Changing perceptions of Film Studies: How to increase uptake of A Level Film Studies in an inner London Academy

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Changing perceptions of Film Studies:

How to increase uptake of A Level Film Studies in an inner London Academy

Abstract

Working as head of Film and Media in a school with a traditionally low uptake of creative and arts-based subjects, I have been faced with the challenge of attempting to increase the uptake of Film Studies amongst the current year 11 cohort. Whilst the balance between creative art subjects and STEM being taught in schools is something that has been part of the national discussion about education in England for the last two decades, most of this focus has been on the drive to increase numbers and gender equality amongst the students opting to study STEM subjects. Despite the long-standing evidence that creative thinking is essential to student progress and learning in the classroom, not just to the creative subjects, but to their holistic learning, little has been written in terms of how we can best tackle negative views of arts subjects amongst disinterested groups. Having surveyed the year group as a whole at the beginning of the year, I created a sample group that reflected the year group in terms of gender and levels of interest in choosing Film Studies as one of their A level options, and across the year provided three interventions for this group, each aiming to tackle a misconception or driver of negative perceptions that emerged from focus groups and student surveys. This group, in comparison to the rest of the year who acted as a control group, showed sizable shifts in attitudes towards Film Studies, and whilst the true impact won't be known until options are finalised, the proportion of students intending or considering to study Film have increased significantly.

The lack of a breadth of Film Studies specific research, and the inability to definitively know if the interventions themselves, rather than just increased exposure to Film Studies as a prospect, were the true force for these changes limited the research. However, the findings did lead to potential solutions and actions for my department moving forwards.

The research pointed towards issues around motivation, parental and family attitudes towards the subject, as well as uncertainty of what the subject was and where it could lead students beyond their time in education. Whilst each of these elements are explored in more detail within the research, there are some overall solutions that seem to present themselves, particularly around exposure to the subject.

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Introduction and rationale

The balance between creative art subjects and STEM being taught in schools is something that has been part of the national discussion in English education for the last two decades (Brown, Brown, Merrill and Reardon, 2011; Bybee, 2010; Tytler, Osborne, Williams, Tytler, & Cripps Clark, 2008), with most of this focus being on the drive to increase numbers and gender equality amongst the students opting to study STEM subjects. However, it has long been accepted that creative thinking is essential to student progress and learning in the classroom, not just to the creative subjects, but to their holistic learning (Torrance, 1965; Garra, 2017) and as such, schools have a need to strike a balance across the curricula disciplines that they offer. As a result of the work around STEM subjects, in recent years, many schools have seen an increase of STEM uptake whilst the creative subjects have started to fall behind in terms of numbers and funding, and this is certainly the case within this study's focus school. The focus school of this study is an inner city 11-18 coeducational Academy, with roughly 1200 students across the school and Sixth Form.

Traditionally, within the school, subjects such as maths, the sciences and business studies are opted for in very high numbers by students going in to Year 12. This tends to leave the creative arts subjects with very small class sizes, if they interest enough students for the courses to run at all. This is an issue that is worsening over time, and for both of the last two cohorts, A Level Music, Drama and Film Studies failed to attract enough students for the school to offer any of the qualifications. This is an area that has been targeted by the school leadership as one for improvement this year and as part of this the creative arts departments will become more collaborative in an attempt to encourage more students to take up creative subjects. The school has recognised the need for students to have the opportunity to explore their creativity and artistic skills, along with the analytical thinking that the arts subjects provide. As the newly appointed Head of Film and Media within the school, it is part of my remit for the year to drive up the number of students choosing Film Studies for A level. I want to ensure this process is done so in a way that appeals to the students who would benefit from the study of Film and tackles the concerns and barriers that are currently stopping students from choosing the subject.

The study aimed to explore the literature that exists around creative subjects and the perceptions that are held of them within education, along with the potential barriers for students in their decision-making process when it comes to post-16 options. From here, the study went on to collect data from current Year 11 students as they went through the options process and tried to uncover the reasons for the low uptake of Film Studies. Finally, the study aimed to see whether there is potential to put interventions in place to tackle these issues.

Critical review of the literature

My review of the literature around the context of my research hinged upon five key areas that my colleagues and I identified as what we view to be key factors in the discussion:

- Why creative subjects are important.
- The need for continuity.
- Lack of motivation to study film.
- Attribution of lesser value to film as a subject.
- Family/environmental factors.

Why creative subjects are important.

The place of Film Studies within the field of educational research tends to be in the exploration of film as a tool for the teaching of other subjects. Whilst it has been proven to be a powerful way of diversifying and complementing pedagogical choices (Amelio, 1971) and of developing knowledge and curricula of other subjects (Meyer, 2006; Marcus, Metzger, Paxton and Stoddard, 2018) there has been little research in to the teaching of Film Studies as a discipline and the impact that it can have on the learners that study it. There has even been research into how film has shaped school spaces and dynamics (Giroux, 2008) and yet no research that into the ways that school spaces and dynamics can shape Film Studies courses or outcomes. Whilst this in itself says something about the value that is attributed to Film Studies as a an academic discipline, something that will be explored further in this review, there is plenty of research that points to the value of the group of subjects that film belongs to, and the potential barriers to student uptake and success in these subjects. The development of creativity and scepticism is something that is seen to be hugely beneficial for students' learning across the curriculum (Torrance, 1965) and an increased contact with the arts and creative subjects is one way to ensure this development is encouraged. Chronopolou and Riga (2012) acknowledge this, and state that “the emergence of creative behaviours, such as an increased freedom of expression, a tendency to explore and experiment, and a questioning of what is commonly accepted, were considered to be a consequence of the specific educational programme” (p.1) which in this case saw an increased engagement with a programme of study around the creative arts. Beyond their progress in the classroom, the advantages of studying arts-based subjects to students' wider success (Hill and Davidson, 2019) is something that develops the case for the value of creative arts subjects further.

Despite the lack of direct research into the value and power of Film Studies, there is much that can be applied to it as a discipline from other areas of education research. For instance, the need for students to see and feel tangible connections between taught subject content and their personal experiences is well documented and perhaps best

summarised in Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez's notion of 'Funds of Knowledge' (Moll et al., 1992). And one key merit that Film Studies could bring to a school's programme of study is the direct connections and prior knowledge that students have of film and moving image media (James, 1999). Not only do these funds increase student engagement, but the use of "strategic connections" (Moll et al., p.132) within the planning of lessons and pedagogical choices has a huge benefit to student understanding and progress. The power of using topics and content that is directly relatable to students' own lives is hugely beneficial (Hopkin, 2015) and given the popularity of film as a medium amongst young people it offers an opportunity to take advantage of this and expand students' skill sets and wider learning.

It is this engagement with the subject in their everyday lives that makes Film Studies a subject worthy of study. As Silverstone (1999) puts it **"**It is because the media are central to our everyday lives that we must study them." (p.2). The existing knowledge and engagement, even subconscious, means that the subject has tremendous value to students and allows them to "[s]tudy them as social and cultural as well as political and economic" (ibid.). Film presents the perfect opportunity for that, as it balances the study of artistic forms and the wider social significance of them. Dyer (1998) summarises its value by saying **"**For formal and aesthetic discourse, film matters for its artistic merit. It is a concern with the politics of film that has underpinned the emergence of what we may call a cultural studies perspective. The aesthetic and cultural cannot stand in opposition." (p.4).

This seems to be a particularly big opportunity in schools such as the focus of this study, as a student body with unusually high numbers of students who qualify for free school meals (FSM) and students who speak English as an additional language (EAL) may well find themselves 'discriminated' against by curriculum and policy makers, particularly in subjects such as literature (Sinfield, 1985, p.160) where their background knowledge and engagement with the subject beyond the classroom may be lesser than their peers elsewhere in the country. This however seems to be less likely in a subject such as Film studies, due to the wider spread engagement with the art form amongst all students.

With all this in mind, the question then remains: what is preventing students from choosing these subjects?

What are the barriers for students choosing film studies?

I will now start to consider the possible drivers behind the low uptake of Film Studies, and the reasons that students may give the subject less worth than the alternatives that they are offered.

The need for continuity.

Film Studies' position as an optional subject means that, whether it be at GCSE or A level, students must begin their learning and knowledge seemingly from scratch. Though this is of course not entirely true given the transferable nature of many skills and areas of knowledge gained in other areas of the curriculum, this perception could be one element of choosing to study film that students would find off putting. Given that transitions in education can be very problematic, and students can experience some hugely negative impacts if they find one of these difficult

(Haggis & Pouget, 2002; Macaro & Wingate, 2007) it is understandable that students may want to avoid what they perceive to be the difficulties of beginning an entirely new subject.

The chances of a student being both academically successful and developing a view of learning and growth that will provide them with an appreciation of a lifelong acquisition of knowledge, hinges on the success of the creation of a clear pathway that links all their years in education (Claxton, 2009). Establishing the view that education is a process of continual accumulation and progression skills, along with the mentality and cognitive skills to achieve this, gives young people a better chance of attaining well in school, but also of being suitably prepared for life beyond education (Boekaerts, 1999). If this process is disrupted or made to be more disjointed, then this progressive growth of skills and cognitive capability can be significantly limited. Potential reasons for inhibiting this progression are varied and complex (Green, 2005). They can be caused by choices and structures made by the school and designers of curricula, which can result in students seeing fewer connections and routes through the different stages of their education (Ballinger, 2003; Stewart and McCormack, 1997). This can cause problems within individual subject areas, so the addition of choosing an unfamiliar subject to the process of negotiating and already potentially problematic transition between pre and post 16 levels of education could certainly present itself as an unappealing prospect. As well as this, these moments of transition can be made more challenging by students not having developed the meta-cognition (Marland, 2003) and levels of independence and self-direction that become increasingly important at higher levels of education (Smith, 2004; Smith, 2003), giving students a wide range of challenges to contend with before the consideration of gaining an understanding of what unfamiliar courses of study will entail.

Whilst applicable to the context of this study, it is worth noting that the vast majority of research that covers the difficulties of transitions in study focuses on the jumps between KS2 and KS3, or between school and higher education. Therefore, the emphasis of the research is rarely on the challenges that are presented by beginning the study of an entirely new subject.

Despite all of this, given that the uptake of other optional subjects particularly Business Studies and Economics is very high amongst the same cohort at the focus school, it stands to reason that this factor is probably not the biggest driver in the low uptake of Film Studies. However, it is worth noting that both Business Studies and Economics are offered, and popular, at KS4, as well as KS5, whereas Film Studies does not appear on the KS4 curriculum. Given the clear value that visible routes through education can provide to students, it logically follows that an increased presence in KS3 and KS4 study for Film and similar creative subjects could improve student perceptions of the subject and their chances of success in it. This need for continuity between levels of study was furthered by the policy change in 2013 which made full time training or education compulsory until the age of 18. This decision was made, in part, as a response to the Tomlinson report of 2004 which explored the idea of a 14-19 curriculum with both academic and vocational routes available. Its value as a report was evident, and it was viewed as a significant moment in educational policy; “The Tomlinson Report is that rare thing in education, a document on which almost everyone agrees” (Marshall, 2005, pg. 1). However, its significance was not reflected in the government reaction to this report; in fact, it is arguable that the response was in opposition to the report as AS and A2 levels were

“decoupled” (Long, 2017, pg.4), despite the clear suggestion that Key Stages 4 and 5 should have a greater level of cohesion and overlap. Without this, the transitions and breaks in students’ educational journeys can lead to severe disengagement with the educational process (Black & Wiliam, 1998). This again suggests that students may find the prospect of studying a subject such as Film Studies from a position of seemingly nothing both troubling and unappealing. This leads towards the conclusion that beginning the study of Film Studies at KS5 does little, in students' minds at least, to continue the routes of lifelong learning that students need to be successful (Claxton, 2009; Boekearts, 1999).

Lack of motivation to study film.

