporary teacher, with the attendant emic responsibilities of behaviour management and time-keeping [10].

At the start of each session, videos were screened using either DVDs or QuickTime movie files. Every student was offered the chance to comment upon their immediate reaction to a screening via the use of 'traffic lights'. Each student group was presented with three coloured squares. One red. One orange. One green. Red is for... "Please... no more!" Orange means "OK so far... let's give it a little longer". Green is obviously "LOVE IT... LEAVE IT ON!" During the contact hours, a broad range of works were screened, from industrial output such as Disney's *Dumbo*, through to Samantha Moore's animated documentary, *An Eyeeful of Sound*. Planning the screening aspect of the field research has taken over a year and is in a continual state of reflectivity. A notable contribution in this respect was made by Paul Wells, Director of the Animation Academy Research Group at Loughborough University, who argued for the inclusion of familiar 'industrial' works in the first phase of screenings. Hence the inclusion of Disney and Japanese animé in the programme. Ultimately, the most popular of the screenings proved to be Tracey Moffatt's *Doomed*, which is made of edited clips from disaster movies. This AMI video forms part of the Kaldor Art Projects' learning resource, *MOVE: Video Art in Schools*, which has been distributed free of charge to secondary schools in Australia since 2009, with the express purpose of stimulating 'students to further explore the world of contemporary art [11].' At the end of each screening at the school in Loughborough, the students would formulate questions they would like to ask of the film or video maker. Contained within the research design is the premise that students communicate with artists. Tariq Rimawi's animated film, *Missing*, was screened and received well by the majority of the student audience. Fortunately for these students, Tariq is one of my research colleagues at Loughborough University and he kindly agreed to attend a second screening of *Missing*, to be followed by a Question and Answer session. The students surprised both their art teacher and myself with the depth and relevance of their questioning. The teacher concerned was observing quietly and invisibly from an adjacent room, a state of passivity required by my role as temporary teacher. From technical questions to political comments, the range of approaches adopted by these eleven and twelve year olds towards Tariq's film was impressive. Another method used to measure the impact of the screenings was to ask the students to animate their own name. Firstly, the students were asked to interview one another, using the video camcorders I had provided for this express purpose. The intention behind these interviews was to instigate an autobiographical state of

mind within this group of twenty six students. Selected experimental animation pieces by Norman McLaren were shown, including *Free Radicals*. In this film, text jumps around the screen, accompanied by rhythmic drumming. The students were then immediately asked to animate their own first names, using storyboard pads and coloured pens. The subsequent animated work, which I will present at this conference, gives an indication of how quickly some of the students understood some of the processes and effects of AMI within the context of their formal learning.

## Methodologies

The design of the *AMI Impact on Learning* research project is based upon the eudemonistic thrust of action research. A time-based artist, media producer and graphic designer of some twenty five years practice, I am used to creating product for public dissemination. Unsurprisingly, I am drawn towards the practical implementation of research findings, and hence action research as a broad methodology. The premise of action research that projects should be designed to make a positive difference [12] fits well within my critical pedagogic intentions, in terms of both the localised impact of the project upon students and teachers, and the long term effects upon curriculum implementation. Research findings should actively signpost a way forward for social change within the context of the project's parameters [13]. The *AMI Impact on Learning* project emphasises the inclusion of participants within action research processes, an approach in which 'the action researcher and a client collaborate in the diagnosis of a problem and in the development of a solution based on the diagnosis [14].' To this end, the *AMI Impact on Learning* project is designed to allow all participants a prolonged period of time for reflection. Ethnographically speaking, the need for patience and nurturing a sense of mutual respect is a truism. Naught will happen overnight when it comes to establishing the collaborative foundation needed for the implementation of change within the praxis of pedagogic practice. Altering the interpretation of the curriculum within secondary education on a national scale is dependent upon exemplars of best practice, hence the overriding requirement of allowing teachers the time to begin to assimilate elements of IMA practice into their own pedagogies. This implementation may then be recorded and added to the research findings.

