ENGAGING YEAR 9 BOYS IN VISUAL ARTS THEORY THROUGH DIGITAL MEDIA STORYTELLING

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INTRODUCTION

My research topic was built upon my experience as a Visual Arts teacher and observations of most boys' disengagement and lack of confidence in traditional writing-based forms of Art theory assessment tasks.

Sir Ken Robinson's 2008 TED talk, *Changing Education Paradigms,* on the need for educators to encourage creativity and divergent thinking was a key source of inspiration for this project. The medium of film enables students to creatively explore artworks and develop narratives that cater to their strong interest in technology and storytelling.

Robinson notes, *"They're being besieged with information and calls for their attention from every platform - computers, from iPhones... and we're penalising them now for getting distracted. From what? Boring stuff at school, for the most part."*

THE RESEARCH QUESTION

How might creating narrative based film critiques improve Year 9 boys' engagement with Visual Arts theory?
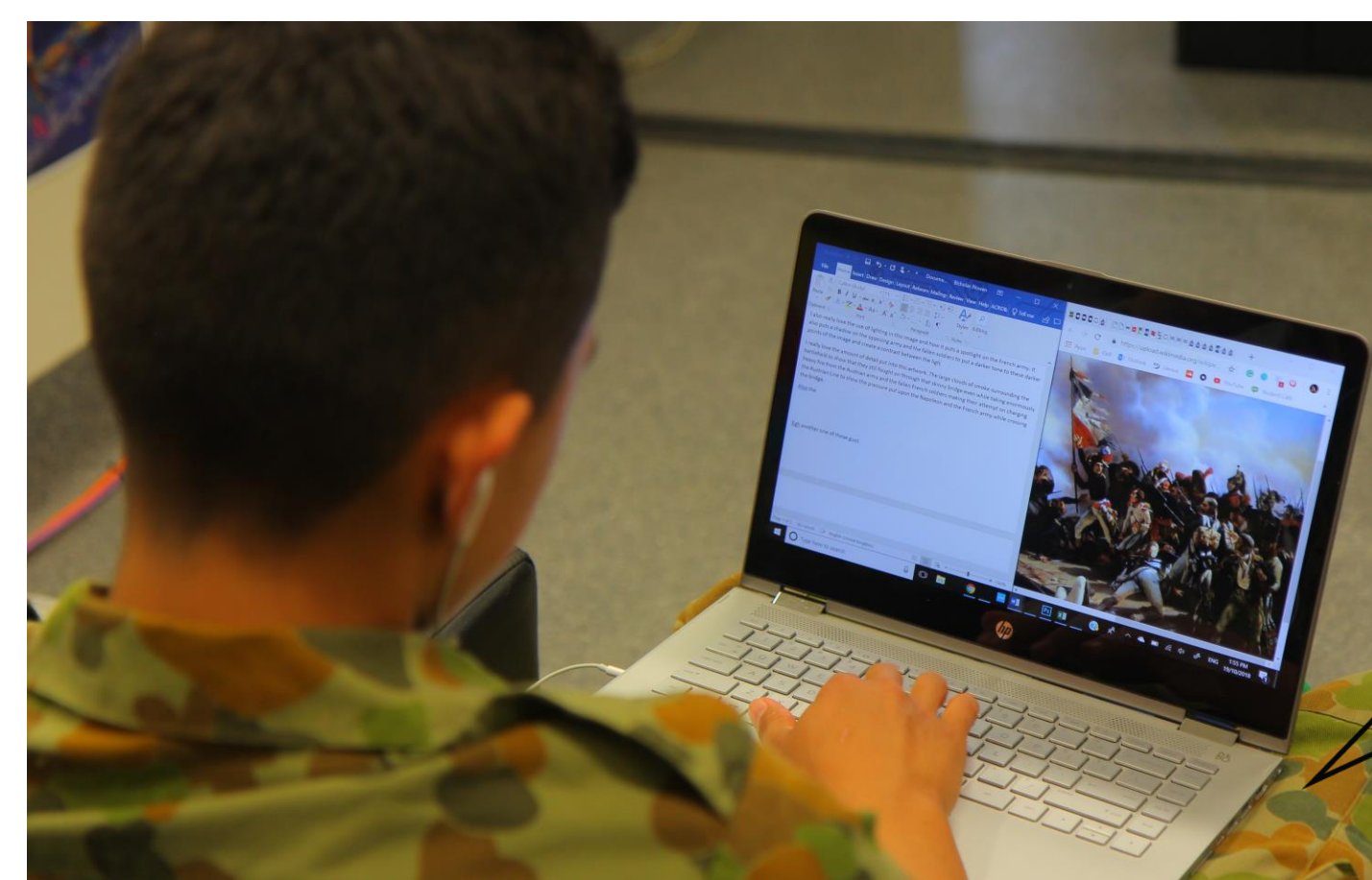
"I found it much more engaging because in the traditional writing tasks I sort of just do it, and I don't really take much in, but in this I took a lot in because I had to learn stuff, like research the artists or figure out how they acted and all that sort of stuff to get it accurate."

