



# Becoming a Problem

A film resource to support discussion about young children and behaviour

## Viewers' Responses to the Film

*An early version of the film was shown to a range of audiences with an interest in young children and childhood. The responses of these users helped shape the final version of the film. Here is a selection of those responses. They may be useful as an aid to discussion, as they show that there was considerable diversity of views. [Further details of the users can be found at the end of this document.]*

### Feelings ('It made me feel...')

*It was clear that the film had provoked a range of feelings in the viewers. This was one of the effects that we had hoped for – that is, to mobilise responses to children and childhood. The soundtrack seemed to be especially significant for many viewers.*

- I didn't get what was going on but it made me feel something.
- The music made me feel as though I was waiting for something disturbing to happen.
- The puppets made me feel real sadness for children.
- Successful on an emotive level.
- It's a really emotional film.
- The film would make teachers emotionally engage.
- It was emotive and so it was powerful.
- I liked the music – it was kind of sombre.
- The music plays a very effective part – makes it more emotional.
- This soundtrack made me feel more apprehensive, worried ... haunting sounds. I liked it.
- The twitching boy made me feel really uncomfortable.
- It was a sombre but interesting sound track. It gave an interesting feel to the images. Even children where you expect jolly music... This soundtrack made me feel more apprehensive, worried... haunting sounds. I liked it.
- It made me feel so sad.
- Oh, I liked the sound track. The seriousness of it... the minor chords made me feel serious about what I was watching. It set the mood, which kept me interested. The music captivated me and worked well with the images and the words.... and other bits of sounds we heard now and then like the children singing. It felt like a mishmash of sensory stimulation, like an overdose. A good overdose though, a feeling of being blasted from all sides.
- It made me feel sad, full of sympathy for the children, wanting punishment and to blame someone.
- Upsetting in a good way.
- I feel angry.
- I feel so frustrated because most people don't get this.
- It made me grimace.
- Intense.
- Powerful.
- Powerful sound.
- An ominous atmosphere of general doom.
- The darkness and disturbing nature of it was brilliant.
- The fact that it was so dark really hit it home for me.
- Like a dark horror film.
- Quite a dark film.
- Disturbing images.
- A bit disturbing – almost like a horror film.
- This was a challenging piece to watch.
- It made everything feel strange, unfamiliar.
- A sinister message.
- Sinister – words, images, sound.
- I was shocked when I saw it, it wasn't what I was expecting at all.



# Becoming a Problem

A film resource to support discussion about young children and behaviour

- It felt controlled, wild, limited, egocentric, restrained, imaginative, lively, exploring.
- It's weird, different.
- The music made it scary.
- Music made it scary, controlling children.
- Freaky.
- The children are kept in silence. This is scary.
- Watching the film was like a psychotic experience.
- Is it just me but did anyone else find that incredibly moving? I am nearly in tears.
- You have to address and engage hearts as well as minds.
- You don't feel neutral.
- Hypnotising – made me feel a bit uncomfortable.
- Sombre.
- It leaves you with a deep sadness. I feel like I've abandoned them to the systems, where many get lost.
- The music makes you go deep.
- It made me feel I want to advocate for him – leave him alone.
- It was very emotional.
- It wasn't what we were expecting.
- It made me feel retrospective... it's hard to do all the things you want to do when we've got so many constraints on us.. it makes me feel sad for him.. (nodding towards child who appeared in the film) and it makes me think of other children we've had...
- Curious about the sound used – was that intentional?
- I found the music hard. It was so pessimistic.
- I loved the film ... I hope you don't remove the music as for me it was a massive part of the understanding of the film.