Another potential barrier to students choosing to study Film could stem from the students finding little or no motivation in the prospect of Film Studies. Motivation is something that is very hard to define, and its origins are unique for every student (Galloway, Rogers, Armstrong, Leo and Jackson, 2004). However, there is some consensus that the most motivated students are driven by forces that are personal and internal, as well as by external factors. One prominent school of thought on the issue of students' motivation explores the need for balance between the 'goals' that students strive for, and the 'drives' that push them onwards towards these (Kleinginna and Kleinginna, 1981; Covington, 2000). For students to be able to develop these 'goals', it is important that students have a notion of what the success they are aiming for looks like, and how they are progressing towards this. The recognition of their progress, development and achievements is essential to the development of motivation and continued drive in students (Dweck and Molden, 2005) and this clearly highlights the relationship between Covington's (2000) 'goals' and drives; the opportunity to reflect on their progress towards a goal drives their learning onwards. This implies that a student's internal motivation, whilst to a degree could be said to be intrinsic, hinges on the interactions and engagement that they have with their teachers, peers and course content. Galloway et al. (2004) also acknowledge this, accepting that the context of learners, their school and the pedagogical choices made in the teaching of a subject must all be considered, but also that the significance of students' inherent inner motivation should not be discounted.

It is worth noting that much of this research and thinking is viewed in terms of student motivation within a single classroom, or at the very least within an individual moment or level of education. It does not explicitly consider the additional challenge of students finding motivation for subjects that they have not studied before, qualifications they are unfamiliar with, and progressions of learning that they may view as not even having started yet. Whilst this is a potential limitation of applying this to the options process and uptake of a subject, it does also offer some potential reasons for students finding the prospect of a new subject unappealing. Without the opportunity to have had goals to work towards in a given subject, students may not appreciate their place within their existing and ongoing learning and development (Claxton, 2009). As such, students may not only fail to develop the drive to succeed in a subject that they have seen no tangible success in but may even view themselves as ignorant and unprepared for study of a new subject. So, as well as not developing the balance between the push and pull of the goals and drives that Covington outlines, they may view themselves as ill-equipped for the study of a previously

untested discipline. This is a double edged sword of demotivation, as failing to recognise one's own ability and success is hugely detrimental for student motivation (Arnot and Reay, 2004); but also, the feeling of being underprepared for the next step of education can have a further negative impact on this and, as a result, levels of attainment (Haggis & Pouget, 2002; Macaro & Wingate, 2007). This is particularly problematic for students who hold the mindset that inherent ability, rather than improvement and growth, are the main factors of success (Claxton, 2009).

Different notions of success lead to different sources and indications of motivation for students (Claxton, 2009) and students' view of what success looks like and the measures that define this result in changing levels and patterns of motivation, within different contexts (Ames, 1992). This could then suggest that there will be again a different pattern and level of motivation for students with little notion of what success in a subject looks like if they are unfamiliar with it. This is furthered by the fact that students' motivation is heightened or dampened by the likelihood they deem themselves as having of reaching these achievements (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier and Ryan, 2011), and again if they have no notion, or a misinformed notion, of what their ability to succeed in a subject would be then their motivation to begin the study of it may well be affected.

However, one view of student motivation would suggest that the nature of A Level study should, regardless of the subject, increase student motivation. The fact that during A Level study learners are presented with greater opportunity to shape the style and content of their learning should be motivating, as this increased agency is something that is seen to drive motivation (Giroux, 1999). The space for students to determine how their study will happen would create opportunities for students to work in collaboration with their teachers to determine the pedagogical choices that should be made to best increase their progress and attainment (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007; Bragg, 2007). However, the fact that the choice and flexibility of study that exists on the A Level Film Studies course fails to motivate students to choose it as an area of learning suggests that other factors must outweigh this one. It is likely, for instance, that if we examine this view against the ideas of student perceptions of their own ability and progress (Arnot and Reay, 2004) it could suggest that the demotivating force of a student's lack of familiarity with a subject and its content could overshadow the motivation gained from increased independence within it.

Attribution of lesser value to film as a subject.

Another potential factor, and one that from professional anecdotal evidence I suspect to be hugely significant in the focus school, is that film as a subject is viewed as less valuable and worthy of study than others. The fact that it is not just film but all creative subjects that suffer from low uptake in the school, suggests that it is an attitude that applies to the arts and creative subjects as a whole, rather than just to Film Studies in isolation. As I have already touched upon, the level of educational research in to Film Studies is minimal and, as such, much of the findings and hypotheses that I will explore in this section have been made whilst looking at the collective arts subjects, or other individual subjects within that umbrella group. Many of these findings seem to be applicable and transferable to others, so it is more than plausible that they will apply to Film Studies as well.

The view of arts subjects as a collective is something that has been explored to an extent, particularly in terms of the place they hold in a perceived hierarchy of subjects. Bell, Malacova, Shannon and Vidal Rodeiro (2006) explored the impact of comments from politicians and leading universities on the value assigned to different disciplines and subject areas. Building on a claim in July 2006 in the Observer from Boris Johnson that 'This year, as every year for the last two decades, we are seeing a drift away from crunchier subjects such as sciences, maths and languages.' (Johnson, Observer, 2006) the report explores the notion that the media and the voices that are given a platform within it create a narrative around the spread of a group 'softer subjects to which the arts are viewed to belong. Bell et al. go on to point out that Cambridge and other leading universities list on their website a group of subjects that includes Media Studies that are viewed as 'less effective preparation' for study at their university (http://www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/requirements/, 2019). It is worth noting that other leading universities, for instance Warwick, state on their admissions site that "Breadth of subjects is valued by our selectors" over a preference to certain subjects (http://warwick.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/apply/entry/, 2019) suggesting that there is a place for the arts at other leading institutions. Nonetheless, it is significant that leading politicians and educational organisations further the idea that certain subjects have more worth than others. The report goes on to point out that up until the 1960s there was some resistance to the study of literature and English as a subject at the highest levels, and that the arts and media may find themselves in a similar position of changed perception in the near future. The report finishes by highlighting the potential for this attitude to perpetuate an elitist view of education, and in turn push out groups such as FSM and female students who traditionally take up some of the "crunchier" subjects in smaller numbers.

This is an idea that is developed by Kinder and Harland (2004) who also explore the impact of devaluing subjects on student engagement, particularly of those in groups that are already more likely to fail to engage with learning. Going further than Bell et al., they identify a further hierarchy of subjects within the arts. They acknowledge that arts are not viewed as 'core' subjects, but within the arts "art and music are established foundation subjects; drama and dance have a more peripheral status, thus implying they are even less important than art and music." (Kinder & Harland, 2004, p.568). By identifying a power structure within the group of subjects that are already viewed as less important by some, they flag the fact that some subjects are pushed out almost entirely. They identify that the amount of time students have to engage with a subject in Key Stages 1,2 and 3 will have a direct impact on their success and perception of it at KS4. If we apply this to Film Studies, a subject that is not taught in the focus school before KS5 and is notably entirely absent in both reports and grouped together with Media Studies by Cambridge, this could identify a key factor in students' reluctance to study the subject.

One arts subject that has had more research in to the levels of uptake is music. Bray (2000), Wright (2002), Lamont, Hargreaves, Marshall and Tarrant (2003) and Lamont and Maton (2008) have explored the potential factors in falling levels of uptake of GCSE music across schools. Whilst the studies do focus explicitly on music, the findings and theoretical reasons offered all apply directly to Film Studies. Firstly, Bray (2000) offers two key reasons as to why students may be reluctant to study GCSE Music: That students see GCSE study of music as separate from any

previous musical experiences, and that students may be put off from studying music as they do not feel that they have the knowledge or expertise existing to succeed. If we take these reasons as true, then by applying them to Film Studies they certainly offer some potential hypothesise as to why students may feel hesitant to study Film. Firstly, given that Music is a subject often taught across KS2 and KS3 and students still felt an anxiety about studying it at a higher level, the idea of starting to study a subject like Film Studies with no KS2 or KS3 experience could make this anxiety worse. In the focus school of Bray's research, where Music was offered as a GCSE option, students found the notion of studying creative subjects at a level higher than their existing knowledge and experience daunting. If students are concerned by the differences that present themselves between levels of study in a subject that they are familiar with, then it stands to reason that these feelings would be exacerbated when faced with the prospect of a completely unfamiliar subject. This builds directly into Bray's second suggested barrier for students; if they are unfamiliar with Film Studies as a subject and a concept then they are very unlikely to view themselves as prepared to study it. Wright (2002) found that students who engaged with music and learnt an instrument outside of school were more likely to feel confident in studying music at GCSE. This should suggest that engagement with film outside of school should be an advantage, however it could be that students do not view their engagement with film outside of school as close enough to learning to be valuable to its study. It has, however, been suggested that students are capable of recognising their skills in other but related subjects as transferable and empowering in the study of new disciplines (Van de Werfhorst, Sullivan and Cheung, 2003), so perhaps it is the case that more parallels and cross overs with other curriculum areas need to be drawn out to encourage students towards the study of film. Lamont and Maton (2008) conclude that these factors result in students recognising a 'code shift' (Lamont and Maton, 2008, p.1) in the rules of success at different levels of study in music, which they find demotivating and troubling. This again is a factor that would be understandably worsened in a situation in which a student is not just learning how recognised codes have changed but coming to terms with an entirely different set. Bray (2000) also recognises this, and points out that the Dearing Review of the national curriculum in 1994 found that students who have been given a foundation in a subject such as music through its study at KS1, 2 and 3 should both find the subject more appealing than others, and be better qualified to recognise whether or not they are likely to be successful at it in higher levels of education. This again presents a problem for subjects such as Film Studies, which on this basis will be both less appealing, and more of an unknown than many of the other subjects on offer to students.

Wright (2002) also theorised that an additional factor in student uptake was that students viewed music as less important than others. This develops the ideas of Bell et al. (2006) and compounds the notion that the perceived hierarchy of subjects and their value has a considerable impact on students' perceptions and choice of subjects.

Family/environmental factors.

The final factor that I shall consider is the impact of the influence that home-life and family can have on a students' attitudes, success and perceived value in a subject. The attitudes that students are exposed to at home and in their local community towards school, learning and individual subjects often are reflected in the way that students engage with their own learning in school (Horgan, 2007). If these attitudes are negative, then it can have a hugely

detrimental knock on effect on students, their attitude and success at schools, and can be particularly problematic in areas with high levels of deprivation (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), where negative attitudes towards education can be more deeply entrenched (Newman and Fantus, 2015). Whilst the focus school of this study does serve a student body with a high level of deprivation, the attitudes expressed towards school and education in general are mostly hugely supportive and positive. However, these attitudes may not be so positive to all subjects, as for communities and parents to develop a positive view of study and education, it is important that they recognise and appreciate the style and focus of learning (Ouelett, 1996), and this may not be the case for newer subjects such as Film Studies. This is potentially problematic, as it has been argued that parental input is a key factor in a student's likelihood to succeed at school (Harris and Goodall, 2007).

Harris and Goodall draw out the distinction between parental engagement, a term commonly used by schools in promoting community links, and parental involvement. They argue that the latter is a much more hands on interaction with student learning and subject content, and that it is this that really adds value to a student's in school learning. It is more likely that a student with parents at home that are involved in their education will have not only a better attitude towards learning, but more sustained attainment in school (Harris and Chrispeels, 2006). Active involvement in learning tasks is key, but it is also other factors that drive this, including the level of cognitive stimulation students get from their home environment and, perhaps most importantly for this study, parents' beliefs aspirations and attitudes towards different subjects (Feinstein and Sabates, 2006). These studies, along with other more long-term research projects (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart, 1999; Melhuish, Sylva, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart, 2001), collectively reflect the strength of influence and important role that parental involvement plays in student attainment and progress. They go as far as to suggest that parental involvement has in fact more significance than almost all other possible factors on educational influence; they do however recognise that there a large range of other factors involved in student success, and parental involvement fits in as part of a much wider context (Sacker, Shoon and Bartley, 2002). With this in mind, it would suggest that perhaps one factor leading to students' lack of interest in Film Studies could come from attitudes that they are exposed to at home, and the reverse of this is that parental involvement could represent an opportunity to change perceptions.

There are, however, several obstructions to parental involvement in a student's education, many of which are highly relevant to the context of the study school. Firstly, as the school has a high number of EAL students, and EAL parents, the barrier that language and communication difficulties present have the potential to reduce the opportunities for parental involvement. It has been seen that parents with low levels of English struggle to engage with schools and their children's learning (Strand et al., 2010), and, beyond this, having little understanding of the educational system and the workings of a school worsens this.

