Challenging the Literacy of 'Literacy and Numeracy': The Potential for Film and Moving Image Media in the Irish Educational Landscape

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Abstract: This paper argues that despite a nationally sanctioned plan of action that sees media literacy as little more than the capacity to send an email, recent changes to curricular policy and intent at subject-specific and cycle-wide levels are making spaces for the possibility of wider film usage within Irish education. In its overview of the contemporary pedagogical landscape, the assertion is made that many benefits would come from such inclusion. The analysis asserts that the unique capacities of dialogic, multimodal engagement can incentivise learning and strengthen direct curricular support as well as wider outcomes-based objectives oriented within, and beyond, the four walls of the Irish classroom. It is argued that the time to engage in such thinking is now. Coupled with a host of initiatives and arguments from educational, cultural and media industry stakeholders, the exploration of such possibilities, new models of filmic engagement, and a greater emphasis on media literacy skillsets, is necessary to equip Irish students for both scholastic endeavour and wider civic participation.

Keywords: film, media literacy, Irish curricula, education policy

Film and moving image media have the capacity to broaden the Irish mandate for literacy education in a manner in keeping with international precedents and the nation's own recently revised outcomes for student development.

Introduction

In July 2011, the Irish Department of Education and Skills (DES) published a new strategy to underpin the aims of primary and secondary curricula across the Republic of Ireland through the end of the decade. *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* places these titular skillsets at the core of this new educational remit (DES, 2011a). Acknowledging the influence of '[a]lmost 480 written submissions' from stakeholders that included educators, community organisations and public bodies as well as concerned parents, the document addressed Ireland's recent slippage in the triennial Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) – a global league table of students' aptitude administered by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (DES, 2011a, p.7). The 2009 scores returned a significant drop in both percentile, and placement, when compared to Irish students' results in the 2006 and 2003 research reports. Ireland's mean score for reading comprehension placed it 21st amongst nations in 2009, compared to sixth and seventh amongst nations in 2006 and 2003, respectively (PISA, 2003; 2006).[1]

It is clear that at present, the Irish educational system is at a crucial interstice. Through the year 2020, these dual notions of 'literacy' and 'numeracy' will continue to act as lightning rods for Irish educational discourse. The purpose of this paper is to explore the definition of literacy as determined by this national plan for action and challenge the role delegated to film, media and other forms of communication that demarcate a notion of literacy informed by the current, digital climate. This paper argues that the myopia of the national plan makes little concession for such skills in the face of cultural benefit, international precedent and the findings of indigenous stakeholders from both educational and industry-led perspectives. It stands to assert the place of film in the wider second level curricula, and challenges the notions of literacy and numeracy as currently envisaged for the future Irish educational landscape. The core of this argument emphasises a widening of the Irish educational landscape's discussion around

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literacy – its definition, mediums of employ and wider benefits – by arguing that film and moving image media can expand the manner in which curricula are investigated. Such strategies, this essay will argue, benefit subject specific learning outcomes as well as the development of students beyond the classroom.

Defining Literacy in Irish Educational Policy

In the autumn prior to the release of Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life, the Department of Education and Skills released its draft national plan under the title *Better Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People* (DES, 2010a). The curriculum-wide, draft plan presented a definition of literacy that succinctly set out its goals. 'Literacy', it argued:

> conventionally refers to reading, writing, speaking, viewing, and listening effectively in a range of contexts. In the 21st century, the definition of literacy has expanded to refer to a flexible, sustainable mastery of a set of capabilities in the use and production of traditional texts and new communications technologies using spoken language, print and multimedia (DES, 2010a, p. 9).

The draft policy then asserted, in bold typeface, that:

> it is essential that every child leaving our school system […] is able to speak, read and write at a level that enables them [sic] to participate fully in education and in Irish life and society' (DES, 2010a, p. 9).