## Thoughts ('It made me think...')

*Many viewers said the film made them think - again an aim of the project.*

- It makes you think about how other children think about naughty children.
- It makes you think – is it really that simple as the (policy) documents are suggesting.
- You really don't get a chance to think, so a film like this would force you to think about children in a very different, sombre way.
- I liked all the quotes ... I'd never heard of those things before, so they made me think.
- The film made me think about the adults at [school]... kids can feel closer to teachers.
- It made me think about how children's creativity can be interpreted as naughty.
- Made me think about how we 'freeze children'... we focus on what's right and wrong, rather than a variety of differences.
- When I read 'Are you listening?' I thought about how that could be directed at the kids, but more poignantly at the adults who work with them – at us.
- Also the scary music makes you think that what we need to think about is not all obvious.
- It should make (practitioners) sit up and think about what's happening to children.
- Made me question if education is a way of controlling children.
- We don't really think much – there's so little time in our lives, but we need to make time.
- What I saw provided images of what I already think – resonated.
- I thought about children's rights all the way through.
- I wondered if teachers are so enmeshed in the rules that they can't see how embroiled they are.
- It makes you think differently – outside the box.
- Interesting for your mind and feelings to deal with all at once.
- It's just made me think about home (Mrs P began to cry).
- The little smile when we saw his face [child who featured in the film]... and all the little things we missed because we're so busy ... when you've got 39 in a class you just don't have the time.



# Becoming a Problem

A film resource to support discussion about young children and behaviour

- That's why it is important to have research... they can capture the details and it makes you think about what you are doing.
- From the word go, it got me thinking about the negative aspects of views of children – not “oh look at these nice pictures of children”.
- I liked it – it was thought provoking – how you deal with children.
- That was a good quote [Piaget]: why *do* we educate children to pass exams?
- It made me start to think about aspects of children I usually push aside to ‘get on with the job’.
- It makes you think how children are enshrouded in systems... you lose sight of them... the weight of the systems and the way they're tied down by them is overwhelming in that film.
- It makes you look at ‘official texts’ differently...there is a sharp delineation between official documents and children.
- Soundtrack makes you think about the film in relation to text to gain understanding.
- What I find interesting is the children how they are able to resist, how they are incredibly patient.... Calm... serene throughout that film. Even those with the pistol... there's a calmness that's beautiful.

## Remembering and connecting ('It reminds me...')

*The film led some viewers to recall their own experiences.*

- I liked that you showed some children being bored, fidgety, feeling uncomfortable... I remember fidgeting and I had to miss playtime, which just made me more fidgety.
- Watching the film has reminded me of the schools I went to in Asia, where they don't think or care about the children.
- The film's quite real to me. Most of the children that work with us have experienced some of what you've shown so it seems real for me and it is real for them.
- The puppet in the classroom – I've seen teachers... good teachers doing that hand-guiding when a child struggles to paint or glue or write... a thousand times, but seeing it next to a puppet changes how you look at it, what you are able to think of it. The film made strange what I thought was so familiar.
- It connected with my own experience of war and refugee children. Adults need to confront difficult things and to think about the impact of violence on children.
- It's made me think of my little boy...with the guns ...he plays with guns all the time and people often stare but I always think ...you can get water pistols all kinds of toy guns. So are you saying that gun play is bad?
- When I read ‘you can see these children going wrong’ and ‘her dislike of her is almost palpable’. I could relate on lots of different levels to those comments.
- It's hard to do all the things you want to do when we've got so many constraints on us.. it makes me feel sad for him.. (nodding towards child who appeared in the film) and it makes me think of other children we've had.
- I'll never forget when we took [a particular child] to Horrible Histories, and he saw the mummy – crying, sobbing. He would never sit still. Always attention-seeking. I had to try to be a bit objective (ie to understand his difficulties and meet his needs), but it's hard –you've got to educate 30 kids.
- You *think* the physical ability is there, but it's not, despite the obvious intelligence (speaking of her son). He was so hard to potty train.
- The first teacher my daughter had was quite negative. My daughter was lively, but this was considered *naughty*, and that just carried on through her whole time at school. I think it rubbed off on me, reinforced to me that my daughter was naughty. Made me feel pretty awful. My granddaughter is *not* described as naughty but as “enthusiastic”.
- I remember parents evenings (with my daughter) – feeling real fear. But now (with granddaughter), parents evenings are so lovely. Positive, relaxed. Such relief not to hear anything nasty.
- My negativity towards schools is still there, and it surfaces sometimes.
- Sometimes I catch myself saying to myself “why did I say that”? But I try never to say that [granddaughter] is naughty.