Beyond language, one factor that has been theorised as being the largest barrier to parental involvement is the socio-economic status of the family (Crozier, 1997; Crozier, 1999; Crozier, 2001; Rea and Weiner, 1998; Tett, 2001; Vincent, 2001; Vincent and Martin, 2000). The way in which this barrier presents itself is difficult to accurately define

and test. However, Nechyba, McEwan and Older-Aguilar (1999) offered a summary of these as being three main factors: the presence of a 'culture of poverty' (p.29) in which these families exist where education is less valued; the lack of a cultural and professional network in which the students can develop social skills; and parents viewing educational institutions as having processes and values that were at odds with their own, making it hard for them to participate. This therefore suggests that it may be less likely for the students of the focus school to have parental involvement in their studies, particularly in areas of education that the parents are less familiar with, of which Film Studies may well be one. This compounds the challenges that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds face when stepping up to higher levels of education, particularly in the arts. Both the content of courses focused on the arts and the writers of the curricula that dictate how it is studied can disadvantage students on the grounds of class and ethnicity (Sinfield, 1985), and in a school where the proportion of learners that qualify for FSM is 72% and the number of EAL students is 92%, these disadvantages become significant.

The impact of a student's socio-economic status on their progress and attainment has been well researched (Ghate and Hazel, 2002; Halsey, 2006; Wedge & Prosser, 1973) and the problems that are often highlighted are issues that become even more prevalent when facing the task of beginning the study of a new subject. Misunderstanding and misconceptions can be very damaging to student success, engagement and motivation (Carless, 2006) and are more likely to appear in students from lower SES backgrounds, particularly in areas of their learning in which they have lower levels of confidence. So, when faced with the prospect of an unknown subject, which may be compounded by taster sessions and small insights in to the course, students may well find themselves put off and disengaged. Creating these situations that will often be viewed as “stressors” (Ghate and Hazel, 2002) for students from these backgrounds is hugely demotivating at any level of education but particularly at moments of change and transition (Lister, 2004). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the notion of choosing any subject such as Film Studies with which students are unfamiliar may be one that seems even more unappealing to students from lower SES background. Student confidence and success often hinges on their ability to relate to the skills and knowledge needed for a subject through their own ' Funds of Knowledge' (Moll et al., 1992) and the creation of “Strategic connections” (p. 132) between the content of a course and the student's existing areas of understanding. This could therefore be a reason behind low student uptake of Film Studies, as these students struggle to see these connections with a subject that they have not yet studied. This is compounded by the reduced likelihood of parental involvement, as one mechanism that students use to create these connections is through conversations with peers and parents who have a shared cultural frame of reference in which to tackle the subject content (Lipstein and Renniger, 2007). If students do not have access to these interactions at home, then they may well struggle to put learning or the content of a course in to their own spheres of understanding (James, 1999). Therefore, this creates the increased challenge of both parental involvement and engagement being less likely for students from lower SES backgrounds, particularly in a new discipline.

Language and SES are not the only factors in the levels of parental involvement, and other research projects have highlighted aspects such as being a single parent (Anning, 2000; Standing, 1999), and the view of parents that

they had certain 'roles' to fulfil, and being an educator was not one of them (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; Williams, Williams and Ullman, 2002). Kohl, Lengua and McMahon (2000) explored many of these factors, including parental educational levels, mental health and relationship status and raised the argument that parental involvement with student learning may reflect their own educational experiences, which in turn influence the choices and attitudes of their children. Again, this is problematic in the study school, as many of the parents were educated in schools outside of the UK, where the arts and Film Studies do not feature. It therefore seems to follow that an effort could be made to involve parents more in the options process and expose them to the workings of the school and Film Studies as a subject as a solution to this aspect of the problem. Demie, Lewis and Mclean (2007) advocate hands on parent experiences in schools, with workshops, meetings and lessons for parents offering potential solutions for low levels of involvement. In response to the issue in one school where language was a barrier, the employment of a specialist liaison member of staff to interact with parents proved very successful. Whilst this may suggest that reaching out to parents and offering in school involvement may be a solution, there has been contradictory research that suggests that parental involvement that is carried out in school has little to no benefit to the child, or effect on the levels of involvement in learning at home, in which the real value lies (Okpala, Okpala and Smith, 2001). Parents are often wary of taking on a role and level of engagement that is somehow not their place (Williams et al. 2002) and in fact find situations such as parents' evenings where they are required to interact with teachers both frustrating and confusing (Cullingford and Morrison, 1999; Power and Clark, 2000). Crozier (1999) found that parents from working class backgrounds found contact with teachers to be both distancing and unhelpful. It therefore seems to be suggested that in changing student perceptions towards a subject aiming to change those of parents first may not be the most effective way of approaching the task.

Summary

The different areas of the literature have revealed some key ideas that I took forward in to the study and use to help shape the nature of the data that I collected and the subsequent interpretation of the data.

- Why creative subjects are important

The value of film in education is often seen as being in relation to other subjects rather than the value of film. This could be a driver of student misconceptions and lack of understanding of Film Studies, given that it is viewed in this way in the wider educational sphere. Given that film has noticeable relevance to young people's lives, it has the huge potential to be a subject in which students can be successful, as they will be able to bring their independent experience and knowledge of the art form to their study.

- The need for continuity.

Students perform best academically when they see their learning as a continuous process, moving through the different levels of education. The fact that Film Studies is a subject that students first encounter at KS5, and may have

little understanding of how it fits in with other subjects they have previously studied, is problematic and another potential driver for low uptake.

- Lack of motivation to study film.

Motivation and its origin are ideas that are hard to definitively outline for students, however the fact that students may have no perception of their potential to succeed in Film Studies, or have any past successes that they can tangibly link to success in film may be something that is hugely demotivating. Tying this in to the previous section, the seemingly disconnected nature of Film Studies to their previous learning may be a defining factor in their choice of whether to choose to study it.

- Attribution of lesser value to film as a subject.

There is a perception amongst many areas of society that the arts, and individual subjects within that category, have less value than others, and as such get deemed to be less important and worthy of study. If this is a perception that students have of Film Studies, then it is certainly something that would need tackling to boost student uptake.

- Family/environmental factors.

The influence of parents and families on a student's success and attitude to learning is significant. Parental involvement with a subject can lead to students viewing it more positively and being more successful in their study of it. However, students whose parents are from lower SES, EAL or other backgrounds that are less comfortable and familiar with educational systems may struggle to engage with their learning. This is exacerbated when it comes to subjects like Film Studies that are less likely to have been studied by parents.

These findings left me with three overall questions that have been taken in to the design of my study:

1. What motivates a student to choose to study a subject?
2. What are the main barriers that prevent students from choosing a subject for further study?
3. What are the driving factors in students' attitudes towards a subject?

Methodology

Research design

Given the nature of the research questions and the fact that the data needed to explore these are based around attitudes and personal motivations I was initially led to a qualitative approach as this seemed to be the most likely to allow me to access the data that would be valuable. However, given that 'the opportunity to use multiple methods of data collection is a major strength of case study research' (Merriam, 1988, p.69), I decided that a mixed methods approach would be the most robust as it would allow me to analyse the broader patterns, as well as the more detailed data of individual participants. As the research questions were focused around attitudes and motivations, qualitative data collection through focus groups and open questionnaire questions allowed me to gain an insight in to

students' views and thoughts around the subject and options process. This was supported by closed questions created around the findings from the literature which provided quantitative data that supported the qualitative findings and allowed me to refine the questioning and research of the subsequent cycles. The research was designed to have four phases of data collection and analysis; a starting point at which baseline data would be established to guide the creation of interventions and provide a point of comparison, followed by three cycles of intervention and analysis. These cycles of data and analysis allow for the project to fit with Thomas' view of action research, in which **'**continual refinement of your thinking, built upon a foundation of reflection' (2013, p246) is essential, and adheres to the model of action research laid out by Lewin in his 1946 'Action Research and Minority Problems'. The cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection (Lewin, 1946), allowed the study to identify the biggest perception issues and barriers at 3 distinct points from which interventions could be planned. Allowing for time and space for this reflection and analysis ensures that each intervention is based around sound findings and thinking. Whilst this model of action research has been challenged, due to issues of scale, workload and applicability to other contexts, it has been shown to have a great scope for change and improvement that can be used in a range of contexts (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007).

The collection of the baseline data was done in two parts. The first of which was used to establish details needed to create an effective sample group, as well as to collect gauge the overall attitudes and opinions of a larger group, in this case the whole year 11 cohort (aged 15-16). This was done through a combination of the collation and analysis of existing demographic data, and through the surveying of the year group using a simple single question Likert scale survey, asking students "How interested are you in studying Film Studies at A level?", with the three options "Not interested", "Somewhat interested" and "Very interested". Once this data was collected, a sample was formed for the remaining cycles of research and data collection. Whilst a Likert scale is limited in terms of the responses that students can give and tends to come with a certain amount of grouping in the middle group, it is a sound method for gauging overall attitudes and views and is a good starting point for the study (Cohen et al., 2007).

<u>Selection of participants and sample</u>

As the success of this research relied on gaining insight in to students' personal motivations, understanding and perceptions, it was important to design a framework that allowed for detailed analysis and close investigation of qualitative data. Given the scale and time frame of the project, it was clear that a sample would be needed, rather than attempting to gain this information from the whole year group, as this would allow for more depth to be gained from the data, opposed to a shallower wider reaching analysis. Once the initial data collection was done to determine the levels of interest in Film Studies of the cohort, the data was analysed (outlined fully in the findings and analysis section that follows) to determine the demographic factors that seemed to have a significant impact on interest. Once this was done, a sample was created that was reflective of the whole year group in terms of interest in Film Studies, as well as gender, FSM status and prior attainment in English Language, as these seemed to be the factors that emerged from the literature as being potentially influential on interest levels. This purposive sample was created with a view of ensuring that the students within the sample would be available to participate in the research,

and the other advantage of this type of sampling was that the other variable involved (gender, FSM and EAL) could be controlled. There is a limitation of this form of sampling in that researcher and participant bias can influence the selection and findings, however names of participants were removed before the sample was selected to minimise this and to ensure that they were selected on their suitability for the study alone. The sample size was established as being 48 students, who would be further divided in to three focus groups of sixteen, and each group again being representative of the year group. At the first stage of data collection, no student was ruled out of participating, other than by self-elimination. Once the responses were received to the initial survey, each student's name was replaced with a number, and the samples were randomly selected, purely on the basis of creating a group that matched the makeup of the year cohort. This process was also used to create the smaller focus groups.

Baseline data from sample

The baseline data collection was done in two steps. Firstly, the data generated from the Likert scale survey and the pre-existing demographical data that was used to determine that the purposive sample make up was collated for the sample group. Secondly, the group were given a further questionnaire to complete, made up of a combination of both open and closed questions (see appendix a). The questions that made up the questionnaire were based around the notions outlined in Osborne, Simon and Collins' 2003 'Attitudes towards science: A review of the literature and its implications '. Whilst this paper was exploring the attitudes of students towards science, the elements that they determined to make up the drive and motivating factors behind students' attitudes seemed to be in line with the literature around the topic, but also directly transferable to this project. Osbourne et al. use Klopfer's 1971 *Evaluation of learning in science* as their starting point, who laid out the affective behaviours in study of science as being:

> the manifestation of favourable attitudes towards science and scientists;
>
> the acceptance of scientific enquiry as a way of thought;
>
> the adoption of ‘scientific attitudes’; the enjoyment of science learning experiences;
>
> the development of interests in science and science-related activities;
>
> (Osbourne et al., 2003, p.1053)

From here, they go on to develop these using a summary of other works (e.g. Breakwell and Beardsell 1992; Crawley and Black 1992; Koballa Jr. 1995; Piburn 1993; Talton and Simpson 1985, 1986, 1987; Woolnough 1994) to come to a more conclusive list of the factors that are identified as being significant in determining a student's attitude towards a subject. These are:

> the perception of the science teacher;
>
> anxiety toward science;

the value of science;

self-esteem at science;

motivation towards science;

enjoyment of science;

attitudes of peers and friends towards science;

attitudes of parents towards science;

the nature of the classroom environment;

achievement in science;

fear of failure on course;

the development of an interest in pursuing a career in science or science related work.