Borrowed verbatim from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's (ACARA) publication, *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English* (2009), the working definition of literacy in the Irish document appeared in a footnote and did not provide a citation identifying the definition's provenance. Furthermore, elements found within the Australian report that did not end up in the Irish draft plan, placed the former in a stronger position regarding curricular development and wider learning outcomes.

The originary document expands its definition of literacy to include a sense of malleability necessary for young people in the navigation of the modern day world. 'Students', ACARA argues, 'need to be able to adjust and modify their use of language to better meet contextual demands in varying situations', and they must be able to assert themselves across varying modes of communication: 'listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing and creating' (ACARA, 2009, p.6). This idea of 'creation' is wholly ignored in the Irish draft plan for the bolstering of literacy skillsets within the Republic. Defined in the Australian document as 'the production of multimodal texts in the same way that writing refers to the production of print text', no such identification exists in Ireland's educational strategy (ACARA, 2009, p.6).

In the wake of the half-year long consultation process, the finalized educational strategy made concessions toward a wider variety of media; however, the notions of creative value, explorative engagement, or the benefits of such actions – with any type of text – were still lacking. Arguing that for the national educational outlook 'our understanding of literacy […] includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text broadcast and digital media', the plan acknowledges the encroachment of digital media on the paper-centric classroom, as well as the wider world (DES, 2011a, p. 8). However, it asserts that mastery of such analytical capacities of digital texts is requisite for 'basic tasks, such as reading or sending an email' (DES, 2011a, p. 8). Furthermore, the only time any acknowledgement of 'creative' engagement with any medium appears in *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* it is a singular observation, in footnote form. Appended to the argument that as a nation, there requires a greater rollout of standardized testing across the Republic – for the sake of keeping tabs on the progress of our literacy standards, the note acknowledges that such 'testing cannot measure […students'] ability to write creatively' (DES, 2011a, p.75).

Media Literacy: Creating, Critiquing and Using Multimodal Texts

Defined rather broadly by The Office of Communications (Ofcom), the British regulatory body for the communication industries, media literacy is 'the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts' (Ofcom, 2006, p.3). For a more nuanced definition of the term, the work of the Europe-wide MEDIA programme (2007), and the 2009 European Association for Viewers' Interests [EAVI], under the European Union's Media Literacy Unit, point to expanded denotations. Both are presented as more specific than Ofcom's model, yet broadly multiplicitous in what they encompass under the rubric of 'media literacy'.

