

# FILM: A LANGUAGE WITHOUT BORDERS RESEARCH REPORT

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# INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH APPROACH

## Introduction

In 2017, a consortium of BFI (British Film Institute), Danish Film Institute, and German school-cinema organisation Vision Kino, were awarded project funding by the European Commission's MEDIA programme to bring groups of school children with refugee backgrounds into dialogue with their peers at a series of cinema screenings in the three countries. The project funded licensing of 8 feature and 3 short films; the creation of study guides for the films; and research into how teachers used the materials, and felt about the screenings.

The project ran from January 2018 until the end of March 2019. This is the report of the research carried out alongside the project; the final project report itself is available in English, Danish, German, Greek, and Italian and can be found here:

[bfi.org.uk/education-research/education/film-language-without-borders](http://bfi.org.uk/education-research/education/film-language-without-borders)

## Research approach: Identity formation and film literacy

The following study gives an insight into the contexts and products of identity formation, and literary and intercultural learning, within a European film education project in three different countries. It discusses the results in relation to the key question: can film be a language without borders?

Films offer children and young adults a repertoire of role models, give answers to unanswered questions, offer alternative patterns of action, and work like 'overtures for real life' (Barthelmes 2006)<sup>1</sup>. For children, films are close to the real world; they pick films mainly thematically, in relation to their own situation (Tatsch 2010)<sup>2</sup>. From primary school on, children's ability to understand film increases. They are more and more able to receive and understand the whole plot of a film, to distinguish between fiction and reality, and to adopt the perspectives of different film characters (Tatsch 2010). These capabilities could go hand in hand with the **aspects of literary learning** that Spinner (2006)<sup>3</sup> modeled as relevant for teaching literature and film at school in general:

- Developing ideas while reading and listening
- Bringing subjective involvement and precise perception into play with each other
- Paying attention to film language and language in film
- Understanding the perspectives of film characters
- Understanding narrative and the dramaturgical logic of action
- Dealing consciously with 'fictionality'
- Understanding metaphorical and symbolic expressions
- Engaging in the inconclusiveness of the symbolic process
- Become familiar with talking about film and literature
- Gain prototypical ideas of genres/genres
- Developing literary (and cinematic?) historical awareness

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<sup>1</sup> Barthelmes, Jürgen (2006): Erleben – Lernen – Erfahren. Der Stellenwert des Kinderkinos für die Bildungsprozesse der Heranwachsenden. In: Kinder- und Jugendfilm Korrespondenz, H. 3, 3-11.

<sup>2</sup> Tatsch, Isabell (2010): Filmwahrnehmung und Filmerleben von Kindern. In: Josting, Petra/Maiwald, Klaus (Hg.): Verfilmte Kinderliteratur. Gattungen, Produktion, Distribution, Rezeption und Modelle für den Deutschunterricht. München: kopaed. S. 143-153.

<sup>3</sup> Spinner, Kaspar (2006): Literarisches Lernen. Praxis Deutsch 200, S. 6-16.

Furthermore, he pointed out that teaching film has more **far-reaching goals** than just developing skills in dealing with the film: children find their own desires in texts and media and they learn to understand themselves (identity formation); children get to know inner conflicts and relationships between characters which leads to a psychological understanding of what happens in the world; film enhances the capacity for moral judgment (thinking about law and justice, guilt and forgiveness), broadens world knowledge, develops fantasy and imagination and the capacity for more detailed perception in an aesthetic way (Spinner 2017, 144f.). Overall, film literacy helps make new audiences familiar with the (literary) tradition of (European) film and the knowledge of canonical works, but also to enhance open-mindedness towards current developments in contemporary European culture and ideas, willingness to participate in cultural life, and personality development through experiences of one's own culture (see Kepser/Abraham 2016, 108ff.). As film is an **inclusive medium** with the potential to address and attract (nearly) all people regardless of reading skills, home language, ethnic background, cognitive, bodily and emotional constitution or age and gender (Anders 2016<sup>4</sup>; Anders/Riegert 2018)<sup>5</sup>, new audiences for film not only consist of people with a migrant background, but all people in our 'migrant society'.

