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Final Research Paper: Student Collaboration in Film

Filmmaking must be collaborative; as it is too complicated, intricate, and involved to complete on one's own. A group of passionate filmmakers that can effectively collaborate is arguably the most essential part of making a film. Scholar and filmmaker Ted Hardin even argues that, “ The feeling that comes from working effectively as a group is important: it can be the most exhilarating and energizing experience imaginable... Careful selection of the right partners makes anything in the world possible. A team of determined friends is unstoppable” (Hardin, 33). While group work can be very rewarding, it can also go poorly if collaboration is not properly performed. In this essay, I argue that the best tools for collaborative student filmmaking include Bilby's Wheelbook surveys, group contracts, and specific role assignments. Through my research, I hope to discover how to be a better teammate, and compare it to my experiences from my student film, “Choices.”

The journal, “A focus on collaboration: Fostering Australian Screen Production Students' teamwork skills” by Kath Dooley and Larissa Sexton-Finck summarizes a study performed on Australian film students, with a goal to foster and improve teamwork skills. Dooley and Sexton-Finck first express that a project based career is extremely complicated, and requires the collaboration of individuals who have a mix of specialization and diverse knowledge. They

reiterate from other scholars that thriving qualities within the film industry include someone who has formal education, experience, talent, and an easy-going personality (Dooley et al, 75). After stressing the importance of students' collaboration skills in screen production, Dooley and Sexton-Finck conducted an experiment on two classrooms of Australian film students, hoping to find effective methods that other instructors could adopt. Their first method was a personality survey sent out to students based off of Bibly's Wheelbook, a model that "suggests that the self is composed of two sides, these involving a person's essential qualities or essence (the inner circle) and the personality traits that emerge in situations of duress (the outer circle)... For example, the 'Can Do Person' is brave, strong and manually competent in essence, but when placed under duress, may become a pushy or destructive 'dictator' personality" (Dooley et al, 78). The purpose of this survey is for students to understand their own strengths and weaknesses, and therefore consciously catch themselves (and each other) from falling into their own negative tendencies during collaboration. I think that the Choices team would have greatly benefited from completing this personality test before pre-production. With such a complicated, work-heavy, and semester-long project, our team certainly saw each other's best sides and likewise, our worst sides. Creating a film from conception to finish



required a lot of time spent with my teammates, and with that came our own experiences, work ethics, and personalities. Knowing what to expect from ourselves and each other's personalities certainly would have helped us become more invested and helpful during our collaboration process. Another experiment that this journal conducts is the implementation of group contracts, "... each group was asked to submit a contract that outlined their planned approach to group communication, decision making and conflict management... students decided: how they would communicate in the preproduction, production and post-production phases; the limits and scope of each person's creative contribution and role in decision making; what they would do if a team member failed to complete their assigned work; how they would respond to a team member who took on the work of others; how conflicts would be managed; and, what grade they hoped to achieve for the completed project" (Dooley et al, 81). I believe that Choices would have responded well from group contracts. Our official roles (producer, director, editor, etc.) were definitely a bit blurry at times, and made it difficult to navigate who should complete what task. I think it would have been helpful to determine our responsibilities upfront, so there was no room for confusion. Additionally, we had to all chip in with multiple roles for the assignment's sake, which often led to weaker work and/or the leader completing most of the work themselves. I believe our team would have thrived in a scenario where the producer didn't have to worry about post-production as much as the editor, and vice versa. Ultimately, Kath Dooley and Larissa Sexton-Finck found that using personality tests and team contracts fostered effective communication and team collaboration for student film making.

The article, "Student film collaboration: The east-west dilemma" from the *Journal of International Communication*, conducted studies from a different angle, but the methods and results were still similar to "A focus on collaboration." Researchers Susan Kerrigan and Pieter

Aquilla theorized that students in Singapore would possess more eastern collaborative-traits, and Australian students would have more western individualistic-traits (while collaborating in film). They put their hypothesis to the test in a survey; using 17 questions based on Bilby's Wheelbook, and 13 questions about general collaborative experiences (Kerrigan et al, 152). To their surprise, they found that both western and eastern students acknowledge the importance of collaboration, but mostly possess individualistic traits, "The results showed little significant variation between the Australian and Singaporean students. Both cohorts have a tendency towards the upper-aggressive range of behaviours. An analysis of the distribution between the aggressive and passive hemispheres shows a variation of 94%, which indicates that the Australasian cohorts share similar, if not equal, behaviours" (Kerrigan et al, 152). These results not only touch on the globalization of western film-making, but they also reveal the most effective way for group collaboration. This study finds that students thrive having individual/specialized roles within the greater collaboration. Thus, emphasizing the argument that Choices would have excelled greater with individually assigned roles, rather than the whole group doing small chunks of everything.

The article, "Notes on Collaboration: Assessing Student Behaviors" by Ted Hardin also seeks to investigate how interpersonal factors affect the ability of students to successfully create a film, and hopes to discover the best way for students to work collaboratively. Hardin stresses the importance of team work by quoting director Tom DiCillo, "The relationships on the set of a film are incredibly important and interdependent and ultimately affect what gets put on film. I firmly believe this, some people may argue with that, but I firmly believe it- especially on a low budget film" (Hardin, 31). It is for this reason that Hardin dives into his research; examining four Film and Video courses at Columbia College Chicago. Hardin uses Bilby's Wheelbook to better understand his students (and allow them to better understand themselves). Hardin also

further analyzes Bilby's objectives, "The game Bilby refers to in his writings is what he calls the 'awareness game,' and it has three basic steps: first, in one's self, recognize and drop manipulations; second, with others, recognize and step aside from their manipulations; and finally, during interactions, use non-manipulative language" (Hardin, 34). Similar to the previous articles, Hardin asserts that awareness of one's self and their teammates' tendencies allow them to avoid manipulative behaviors that are toxic to the production. Hardin also finds that, "students are more likely to demonstrate manipulative behavior with work allocation concerns or with conflicts than around other collaborative issues" (Hardin, 45). While I had the pleasure of seeing my group's "inner wheelbook" sides, I also saw their "outer wheelbook" sides, *especially* when work was not properly allocated. I myself was a victim to this theory. I wish I was aware of the Bilby's Wheelbook model before working on this group project. I'm certain it would've been beneficial. I also believe that my group's overall relationship would have been stronger if we were able to understand each other and ourselves more.

It is clear that using the Bilby's Wheelbook model is effective for film collaboration. Students are able to collaborate better if they are aware of their teammate's best and worst qualities, as well as their own. This not only strengthens the bond of the team, but helps to increase the competency of the group as a whole. It is also evident that work allocation is important to identify upfront. This could be done through the use of team contracts, and/ or assigning specific filmmaking roles to each student (ex. one person is the producer, one person is the editor, etc.). To reiterate my point and reflect on choices: I believe that the individuals within Choices would have better expressed their talents and work ethics through role assignments, group contracts, and Bilby's Wheelbook surveys.

Works Cited

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