(Osbourne et al., 2003, p.1054)

These factors were used to design the initial questionnaire (appendix A), with versions of them appearing as options on some multiple-choice questions. As well as these, there were some open questions, which provided the participants with the opportunity to express opinions and factors that may have been missed. This data was then analysed to create a picture of the starting point of the study and of the students' baseline perceptions and used to design the first intervention and follow up data collection. Whilst this study is focused around a different subject and discipline, the factors drawn out are transferable and applicable, and in looking across subjects and contexts in the design of the research, it increases the likelihood that the findings will be themselves applicable to other contexts for teachers in similar positions, something that is essential to quality research (Stake, 1978; Bassey, 1981).

Intervention and data collection one

After analysing the data from this baseline, the first intervention that was designed was a subject taster session for the students. For the sake of practicality, the total sample group was too large for the session to be delivered to in one go, so the session was run three times, once for each group of 16 that had been created for the smaller focus groups. The session was delivered by the same member of staff each time for the sake of consistency and fairness and was designed in a way that focussed on the three elements of student attitudes towards Film Studies that appeared to be the largest influencers at that point. For instance, students listed enjoyment of a subject as one of the most significant factors in their options choices in the first data collection, so the first sessions were designed around being as rewarding and enjoyable as possible.

Once the intervention had been completed, data was again collected from the participants, again through a questionnaire of both open and closed questions, finishing with a repeat of the Likert scale question gauging interest,

providing a clear point of comparison. Alongside the questionnaire, the participants took part in a focus group with the same students they experienced the intervention with and were asked exploratory questions that expanded on the answers given in the questionnaire. Through content analysis of the questionnaire response and identifying patterns in the quantitative data and from word repetitions in the qualitative data, I was able to draw conclusions from the questionnaires, but also use this data to create the questions that would guide the focus group conversations. Discourse and content analysis of this focus group data alongside these two data pools from the questionnaires was then used to collaborate and interrogate any findings from the questionnaire, and all of this was done through the guiding lens of the conclusions drawn from the previous review of the literature. Having the focus group, open answers and closed answers allowed for the analysis to be based around a triangulation of data, making the findings more robust (Cohen et al., 2007; Merriam, 1988).

Intervention and data collection two

From the findings of the data from the first intervention, a second was planned to address the next issue that arose as the main factor in students' hesitations to consider Film Studies. As this intervention was aimed at addressing the issue of parental attitudes and involvement, the added challenge and factor of involving an additional group of people in the research had to be taken in to account. A resource was produced to address issues that students perceived as being important to their parents and was given to parents at a year group options evening in person by the researcher. For participants whose parents did not attend, the document was posted to the parents, and followed up with a phone call explaining the purpose of it, mirroring the conversations that happened in person at the options event. This was important for ensuring that all students and their parents received as close to the same intervention as each other as possible.

Again, following on from the intervention, another round of data collection was carried out, and with the view of creating comparable cycles, following Lewin's 1946 model, of research and evidence, the same combination of open and closed questionnaire responses, Likert scale opinion and focus groups was used to gather a range of qualitative and quantitative data. This data was again analysed for key patterns and repetitions, and looked at against the data of intervention one, the base line data and the findings from the existing literature.

Intervention and data collection three

The final intervention of the study was designed looking back over the three data points that had been collected by this point, with a focus on drawing out the remaining factors that were the most important to students from the data post intervention two. This intervention then took on the form of a careers workshop and was attended by all pf the students at the same time, ensuring that the quality and content of the intervention was consistent for all participants. Having all the participants take part in the same intervention at the same time, and having the final intervention based around in school interactions without the external factor of parents from intervention two, meant that there was a good opportunity for all students to finish their part in the study in the same way.

Data was then collected in the same way as the previous two cycles, and findings were drawn out using the same tools of analysis. For this final cycle of analysis, the findings were formed in terms of the impact of the final intervention, but also allowed for a comparison across all three interventions, and an analysis of the cycles combined.

The data would at the end of the study, be compared to the control group formed by the rest of the year 11 cohort.

Collaborations

As much work in schools should be, the research was both informed and supported throughout by a number of colleagues, who provided a network of collaboration that was essential to the project's success (Cook and Friend, 1995). Collaborating with the head of Year 11 and other year 11 tutors was important for ensuring that the research was planned for times that all the students that were taking part would be available. Also, conversations with the head of year about any students who may need to be excluded from the study, of which thankfully there were none, happened before the process started. As well as this, knowing what events and interventions of other kinds were planned for the year group meant that I could effectively use these opportunities to make the research easier to conduct, and avoid conflicts in terms of both timing and messages that students were receiving.

As well as this logistical collaboration, conversations with the subject leaders for other arts and creative subjects fed in to the design of the questionnaires, and questions used in focus groups, and in to the thinking and conclusions that were drawn from the analysis of data. Similarly, before taking the lead of the Film and Media department, when the project was in its early stages of inception, conversations and collaboration with the outgoing head of department was an important stage of collaborative thinking that allowed for the input of a colleague who had attempted to tackle the challenges outlined in the rationale for many years.

Ethical considerations

The validity and ethical compliance of the research was carefully considered, and each step and research cycle were planned in relation to the guidelines laid out by BERA for ethical research. The BERA guidelines outline five main areas of concern be considered in research design and delivery, namely: minimising harm, maintaining participant autonomy, protecting participant privacy, ensuring the benefits of research are reciprocal and maintaining impartiality (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002, p.473).Whilst these concerns do not cover all elements of ethical considerations that could be taken, they are considered to be the prominent and most significant (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012).

To ensure that these were complied with, anonymity was guaranteed for the participants, and their responses and data were stored using an identification number rather than their name, which could not be connected to the participants other than by the researcher. As well as this, the data was stored throughout the study on an encrypted hard drive, stored in a locked office. At every step of the process, every participant was informed on

the purpose of the study, and of the tasks and interventions in advance, as far as possible. The students were informed of their right to withdraw at any point in the study, and to ensure that any guilt or sense of responsibility was removed, informed of the fact that other students could easily be used in their place if they did choose to do so. Finally, the fact that the research was designed in way that included no intrusive or questions around sensitive topics meant that the risk of harm was extremely low (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). All research was conducted in normal school time, at a point where no other academic sessions were happening, ensuring their learning was in no way impacted negatively, and that the project was in line with the modus operandi of the MSc Learning and Teaching at Oxford University.

Limitations

There are a number of aspects of the study and methods used that present potential limitations to the success and validity of the project and its findings. Acknowledging these limitations does not in itself deal with them, or indeed accept that they undermine the research, but it does allow for reflection and consideration of how best to tackle them.

Firstly, the lines of questioning, the research materials, and the aspects of student attitudes towards Film used in the discussions and analysis were based around Osbourne et al.'s 2003 study in to students' view of science. There is the obvious limitation here that a study about science-related attitudes may not have been directly applicable to students' opinions of Film Studies. However, the drivers of student perception were generalised enough to be adapted and applied to the more creative context. As well as this, within their study, Osbourne et al. identify some limitations of the research, which they summarise in to two main issues: Student attitudes towards a subject are made up of several factors and influences that combine and work together which leads to difficulty in identifying the most important elements, and that there may be larger attitudes or values that outweigh student behaviour and actions beyond their view of the subject in question (Osbourne et al., 2003). Therefore, it is possible that any data around student interest in Film Studies may not actually be to do with their view of the subject at all.

A second potential limitation of the study was the nature of intervention that includes interaction with parents. The two main issues with this element of the study were that, firstly, the intervention was designed around information provided by students about their perception of their parents and their attitudes, rather than by parents themselves. However, given that the reason for this intervention was to change student's perceptions of their parents' attitudes towards Film Studies, it does not seem unreasonable that this was the right course of action. Secondly, whilst the intervention aimed to promote the subject to parents, and deal with misconceptions and the perception of the subject, there is the possibility that it could have impacted negatively on parents' view of Film Studies. Harris and Goodall's 2007 research distinguishes between 'Parental involvement' and 'Parental engagement' arguing that when parents have contact with schools but are not made to feel successfully involved, then it can promote negative feelings towards the school and the education that is being provided there (Harris and Goodall, 2007). Therefore, it was important to ensure that parents were made to feel involved in this intervention, so as not to

create attitudes towards the researchers and the subject of research, which would likely develop negative perceptions of Film Studies.

As well as this, whilst the analysis and discussions are focused on each intervention and the impact that they have on student opinions and perceptions, it cannot be ruled out that any changes in students' attitudes over the course of the project are not caused by the cumulative effect of all of the interventions together, or simply from increased exposure to the notion of Film Studies.

Finally, the limitation that was drawn out in the review of the literature remains relevant throughout. Whilst every finding applied to the research and findings comes from thinking and literature which can be transferable to the context, there is very little educational research of any kind in to Film Studies. This remains a limitation of the study, as discussion of findings and results would be enriched by reading and comparison to other studies around the subject.

Findings and analysis

As laid out in the above section, the research was done in four distinct parts, the initial survey and follow up questionnaire and focus group before any intervention was done, and the following three cycles of intervention followed by another survey, questionnaire and focus group each time. As the findings at each stage informed the next step of intervention and analysis, I shall lay out the findings and analysis in a way that mirrors the process used.

First findings – before intervention:

The response of students to the initial survey reflected what was already known; in general students were not interested in Film Studies as a post-16 option and most of those who were only slightly interested (see appendix b). Only 13% of students in Year 11 considered themselves to be 'Very interested' in the subject, with almost half of the year group not at all interested. At this stage, the results revealed little that was not already known as the low uptake of the subject over the last few years in the school pointed to the same conclusion. From this alone there was little that could be hypothesised about the reasons why students were so disinterested. When this data was broken down further by several variables in terms of demographic data, there were two factors that stood out as significant. Analysing the levels of interest by gender, FSM status and prior attainment in English Language seemed to have an impact on results. Boys were marginally more interested in studying Film than girls, high prior attainers (HPAs) were significantly more disinterested in studying Film than both lower and middle prior attaining students (LPAs and MPAs) and those in receipt of free school meals were more likely to be 'Very interested' in the subject. Whilst there is little in the literature to suggest why boys may be more inclined to study film, there are several hypothesises that could explain the fact that HPA were less likely to be interested, with 65% of HPA attaining students saying they had no interest. With the derisory attitude shown towards film by certain institutions and public figures (Johnson, Observer, 2006; Cambridge University, 2019), it is possible that students who are more aware and engaged with debates and viewpoints within education have had their view of the subject influenced by this perception of the subject. As well

as this, it is plausible that students with higher prior attainment may well be students who are more reflective and aware of their own learning and may therefore be more conscious of factors on their progress such as switching to unfamiliar subjects with new criteria for success (Lamont & Maton, 2008).

A potential driver behind the increase in the proportion of students who were 'very interested' within the FSM cohort, could be in response to negative attitudes towards their existing study and subjects that they have experienced at home, which is known to have a sizeable impact on students (Horgan, 2007). The likelihood of parents expressing criticism of education at home increases with the level of deprivation (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), and in these households it can be most difficult to change these perceptions of schooling (Newman and Fantus, 2015). It is therefore conceivable that students from these backgrounds could have experienced negative input towards their study from parents, and therefore be drawn to a subject that is unfamiliar to them, and not associated with the criticism they have heard expressed. However, Oulett's (1996) view that parents are more likely to encourage positive views towards versions of education with which they are familiar seems to go against this logic. Whilst deeper interrogation of these figures was needed to identify possible causes, these differences were pronounced enough to be deemed significant and as such I ensured that the sample group reflected the proportion of students in terms of gender, FSM and prior attainment levels of the whole year cohort.