These considerations lead us to the question: **How can a migrant society benefit from European film and the various abilities and capacities it could support?** Could European film be a language that bridges the gap between different people from various cultures, and also a bridge that helps audiences to develop an open-minded identity, to understand the feelings of others better, and to foster empathy for each other? Would this be a contribution to intercultural learning?

Identity formation, and literary and intercultural learning are inner processes and therefore difficult to quantify and challenging to examine. This study ('Film: A Language Without Borders') follows the suggestion of Albrecht/Hornberger (2014)<sup>6</sup> to investigate the **contexts** that could foster capabilities in children and young adults, rather than just to investigate the formation and experience itself. As teaching cannot on its own guarantee identity formation, or literary and intercultural learning, but often can make it possible, teaching conditions like the teaching material, the preparation of the film screening, the film screening itself, and the debriefing activities should be examined. The study used qualitative research methods, but there were also quantitative data which underlined the perspectives of the research subjects (who were mostly teachers).

Besides the contexts, the products of experiences with film can be a basis for research: in interviews, group discussions, student texts or drawings, children and young adults make their experiences transparent. These verbal and non-verbal documents could give an idea of the experience, probably even if teachers just reproduce what their students mentioned during the film screening or in the class. Then the research team must triangulate and interpret the different data. The research findings in this study are partial in that the interviews, student texts, drawings etc. are (only) excerpts of what is imagined and experienced in the child or young adult themselves in a much more variegated way (Spinner 1998, 51)<sup>7</sup>.

The following study therefore gives an insight into the **contexts and products of identity formation, and literary and intercultural learning** within a **European film education project in three different countries**. It discusses the results in relation to the key question: **Is film a language without borders?**

4 Anders, Petra (2016): Medien als Perspektive für Inklusion? Überlegungen zum gemeinsamen Unterricht im Fach Deutsch. In: Musenberg, Oliver/Riegert, Judith (Hrsg.): Didaktik und Differenz. Perspektiven von Theoriebildung und empirischer Forschung, Bad Heilbronn: Verlag Julius Klinkhardt, S. 122-133.

5 Anders, Petra/Riegert, Judith (Hgg.) (2018): 'Inklusiv unterrichten: Textzugänge'. Themenheft der Zeitschrift 'Deutsch 5-10', Heft 55.

6 Albrecht, Christian/Hornberger, Johannes (2014): Empirische Zugänge zu ästhetischer Erfahrung. In: Oliver Jahraus/Eckart Liebau/Ernst Pöppel/Ernst Wagner (Hrsg.): Gestalten und Erkennen. Ästhetische Bildung und Kompetenz. Münster/New York: Waxmann, S. 49-61.)

7 Kaspar H. Spinner: 'Thesen zur ästhetischen Bildung im Literaturunterricht heute', in: Der Deutschunterricht 50 (1998), S. 46-54.



# 1. FILM SCREENINGS AND AUDIENCES



## 1. Film screenings and audiences

The films in the project were screened in cinemas, and sometimes online, to more than 65,000 children and young people, in Germany, Denmark, and the UK.

### 1.1 Germany

The European project Film: A Language Without Borders was a part of the German SchulKinoWochen (School Cinema Weeks) in 2018. The researchers interviewed a sample of teachers who had brought their classes to a selection of films in the programme with the focus on European cultural heritage.

In cooperation with Vision Kino, specific materials were designed for each of the films, which teachers could use to prepare and follow up the viewing of the films. The proposed tasks were designed to open up routes into the films, which in turn would help develop appropriate abilities and attributes even at a low linguistic level. This focus would ensure use in multicultural classes, where it cannot be assumed that German is spoken at first language level. In most classes, a range of countries of origin were represented, but the level varied from a homogeneously high-performing class to a very heterogeneous, low-performing class and an inclusion class with an increased need for support. The cultural backgrounds from the pupils in the focus classes were Turkey, India, Greece, Russia, Germany, Kosovo, Albania, Belarus, Senegal, Ghana, Romania, Syria, Italy, Palestine, Spain, and Lebanon. Furthermore, there were 12 pupils among the secondary students who had special needs status (in cognitive development; learning; emotional-social development).