# Becoming a Problem

A film resource to support discussion about young children and behaviour

## Some miscellaneous comments

- The film plants a niggling seed, a doubt.
- You can see who's got their cards marked at 5 years old.
- I've just finished my teacher training course and I have to say that it's so very concrete.
- Good for children to see and comment on – do they have that opportunity – to say something about themselves.
- I like the quote at the end about children can only learn what is known.
- True, it's true.
- I always used to find it uncomfortable to talk to adults because they talk down to me.
- Among the staff there were a few heated discussions concerning the film.
- The boy on the carpet, with his fists, his voice comes through, but I bet he's already got a reputation, so what's happening to *his* voice? What do you want the film to say about what's happening to his voice. It gets colonised... even worse, killed.
- How can we make it OK for young children to voice their disapproval from a young age, while it's happening to them?
- The text [quoting from a policy document] really contrasts with the disturbing images.
- The film looks at over-control in the classroom. Is there a dilemma of under-control? How could we use the film to open this up?
- The children were like controlled robots.
- I do feel that it showed the darker side to how our interactions with children may be perceived by the kids, and the fact that it was so dark really hit home with me, the impact adults and their expectations of children may be having on children.
- If the purpose of your film is to influence the thinking of people who do not spend their days thinking about these issues then you have to address and engage hearts as well as minds.
- It's such a shame for some children, like the boy who seems frustrated in the film. In the Foundation Stage we're always fighting to keep it free-er, but it's a battle....
- We keep fighting to keep the pressures of the National Curriculum out of the Foundation Stage. And when you see this film you realise why it is important.
- With such big class sizes you forget what each child is going through, not just the naughty kids but those who are quiet or reserved.
- It's a very hard situation, trying to fully understand a child's issues – [reminding yourself] don't judge a book by its cover.
- We should let children take the lead. BUT, from a teaching perspective, we have all the targets to meet. We're banging our heads against a brick wall – constantly pushing children to meet the targets. There are 30 children, all supposed to constantly move on. And constantly having to assess what you're doing to keep them on track. No time to consolidate skills.
- There's a lot to learn in Reception that's not academic. You're teaching them how to be a student. Some kids will never learn that.
- (As a teacher) you *do* label. But it's hard not to. I think there's a mad over-labelling of children in general – classing them as special needs just because they're not 'normal'.
- Every one can access it...It creates a dialogue that everyone can join in on because I imagine that everyone finds it an unexpected experience, so we're all wrong-footed at the same time.
- The way you used images with the text was interesting. The text flashed by too quickly at times, but I liked the fact you had to read it quickly and often missed the last couple of words.
- It's boy culture...being boisterous... I'm not against gun-play. If you stop them playing it, they just find more creative ways to do it!
- It would be odd if boys weren't boisterous.
- (How you will respond) depends on your own background – these are issues that inner-city children will already be experiencing; whereas we are quite middle class. We know our kids are quite well-adjusted. Even though [my son] Sam is quite frisky it's not really the same.
- I hope you don't remove the music as for me it was a massive part of the understanding of the film



# Becoming a Problem

A film resource to support discussion about young children and behaviour

## So what was the film 'about'?

*Several respondents told us what they thought the film was about, or what its purpose/message was.*

- On the one hand the film gestures at the sentimentality of childhood – uniforms etc, but then it also disrupts those sentiments.
- The film deals with the idea of reputation – you can see who's got their cards marked at 5 years.
- This film looks at over-control in the classroom. Is there a dilemma of under-control?
- The film is showing you how to do it the right way, the best way.
- For me, it's a way into a shared conversation. You can't rely on any shorthand because you can't make sense in a usual way.
- We treat children like monkeys, measuring children's brains.
- The film is telling us that we're producing puppets, but there's no practical guidance on how to do it differently.
- I didn't get the bit about the puppets.
- Is that your agenda, an attempt to give a voice to the child?
- There seems to be a comparison between 'normality' and 'not normal' going on.
- Imagery of 'difficult' bodies represents the constraints and restraints the educational system is putting on young children.
- The film suggests children need to be guided but they are constructed as vulnerable.
- The video clearly demonstrates policy doesn't always link to practice – ie "children recognise their own qualities" - as teacher holds his hand to guide the brush!
- Shows how adults bring their own perceptions of behaviour to understand why a child may be behaving in a certain way.
- Not sure what the aim was? What was the film trying to get across?
- We say children have voices but they are controlled from such an early age.
- Film is about trying to shift belief . Support a non-directive conversation.
- The purpose is to promote alternative conceptualisations of children without being too directive.
- The film shows the struggles that children have, which the system ignores.
- I didn't get it.