The European Union's MEDIA project defines media literacy as an enmeshing of 'classical' literacy capabilities and audiovisual comprehension skills grounded upon electronic, sequentially presented, materials such as film, radio and broadcast media. According to the project these digital/informational literacies are necessary to negotiate and organize the torrents of stimuli that present themselves to citizens whether via an active seeking-out of media or through the passive consumption that occurs in daily social life (Media Literacy, 2007, p.8). Furthering the user-centric specificity, EAVI's *Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy* (2009), equally stresses the critical understanding of multimodal texts, in analogue and new media forms, as well as visual criticality and digital navigability. In the shadow of Marshall McLuhan's notion of convergent forms of technology and communication (McLuhan, 1964/2001), and with an acknowledged debt to the work of EU Kids Online director Professor Sonia Livingstone, EAVI moves beyond an understanding of literacy benefitting the singular, literate individual. This in turn argues that such media literacy capabilities are vital for social relations around the nexuses of civil society, education, policy and industry (EAVI, 2009, p.8). Literacy is not just for 'learning and life' for the individual, for the EAVI, it is necessary for civic participation and wider social discourse.
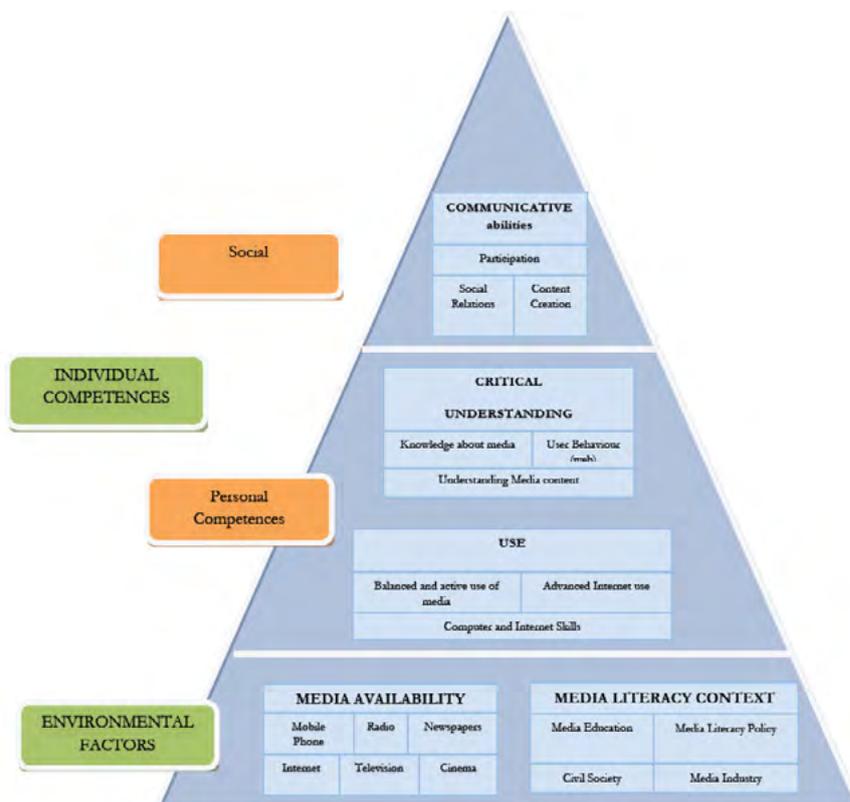

Figure 1: EAVI Model for Media Literacy (EAVI, 2009, p.32)

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Toward this definition, the EAVI presents a comprehensive graph (Figure 1) to envisage all of the elements they fold into their pedagogical, and andragogical, aims. The model also shows the manner in which these wider relations, and individuated critical comprehensive and active 'use' skills, ultimately serve to foster creative endeavours as well social and industrial cohesion.

Rather than compartmentalizing competing prefix terminology often attached to the notion of 'literacy', the EAVI study points to a series of 'similar terms and concepts including […] "cultural literacy", "information literacy", "audiovisual literacy" and "media education"' that are implicit in the formation of media literate citizens in the 21st century (EAVI, 2009, p. 21). The fluidity of this 2009 model has had a lasting effect at the Europe-wide policy level. In the September 2011 publication of the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) summit proceedings on the theme of *Transforming Audiences*, Susanne Ding, who was then serving as European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture, acknowledged that the 2009 EAVI study provides the guiding document by which media literacy levels are to subsequently be assessed across the European Union (Ding, 2011, in Livingstone, 2011, p.5-6).

In her arguments, Ding cited the dually oriented nature of the EAVI study, and its overt acknowledgement of individual skillsets and wider policy-driven and infrastructural elements as vital to understanding how to:

> further strengthen the role of media literacy in these policy field[s], streamline the understanding of media literacy and the requirements for media literacy education, […] while constantly adapting to new results in media literacy research or the development of new technologies (Ding, 2011, in Livingstone, 2011, p. 7).

While making accessions to 'new technologies' as they may arise, one facet of media literacy identified by Ding in her statements to the convened researchers and stakeholders was that of film; specifically '[t]he place of film literacy in European school education' (Ding, 2011, in Livingstone, 2011, p. 7). Before looking at the benefits of film for the classroom, a brief survey must be undertaken to determine where film presently exists within Irish national curricula.