Understanding which research methodologies might assist the examination of the effects of artists' moving image on student learning has been a priority. What has emerged is a broadly ethnographic approach to research. The commonsensical flexibility of ethnography encourages the inclusion of other applicable methodologies. Thus the *AMI* project is sited in how 'we all make sense of the world around us in our daily lives' whilst remaining open to scientific systems [15].

Penn Handwerker enthusiastically takes this postulation one stage further when she proposes that superior ethnography (*superethnography?*) 'ordinarily blends numbers, words and pictures [16].' Ethnography thus provides an umbrella for any methodologies incorporated into the *AMI* project.

In mid-2010, I conducted a quantitative survey of thirty six art teachers. The purpose was to construct an understanding of whether or not artists working with moving image media were commonly referenced within formal art studies in England. These teachers were provided with a complete list of Turner Prize nominees, a grouping chosen because the press coverage of this

competition leaves both students and teachers with 'impressions of what comprises contemporary practice [17].' Research participants were not informed beforehand of the makeup of this list. The results of this survey give an indication of the impact within formal art studies of those artists who are recognisable through their use of moving image media. For instance, Jeremy Deller, the 2004 Turner Prize winner, was cited as a reference within the classroom by only one of the surveyed art teachers. Deller is perhaps best known for his re-enactment of *The Battle of Orgreave*, that infamous day of conflict in 1984 between striking miners and the police force. In comparison, Chris Ofili, whose watercolours provide an introduction to figurative painting for many secondary students, was referenced by every respondent to the survey.

Ethnography also affords a hospitality to the visual practitioner, such as myself. The writings of Sarah Pink, Professor of Social Sciences at Loughborough University, have provided a particular impetus to my search for texts regarding community based field research and the presentation of recorded data in a visual manner. Pink is a leading light in this burgeoning anthropological niche. Regarding my stance as an action researcher, 'I want to make a difference', Pink is delightfully supportive, talking of using visual anthropological theory, methodology and practice to achieve applied non-academic ends [involving] problem solving and engaging in 'cultural brokerage' (Pink, 2006). This involves first, representing one group's experiences to another, working across academic disciplines and organizational cultures [18].

As the AMI project progresses, this cross-referencing will hopefully accelerate, as participants begin to produce work for inclusion within the e-learning resource, [www.time-based-media.com](http://www.time-based-media.com). My desire to actively present the AMI research project at the McLuhan Galaxy conference is potentially part of this cross-referencing process. It may be that like me, you are part of a small academic community that is gathering in Barcelona in May 2011 to celebrate the life and work of one Marshall McLuhan. As a joint member of this community, this ethnographic concentration, I invite you to speak with me. Allow me to record your comments and add them to the diaspora. I'm sure Marshall would approve! Moreover, visual ethnography allows one to subjectively consider the academic praxis of written text. As Sian Ede commented:

*Visual artists are not, of course, expected to use language fluently (although some can) for it is not their primary medium, but artists from any art form might find it hard to compete with an intellectual community for whom the language of rational explanation is part and parcel of the disciplinary approach to the work [19].*

My preferred language of expression is televisual. My presentation at the McLuhan Galaxy conference will underline this preference. It is reassuring to know that few, if any, of you reading this in Barcelona in 2011 will disagree with Marshall's suggestion in 1960 (two years before I was born) that if a language 'contrived and used by many people is a mass medium, any one of our new media is in a sense a new language [20].' In this respect, I am attempting to explore an emerging visual language, existant within the praxis of AMI practice.

A priority within the planning of the research programme has been to investigate the need for, and the processes involved in, producing an AMI (artists' moving image) learning e-resource, available for art and design studies in secondary schools in England. As part of the research process, I have produced and distributed a 'beta' version of such a learning resource, [www.timebasedmedia.com](http://www.timebasedmedia.com), which has been made accessible via the Internet. This e-resource has been devised with the purpose of engaging art students by focusing on AMI works.