RESEARCH CONTENTS AND PARTICIPANTS

The Southport School is a private, all boys Anglican School on the Gold Coast, in Queensland, Australia. The school has approximately 1600 students from pre-school to Year 12, including around 300 boarders from years 7-12. The boys generally come from high socioeconomic backgrounds. My project participants were a Year 9 Art class of 14 boys.

THE RESEARCH ACTION

The boys were required to create narrative based short films on their artworks, choosing from a range of 18th and 19th century paintings that were selected for their storytelling opportunities. The boys were able to utilise green screen technology and costumes to role play as the artists or characters from the paintings and to immerse themselves into their artworks.

The assessment task spanned 7 lessons and featured exemplar films, demonstration of filming and editing techniques, script development, film production, and final evaluations.

"It was much more fun to do a video, 'cause you do it with all your mates, and then you can just choreograph in your own certain thing to it. With just writing words, it's kinda just a bit old and boring."

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The main forms of data collection utilised for this project were:
1. Questionnaires
2. Filmed Interviews (groups and individuals)
3. Lesson observations, using field notes and film recordings.
4. Boys' film submissions

As the collected data featured qualitative and quantitative sources, I interpreted them using a triangulation mixed methods approach, allowing for informal comparisons of the data (Mertler, 2017).
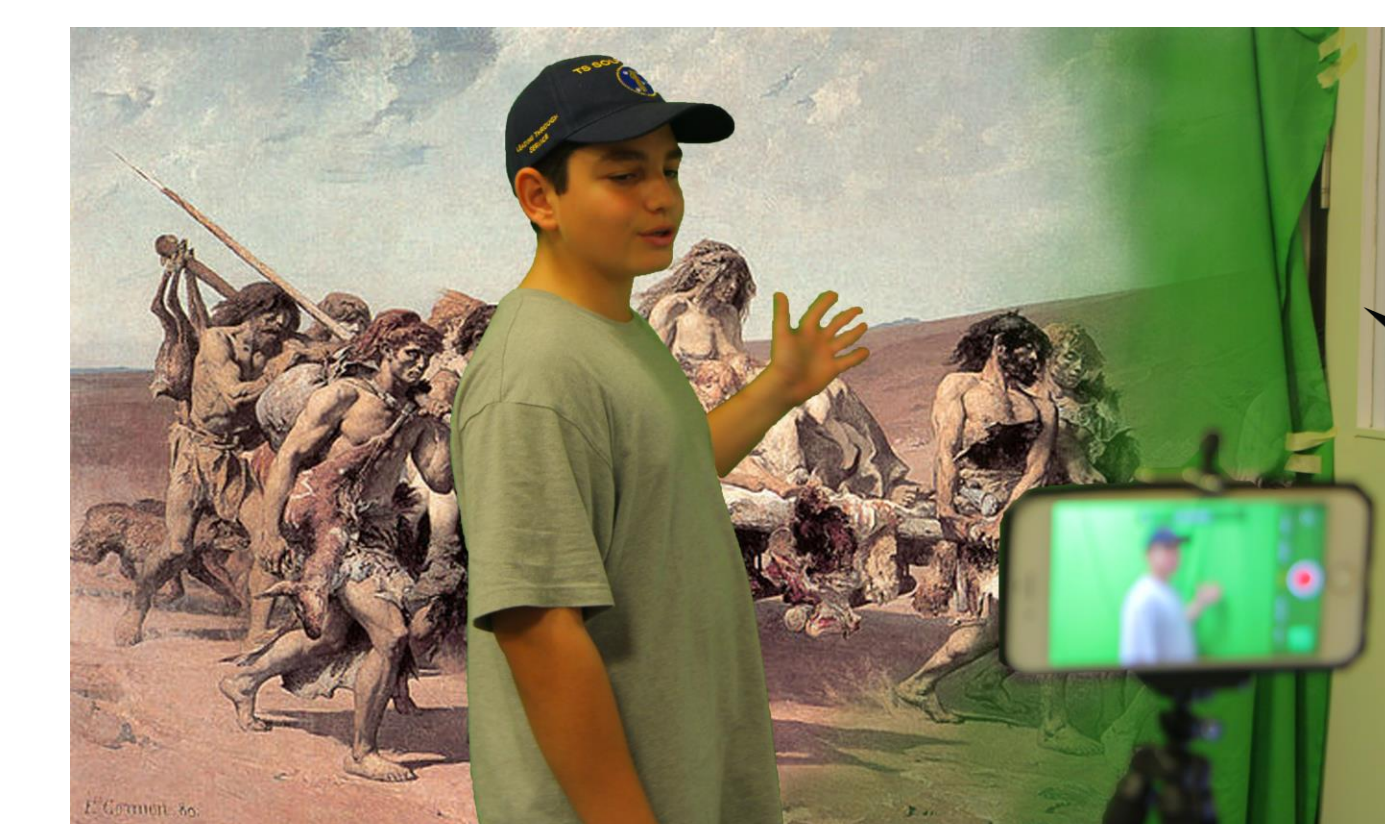
"Oh, it was just cool, learning how to do green screen. Now I know I can do that with other things."

KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Enhanced Engagement Through Creativity and Collaboration. Throughout the course of the project, boys were enthusiastically discussing and developing their films together, which helped foster a dynamic and exciting classroom environment.

Improved Digital Literacy. Participants were able to greatly develop and enhance their skills in using digital media by independently learning film and editing skills in their selected editing programs.

Furthering Knowledge of Art History Through a Narrative Approach. Many boys stated that they were able to obtain a deeper understanding of their artwork as a result of this non-traditional, narrative approach.

CONCLUSIONS

Most participants were enthusiastic about the prospect of continuing to utilise non-traditional approaches to art theory. Based on the success of this project, I plan on implementing more creative and participatory approaches to art theory across all the year groups that I teach.

The project has also highlighted the importance of a strong narrative element to engage boys' interest and promote further development of their literacy skills.

KEY READINGS

Miller, S., & Pennycuff, L. (2008). The power of story: Using storytelling to improve literacy learning. *Journal of Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives in Education, 1*, 36–43.