The interviews in Germany (Bremen and Baden-Württemberg) examine the potential of the following European films which were shown in all three countries (UK, Denmark, Germany):

- *Ernest & Célestine* (F, BEL, LUX 2012)  
The animated film *Ernest & Célestine* tells the story of the beginning of a friendship between a big bear and a small mouse. Contrary to all the prejudices of their respective membership groups, they stand up for each other.
- *Paddington* (GB 2014)  
*Paddington*, a little bear ‘from darkest Peru’ arrives in London looking for a new home and a new family. Although he already speaks some English, nobody wants to take in the clumsy bear so settling into the new environment with different cultural rules is adventurous.
- *My Life as a Courgette* (CH, F 2016)  
*My Life as a Courgette* tells of the sorrows and joys of a child who grows up in a children’s home after the accidental death of his parents.
- *Billy Elliot – I will dance* (GB 2000)  
Billy Elliot is a boy whose passion is dancing, which does not fit the stereotype of an English boy in a working class community in the 1980s.

The German perspective on the potential of the films and the teaching materials is focused through the lens of teachers. The participating classes came from two federal states with regional differences.

- In Baden-Württemberg researchers spoke to teachers from 13 primary school classes who had visited the films *Paddington*, *Ernest & Célestine* and *My Life as a Courgette*. The children were aged between seven and ten years old and mostly came from rural areas. The teachers had different levels of professional experience, ranging from two to thirty-five years. A majority had already visited the school cinema weeks at least once, one teacher having been coming since the beginning of her career, i.e. for 14 years.
- The work with the British film *Billy Elliot* took place in Bremen in 6 secondary schools (4 comprehensive schools and 2 gymnasiums). The age of the pupils therefore fluctuated between 10-13 years.

## 1.2 UK

### Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (mima)

mima is an arts venue in the centre of the large post-industrial town of Middlesbrough in the north east of England. Due to the quantities of unused and cheap accommodation in this town, large numbers of asylum seekers have been sent here in recent years and thus there has been an increased intake of migrant children into local schools. Through a Films for Families programme, mima arranged for monthly Saturday morning screenings of the following from April-Sept 2018: *Paddington*; *My Life as a Courgette*; *The Red Balloon*; *Emil and the Detectives*; *Ernest & Célestine* and *Palle, Alone in the World*.

The aim was to attract local families to watch free family-friendly mainly international films, in a relaxed environment that included post-screening activities such as drawing, craftwork and talking about themes and ideas from the films. The researcher travelled to Middlesbrough to visit a French language screening of *My Life as a Courgette*. On this occasion the film was not very well attended: there were three families, 2 with very young children, for whom the film was not entirely appropriate. Having said this, some of the resources were in use and some drawings were made in the process. The researcher was subsequently able to interview the Learning Co-ordinator to gain a valuable perspective on the context in which mima works and the challenges it faces in attracting the project's target audience to the venue to experience film. Some of these insights are shared and triangulated with findings from the other settings below.

### The Gulbenkian Cinema, Canterbury

The Gulbenkian Cinema and Theatre is located within the grounds of Kent University in the south east of England, and as such sits in contrast with the location of mima. Education and community cohesion are specific policy themes in Kent County Council's social provision for the numbers of migrants settling in this part of England. The researcher visited a BFI-facilitated showing of *Paddington* to a group of 131 children from 2 local primary schools, with an age range between 7-10 years old. Although there is a high density of migrants living in Kent, the children who came to the screening were largely, though not exclusively, British born middle-class children. The BFI facilitator conducted a Question and Answer session after the film around the meaning of 'home'. A couple of weeks after the event, the researcher interviewed one of the teachers who had brought a small group of children made up of members of the School Council.

### British Film Institute, London

On 5 June 2018, the BFI screened 2 films – *Jemima and Johnny* and *Palle, Alone in the World* – to an audience of 4 schools. Of the teachers that responded positively to post-screening emails, one brought a group of 30 children aged between 8-9 years (Years 3 & 4) and another brought 55 children aged 9-10 years (Years 4 & 5). The screening was run by a BFI facilitator using the same format as the Question and Answer activity at The Gulbenkian. As a central London location, the BFI attracted schools with diverse intakes of children, and many different ethnicities were represented in the audience. The researcher made arrangements with 2 of the teachers for phone interviews a couple of weeks after the cinema trip. These teachers were highly engaged in the event: one had studied film at university and collated feedback sheets from her children that recorded their memorable impressions weeks after the screenings.