## Is it 'art'?

*A few viewers commented on the film as 'art' – for some this was a positive aspect, for others, it was a problem.*

- I saw it more as an art piece, but I think there is a place for this in the work we do. It makes you think differently – outside the box.
- At the moment it is the equivalent of an intellectual French art film, great for the aficionado and intellectual but not your average punter.
- I found the film to be an engaging piece of art and it is art, which is important in itself because it takes you outside of traditional notions of education.
- More like the sort of thing you would expect to find in the Tate Modern (said pejoratively)

## Was the film 'manipulative'?

*Some viewers felt the film was attempting to manipulate their responses*

- The text makes me feel like I'm undergoing some training.
- I would wonder if the film's images are being used to confirm a certain, albeit different set of beliefs, rather than keeping the pressure on, continually disrupting them.
- Brainwashing.
- Is this film trying to manipulate our thinking?
- The colour of the images made it a little sentimental.



# Becoming a Problem

A film resource to support discussion about young children and behaviour

- There seems to be one message and that's a sinister message about the way we're currently doing things in the classroom.
- I found the music hard. It was so pessimistic. I couldn't concentrate on the images properly, like I wasn't being allowed to make my own mind up about them because I was being led to look at them in a certain way, filled with dread.
- The colouring of images was seen as an artistic choice that was 'overly suggestive'...precluded a chance to freely decide how to interpret the content and provoked an almost defensive reaction.

## Putting the film to work

*We asked viewers to comment on whether the film was relevant to their concerns, and how it could be used in professional training or development*

- I could see your film being part of cross-professional training. I think teachers would see it very differently to how we've viewed it...What I think would be really interesting would be what a room full of different professionals would say in response to the film and each other. (Educational Psychologist, member of CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) team).
- I think the film has huge potential across children's services, social workers, early years practitioners in children's centres, youth workers... the lot. (Local Authority Director of Children's Services)
- Social Workers might not react in the same way. In my experience, they're used to working with disaffected kids. Children who've been expelled excluded and so on. I think if they were to watch that film, they'd have a different take on what they were watching. I don't think they'd have a problem with what it's trying to say (Teacher Educator)
- I think some early years teachers will absolutely get it and really respond to it, while others will be left wondering a bit (no bad thing), and a small minority might be put off entirely. But you can't please all of the people all of the time etc... (former senior policy adviser, General Teaching Council for England).
- The early outcomes of the Eileen Munro report into social care... would suggest to me that the children's workforce more generally should see a film like this – to avoid the deeply siloed practices that still persist in some counties. It would be useful in the initiation of creating a shared discourse between different professional groups. ... looking how to break entrenched habits across the children's workforce. (Local Authority Director of Children's Services).
- One place to start is in Initial Teacher Training and the Masters in Teaching and Learning because the students are still hooked into learning. (Local Authority Director of Children's Services).
- The film's a good platform/workshop – the teachers are so alienated from these concerns, could you get them to start with the film and move into 'their story' through dramas/photographs/making their own film? (Social Worker, CAMHS team)
- I see it as being scalable, from being used in a small staff meeting through to larger, multiprofessional training sessions. (Local Authority Director of Children's Services)
- You should look at other dissemination possibilities, such as UK Ed Chat (Twitter feed). Think about how the film might be able to circulate in other, non-face to face arenas (Former Director, FutureLab).
- More engaging than standard training resources. (Teacher)
- It could be useful as a staffroom resource to open conversation about behaviour. (Teacher)
- What I think would be really interesting would be what a room full of different professionals would say in response to the film, and each other (member of CAMHS team).
- Every one can access it...It creates a dialogue that everyone can join in on because I imagine that everyone finds it an unexpected experience, so we're all wrong-footed at the same time. (Teacher Educator).
- I'd like to talk more with our CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) team about the emotional side of children's development...I think this film captures what emotions the children go through so more training to do with things other than the curriculum would help us (Teacher).