The questionnaire allowed for the students that made up the sample group to articulate both their views on subject choices in the options process in general and their perceptions of Film Studies through a range of open-ended questions, as well as seeking to gain an overview of certain factors and their influence through some closed answer questions. When choosing the factor that they considered to be the most significant, students identified the career paths and enjoyment as the two most important, with their past achievement being another factor chosen by a significant number of the group. The list offered eight factors which covered the aspects of student perception and attitude that were identified by Osbourne et al. in their 2003 study, but also had space for an open 'Other' option. From this list, the only three that were chosen by a sizeable proportion of students where the three, with career paths being the most significant (39%), enjoyment of the subject next most important (33%) and past achievement being the third most chosen option (17%) (see appendix c). It is interesting that students viewed career progression as the key factor in their choices, given that it is not something that is overtly the focus of education in school. This suggests that this driver of their choices could be coming from their home lives and lives outside of school. A student's views of education and where it can take them is often influenced by their parent's view of education (Kohl et al., 2000) and in a context such as the study school's where parents have often gone to the lengths of emigrating to a new country for the sake of a career, it is perhaps not surprising that students hold this as an important value. When these results are broken down by level of interest in Film Studies, those who consider themselves to not be interested in the subject, responded that career progression was the biggest factor in an even more comprehensive way, with 80% of these students listing it as the most significant factor. This leads to the conclusion that amongst those who are not interested in the subject; they do not see how Film studies can provide them with a career path that they are interested in.

This suggestion is furthered when we consider the responses given to the question 'How relevant do you think Film studies is to your career aspirations?'. Responses were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, with 7 being the very relevant and 1 being not at all relevant, and across the whole focus group 54% responded by choosing a number in the lowest three options, 21% chose four, and only 25% chose a number between five and seven. The large group in the middle section could be explained by understandable uncertainty and ignorance of career prospects, alongside the expected middle grouping of responses expected with a Likert scale question (Cohen et al., 2007). Again, when we consider these results through the lens of the interest levels in Film Studies, it is quite revealing, with 100% of students not interested choosing a number between one and three, and 67% those very interested in the subject choosing a number between 5 and 7. When asked to elaborate on this in an open-ended question, students often stated that the subject had no links to the careers they wanted, or viewed the subject as only leading to a small number of directly associated careers. Often students held misconceptions of where the subject could take them, listing careers such as marketing and acting as having no link to Film Studies. Likewise, many students not interested in the subject made statements such as “I don't want to be a film director”, reducing the skills associated with the subject hugely. This failure to see how Film Studies can help them achieve their targets in life could explain their reluctance to choose the subject, as without being able to see how the course can help drive them towards their goals would result in much lower motivation (Kleinginna and Kleinginna, 1981; Covington, 2000).

After career progression, enjoyment and past achievement were the largest factors listed by students as influencing their choices. It seems sensible to consider these two factors together, as both rely on positive past experiences of the subject, and when combined, make up the factor chosen by 60% of the sample group students. This would suggest that the single biggest factor in student disinterest towards Film Studies is simply lack of exposure and experience of the subject. This finding is something that was pointed to by the literature and is therefore a conclusion that was expected to come from the data. It is clear that students are more motivated by subjects in which they have previously been able to recognise their success and ability (Deci et al., 2011; Arnot and Reay 2004), so it stands to reason that a subject which students have no notion of their capability or likelihood to succeed would be an unappealing one, and that this would be something that students recognise as a factor in their choices. This is likely to be compounded by the fact that there is little opportunity for students to have experienced something similar to Film Studies in their day to day lives, and this can be a powerful driver towards the study of other art subjects for students (Wright, 2002). Likewise, given the problematic nature of transitions and the discomfort that they can cause to students (Haggis & Pouget, 2002; Macaro & Wingate, 2007) it is also reasonable to assume that students may be drawn to the paths most familiar to them. This factor was however least chosen amongst the group of students who were very interested', as only 17% of students listed enjoyment of subjects as the biggest factor, as this was overshadowed by their focus on careers.

This finding was compounded by the data from question four, in which students were directly asked if having studied a subject previously was likely to increase or decrease the likelihood of them choosing to study it further, to which 61% of the students said they were more likely to choose a subject that they were familiar with. This barrier

can be reduced by students' ability to recognise the transferable skills that they can bring to their study from other subjects (Van de Werfhorst et al., 2003). However, the impact of this was clearly limited by student understanding of Film Studies, as when asked which subjects they associated with Film Studies, there was no pattern of students choosing relevant subjects, and responses included almost all subjects on the curriculum. All of this was also reflected in students' responses to the question 'What would make Film Studies more appealing to you?' from which the overwhelming response was that students wanted more information about the course, subject and career prospects.

Interestingly, though the literature pointed to its significance (Lipstein & Renniger, 2007; Ouelett, 1996) parental influence was not a factor that was identified by many, and only came out as significant in the 'somewhat interested' group, at 17%. This could reflect that students who are less certain are more likely to look for guidance from their family, but it was somewhat surprising that students didn't draw this out as a factor on a larger scale.

Taking these findings in to the focus group meant that some of the questions could be guided towards these hypothetical findings and explore the roles that home life played in student perceptions, as well as seeking elaboration on the areas of information that students were keen to gain. Again, the data from the focus groups (see appendix d) pointed to the fact that students were simply unaware of the subject, and that there was a need for increased visibility and engagement with it. Students responded to questions by saying “I don't really know what it is”, “I don't know what a lesson is like”, even asking “where is it even taught?”. They also linked it to other expected factors by wanting to know who taught it, what jobs it led to, and questioning if they'd enjoy the film choices on the course.

It is worth noting, that when these findings are considered in terms of the demographic factors of FSM, gender and prior attainment, the patterns identifiable remain the same.

Summary of findings:

When all of these data sets are considered together, there seem to be three clear findings that come through at this point of the study:

- Students value experience and knowledge of the skills needed in a subject when making their choices for further study.
- The need for students to be able to see tangible career prospects and next steps is great.
- Students hold certain misconceptions about both of these when it comes to Film Studies that stems from lack of exposure to the subject.

From this, the first intervention was designed in a way that would tackle the first barrier, as it emerged as the most significant factor. As such, its aim was to expose students to the subject in a way that provided them with key

information in a way that was enjoyable and allowed them to understand the skills that they could bring to the subject in order to be successful.

Second findings – after intervention one:

Intervention one took the form of a taster session for all the students that made up the sample group, and was collaboratively planned with other Film teachers, and using language and curriculum content from other subject leaders in subjects with cross-curricula links. The session was designed to be as engaging and enjoyable as possible, whilst introducing students to the overall premise and content of a Film Studies course, and how it fit in to students' existing knowledge and skills. Across the survey, questionnaire and focus group, some of the questions were adapted to assess the success of the different aims of the intervention, and some questions were left as direct repetitions of the last cycle's data collection, to provide clear points of comparison.

When asked to respond to the same survey gauging their interest in studying film, there was a clear decrease in the number of students that were 'not interested' in Film Studies, though this seemed to lead to an increase in the number of students 'somewhat interested' rather than those 'very interested'. The number of students who were 'not interested' in the subject fell from 48% to 25%, with an increase in students who were 'somewhat interested' rising from 39% to 58% and those 'very interested' only marginally increasing from 13% to 17%. The most notable change came from HPA students, with a 32% drop in the number of HPA students who considered themselves not interested in the subject (see appendix e). This is perhaps understandable, as the hypothesised notion that HPA students would be cautious of approaching a subject in which they had no understanding of success (Lamonth & Maton, 2008) would be alleviated to an extent by a session in which these students were exposed to what success looks like in the subject, and the motivating factor of knowing their own likelihood of achieving it (Arnot and Reay 2004; Deci et al., 2011). As well as this, having the opportunity to enjoy and appreciate the challenge of the subject, may well go some way to undo the damaging influence of the negative views they had been exposed to previously (Johnson, Observer, 2006; Cambridge University, 2019). Again, some of the movement to the middle would have to be attributed to the fact that there will always be a tendency amongst some respondents to gather at the non-committal middle ground (Cohen et al., 2007), but it seems undeniable that the intervention went at least some way to increase overall levels of interest.

The questionnaire, designed to provide such data, allowed for the analysis of the success of the intervention and the student perception of it, along with any changes in the attitudes towards Film Studies overall. Given that enjoyment came out as such an important factor in student perceptions of a subject, it was important to measure their enjoyment of the intervention. On the initial response to being asked to measure their enjoyment on a Likert scale, 68% responded with a number between five and seven, showing that they had enjoyed the intervention to some extent (see appendix f). Given that the proportion of students who said they did not enjoy the intervention was 24%, a figure incredibly similar to the proportion of students who remained disinterested in the subject, it stands to reason that the recognition of the importance that enjoyment of a subject has on students' option choices was valid.

The students were given open-ended questions to elaborate on what they did and didn't enjoy, and the data pointed to the fact that students enjoyed the film choices, creative elements of the session and learning new information and facts (see appendix g). As well as this, as is suggested by Van de Werfhorst et al. (2003) about the empowering nature of transferable skills and knowledge, several students mentioned the connections to other subjects as enjoyable aspects of the session.

Those who did not enjoy the session highlighted their own lack of interest and passion for the subject, but also their lack of the skills and knowledge from other subjects, showing the reverse of the empowerment that transferable skills can bring. Also, a pattern of language in the responses seems to reveal that students still don't fully grasp what the content of the course and subject is, so a degree of uncertainty and ignorance of the subject remains amongst the group with no interest in studying Film.

Given the importance of the input of parents on their child's likelihood to harbour positive attitudes towards education, and to their academic success (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Harris and Chrispeels, 2006; Melhuish et al., 2001; Sylva et al. 1999), it seemed prudent at this point to explore the issue with the focus group, despite it only being mentioned as significant by a small group up until this point. When asked if they had discussed the intervention with their parents, it was incredibly interesting to find, that of the students who were not interested in studying film, 89% of students had discussed it at home, compared to only 43% of the students in the other two groups (see appendix g). This could suggest that the students who maintained a negative view of the subject, could have been influenced in expressing this view by the viewpoints they were hearing about it at home. Given the power of influence that parental views can have on attitudes to subjects and education (Horgan, 2007), it is highly possible that the attitude that was being expressed by the students, was in fact that of their parents. The follow up question that asked those who had spoken to their parents to elaborate on the conversations added to this hypothesis, as of the students who did speak to their parents 74% gave responses that suggested a negative or disinterested response to the intervention. However, despite this possible negative influence on student perceptions of the subject, in comparison to the 55% of students who said that they viewed Film as irrelevant to their aspirations before the intervention, only 32% of students said as much after. As well as that, 54% of students in the sample group said that they were more likely to study film after the session. This all points to the fact that the exposure to the subject and opportunity to engage with its content is essential for changing student perceptions.

The focus groups again allowed for some exploration and elaboration of the answers that students gave in the questionnaires, and to explore the barriers that remained in place in students' minds, and the details of the parents' negative reactions to the intervention. There was a clear pattern across many student responses of surprise at both the enjoyment and challenge of the subject. One student, an HPA noted “it actually made me think a lot more than I expected” and the word “fun” was used by over 70% of students (see appendix h). These responses reinforce two ideas that have been evident throughout the study so far. Enjoyment is essential for creating a positive perception of a subject for a student, and the students who have higher levels of attainment have a pre-held view that Film Studies is a subject not as challenging or worthy of study as others. These attitudes were more strikingly

present when students were asked about their parents' response to the intervention, with student using phrases such as “waste of time”, “too easy”, “not serious enough” and “not going to get me in to a university” when they were explaining their parents' reactions. Given this data, it seems likely that the views expressed by certain figures, institutions and press outlets about the study of creative and arts subjects have made their way in to parental thinking, and perhaps this is exacerbated by Film's position as a relatively new subject, and not something parents recognise from their own schooling, something that can inhibit the development of positive views (Ouelett, 1996).

This was unsurprisingly one of two factors that students drew out as remaining barriers to their choosing of film as an option, these being the views of their parents, and the career paths that the study of film could lead to.

Third findings - after intervention two:

For the second intervention, it seemed sensible to try and tackle the two issues that arose from the data of the previous two points of collection. It was obvious that student perceptions were still being influenced by the attitudes expressed by parents at home, and from the lack of understanding of where to go next. The timing of the study meant that intervention two coincided with a whole school Post 16 options evening for students and parents, which seemed a good opportunity to try and provide the sample group and their parents, an intervention to address remaining misconceptions about the subject. Therefore, an information sheet on the course, subject and possible next steps (see appendix I) was produced and handed out to parents of all students in the focus group. As well as this, one to one meetings between these parents and myself were arranged across the evening.