### Glasgow Film Theatre

The Glasgow Film Theatre (GFT) screened many of the films as part of their free education programme for schools. Films for younger pupils (*Paddington* and *Ernest and Célestine*) were shown during the summer term. *Sing Street* ran as a separate event as part of a series of activities and initiatives in the Refugee Festival Scotland (15-24 June 2018). *Billy Elliot* (7 attendees) and *Aicha* (12 attendees) were programmed as part of The Glasgow Youth Film Festival which ran 14 – 16 September 2018.



### 1.3 Denmark

#### Screenings in the Cinematheque for specially invited schools, April-May 2018:

The Cinematheque is the publicly accessible area of the Danish Film Institute. Three cinemas present Danish and international films, along with a research library, a restaurant and FILM-X, which features creative film studios for children and young people.

#### What happened in the Cinematheque?

Classes in Copenhagen for newly arrived students, as well as regular classes with students of various ethnicities, were invited to free film screenings in the Cinematheque. To begin with we programmed four screenings of the films: *Fighter*, *Billy Elliot*, *We Shall Overcome* and *Paddington* for students from year 2-11. When interest proved greater than expected, we chose to programme an additional three screenings.

The screenings began with a presentation of the film and the project itself. After the film, we opened up for a facilitated dialogue based conversation – also about difficult, unfamiliar and sensitive subjects.

The screenings all had in common that they clearly initiated feelings and thoughts among the students, many of whom had the courage to speak about the message and thematics of the film. Our general experience was that the children were direct, courageous and honest in their comments, including around potentially sensitive and difficult subjects such as fleeing from one's homeland, daring to follow one's dream, forced marriages and family relations, as well as the importance of belonging to a place in the world. Many posed questions regarding the narrative of the film and were even brave enough to share very personal comments and reflections. A researcher, as appears in the research report observed three of the screenings.

#### Numbers

Seven film screenings with 1,006 students and their teachers

#### Screenings in the School-Cinema programme in the school year 2018/2019:

Med Skolen i Biografen, is the Danish Film Institute's school-cinema scheme, which works by virtue of partnerships with regional centres for educational resources, cinemas, municipalities and schools. The scheme puts together a programme each year of 10-12 Danish and international feature films with accompanying educational material. The scheme is popular: Approximately 80% of the country's municipalities and cinemas draw around 245,000 pupils each year, the equivalent of every third school pupil.

#### What happened in Med Skolen i Biografen?

The two films, *My Life as a Courgette* and *Billy Elliot*, were screened. *My Life as a Courgette* had screenings in the spring of 2018, and *Billy Elliot* were screened in the fall.

Both films have been very popular. Teachers and students regarded the films as entertaining and educational, as well as providing access to a common experience around film language and the key topics, especially around diversity, being different and being alone in the world as orphans.

#### Numbers as of 31 December 2018:

Film	Participants
<i>My Life as a Courgette</i>	16,875
<i>Billy Elliot</i>	19,032

# ‘I have thought many times about the film, refugees, and losing my home since the experience...’

Teacher, UK

## Streaming of films and access to study guide on FILMCENTRALEN/Undervisning:

Filmcentralen/Undervisning is the Danish Film Institute’s online streaming service, which affords teachers in primary and high schools access to primarily short and documentary films with a few feature films, as well as educational materials. 90% of all schools subscribe to Filmcentralen/Undervisning, which in 2017 contained more than 2,000 film titles and 700 collections of educational materials.

## What happened at Filmcentralen/Undervisning?

There were three short films connected to the project: *Palle Alone in the World*, *Jemima and Johnny*, *The Red Balloon*, and three feature films: *My Life as a Courgette*, *Ernest & Célestine* and *Fighter*, all made available on Filmcentralen/Undervisning. The film *We Shall Overcome* is accessible on ‘mit CFU’, another streaming site for schools.

The above mentioned films, and the project’s other films, which have only been screened in the cinemas, all have accompanying educational material on Filmcentralen/Undervisning. In addition, basic material has been developed, which elaborate on the film-pedagogical basis for working with this subject area and can be used if one wishes to continue the work with other films of one’s own choosing. The educational materials contain ideas and assignments for the study of filmic tools, film analysis and thematics. It is also about encouraging the students’ own reflections, to further their awareness of the cinematic form from a cross-cultural perspective, and their relation to the meeting with European film.

