Written interview with Raffaella Traniello

Please, introduce yourself.

I'm Raffaella Traniello, part-time permanent teacher in a public primary school in Padova (Italy, Venice area). I used to be a classical musician so I developed a passion for performing arts. I first started class animation workshops in 2006. I'm now working in a more elaborate cinema school project with 3-14y old children. I spend about 20-30 hours per class, along with the subject teacher, creating a film (mostly animation) on any interesting school topic, for a total of about 300 hours a year in the whole school. Climate change, UNICEF, Iqbal Masih, politeness on line are the topics I'm working on in these weeks. Many teachers are collaborating with me, especially Italian, history, geography, science, art teachers.
Beside my teaching job I'm also an occasional free-lance videomaker and animator.
Since 2007 I'm a volunteer of Corti a Ponte, a Short Film Festival with an international section dedicated to films made by children and youth. I'm currently the Artistic director.

Do you think that society, children and young people in particular, are ready to study film and animation starting with primary school? In your opinion, why or why not?

Yes, why not? Since society, children and young people do use the language of film and animation in everyday life it is possible to study it. This is what schools are for: understanding the reality we live in.

Do you think it would be useful for young people to be introduced to the basics of video production/film and animation in order to develop a critical mindset towards film and multimedia they encounter on a daily basis?

I consider production like *writing cinema language*. In primary schools we teach Italian writing together with Italian reading. *Reading cinema* means to me fully understanding a film: meaning, technique (cinematography, acting, soundtrack, narration, ...), style, artistic value, historical context. Just like we do with letters and words, we can start teaching reading and writing the cinema grammar, step by step.

Would they then be able to form an opinion on what is art and what is kitsch?

Probably not, since not even adults get it. I don't think this is an objective of primary schools, maybe it is a goal of Tertiary education. In the Italian curriculum we start studying the art of language (literature) at 11. Before that we just study how Italian language is made and correctly used, to read and understand a text, to express personal feeling and opinions through Italian language. The same objectives can be set for cinema studies: being able to understand a film and produce a video-expression of ourselves.

Would the parent-teacher collaboration need to improve in order to explain to children how to, how many, and which movies to watch?

In my experience the parent-teacher collaboration is good enough. For very young children parents are already very close and involved. For older children we can count on their personal involvement

(this is an aim of our teaching work). It think we should work to build a collection of "video-libraries", that is a list of Institutions or virtual places that can offer a list of selected films good for young audiences: ECFA (European Children Film Association), Cineteques, Children Film Festivals, Vimeo channels, Public libraries, Public TV channels...

From what age could children start learning about film?

I worked with children as young as 2 ½ but I think the best age for a start is 4-5.

Is the study of film present in your country's primary education? And if so, how: as a compulsory or elective subject?

Yes, it is present but in a particular way. It s not a specific subject (except in multimedia high schools), it's a cross-subject topic.
Since the early 2000 the Ministry of education promoted the use of digital media in our teaching. The focus was more on devices than art.
In 2016 Italy promulgate a "Cinema law" to support film productions and audience development, including film education. The Ministry for Art, Culture and Tourism along with the Ministry of Education set some funds dedicated to promote film education in schools. Now the focus is on the cinema art and language.
This national program is called "Cinema per la scuola" https://cinemaperlascuola.it/
Schools are requested to organize film activities, be them screenings or productions.
Festivals get funds for organizing school dedicated activities.

Is the teaching staff educated for and open to covering film and animation as part of their subjects?
The "Cinema per la scuola" program is organizing a national cinema education campaign for teachers. Participation will be on a volutary basis.

Are individual teachers ready to modify their curriculum in order to keep with the times and implement multimedia?
Most of the teachers are open to professional development. Nowadays all our classes have a digital whiteboard connected to the internet, so film and video are very handy. Most of the teachers do use video as a teaching resource (more so during this COVID-19 pandemic where school is or have been distant teaching). The next step is to pay attention to the language, beside the content of a video or film.

Is it necessary to study film and animation as a separate subject or should it be intertwined with others. What is the situation like in your city/country? What is it like in your current country of employment?

I quite like the current Italian situation where *film studies* is a separate subject only in high schools targeted at multimedia. The dark side of having it as a separate subject is the need of marks. To have film activities free from judgments on pupils keeps cinema a free area of expression, where children can think and talk about themselves with no conditioning or anxiety. Studying cinema in primary schools can be pure joy, with no fears of failure.

A look into the significance of modern technology in class

The digital revolution is a coin with two sides. On the good side it gave everyone the possibility to buy a videocamera and start filming, on the other side it lowered the quality of the available

productions and of the audience expectations. Schools can buy affordable cameras but have to work harder on film education.

The audience is so used to excellent effects that a 3D animation so perfect to seem real is becoming boring. There is a new interest for stop-motion or for hand painted animations and childish school productions are more welcome and appreciated.

Modern technology is not necessary to make animations. But surely the possibility to use stop-motion programs gives the children the possibility to learn by doing. With digital photography mistakes are not expensive.

The importance of animation in working with students

I believe film education is a very important activity. Personally I found animation production a better educational tool than film production for many reasons:
Manual skills:
To prepare the objects to animate children train their manual skills: draw, color, cut out, model, …
Collaboration:
Collaboration is needed also in film production but animation work is so a long and patient process that the need for collaboration is tripled.
Even roles:
Also film productions needs many different roles. But when the film is finished all the attention goes to actors only. School's mission is to give recognition to anyone, none excluded. Every single frame of an animation (made in a group as I do) reflects the work of not less than 15 children and is the symbol of the whole group collaboration.
Niceness
A beginner animation is nicer than a beginner film. This is specially true when the screen shows young children drawings that are usually very cute and clever.

A look into the interests of children and young people when it comes to video production

Am interesting feedback I got from older children:
The good thing about this workshop is that the teachers were interested in knowing our own opinion and ideas. They usually only want to hear back from us what they told. It's nice to be listened to, to feel that our ideas are important and can be shared.