# Becoming a Problem

A film resource to support discussion about young children and behaviour

- It'd be a great training tool. I was just thinking of how I might use it with the students. They'd be expecting a Teacher's TV-type of film, but I was wondering what sense they'd make of this film. Then again, the 'making sense' is the bit we want to shake up. This film might feel like a no-sense, or nonsense film to them. They would try to patch things.... images together so that they fit with what they think they know. I'd love to use it in one of my sessions. I think it would make some students confused, which is always a good place to start. (Teacher Educator)
- I have thought a lot about your film and its purpose to promote alternative conceptualisations of children - without being too directive. I think that this is a real issue in our society and much needed (Education Consultant/Educational Psychologist)
- It would be a really interesting journey into the filmmakers mind if you take out the classroom footage. We would all put different You Tube clips in there wouldn't we? Now that would be a really fascinating training activity – where would your mind take you to on You Tube if you were stimulated by random classroom scenes (Teacher Educator)

## Reservations; criticisms; suggestions for improvement

*We tried to address criticisms in the final version of the film, where time allowed, while trying to stay faithful to our original vision.*

### *Text*

- The text is too quick and very intellectual.
- Images and text are all moving too quickly.
- Too many images going too fast, especially at the beginning.
- It didn't need as much text.
- The text is very quick across the screen.
- The text was so quick, so I found myself rushing to read it and missing images.

### *Representation/voices of children*

- I think the film needs more comments from the children. Children talk about how they feel about how they are being taught... and treated... by teachers and each other really.
- Most of the children portrayed were not 'normal'. They (school students) did not feel that the film represented them because they are 'normal' children.
- More images of real children would show what actually happens in the classroom.
- Children are able to express their own ideas and it could be interesting to have examples of children's descriptions of their observations.
- Perhaps more children's sounds could be included... Different forms of children's voices come through, but you could use a child's voice to ask questions.
- Could you get some young people to create the music soundtrack for your film?
- What was lacking – the *joyousness* of childhood.
- Didn't see children play; didn't see the joyousness of play.
- Children are not present enough – too much doing to and doing with. Needs more of children showing what they are and what they can do. Perhaps children were presented too much as victims and not allowed presence or creativity.

### *Accessibility/Comprehensibility*

- Some of the references to films were not accessible to students and staff from different cultural backgrounds... non-Western cultures.
- It was difficult to get a sense of context for the clips.
- The film is telling us that we're producing puppets, but there's no practical guidance on how to do it differently.
- It had no title so you couldn't know what was to come. Not sure what we were supposed to be learning.. . what was the point of it all?



# Becoming a Problem

A film resource to support discussion about young children and behaviour

- In order to be sure of stimulating a good discussion about children, behaviour and adults' views of them, I therefore think the training resources will be crucial, or at the very least a set of guiding questions - if such materials are purely optional, I think there's a risk of the discussion getting bogged down in what particular aspects of the film mean, and not in a heuristic-hermeneutic sense either...
- I enjoyed the various literary references and visual allusions - though personally I occasionally found the fragmentary nature of these a little distracting, and I felt I could have done with more of the classroom interactions so as to have something sturdier to get my teeth into with regard to policy/theory/practice.
- I don't really understand why the weird pictures and clips are in here. Freaky.
- Dramatic with the music, but soundtrack was a bit distracting.
- Confusing.
- In places it was too abstract.
- There are some unrelated scenes with dogs and creepy dolls. I don't see the connections with children in classrooms.
- Not really sure what to make of it.
- What has this got to do with behaviour?
- At the moment it is the equivalent of an intellectual French art film, great for the aficionado and intellectual but not your average punter.
- Sometimes it seems like the film is just random images put together, like a dark horror film.
- It is bizarre at first but it makes a lot of underlying sense.
- The quotes are too quick – you need time to process.
- Didn't get the shoes – at all.
- The images are too fast – you need to slow them down.