Robinson, Sir K. (2008). [video] RSA: Changing education paradigms: *The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.*

Watson, A.K., Martino, M., & Watson, W. (2010). The problem of boys' literacy underachievement: Raising some questions. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 53*(5), 356–361.
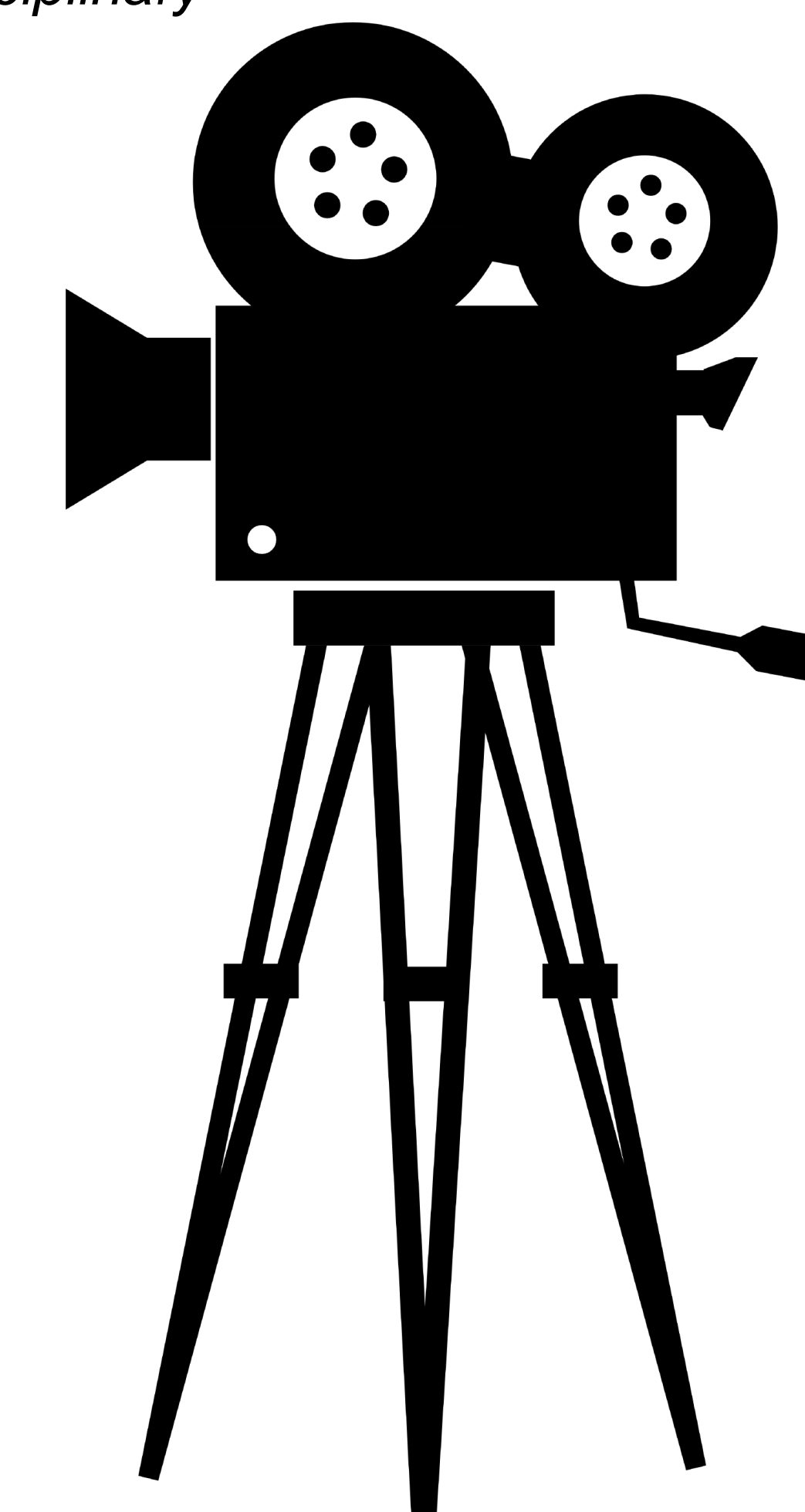
International Boys' Schools Coalition Action Research Program 2018 - 2019
Boys and Stories: Pathways to Learning

Scan this QR code to watch a video taster of my research project.