## **Background: my practice as an artist teacher**

The *AMI Impact on Learning* project provides for the convergence of: my scholarly interests in the distribution of AMI (artists' moving image) works and related learning resources; new media art practices; my own art and design productivity; my pedagogic practice. The experience and understanding I have built up during years of working within the art, design, media and education/academic sectors has helped refine my approach towards this research project.

As the context of this research is arts and media focused education in state schools in England, negotiations with artists and their representatives have been essential. The online learning e-resource ([www.timebasedmedia.com](http://www.timebasedmedia.com)) has been designed to support innovative teaching, and therefore the provision of accessible contemporary works was essential. With a background in art and design practice, and experience in online distribution, I was able to suggest a number of strategies, including digital watermarking, which might reassure artists regarding potential copyright infringement. The artist's sensitivity to their relationship with, and their influence on, their own work [21] was taken into account during all negotiations. In my capacity as a trained art teacher I am workshopping the completed online learning resource in secondary schools. In this way I am able to collect data on the impact of this resource (as well as others, for example the *MOVE: Video Art in Schools* DVD resource) as well as students' learning and teachers' developing pedagogies.

## **The need for AMI learning resources in secondary schools**

There is a paucity within formal art studies in the UK, regarding the provision of learning resources focused on artists' moving image works. This statement is integral to my hypothesis, regarding the estimation of students' development of an understanding and assimilation of contemporary AMI practices and the impact of this development upon their overall learning within formal education. There are exceptions to this hypothetical statement, but these appear to be subject to the commitment of individual teachers, rather than via concerted and organised promotion [22]. There is a continuum of research analysis [23] which highlights the potential of moving image focused arts education to counter the alienation of students from classroom activities. In comparison, Australian secondary schools are well provided for. Teachers may access a boxed set of DVDs containing digital AMI works, entitled *MOVE: Video Art in Schools*. These sets include accompanying texts, which are designed specifically to assist teachers and students investigate AMI contemporary art practices. Australian teachers have commented upon the resource's ability to re-engage students who might be at risk of failing within formal education settings. In terms of using the [www.timebasedmedia.com](http://www.timebasedmedia.com) website as an agent for re-engagement, I have included *the man*, a video/slide work which I created using commonplace mobile phone technology. Because of the political content and the relatively low-spec technology used, this inclusion was designed to provoke an engaged response from Key Stage 3 students, as opposed to deferential indifference.

In terms of re-engaging learners and effecting a medium to long-term turnaround in students' involvement in their learning and art practice, the available research findings indicate



that the use of moving image provides an artistic medium 'through which dispossessed or marginalised young people can create a sense of belonging and identity [24].' The same report from the Indoor Lane Way project (which is an ongoing initiative in the Australian state of Victoria) also pointed to the potential development of 'an artistic process in individuals that lasts beyond the confines of the project timeline [25].' One possible reason for secondary art students' sensitivity to moving image art is the contemporaneous nature and relevance of this emerging body of work. John Kaldor, Australian art impresario and education benefactor notes that video art 'is fast becoming one of the mainstream forms of art expression [26].' Artists such as Steve McQueen and Sam Taylor-Wood, having received public acclaim for their video works, provide instances of both contemporary practice (as opposed to Dead White European Males – DWEMs - as discussed in Addison and Burgess, 2007) and role models for students, who are attempting to connect with formal art studies in a multiracial, multicultural, multifaceted English society. The use of video as a creative medium, within the context of secondary school art education, fits well within the present art and design curriculum. With regard to contemporaneous art practice and the fostering of relevant student skill sets, The Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) comments that students' 'experience of new technologies helps them to develop the skills to investigate alternative ways of working [27].'