Given that parents can find interactions in school challenging and confusing (Cullingford and Morrison, 1999; Power and Clark, 2000), especially parents from contexts similar to the study school’s Crozier (1999), it was important that steps were taken to put parents at ease. Therefore, phone calls were made to the parents in advance of the event, and the nature of the research explained, so that all the parents involved had the opportunity to not take part, but also to hopefully take any frustrating elements of the study out. As the true value of parental interactions in education comes through involvement rather than just engagement (Harris and Goodall, 2007), the most valuable of this taking place in the home (Okpala et al. 2001) both the information given out on the sheet, and the conversations with parents, provided direct tasks and conversations to be carried out at home after the evening event.

Again, looking first at the headline figure, the intervention seems to have been successful. When presented with the survey of interest levels for the third time, the number of students very interested in studying film was at 27%, up from 17% after the first intervention, and from 13% beforehand. The number of students not interested at all in studying film, which was originally 48%, down to 25% after intervention one, was now at 17%. Furthermore, after the first intervention, there had been some students who had found themselves put off, and less likely to study Film Studies. However, when analysing data from the questionnaire (see appendix J) after intervention two, 0% of students said they were less likely to choose the subject. This of course doesn't mean that all students would consider the subject but does show that the additional information and involvement of their parents had no negative

effect on the sample group. The positive impact of this intervention was also seen in the fact that 58% of students now saw film as relevant to their career aspirations, which was up from 23% originally, and 35% after intervention one.

Given that the intervention was aimed at parental perceptions as much as it was student perceptions it was important that the questionnaire explored the impact that the event had on parents and conversations between students and parents. When asked if they had spoken to their parents at home around the intervention, 94% of students said that they had engaged in conversations at home about it. This, in comparison to the 56% of students who discussed the previous intervention, suggests that the intervention had successfully involved the parents rather than just engaged them, as they had continued to take part in discussions around their children's education beyond the initial event. This involvement increases the chance of parental influence being significant (Harris and Goodall, 2007), and the fact that the conversations occurred at home and not in school, again, make them more likely to have an impact on attitudes and perceptions of the subject (Okpala et al. 2001).

Students were then given the opportunity to expand on the nature of these conversations, and the impact of them, with some open questions. Almost half of the students used phrases that included language around their parents' surprise or changing minds, and almost a third talked about how their parents previously had not taken subjects like Film Studies seriously with the word "serious" or "seriously" used by 15 students. This seems to support the idea that the negative press and attitudes that have been expressed about Film and the arts (Bell et al., 2006) have had an impact on parents, and therefore students, who have been less likely to consider them worthy of study due to the devaluing power of these views (Kinder and Harland, 2004). One thing that did emerge from these questions however as a barrier that remained, was again the idea that both students and parents remained uncertain about the nature of the careers and employment that the study of Film Studies could lead to.

The focus group data also supported these findings, as they again showed that students felt the intervention had provided their parents with information that had surprised them and changed their view. One student noted "He would never have let me choose Film Studies before", and another saying, "Having the teacher back you up that it is a good subject makes it easier to convince them". Both of these, along with the wider pattern of similar phrases used by students, reflect the impact that parental influence has on the choices that students make. Whilst it has been argued that parental influence fits in to a much larger picture of contextual factors (Sacker et al. 2002), the fact that students were using phrases about being 'allowed' to study a subject, and 'convincing' their parents to let them choose something, suggests that it is perhaps the largest factor within that bigger picture.

As well as that, students who do go on to choose Film Studies will perhaps be benefited from the intervention, as several students commented on the fact that now their parents knew what the subject was, that they would be able to talk about it at home if they did choose to study it. By introducing and outlining the course to the parents of students who may go on to study Film, the subject content was added to parent's educational frame of

reference, something that is essential for effective parental input (Ouelett, 1996), and would not only improve student attitudes towards their learning, but also their longer term attainment (Harris and Chrispeels, 2006).

Fourth findings - after intervention three:

The success of the first two interventions meant that the student responses in both the focus group and questionnaire data suggested that the barriers of not having had the chance to experience and enjoy the subject, and the pressures to choose alternatives from parents were some way towards being dismantled. However, the pattern that emerged across the data was that there remained a level of uncertainty about the career paths and next steps that Film Studies could lead to. It was therefore a logical step to have the next intervention focused on career prospects and pathways. Given that students had expressed questions about both long-term careers and their next steps in education, the intervention included information about Sixth Form study, University courses, and careers beyond that. The session included meeting two industry professionals who had studied Film, testimonials from past students and professionals from other industries beyond media who had studied film, and a Q and A with current Film Studies students.

The intervention again seemed to have a profound impact on students, as the number of students who were not at all interested in Film Studies dropped a further 4 percentage points, to 13%, and the number of students very interested in studying Film rose a remarkable 15 percentage points to 42%. As well as this, as with the second intervention, no students responded by saying that they were less likely to study Film as a result of the session, and over two thirds said that they were more likely to choose the subject now as they had been beforehand. This number seems to have a possible correlation to the relevance students see Film as having to their own aspirations, as a very similar proportion of students, 68%, said that they now viewed Film as a relevant subject to their own goals. As students were now able to see Film as something that would help them to achieve their goals, it is no wonder that students in the focus group now felt more motivated to study it (Kleinginna and Kleinginna, 1981; Covington, 2000). The influence of the session itself on these changes is evident in the fact that 74% of students placed themselves on the top three points of a seven-point Likert scale, asking them to rate the usefulness of the intervention for their decision making in the options process. When asked to expand on this, students regularly mentioned their surprise at the “range” and “variety” of the careers that Film Studies could lead them to (see appendix K). They also discussed the careers they now though film could lead them to, and many of the misconceptions around certain careers, such as Law and Marketing, now seemed to have been addressed, as they were picked out as examples by multiple students.

It seemed important to consider the interventions as connected parts of the same process, so the students were again asked about their conversations at home about the intervention, and it was encouraging that 86% of students said that they had spoken to their parents about it, though down from the 94% of students who discussed the previous intervention at home, this is significantly more than the 56% of students who discussed intervention one at home. Given that the second intervention had directly involved parents, it is no surprise that the proportion of

students that spoke at home about it was higher, but the fact that 30% more students spoke about the third intervention than the previous intervention that did not involve parents suggests that the combined impact of the study has been to increase the number of meaningful conversations that are taking place at home about educational choices. When elaborating on these conversations, students responded by saying that they had explained to parents the careers that Film Studies could lead to and had also discussed university courses and further study. Phrases around their parents increased support and surprise at the career prospects that came with Film Studies were a regular pattern across the responses, along with a lot of phrases around "reputation".

Having seemingly tackled the three main barriers that students outlined at the beginning of the study, and throughout, when asked about what might stop them from choosing to study Film, students were now focused much more on practical issues, opposed to those around their own interest or aspirations. Given that by this point, students had been making their choices, and reviewing the offers of various Sixth Forms and colleges, students picked out issues around timetable 'blocking' and not having enough choices to choose all the subjects they wanted to study.

The focus group conversations and responses provided additional data which again supported these conclusions and observations, as the problem of trying to fit Film Studies in to their programme of study due to issues of timetabling and the offers of institutions came up frequently with each group (see appendix L). Students expressed their frustration and annoyance at the limitations that these structures and courses placed on them, and how they were forced to choose between two or more subjects that they were interested in studying. This factor was not considered earlier in the study, as the focus on student perceptions and attitudes towards the study overlooked the significant role that timetabling, and school's logistical choices could play in impacting on the uptake of certain subjects. However, the fact that when faced with these clashes and choices students have historically prioritised other subjects over the arts, means that it is still important to make this focus the first and foremost issue to tackle. When talking about the conversations with their parents about the intervention, again much of the language used seemed to indicate that there was an element of permission and persuasion required, perhaps suggesting that the previous intervention had not entirely changed the pre-held perceptions that parents had of Film and creative subjects. Students spoke about "convincing" and "persuading" and that the session had given them "evidence" which would make the parents more likely to "allow" them to choose film.

Overall findings – reviewing the intervention cycles

Having reviewed the literature, three research questions were laid out for the rest of the study to attempt to follow and answer:

1. What motivates a student to choose to study a subject?
2. What are the main barriers that prevent students from choosing a subject for further study?
3. What are the driving factors in student's attitudes towards a subject?

The interventions set out to reactively respond to the data and findings at each stage, with the view of identify the motivations that students had for the choices they were planning to make, the driving factors behind these motivations and the attitudes that informed them, and to identify and eliminate the barriers that students felt were stopping them from choosing Film at each point. This process led to the collection of data across a longer process that when analysed in combination, does lend some answers to the three research questions.

1. What motivates a student to choose to study a subject?

The initial data taken from students at the beginning of the study outlined three main factors in motivating students: their enjoyment and past attainment in the subject, the perceived career paths that the subject could lead them in to, and the influence of parental attitudes and ideas about education. This finding corroborated views outlined in the literature as it has been suggested that a large factor in student motivation is a student's ability to recognise their own ability and achievement in a subject (Arnot and Reay, 2004; Deci et al., 2011). It seems highly likely that students enjoy subjects in which they see themselves as successful and capable, so having students identify both attainment and enjoyment in combination is not surprising. This also seems to support the idea that students find transitions demotivating (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Boekearts, 1999) as students are more drawn to subjects that they are familiar with and follow on from one stage of education to the next. The ability to see clear pathways of learning that lead from one level of study to another is essential to student motivation (Claxton, 2009) as it allows students to see and tangibly feel their own progress. Giving students this clear progression and points of reflection allows them to form clear goals to aim for, and driving factors from past learning (Covington, 2000; Dweck and Molden, 2005).This then could explain why students are not motivated to choose subjects that they are new to at post-16, and would seemingly be more likely to choose a subject in which they have had positive experiences and a sense of their own progress. This came out in the qualitative data, in which students often mentioned their own success and enjoyment of subjects they had studies as being important to their decision-making process. The fact that the first intervention, designed to give students the chance to engage with an enjoyable session of Film Studies in which they're existing knowledge and transferable skills were highlighted, was successful in increasing interest also goes further towards supporting this.

This idea of students being motivated by visible pathways also seems to apply to their view of careers and the importance they give this when making decisions about further study. The career paths that the subject can lead to was the single biggest factor that came out of the initial questionnaire, and the final intervention in which students were exposed to different routes through education and employment that included Film Studies was the most significant in terms of increasing the number of students that were 'very interested' choosing to study film. It seems that these two factors, which do have considerable overlap, were the biggest factors in student motivation for selecting a subject.

Whilst the idea of parental influence and impact on choices was significant for students, it seems from the nature of the qualitative data, that it was seen as more of an inhibiting barrier, than a driver of motivation.

2. What are the main barriers that prevent students from choosing a subject for further study?

and

3. What are the driving factors in students' attitudes towards a subject?

Across the study, the barriers that seemed to emerge throughout were that of the influence of parents on students' choices, especially when parents hold a negative view of a subject themselves, a perceived lack of value of a subject and the lack of knowledge and exposure to a subject. It seems that research questions 2 and 3 are intrinsically linked and woven together, as it is often the students' attitudes to the subject, regardless of from where it stems, that become the barrier to them choosing to study it. Therefore, when considering how the findings lay out an answer to these two questions, it seems logical to consider them together.

The arts are subjects that are shown to be better engaged with by students if they have had exposure to them throughout their educational life (Bray, 2000; Lamont et al., 2003; Lamont & Maton, 2008) given that Film Studies is a subject entirely absent from Key Stages 1-3, and rarely taught at Key Stage 4, it is no wonder then that students are put off by their lack of experience in the subject. Students commented on their lack of knowledge of the subject in both the initial questionnaires and focus groups, and even once exposed to the subject in intervention one, those who remained disinterested cited their inexperience and unawareness as reasons for not wanting to study Film. Students referenced a lack of understanding of the subject, an absence of knowledge about what the course contained, and mentioned their apprehension caused by not knowing where or by whom the lessons where taught. This factor is compounded in the focus school, as interest in studying the arts is increased through exposure and experience of it outside of school (Wright, 2002), which if not through direct academic experience can come from parental education. However, given the context of the school, it is highly unlikely that the parents of the focus group have experience of Film Studies and are therefore extremely unlikely to be able to share experience and expertise of the subject.