The Place of Film in Irish Education

Presently the standardized use of film in Irish schools is relegated, at curricular level, to two instances: secondary English classes – where prescribed feature films are treated as, and compared to, a novel, play or poem – and can be written about as such, and a singular, more-or-less bi-annual inclusion of one film-related question on the Higher Level Fine Art Leaving Certificate Examination. It must be noted that the Fine Art programme has not been revised in forty-one years and the suggested resources for 'contemporary' practices of art of any medium are three decades old.[2] While revisions to the syllabus were explored as recently as 2007, and provisions were to be made for electronic, and digital, media within Irish art education, these plans have yet to be implemented.[3]

Film in the English Classroom

In the English classroom, films appear on the comparative element of the Leaving Certificate Examination. Annually, a list of six films as determined by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) is given out for each Leaving Certificate Exam-taking class, and from the list of prescribed films, the educator may choose to screen any, or all, of them. As they are placed within the context of comparative study, the films are then merited on their capacity to be analyzed against a host of forms of the written word. Looking at the films chosen between 2007 and 2013, a clear pattern can be inferred by the titles selected. Annually there exists one 'black and white' film; one subtitled film – though whether films in Italian or Spanish should

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be reserved for the English curriculum is a debate for another day; a Shakespearian adaptation; an obligatory Irish feature such as *32A* (Quinn, 2007) or *Inside I'm Dancing* (O'Donnell, 2004) and two additional films that are discriminating enough in their construction to carry the mantle of 'art' film, but straight forward enough in narrative and construction to find popular appeal. Despite marked difference in subject matter and construction, the films of Peter Weir, the addition of Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006), as well as the recent examples of films directed by Fernando Meirelles and Baz Luhrmann's non-Shakespearian work fit, into this rubric.

The films chosen appear under the auspice of comparing them to text-based forms of storytelling. Even at Higher Level examination, the unique capacities of film – what determines 'film as film' as theorist Victor F. Perkins (1972/1993) asserts – is lost in light of simply working through the 'themes or issues' raised in each example as well as the 'values and attitudes' portrayed by the actors in each tableaux (SEC, 2011a, p.4-5). In turn, the questions on recent Ordinary Level examinations ask students to analyze the 'social settings' in which actions take place or the 'relationships between characters' on display, in any one of the texts he or she has read, or watched, over the course of the year (SEC, 2011b, p.8-9). For both examinations, writing on film is wholly optional.

By engaging with the properties of the medium that are transferrable to dramatic or poetic forms of narration, the comparative element of the English Examination focuses solely on the dialogue and its acted delivery found within these films – simply reading their screenplays would indeed suffice. In many ways the English curriculum appears to operate under the fallacy identified by the British Film Institute (BFI) when they argue that:

> [f]or many years 'media literacy' has been seen as a different, and often threatening alternative to print literacy. Media skills, it is assumed, are bound to dilute or displace learning about the written word. They are also seen as highly specialised: not only different from other literacy skills, but requiring a completely different pedagogy. (BFI, 2008, p.9)

Concomitant to the work of the EAVI, the British organization argues that '[l]iteracy is not just about the written word', and that learning about moving image media is a 'fundamental entitlement' that allows young people to be in a position in which they can participate in 'social, cultural and political life' (BFI, 2008, p.5-8). Such an impetus for wider learning is not found in the manner to which film is presently relegated in the English syllabus. Similarly, any impulse toward the creative aspect of media engagement championed within Australia's English curriculum, is equally missing in the use of film in the English classroom.

The Place of Film in Irish Education; the Art Curriculum

The place of film in Leaving Certificate Art is equally problematic for the medium. Over the past six years, 2007-2012, only the Higher Level papers of four Leaving Certificate Examinations have included the choice of answering a question about the medium of art. The most recent example of the exam script posed the notion of the "suspen[sion of dis]belief" to students and asked those sitting the exam to discuss any films they have enjoyed which 'transport[ed] them to another time, another place [or] even another world' (SEC, 2012, p.6).