All of the materials present the project as well as the content and purpose of the material. You can find both the basis material and other material on the project’s main page on Filmcentralen/Undervisning, with a focus on teaching Danish as a second language.

The materials were developed in Germany and translated into Danish. It proved to be more challenging than expected to ensure that language usage and content would work optimally in a Danish educational context. The German language is quite different from Danish, which meant that we spent quite some time finding the right Danish ‘language tone’ and way to address our teachers. One example is that the word ‘Migrationsgesellschaft’ has a negative ring to it in Denmark and was translated to ‘a multicultural society/perspective’.

## Numbers

Three short films and four feature films are available online, and these are the streams as per 31 December 2018	7,343
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Eight educational materials are accessible online and the total unique page views as of 31 December 2018	4,696
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SYNGE STREET CBS

Image: Sing Street



## 2. METHODS AND RESOURCES OF RESEARCH

## 2. Methods and resources of research

The researchers across the three countries worked to a common framework of questions, for both interviews and questionnaires, though the number of respondents varied from country to country.

### 2.1 Germany

In Germany, the researchers carried out semi-structured telephone interviews derived from the key questions with 19 teachers of an average duration of 30 minutes.

### 2.2 UK

In the UK the main research target group was 85 children aged 6-10 with their teachers. The researcher carried out telephone-interviews with four teachers and one Learning Co-ordinator.

### 2.3 Denmark

In Denmark, the research tools were slightly more varied:

- Observation of participants during three film screenings (*Fighter*, *Billy Elliot*, *Paddington*).
- Three group interviews with a total of 15 students, aged 8-14, with a focus on sharing their immediate experiences following the screenings, and to study how they handle discussions around potentially emotional topics and themes from the films.
- Visits to two schools in the Copenhagen area, observing participation while the class went through the educational material for *Paddington* and another film not in the project (The Children's World/ Børnenes Verden).
- Individual interviews with four primary school teachers (*Fighter*, *Billy Elliot*, *Paddington*) following the common semi-structured framework.
- A questionnaire was developed in connection with the project (114 respondents), aimed at teachers around the country who teach in classrooms where the students have diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

### 2.4 Methods of analysis

The accompanying research was based on the question of the extent to which film is a low-threshold medium that serves to develop new target groups with an open-minded mindset in a migrant society.

The interviews with the teachers were conducted in a structured format that elaborated this question. The observations of the film screenings and the group discussions were also subjected to this guiding question.

The answers of the teachers as well as the transcripts of the class observations and the group discussions were subjected to a content analysis according to Mayring (2015)<sup>8</sup>. The following categories emerged:

- Statements on the use of teaching material
- Statements about participation opportunities for children and adolescents
- Statements about topics that have arisen during teaching with the film
- Challenges that accompanied the use of the film
- Statements on the assessment of the teaching material and the teaching unit

Contextual material such as children's drawings complemented the teachers' impressions.

Statements were compiled for the report that significantly illustrated the general results.

#### Summary of research data

##### Individual interviews of teachers

(28 teachers talking about circa 600 children)

Denmark	4
UK	5
Germany	19

##### Group interviews with students

Denmark 3 (45 students)

##### Observations in school visits

Denmark 2

##### Observations during the screening

Denmark (for 405 students) 3  
UK 3

##### Questionnaires

Denmark 114  
Germany 2,956

<sup>8</sup> Philipp Mayring: Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Grundlagen und Techniken. 12. Auflage. Beltz, Weinheim/Basel 2015



Image: Paddington



### **3. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### 3. Research findings

In this section, we report the findings from the collated data, around the themes that emerged from the data analysis. We illustrate each point with a quote or example, where possible identified to the source country, the film being studied, and the age of children in the class if it isn't already clear from the age suitability of the film.