## Structure

- In places it was too abstract – perhaps needs more leading through, the links between the images and the child – more context.
- I think that children watching this will need background knowledge to access the depth of text.
- A preamble would set it up but it mustn't detract from the concerns.
- If I were to use this as a training tool, I think it needs some text that offers a preamble that doesn't sanitise it.
- I don't think you should shy away from making a case through the video. Don't be afraid to be more direct with your message(s).
- Perhaps questions or some things to hold in your head as you watch it. Dorothy Heathcote's stuff working with children with behaviour issues uses empowerment in drama to modify disruptive behaviour in the classroom. Could the film use/provoke the viewers into doing some drama work?
- You'd have to get the balance right between preparing the viewer without reducing the film to some usual training video, avoid killing how its different.
- It needs to sit in a context where the viewers are not expecting a 'normal' experience... so this film has to be positioned to avoid people thinking it's taking the piss. Where and how you pitch it are the key questions.
- It has to sit in a context where the audience is not expecting 'normal' experiences.
- The film lacked a clear focus, there was no voiceover or presenter to guide you through it Interesting for your mind and feelings to deal with all at once.
- There were no answers or solutions offered ... this could be a good but very unexpected thing for a training resource.
- Is there a way to diversify the message so that there are several ideas going on. It is a busy, fragmented film, so although there's lots going on to stimulate your mind as you look, read, listen, there's still that one sinister interpretation that I'm led towards.
- It operates like a rupture, so in terms of preparing the viewers, there needs to be a sense of where some fragments are coming from, for example the Piaget clip.
- You could break the video down into small units to unpack.





# Becoming a Problem

A film resource to support discussion about young children and behaviour

- I think questions at the beginning of the film might prepare the audience for the need to engage with innovative thinking.
- I would mention behaviour at the outset and embed a number of related questions into the images to lighten the audience's decoding tasks. How hard do you want them to work when they're watching the film?
- Flag up the themes you're looking at – touch, puppetry etc
- I would enjoy watching 5-10 seconds of the film, then have time to reflect and discuss this clip before watching more. It's too much in one long film, no space to digest any of it.
- It might be worth saying to people 'there's going to be writing *and* imagery'.
- Really fine balance in the level at which you are subtle or explicit. Sometimes there's too much subtlety and people don't get it at all. Sometimes thinking needs to be structured.
- Perhaps ask questions before or after the film.
- The frame will be critical.
- Either needs a very strong frame, or it's too subtle (and should be simpler and clearer in its message).
- The philosophical statements are quite philosophical – difficult to get your head round. On the one hand they're too complicated, but also it makes you work at it, so they should be there. You don't want to underestimate different audiences.

## *Miscellaneous criticisms*

- Some bits were obscure – puppets. How that fitted with children's lives. I wondered what this was saying to me – eg are puppets the masks we wear?
- The repetition of the puppetry images was seen as unnecessarily dwelling on a point well made within the first two seconds.
- The naked guy didn't quite work. Why is he there?
- Children expressed the wish to hear the dialogue that went along with some of the classroom scenes.
- The things happening in schools... are far worse....real examples of cruelty could be found ... actions of teachers not shocking enough or performed on SEN children...might give them the chance to distance themselves from the discourse.
- It needs to be carefully put forward [as exploratory], not another way of bashing our hard work as women, teachers, mothers, health professionals, or potentially used in that way.
- If the education system is so constraining on children we would not be sitting here today trying to get a degree. I know not all children make it through the education system but maybe it just needs updating to fit into today's society.
- Why did you use so much symbolism?

## **Details of the users who commented on the prototype film**

Users were interviewed individually or in groups.

Individual interviewees included:

a Local Authority Director of Children's Services;  
a former Senior Policy Adviser at the General Teaching Council;  
a Head Teacher of a school for children with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD);  
an educational psychologist/consultant on behaviour and emotional issues;  
the former Research Director of Futurelab;  
a media journalist.

Group interviews were conducted with:

10 members of a CAMHS team (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) in the North of England (a clinical psychologist; a social work manager; a nurse manager; an operational CAMHS nurse; an



# Becoming a Problem

A film resource to support discussion about young children and behaviour

autism specialist manager; a child mental health practitioner; a social worker; a social work student; a psychoanalytic psychotherapist, and an intercultural psychotherapist);

4 parents attending a mother and toddlers group;

4 teachers who took part in the original research on which this follow-on project was based;

12 university-based early childhood teacher educators (working across early childhood studies and teacher training programmes. Previous roles included: a former local authority Early Years Adviser; a former Children's Centre Leader; a former midwife and health visitor; a former social worker; a former nursery school head teacher, and several former early years and primary teachers.

3 early years teachers;

1 teacher and 10 Year 11 students from a comprehensive school;

1 teacher and 14 students aged between 8 and 16 from a progressive independent school;

approximately 45 trainee teachers, who registered their responses to the film using the BackNoise social networking tool.

[April 2011]