While this question leaves the choice of films to be discussed open to the student, other questions have been more prescriptive. The 2011 examination gave students the option of discussing the merits, and entrepreneurial success, of Pixar animations, under the auspice that the studio has come to such popular, and populist, approval by strategically making films 'firmly fixed on the understanding that the animated world should be based on the real world' (SEC, 2011c, p.5). Recent blockbuster successes such as the *Toy Story* franchise,[4] *Monsters*

Inc. (Docter, 2001), and *Up* (Docter/Peterson, 2009) are given as examples from which the students could draw their elucidations (ibid.). The other portions of the question to which the test takers had to attend in the multi-part film assessment, was a discussion of the visual appeal of the animations about which they chose to write – and a prompt to provide illustrations of the specific elements of these films they were addressing.

The 2011 question was a near verbatim reiteration of the single film-related question on the 2009 Leaving Certificate examination. In 2009, students were asked to provide insight into why the animated films of Pixar and Dreamworks 'proved to be very popular' (SEC, 2009, p.5). Similarly, the question asked for illustrative renderings of the films about which the students wrote (SEC, 2009, p.5). This questions was possibly drawn-up on the heels of *Toy Story 3* having taken over a billion dollars at box offices worldwide the summer previous to the exam sitting students' final year (Box Office Mojo online, n.d). In 2008, the paper had students attending to why there might be broad-based appeal for recent films such as the *Chronicles of Narnia* series,[5] *The Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise[6] and the adaptations of the *Harry Potter* novels[7] (SEC, 2008, p.5).

Since the nation of Ireland has, in the last decade, had the distinction of being the second most cinema-attending nation on the globe (Arts Council, 2004, p.6), and we have more recently been deemed the most cinema-going nation in Europe (De Burca Butler, 2012), the argument can be made that film is resource heavy for teachers – requiring time and specificities of knowledge that not all art educators may possess. Therefore providing questions based on more populist fare – and blockbuster franchises – which students are more likely to have seen of their own volition in the local multiplex, can be considered to make sense in a Leaving Certificate examination. It pays credence to the medium without having to task students with film viewing during class time.

These examples of English and art, and the problematic employ of those analyzed above, are the summative total of the Irish curricular investment in film and moving image media. Counter to the arguments of Ding that film education should be the standard-bearer for European engagement with media at the scholastic level, nowhere else in the national curricula do concessions for film and moving image media appear (in Livingstone, 2011, p.7).

The Benefits of Film Education

Ding's insistence on film literacy as a necessary component of scholastic remit, and the EAVI's belief that film education lends itself to wider cultural benefits, is not without precedent. In the United Kingdom, the place of film in schools was demarcated as a '21st Century Literacy' skillset in a three-year (2008-2011) Lottery funded research endeavour of the same name. The project aimed to 'help children and young people to use, enjoy and understand moving images; not just to be technically capable but to be culturally literate too' (21st Century Literacy, 2008, p.2). Across 10 pilot projects that incorporated both viewing and filmmaking practices, 21st Century Literacy distilled their findings into 10 primary arguments (21st Century Literacy and Available Light Advisory, 2012). As well as having the capacity for uptake 'across the entire curriculum' and 'enhanc[ing] critical, cultural and creative abilities', the study bolstered the notion that film, as a cultural artefact, can teach young people about the diversity found within their own nation, as well as the wider world (21st Century Literacy and Available Light Advisory, 2012, p.6-10).

This idea of culture being transmitted through critical textual analysis is at home in the study of film and the moving image. Speaking in front of the European Parliament in October of 2010, German director and president of the European Film Academy, Wim Wenders, asserted that

the effective implementation of film education can be a vital component in 'the imparting of cultural and social competence' and that, fundamentally, film is 'a universal language that can be taught and learned' (Wenders, 2010, p.4). Wenders further asserts the critical ability to understand the moving image text—to be 'cinemate' to use a portmanteau coined by Thorold Dickinson—leads one from a state of cultural consumption to cultural production (Dickinson in Smith, 1976, p.9). As Wenders states:

> We need to equip our children with the skills to decode images so they'll still have the taste for their own ones, so we can continue in Europe to produce and project our own imagery, our own image and identity, in the future. (Wenders, 2010, p.6 [emphasis in original])

While such momentum has yet to be achieved in the Irish educational landscape, a series of indigenous stakeholders are posing arguments in line with the acknowledgement of cultural identity being tied to regionalized notions of film in the words of Wenders, Ding and the EAVI alike.