One key element of academic success, and positive attitudes towards a subject comes from the ability to have interactions with peers and parents, those with who students share cultural touchpoints, about their studies (Lipstein & Renniger, 2007). These conversations inform their attitudes towards their education, and the individual subjects that may be being discussed (Horgan, 2007) and if Film Studies is entirely absent from these conversations, then it is unlikely that the home life of the focus group would lead to a positive view and increased likelihood of studying film. The fact that the students cited their parents perceptions of Film Studies as a main barrier after the first intervention, and that almost half of the students did not discuss the intervention with their parents at all, shows that the barrier of parental influence was twofold, one being the lack of parent engagement with the options process, but also that when there was engagement, it was to further negative perceptions of Film Studies. The fact that parents will have been exposed to public misconceptions that devalued the subject (Bell et al., 2006) could well explain the damaging nature of their conversations around Film with their children (Kinder and Harland; 2004), and the view that students had of their parent's disapproval of the subject. The language used by students throughout all

stages of the study of needing permission and approval from their parents to choose a subject for further study clearly shows the significance of this barrier, at least in the minds of the students, and it is telling that the two interventions that led to positive conversations between parents and students about Film Studies led to a large increase in interest and positive perceptions of the subject. It was important to engage parents in the process to help embed film in to their understanding of education, as from there they would be more likely to have positive conversations around it which directly shape their children's view (Ouelett, 1996; Feinstein and Sabates, 2006).

To truly measure the success of the programme of interventions, it is important to compare the results of the final data set to that of a control group. The rest of the year 11 cohort formed a control group for this comparison, and the results reflect a very successful outcome of the project. The table below shows the levels of interest in studying Film amongst both the sample group and the control group, taken at the same moment, at the last point of data collection after intervention three.

Table 1 – Interest studying film studies after all interventions

	Not at all interested	Somewhat interested	Very interested
Sample group (% of students)	12%	46%	42%
Control group (% of students)	42%	43%	15%
% difference	-30%	3%	27%

The results show that the study clearly has been effective at changing the perceptions of Film Studies amongst the sample group.

It is worth noting at this point, whilst the prior attainment, FSM status and gender did appear to be factors at the start of the study, at no further point of data analysis did trends appear based on these distinctions.

Conclusions

This study set out to examine the literature around the value and uptake of creative subjects, along with writing around hypothesised factors in the low uptake of film specifically – motivation and family influence. In doing so, some clear conclusions were found in regard to each consideration.

- Why creative subjects are important

The value of creativity and studying of creative subjects is clear: not only does it provide students with a wider range of skills and experiences but it also improves meta-cognition and attainment across the board. Much is made of the value of studying art and music, and research has been led in to the falling number of students deciding to take these through to further study, but the same cannot be said of Film. Whilst the literature does show the value of these subjects as a group, there is little to no writing on the value of studying film, or what Film Studies curricula should look like, simply research in to how film can be used to strengthen the teaching of other disciplines. There is a clear grounding in the thought that creative subjects should be championed and preserved, and there is certainly scope for the value of Film Studies to be explored more as part of this.

- The need for continuity.

The avoidance of potentially problematic transitions is essential for student success and motivation and the journey through education should be one that is clearly visible and signposted for students. In the current system of British education, there is always going to be moments of choice and change to be negotiated, and without a significant change of system, these will always be moments of uncertainty for students. This places subjects like Film Studies in a position that needs careful thought. Absent from the curriculum at lower Key Stages, often not taught until Key Stage 5, Film Studies will need to be viewed as a continuation of study and skills from other cross-curricula subjects, and without this, student confidence and desire to choose Film, will always be an issue.

- Lack of motivation to study film.

Motivation has always been a nebulous and tricky to define concept, given the individuality of all students. However, the often accepted view that motivation is formed through an understanding of students' drives and goals, and the balance between these, means that students will constantly be reflecting on their own progress, attainment and ability, and schools and educators should take opportunities to ensure that these are all signposted to students regularly. Again, the fact that students do not engage with Film until late on in their education, means that these drives from past successes and failures are not present, and unless they have had exposure to the subject and its content, they will struggle to set goals that relate to it. This again means that institutions that offer Film Studies need to ensure students can apply their motivations from other subjects to Film, through the creation of tangible links.

- Attribution of lesser value to film as a subject.

The attitudes of various outlets, figures and institutions towards the arts and Film, have meant that certain messages of devaluation of the subjects have been expressed in the public sphere. This influence is bound to permeate through to parents, and therefore their children, who will hold misconceptions about the value of subjects, their value and

the pathways that will be available to them if they should choose to study them. By being devalued in this way, subjects will become less appealing to students, and less likely to inspire and motivate the students who do choose them to attain well. Film Studies certainly finds itself in this position, often devalued to the point of being grouped with other subjects such as Media from which it is distinct discipline.

- Family/environmental factors.

The influence that family and peers in the community can have on both student attainment and attitudes towards education is well documented in the literature. It is clear that parents apply their own understanding, vision and viewpoints of education to their children's, and this often leads to the students sharing those of their parents. Given the context of the school, the relatively new nature of Film Studies at a school level, and the attitudes expressed to parents above, it would therefore be unsurprising that students with negative perceptions of Film Studies may get them from those around them at home. Changing perceptions of Film Studies, whilst primarily focused on the students in this study, may well prove to be a much wider scale task than just changing the views of those in schools.

From these conclusions, three research questions emerged to be interrogated by the data gathered in the study:

1. What motivates a student to choose to study a subject?

The hypotheses drawn from the literature were supported by the data in terms of student motivation. Students seem to be motivated by subjects they enjoy, have prior achievement in, and offer them a visible pathway from the point they are at in education, to the point they aspire to get to. These factors were present in the data across all points of collection and re-emerged in both qualitative and quantitative findings. The frequent and repeated references to career paths by students highlighted the need for these pathways to be visible for students beyond education, and in to the work place. Whilst parental influence was a factor that emerged, the nature of the data collected suggests that it is better considered in response to question 2.

2. What are the main barriers that prevent students from choosing a subject for further study?

The main barriers that emerged from the study were threefold: lack of knowledge of the subject, perceived lack of value in the subject, and parental disapproval. The data reflects that students are put off subjects of which they have little understanding, in terms of both content but also of course logistics. Alongside this, if the student's only understanding comes from other's viewpoints and misconceptions, they are unlikely to see the merit in study of the subject, especially so if they deem it to be unrelated to their career aspirations. Once these barriers are removed and tackled, certain barriers remain that will pose an issue to all course, namely around school offerings, timetabling and course structures.

3. What are the driving factors in student's attitudes towards a subject?

The findings for question 2 and question 3 point to very similar data from the study. Students' attitudes towards a subject hinge on the same factors as their perceived barriers. Parental approval and promotion, previous experiences of subjects, and the visibility of opportunities in life beyond school offered by the subject drive much of the attitudes and perceptions that students hold. Whilst other factors such as teachers and friends do play a small role, it is for the most part these three sources of influence that dictate student views of a subject.

Overall the study has pointed to some clear answers, and the difference in data collected before and after each stage of intervention corroborates these. The fact that each intervention set out to tackle and address the issues and barriers that came out of the literature and student data and was successful in increasing positive attitudes and interest towards the subject, clearly suggests that these factors are significant in driving perceptions and uptake. The success of these interventions is clear in the increase of student interest, driving the proportion of students 'very interested' in Film Studies from 13% to 42%. As well as this, the number of students who viewed the subject as relevant to their aspirations and had positive conversations with parents about the subject also increased exponentially across the course of the study. The single biggest increase in interest came between after intervention three, which at face value could suggest that visible career links and pathways is the most impactful way to increase uptake of Film Studies. However, it would be naïve to dismiss the possibility that the increase was largest at this point because of the cumulative impact of all three interventions having taken place.

Impact on practice

The results of the study point to several changes and next steps for my own professional practice, and potentially the practice of the school as a whole. As Subject Leader for Film and Media, the findings clearly suggest to me that we need to be doing more as a team to increase the department's visibility, and the exposure and access that students have to the subject throughout their time at school, so as to avoid the situation that the sample group found themselves, of having to negotiate the subject for the first time at the moment of post-16 options. There are two actions that have come directly off the back of the study, with one impacting on extra-curricular events and the other on curriculum design. Firstly, the whole of Year 8 will experience a Film and Media stop day in the summer term, introducing them to the key concepts of the two subjects and the staff that teach them. This will hopefully not only expose students to the subject, but also allow them to gain valuable insight in to both media, in a way that is enjoyable and meaningful and eliminate some of the misconceptions that they may hold. Moreover, with the view of the Tomlinson Report (2004) around 14-19 curricula, the school will be changing its offering in the department, to

Film Studies GCSE and A Level, and Level 1-2 BTEC Creative Media and Level 3 Digital Creative Media. This will hopefully go some way to alleviate the transition between key stages for students who opt to study the subject and create two distinct pathways of learning that lead naturally from one to the other.

The lessons learnt from the study will also be applied to the options process in future, as with clear findings around the barriers and motivating factors for students we can design materials and events that ensure students are provided with all of the information and access to subject content that they need to make an informed decision. Whilst this study has focused on the uptake of Film Studies in particular, the ethics in not applying and sharing this information with other subject areas for their own benefit and future use would be questionable, and as such this data could go on to affect whole school policy change.

The study has been limited by several factors, first and foremost by the lack of available literature specific to Film Studies. This in itself has given me thought and direction for future practice, as there is clearly a need for research, literature and sharing of practice in the subject area, and attempting to create this change, is something that I will take on from this project. As well as this, the sample group dedicated a lot of time over the course of the year or the sake of the interventions, and this is something that would not be plausible and sustainable for whole cohorts. Again, the ethics of providing these interventions for Film Studies alone going forward would need to be questioned, and it certainly would not be an option for every subject in the school to have the time and opportunities to provide their own similar interventions. Whilst we can apply the findings to materials and events going forward, it does not seem like repeating the process as it exists in this study year on year would be a sensible option. Finally, whilst the data of the study does reflect success and the achievement of its aim, the final number of students who actually go on to study Film Studies will be the real test of its impact on uptake of the subject.

Appendices

Appendix A: Cycle 1 questionnaire

Name _____

Section 1: Options

1. As it stands, which subjects are you considering choosing for your KS5 options?

2. When thinking about choosing a subject, what factors influence you? Circle all that apply:

   - Your opinion of the teachers that teach the course
   - Your enjoyment of the subject
   - Your friends' opinions of the subject
   - Your parents' opinions of the subject
   - Your past achievement in the subject
   - Your enjoyment of the subject
   - Fear of failure in other subjects
   - Your career aspirations
   - Other – please specify:

_____

_____

3. Of these, which is the biggest factor?

_____

4. Do you think you're more or less likely to choose a subject that you have studied before? Circle one

Less likely It makes no difference More likely

5. What do you value in a subject at school?

6. What information about a subject would you like to know before you choose your KS5 options?

Section 2: Film Studies

1. What do you know about film studies?

2. Which subjects that you have studied would you associate with Film Studies?

3. How relevant do you think Film Studies is to your career aspirations?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not relevant			Somewhat relevant			Very relevant

4. Why do you think this?

5. What would make Film Studies more appealing to you?

6. Is there anything that puts you off Film Studies? If so, what?

Appendix B: Cycle 1 survey results – 'How interested are you in studying Film Studies?'

Total cohort

	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not interested
Number of students	20	57	71
Percentage of total (148)	13%	39%	48%

Split by free school meal (FSM) eligibility

Students (148)	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not interested
Students not on FSM (58)	11	19	28
% of students not on FSM	19	33	48
Students on FSM (90)	9	38	43
% of students not on FSM	10	42	48

Split by gender

Students (148)	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not interested
Male students (74)	11	30	33
% of male students	15	41	45
Female students (74)	9	27	38
% of female students	12	36	51

Purposive reflective sample

	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not interested
Number of students	6	18	23
Percentage of total (48)	14%	39%	48%

Appendix C: Cycle 1 selected questionnaire results

Section A Question 2 - When thinking about choosing a subject, what factors influence you?