Between the plaudits of the government for the 'creative economy' [28], with its fertile nests of entrepreneurship, and the smiling praise lavished on a toddler's first painterly attempts at making a visual comment on their perceived environment, there is something amiss. Formal education in England has a very public responsibility to expand the creative potential of every young person that passes through its doors. The aim of the learning process is to produce citizens capable of making a positive contribution to society. In terms of an economic contribution, the British government has not been slow to highlight the connection between visual creativity and future fiscal providence. In the twentyfirst century, wise parliamentarians have stepped back from the Evening Standard paper posturings of design and art and social critics. Blackcab jibes at the waste of public funds on questionable costs. Buildings and artworks and social infrastructures have all been swiped at by irritated journalists. Instead of following in the wake of these attempts to sway opinion away from the notion that radical visual creativity is somehow worthwhile, essentially because of its innovative nature, politicians have noticeably supported the notion that innovation in the commercial world of visual design is vital for the economy of this country to thrive in the twentyfirst century.

This political enthusiasm has not as yet extended to ensuring that technological innovations have the necessary impact upon pedagogical practice in art and design classrooms, especially those rooms containing secondary school students in England who have to decide which specialist subjects to follow. With the advent of domestic digital apparatus, these students have already been affected by technological changes. Digital production means have enabled them to join the publishing class. The world of 'digital natives' [29] is vastly different to my infant world of analogue output. In 1971, on the eve of the new digital age, McLuhan wrote:

*I am baffled to know why it is that in the Western world there has been no study of the effects of innovations. There is, of course, much readiness to study the inputs that are called the "content" of our technologies, but insofar as technologies create environments which alter all forms of human perception, there is a hiatus [30].*



Within ethnography, it is understood that the cooperation of participants is imperative. In terms of action research within secondary schools, the participatory group includes students, teachers, support staff, administrative workers and management. Pollner and Emerson comment upon the importance of achieving an air of neutrality when it comes to people's opinions, terming it as 'ethnomethodology indifference', which directs the researcher to 'refrain from assessing correctness, appropriateness or adequacy in articulating the practices and organization of the endogenous order [31].' The endogenous order is the lived order, or the current state of thinking and demonstrable opinion, within a specific community.

*the lived order consists of how participants in the diverse, temporally developing, concrete circumstances comprising the 'society' concertedly organize, recognize, use and achieve whatever they regard or define as sensible, rational, intelligible or orderly [32].*

The importance for academic researchers to engage participants within certain social and professional parameters is accepted within educational research circles. In part this is because of the day-to-day necessity of collaboration between individuals with divergent approaches to teaching in order for schools, colleges and universities to provide a stable plane and fertile ground for learning. In communities of learning, 'relations are about *we* and *us* rather than *me*, *you*, *them* [33].' Commenting upon the 'Critical Minds' research project, which brought together professionals from the Institute of London, four art galleries and four comprehensive schools, Burgess and Addison commented that a primary condition for the success of the research programme was the development of a 'culture of collaboration and mutuality, especially as the professionals involved had diverging beliefs and different pedagogic agendas [34].' My positioning within school communities has yet to be resolved. Certainly my professional role as a teacher provides many bridges which may be used as ways of connecting with school staff.

In contrast, my role as a practising artist promoting the inclusion of moving image as a contemporary art practice may well be regarded as a radical and potentially disquieting presence. Burgess and Addison ask whether artists' interventions in schools might 'disrupt and possibly contest the status quo?' [35] The status quo within the art and design curriculum is dominated by the predominant art practices of drawing and painting [36]. In contrast, the work of many contemporary artists 'is concerned with *challenging and resisting* the very traditions and the notions of subjectivity that are implicit to the art curriculum [37].' Thus my positioning as an artist may have to take a secondary position in order to support my role as a collaborative researcher cum teacher.

A paradox, but one that requires resolution if the research is to succeed in producing results which are both beneficial and effective.