The Benefits of Film Education in Ireland

In their efforts to tether film to Irish education, a number of organizations have placed an emphasis on film's ability to spark learning, bolster cultural identity and mobilise economic redevelopment. In particular Ireland's film and animation industries have been argued to play a central role in functions of what Eurostat had, by the year 2000, deemed the "cultural sector" (European Commission, 2010, p.5). As one of the core domains outlined by *Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries* (2010), the European Union-wide Green Paper solicited thinking around, by, and about professional cultural and creative content producers, suggesting that audiovisual media plays a fundamental part in the 'preservation, creation, production dissemination, trade/sales and education' of Ireland's indigenous cultural specificities. According to this document, education in, and production and transmission of, film, may lead to a 'positive spill-over' of such modes of engagement and thereby entrepreneurial thinking (European Commission, 2010, p.3-5). Simply put, students who have engagement with film, and other creative endeavours in the educational sector, will benefit strongly in their scholastic and professional lives.

There is strong evidence that such thinking is not off the mark. In an April 2011 report presented to the Department for Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht,[8] the Audiovisual Strategic Review Steering Group (AvSRSG[9]) argued that the Irish industries they represented showed a sense of 'resilience' across the country, and that they are poised to increase apace, despite the overwhelming economic despair in which Ireland finds itself today (AvSRSG, 2011, p.32). Having maintained positive growth during a time of significant fiscal retraction, the report identifies that the Irish film and broadcast industries grew from 694 fulltime employees in 1991, to more than 5,400 people by 2007 – presently providing an industry worth more than half a billion Euro to the nation (AvSRSG, 2011, p.i).

Ireland's digital economy is still growing. In the current social and economic climate an 8% net industry growth per annum is achievable, with projected employment totalling to 10,000 people working in a billion-Euro industry by 2016; the AvSRSG's report implores the government to place 'education and training' for young people as the preeminent catalyst for nurturing the innate talent that 'constitutes the quantum of creative, entrepreneurial and technical' skills necessary for the continued success, and ambitious expansion of the industry (AvSRSG, 2011, p.ii-v, 10). The AvSRSG document asserts that it is 'the education system […] in which the skills that develop creativity are fostered' (AvSRSG, 2011, p.12). The invocation of the education system, and a wider definition of literacy itself, removes the document from the confines of the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht and places its advocacy squarely

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at the foot of its sister department, the Department in Education and Skills. Simply:

> Film and television [...] are a contemporary form of communication and, as a visual medium, benefit the curriculum as a dynamic method of education delivery. This content would play a key part in delivering the Government's objectives to build digital and media literacy (AvSRSG, 2011, p.12).

While the Green Paper and the AvSRSG's report make for strong arguments for the expansion of the current role of film across Irish curricula while also lending financial return to the cultural advocacy supported by the arguments of Wim Wenders (2010), such implorations find little uptake within the Department of Education's policy document. Despite the architecture of Ireland's national educational plan, the interests of the cultural and industry stakeholders detailed above may yet gain traction. But as to questions of assessment and the intended outcomes of Irish education, these are being debated by other professional educational organisations.

The Process of Revision to Curricular Assessment, and the Potential for Curricular Inclusion of Film and Moving Image Media

At the same time that DES is calling for a return toward MEDIA's notion of classically-oriented literacy as well as numeracy measures that can provide quantitative ends across primary and Senior Cycle curricula, the manner in which the interstitial years of the Irish Junior Cycle are organized and delivered has undergone significant scrutiny and debate toward forthcoming revision. After a call for consultancy submissions, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) presented their findings in relation to an overhaul of the Junior Cycle framework (NCCA, 2011). Chief amongst these findings was a call to implement wider 'key skills' based learning in the classroom (NCCA, 2011a, slide 2). In a wider concession than the Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life document, these skills include processes such as 'communicating, being creative, working with others and managing information and thinking' – as well as an emphasis on exploratory teaching and learning practices that are grounded in 'practical and creative' subjects, rather than text-oriented rote learning in advance of cumulative assessments (NCCA, 2011a, slide 5).