Factor	Total (48)	% of total	Very (6)	% of very	Some (18)	% of some	Not (23)	% of not
Teachers	3	6%	0	0%	0	0%	2	13%
Enjoyment	16	33%	1	17%	9	50%	7	29%
Career	18	38%	5	83%	3	16.67%	7	29%
Failure fear	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Parents	3	6%	0	0%	3	16.67%	0	0%
Achievement	8	17%	0	0%	3	16.67%	7	29%

Section A Question 4 - Do you think you're more or less likely to choose a subject that you have studied before?

Likelihood	Total (48)	% of total	Very (6)	% of very	Some (18)	% of some	Not (23)	% of not
More	**29**	**61%**	**6**	**100%**	**9**	**50%**	**5**	**22**
Less	**11**	**22%**	**0**	**0%**	**9**	**50%**	**5**	**22**
No difference	**8**	**17%**	**0**	**0%**	**0**	**0**	**13**	**56**

Section B Question 3 - How relevant do you think Film Studies is to your career aspirations?

Relevance	Total (48)	% of total	Very (6)	% of very	Some (18)	% of some	Not (23)	% of not
1	**11**	**22.9%**	**0**	**0%**	**3**	**16.6%**	**9**	**39.1%**
2	**4**	**8.3%**	**0**	**0%**	**3**	**16.6%**	**5**	**21.8%**
3	**11**	**22.9%**	**1**	**16.6%**	**3**	**16.6%**	**9**	**39.1%**
4	**10**	**20.8%**	**1**	**16.6%**	**9**	**50%**	**0**	**0%**
5	**6**	**12.5%**	**2**	**33.3%**	**0**	**0%**	**0**	**0%**
6	**6**	**12.5%**	**2**	**33.3%**	**0**	**0%**	**0**	**0%**
7	**0**	**0%**	**0**	**0%**	**0**	**0%**	**0**	**0%**

Appendix D: Excerpts from Cycle 1 focus groups

Interviewees: Focus group 1

Interviewer: Lead Researcher

Date of interview: 18/09/18

List of abbreviations: LR = Lead Researcher; S = Student (number)

[00:04:26]

LR: One of the questions on the questionnaire you all filled in asked you about what you already know about Film Studies, and in general not many of you knew that much. Why do you think that is?

S2: I've just never, um, been in a lesson for it, so I don't know what a lesson is like"

S1: Yeah, I've not even, like, seen one.

S2: Where is it even taught?

[Laughter]

S4: I guessed that it was looking at Films.

S3: Well, yeah!

S4: But I don't really know what it is, more than that. Yeah.

S5: When would we have been in a lesson, we don't do it on that KS3, thing, with art and stuff.

S1: Carousel.

S5: Yeah it's not on the art carousel.

[00:11:04]

LR: So, if we all agree that you don't know much about it, is that the main reason you don't want to study it?

S3: Kind of. The teachers I like really talked to me and stuff about their subjects. I don't know who teaches it. Film.

S5: Yeah, I don't know if I'd like them.

S1: It’s not why I don’t. I bet its like really old films. Black and white and stuff.

S4: Yeah that would be boring.

[00:14:21] – conversation continued.

S5: And it’s not like being a doctor, you do science for that. What can you do with Film?

S2: I want to be a lawyer, so I want to do Law instead.

Appendix E: Cycle 2 survey results – 'How interested are you in studying Film Studies?'

The most notable change came from HPA students, with a 32% drop in the number of HPA students who considered themselves not interested in the subject

	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not interested
Number of students	8	28	12
Percentage of total (48)	17%	58%	25%

	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not interested
Number of LPAs	4	13	2
Percentage of LPAs (19)	21%	68%	11%
Number of HPAs	3	11	3
Percentage of HPAs (17)	18%	64%	18%

Appendix F – Cycle 2 questionnaire

Name _____

Section 1: Film Studies session

1. On a scale of 1 – 7, how much did you enjoy your first Film Studies session?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat			Very much

2. Expanding on your views above, what did you enjoy about the session?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Was there anything you didn't enjoy?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Did you discuss the session with your parents?

Yes No

5. If so, was there response positive?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Very Negative Not positive or negative Very positive

6. What were there reasons for this?

_____

_____

Section 2: Film Studies

1. After your first session, what do you now know about film studies?

2. Which subjects do you think would go well with Film Studies as options subjects?

3. How relevant do you now think Film Studies is to your career aspirations?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not relevant Somewhat relevant Very relevant

4. Why do you think this?

5. After the session, do you think you're more or less likely to choose Film Studies as an A level?

Less likely | It makes no difference | More likely

6. Is there anything that still puts you off Film Studies? If so, what?

Appendix G – Cycle 2 selected questionnaire results

Section 1, Question 1: On a scale of 1 – 7, how much did you enjoy your first Film Studies session?

Enjoyment	**Total (48)**	**% of total**
1	2	4%
2	5	10%
3	5	10%
4	4	8%
5	11	23%
6	15	32%
7	6	13%

Section 1, Question 4: Did you discuss the session with your parents?

Parent discussion	**Total (48)**	**% of total**
Yes	27	56%
No	21	44%

Section 2, Question 3: How relevant do you now think Film Studies is to your career aspirations?

Relevance	**Total (48)**	**% of total**
1	5	10%
2	4	9%
3	11	23%
4	10	21%
5	11	23%
6	2	4%
7	5	10%

Appendix H – Excerpts from Cycle 2 focus group

Interviewees: Focus group 2

Interviewer: Lead Researcher

Date of interview: 31/10/18

List of abbreviations: LR = Lead Researcher; S = Student (number)

[00:01:44]

LR: What did you all think of the first session then?

S1: It was fun.

S2: Yeah, I really liked it, especially the planning bit.

LR: The storyboarding?

S2: Yeah.

S4: Yeah that was fun.

S3: It was really interesting, it was more like English than I thought too.

S5: [Inaudible] films instead of books.

S1: I can see how it would be harder at A Level as well. It made me think a lot more than I expected".

S4: It wasn't too hard though.

S1: No, it was still fun, but I mean it just was more challenging than I thought Film Studies would be.

[00:09:12]

LR: What did you tell your parents about it?

S4: I told them I wanted to do it.

LR: And what did they say about that?

S4: My Mum doesn't want me too, she said I should do Physics and Maths.

S1: Yeah, my mum said it was too easy. Even though my brother did it, and got a U. [Laughter]

S3: My parents said that I should do something like Maths too. I want to do English and Art, and maybe Film now, but my dad is worried that they're not going to get me in to a university.

LR: Did you ask why he thinks that?

S3: No, but it's because he doesn't think they're serious enough.

S1: I think a lot of people's parents think it's a waste of time.

Appendix I – parent info sheet

Film Studies AS Level – What you need to know

Entry requirements: 5 and 6 in English Language and English Literature (it doesn't matter which way round)

What it is:

Film Studies is an incredibly rich and varied A level course. It gives you the chance to engage with analysis and criticism, the historical, cultural and political contexts of films and the art of film making in your written work alongside your creativity in the practical component of the course.

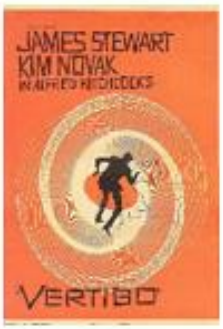
Most importantly, if you like films, you should think about studying Film Studies!

Course outline:

The course is made up of 3 components: American Film, European Film and Production Coursework

Component one: American Film (Exam - 35% of the course)







Component two: European Film (Exam – 35% of the course)







Component three: production (Coursework – 30% of the course)

A short film or screenplay of your own creation – It can be whatever you like!

Where it can take you:

Film Studies can lead you in to a huge range of University courses or professional environments, our class of 2018 went on to study Literature, Law, Business, Psychology, VFX (Special effects and CGI) and Film Production.

Good pairings

The range of disciplines that Film teaches you makes it a good pairing for Art, Drama, English Literature, Law, History and Psychology. Don't be afraid to pair it with Sciences, Universities like diversity!

The current Film Studies Team

[redacted]

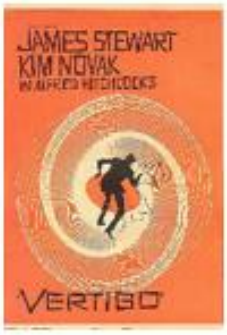
Subject Leader Teacher Media Technician

The A2 Course

In the second year of the course, you will study a range of additional films alongside those from your AS year.

Component one: Varieties of film and filmmaking (Exam - 35% of the course)







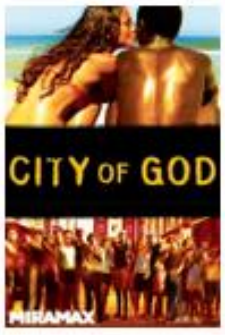


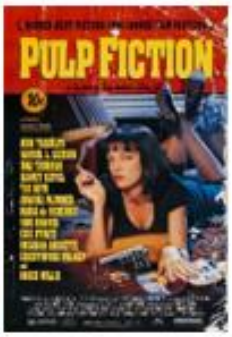


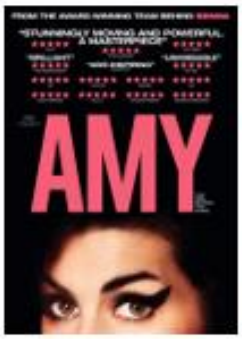


Component two: Global filmmaking perspectives (Exam – 35% of the course)













Component three: production (Coursework – 30% of the course)

A short film or screenplay of your own creation – It can be whatever you like!

Appendix J – Cycle 3 selected questionnaire results

Section 1, Question 4: Did you speak to your parents about the session?

Parental conversation	**Total (48)**	**% of total**
Yes	45	94%
No	3	6%

Section 2, Question 3: How relevant do you now think Film Studies is to your career aspirations?

Relevance	**Total (48)**	**% of total**
1	5	10%
2	2	4%
3	3	7%
4	10	21%
5	10	21%
6	11	23%
7	7	14%

Section 2, Question 5: How likely are you now to choose Film Studies as an A level?

Likelihood	**Total (48)**	**% of total**
More likely	29	60%
No different	19	40%
Less likely	0	0%

Appendix K – Cycle 4 selected questionnaire results

Section 1, Question 1: How useful did you find the session?

Usefulness	**Total (48)**	**% of total**
1	2	4%
2	2	4%
3	3	7%
4	5	10%
5	17	35%
6	9	18%
7	10	21%

Section 1, Question 2: What did you find useful about the session?

Most common answers (number of mentions)

Revealed more careers that could be led in to by Film and arts (24)

Will help with other subjects (13)

Helped with options (12)

Developed passion/interest (8)

Helped persuade parents (6)

Section 1, Question 4: Did you speak to your parents about the session?

Parental conversation	**Total (48)**	**% of total**
Yes	41	86%
No	7	14%

Section 2, Question 3: How relevant do you now think Film Studies is to your career aspirations?

Relevance	**Total (48)**	**% of total**
1	5	10%
2	2	4%
3	4	8%
4	5	10%
5	16	33%
6	10	22%
7	6	13%

Appendix L – Excerpts from Cycle 4 focus group

as the problem of trying to fit Film Studies in to their programme of study due to issues of timetabling and the offers of institutions came up frequently with each group (see appendix L). Students expressed their frustration and annoyance at the limitations that these structures and courses placed on them, and how they were forced to choose between two or more subjects that they were interested in studying.

Interviewees: Focus group 4

Interviewer: Lead Researcher

Date of interview: 28/03/19

List of abbreviations: LR = Lead Researcher; S = Student (number)

[00:06:04]

LR: When you had those conversations at home, what did your parents think about the sessions?

S3: I think it was good for me, because it helped me to persuade them to let me do something creative.

S1: Yeah, I want to do media so it was good to be able to give them the facts and evidence about why it could be good.

S5: It helped me to, like convince them that any subject I choose will be useful. I don't want to do Film, sorry, but they're letting me do Sociology now.

S2: I think it just made me go and look for, you know, what jobs you can get with different A levels, or BTECs or whatever. It made it easier to persuade them to let me choose what I wanted.

[00:11:12]

LR: So a lot of you said you wanted to do Film now in the questionnaire, but have you put it on your options form?

S4: I couldn't.

S1: Nor could I.

LR: Why not?

S4: What are the things called, the columns?

S2: Option blocks.

S4: Yeah, it was in the same option block as History so I couldn't choose both.

S1: Same for me, it was in with Art.

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