## **Why the lack of moving image art practices in secondary school?**

The survey of art teachers I conducted with regard to the incidence of Turner Prize nominees being cited within formal art studies pointed to a distinct paucity with regards to the inclusion of moving image artists in secondary education. Considering that moving image art practices, though commonplace in the twentyfirst century, do not outnumber other forms

of practice, this survey examines the prevalence of a minority. At present, contemporary practices *per se* are not as prevalent as they might be (and should be according to the 2008 QCA curriculum developments) within secondary art education. Indeed, the 2006 education research project *School Art: What's in it? Exploring visual art in the secondary school* found that

*the predominant art practices in all schools surveyed are drawing and painting. The major references for art practice are taken from early twentieth century European art with limited references to art before the 19th century and early 21st century [38].*

In July, 2010, I conducted a workshop at a local secondary school, during which I introduced a group of Year 12 art students to moving image works from the Internet and the *MOVE* DVD collection. None of the students had previously experienced a screening of artists' film or video within a formal education setting. When asked if they might explain this absence, the answers centred on their perception of moving image as entertainment, and therefore a medium which is not worthy of the 'art' label.

Is there then an inherent resistance within the state educational system to the promulgation of contemporary art practice? On a superficial level, this might be explained by the immunising effect on teachers of successive governmental gambits, as the curriculum is tinkered with in order to produce the effect of progress in the education sector. When change is forced upon people, whether that be essentially bureaucratic or cultural, there is a naturally enough a perceived threat to self or social identity. When this change is spearheaded by technological innovation, perceptions might be coloured by a sense of this accompanying threat. In 1969, McLuhan suggested that if any technology weakens a conventional identity image, then this 'creates a response of panic and rage which we call "war" [39].'

Another explanation might be the lack of technical resources, or the perceived lack of associated technical skills on the part of the art department's teaching staff. The fear of students failing with exam results is commonly cited by critical thinkers who examining a curriculum system which sets attainment standards [40]. Delve deeper though, and pervasive resistance to change from within our schools might explained as a means of supporting the status quo regarding power structures within our society [41]. There is much emphasis now on developing students' critical faculties. However, independent and effective thinkers, open to the possibilities of change within both their own lives and society at large [42] are less likely to adhere to the constraints of any status quo. Revolutionaries do not accept the status quo. They are more likely to question governance and actively engage in anti-establishment behaviour. Such critical citizens are more likely to be revolutionary in their thinking than those who never question the power structure which maps out their daily existence. As discussed previously, contemporary art practices abound with examples of artists engaging politically with moving image. Artists *will* question the prevailing power structures within society and artists using moving image media. Therefore, artists' moving image, with its *potential* to reach out and touch virtually every human being alive on this planet via the Internet, might be regarded as a source of anti-establishment behaviour in its various guises. Some intellectuals 'have argued that the western concept of art is a primary means for reinforcing and consolidating existing power relations [43].' With increased curriculum-led incorporation of practice-based art learning, and the need to sustain development of the creative economy [44], the examination of contemporary art practices which question power structures might not produce the required 'responsible' and acquiescent citizens [45]. Perhaps underlying what is ostensibly a reactionary

take on education, there is the perspective of the 'rear-view-mirror society [46]' that McLuhan saw around him and which is echoed in today's social paranoia regarding teenagers.

## Conclusion

Having examined the place of moving image art (AMI) practice in secondary school art education in England, the initial findings of the *AMI Impact on Learning* research project point to a paucity of provision in both related pedagogy and learning resources. When considering the causes of this paucity, a broad range of affective factors have been examined, including: the negative effects of curriculum focused concern; fear of new media; fear of social change; even the self-interest of the art market.

Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and workshops over the past months have formed the basis of the *IMA Impact on Learning* research project. In particular, my adoption of a *visually participatory* ethnographic approach has strengthened a very positive start to the field research.

So far, students, distributors, artists, teachers and academics targeted for participation. One immediate result of the field research has been the reinforcement of one premise of my starting hypothesis; namely that moving-image resources have a positive impact upon engaging (and re-engaging) students of art, design and media with their formal studies.

A small portion of the results so far have been published on the developing *timebasedmedia* website. This resource will continue to be developed and will hopefully provide a basis for further related research. In order to accomplish the eudemonistic prerequisite of action research, that research findings should make a positive difference, this website will provide a working model for teachers and students from any school, in any nation, to work with and improve over the coming years.

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