Eighteen months later after the call to revise the Junior Certificate, the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn, released a statement confirming that the 'terminal Junior Certificate Examinations will be replaced with a school-based model of assessment which would place emphasis on the quality of students' learning experience'. Beginning with the English curriculum, the phasing in of such measures will commence in the autumn of 2014 (DES, 2012).

It must be noted that the overarching aims of literacy and numeracy remain fixed as the primary goals for all Junior Cycle students. Rather than a rote-based learning system, these changes, will focus on in-class assessments of 'understanding and competencies' as well as summative exams (DES, 2012). *Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle* draws upon twenty-four 'Statements of Learning', prized as overarching learning outcomes towards which all educators will strive. The qualities that are reflected in the revised Junior Cycle curriculum run the gamut from entrepreneurial thinking, championed above as an inherent outcome of film-based criticality and problem-solving, to physical well being and healthy diet (NCCA, 2011b, p.15). A number of the goals presented are applicable to the envisaging of film within the Irish curricula as indicated in the work of the BFI and wider European institutions such as MEDIA and the EAVI – all of whom place an emphasis on the integration of media into wider subject specificities.

Eight of the Junior Cycle's key intentions for the revised syllabus are particularly relevant to the discourse around film in the classroom established in this essay. Statements of learning 1,

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2, 3, 7, 12, 17, 19 and 21 read as follows:

1. The student communicates effectively using a variety of means in a range of contexts in L1[10]

2. The student reaches a level of personal proficiency in L2 and one other language in reading, writing, speaking and listening

3. The student creates, appreciates and critically interprets texts (including written, oral, visual or other texts)

7. The student improves their [sic] observation, inquiry and critical-thinking skills

12. The student values local and national heritage and recognises the relevance of the past to the current national and international issues and events

17. The student, creates, presents and appreciates artistic works

19. The student uses ICT effectively and ethically in learning and in life

21. The student appreciates and respects how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which they live

(NCCA, 2011b, p.15)

In each of these 'Statements of Learning', film can be used in a far more nuanced manner than the medium's current employ in the English and Fine Art syllabi. While changes are occurring at the level of the Junior Cycle, and the possibility of a 'short course' in Digital Media Literacy has been noted as coming on stream for Junior Cycle students, this sets up an 'either/or' dynamic which continues the trend of a lack of genuine integration between digital and creative skillsets and core course content that such skills can inform (DES, 2012).

Avenues for change appear to be opening. In January of 2013, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and the Departments of Education and Skills, jointly recognised the launch of the *Arts in Education Charter* (DAHG/DES, 2013). While steadfastly centred on a widening of the dynamic between 'arts education and arts-in-education', which are respectively defined as 'mainstream teaching and learning of the arts as part of a general education' and 'artists of all disciplines visiting schools [or] engaging with arts and cultural practice in the public arena' (DAHG/DES, 2013, p.3), there remains a concession in the document for arts-in-education to make inroads to 'support learning in other curricular areas' (DAHG/DES, 2013, p.11). While not elaborated upon by the charter, the acknowledgement that 'the arts' has the potential to engage wider curricula gives credence to the ability for multimodal engagement to challenge the codified nature of the Irish educational system. It must be observed however that while 'music, painting, dance and drama' are given credence within the charter, film and video as media, as well as teaching tools, still face an uphill battle, as neither is mentioned within the charter (DAHG/DES, 2013, p.7-8).

Conclusion

Film and moving image media have the capacity to broaden the Irish mandate for literacy education in a manner in keeping with international precedents and the nation's own recently revised outcomes for student development. This paper has argued for a wider engagement with film that is at once critical, cultural and creative in contexts that largely challenge national educational directives. The approach adopted by this paper (in keeping with the host of sympathetic stakeholders from educational, cultural and industrial sectors) would see the Irish curricula moving beyond the stymieing confines found within the Republic of Ireland's strategies for English and Fine Art education. The present models for engaging with film, as well as teaching and assessing such material, diverge from wider thinking across the European Union where more novel and integrative approaches to curricular content create the space for a radical overhaul of the discourse around media in the education system.

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Such an approach is echoed in Wenders' statements to the European Parliament and the Green Paper's insistence that '[m]edia literacy education […] promote[s] citizens' creativity and participation in the cultural life of society' – the scholastic benefits of which can be attributed to the fostering of 'imagination, interpersonal skills […and] critical thinking' (European Commission, 2010, p.18). Such an opportunity remains absent from Ireland's national plan as outlined in the Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life.

While the NCCA's document articulates a place for the 'encourage[ment of] innovation in schooling and teaching and creative learning in the classroom', there is as yet no mention of film as being one such example of an innovative technique for any such curriculum (NCCA, 2011b, p.14). Through wider advocacy and a synthesis of the like-minded positions across the sectors from which support for film in education has been drawn, the benefits for both 'learning and life' that are arrived at through media-based investigation can find place and uptake within the Irish educational landscape.

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NOTES

1. Mathematics scores fared worse in 2009 with the mean score of Irish 15 year olds placing the Republic 33rd amongst 65 participating nations – below PISA's arithmetic mean score (PISA, 2009).

2. The 'suggested' list of titles for use in the Leaving Certificate syllabus is populated by texts such as New Grange (O'Riordáin and Daniel, 1964) and Leask's three volumes of Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings (1955, 1958, 1960) toward 'contemporary' art, the syllabus recommends the Modern Irish Landscape slide pack (Arts Council, 1981) and Nicola Gordon Bowe's Recent Irish Stained Glass slide pack (1983) (NCCA, n.d.).

3. Murray (2007) notes proposed changes including 'media and communications, and discovering Irish art' that evolved within the NCCA between 2005 and 2007. Given the lack of revision to syllabi between then and the present, it is clear that these changes have not yet taken place.

4. Toy Story 1 and Toy Story 2 (Lasseter,1995;1999), Toy Story 3 (Unkrich, 2010).

5. Presently, The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe (Adamson, 2005); Prince Caspian (Adamson, 2008) and The Voyage of the Dawn Treader (Apted, 2010).

6. Presently, Pirates of the Caribbean [PotC]: The Curse of the Black Pearl (Verbinski ,2003), PotC: Dead Man's Chest (Verbinski, 2006), PotC: At World's End (Verbinski, 2007) and PotC: On Stranger Tides (Marshall, 2010).

7. Harry Potter [HP] and the Philosopher's Stone (Columbus, 2001), HP and the Chamber of Secrets (Columbus, 2002), HP and the Prisoner of Azkaban (Cuarón, 2004), HP and the Goblet of Fire (Newell, 2005), HP and the Order of the Phoenix (Yates, 2007), HP and the Half-blood Prince (Yates, 2009), HP and the Deathly Hollows [Parts I and II] (Yates, 2010; 2011).

8. The report was initially undertaken under the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism; the departments were reshuffled to their present affiliations after the March 2011 election.

9. The working group was comprised of Brendan Tuohy, Cathal Gaffney (MD Brown Bag Films), Éanna Ó Conghaile (Department of Communications, Energy and National Resources), Ed Guiney (Director Element Pictures), James Morris (Irish Film Board, CEO Windmill Pictures), Larry Bass (CEO Screentime Shinawil), Margaret Lawlor (Department of Enterprise, Jobs and Innovation), Niall O'Donnchu (Department of Arts, Heritage

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and the Gaeltacht) and Tristan Orpen Lynch (MD Subotica Entertainment) (AvRSRG, 2011, p. i-ii).

10. L1 is the primary language used within the school, whether English or Irish.

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