#### 3.1 What impacts of the films were reported

The teachers reported the potential of European films as a:

##### Source to empower minority groups

- if a film contains other languages, it can strengthen bilingual students' feelings of being a greater part of the community if their mother tongue is represented within an unfamiliar framework. (Denmark)
- students feel that they are 'seen': 'Many of my Turkish students expressed delight at the amount of Turkish spoken in the film [*Fighter*]. It really made an impression on them that it wasn't just one sentence in Turkish but whole episodes. I certainly felt that the bilingual students felt seen.' (Denmark)

##### Source for sharing thoughts and impressions

- a class started conversations about fleeing your native country, following your dream, homosexuality, loss, integration, forced marriages and family relations. (Denmark)
- films as speech events: 'Especially when it comes to language, e.g. books quickly reach a border and films have another possibility. They're more compressed. You can get further into [a film] and talk about scenes.' (*Billy Elliot*)
- as a 'common' or 'third space' and an implicit tool for talking about politics 'I think it was good to pick up on a good thing, especially without having to go directly into the subject of refugees right now.' (*Ernest & Célestine*, Germany)

##### Source for reflections on values in a society/community

- engendered idealistic notions on what constitutes 'a home': 'the whole world is our home', 'the world belongs to everybody' and 'anywhere could be your home provided you're safe.' (UK)
- provided opportunities for making meaning accessible through collective viewing and talking: 'I have thought many times about the film, refugees, and losing my home since the experience... watching the film with the discussions we'd had prior and following really deepen the impact.' (UK)
- led to an understanding of local society or, in the case of older films, to understand the extent to which society has changed: 'Change has happened in history and change will happen again because of changes going on in the world... it's just part of a puzzle we were exploring this year... You could just keep picking up that conversation in different forms, that's what teaching is about really isn't it?' (UK)
- gave the teacher the opportunity to respond to the values and norms in our society.
- thematized different conflicts and opened up manifold discourses.

### Source to foster empathy

- deeply touched the children emotionally. (*Paddington*)
- offered 'enriching and informative' experiences: 'it was something that the children wouldn't have been exposed to in their daily lives... seeing things from a different perspective.' (UK)
- increased tolerance.
- had a profound effect on the children's established attitudes to race; children recognized moments of discrimination that were in evidence. (UK, *Jemima and Johnny*)

### Opportunity to learn about the medium

- extended the cultural repertoires regarding society and film culture of young people: 'I think you also have to force the (pupils) a little bit to their luck [...] and sometimes it is just the task of the school to show something different and talk about it and give a little thought-provoking impulse' (*Billy Elliot* interview teacher, Germany); 'I'm looking for special interest films where they wouldn't have gone on their own' (*Ernest & Célestine*).
- experience of narrative cinema for young people who are more familiar with American film culture: 'They first have to be introduced again; with narrative cinema, not just blockbusters. Not everyone has an educational background either. Many children don't even know this from home.' (*Billy Elliot*, Germany)
- opportunity for teachers to continue working with European films: '[Therefore] we will continue to do this in such a way that we watch such movies.'
- introduction to a broad spectrum of film history.
- Chance to show that films are always a mirror of the society they come from.

## 3.2 How did the potential of European films manifest itself in the classes?

### 3.2.1 Dealing with the teaching material

#### How teachers approached the material

- The average teaching time with the materials was 4 lessons (each 45 minutes) in the classroom, mostly 2 hours for preparation and 2 hours for activities after the screening (Germany).
- trying out the material because of a single task with a strong impulse.
- focus on a main topic (e.g. home, friendship).
- adapted own ideas/their own working style to the material (e.g. writing assignments that were entered into an already existing project booklet, developing their own role plays and working with original film material such as the trailer).
- being encouraged to become creative in the question how to teach film.
- exploring a second viewing of the film with an alternative critical perspective.
- developing another project to learn more about 'Children of the world' over 12 school hours. (Germany, *Paddington*)
- reducing the suggestions (for example the topic 'City in the Film') because of less teaching time.

#### How the teachers evaluated the material

- the material was supportive and enabled teachers to open up children's engagement with the film.
- the quality was rated as very high: 'brilliant material with a few key ideas, not overloaded... and the questions at the end too... it was helpful to have the guidance.' (UK, *Paddington*)
- particular qualities: assignments are varied and can be solved independently of one another; the assignments around cinematic tools; the more interactive and engaging assignments. (Denmark)
- difference to one teacher's usual work with cloze texts to fill in.
- emphasized the importance of establishing a clear framework and structure when the students are going to work with film. (Denmark)

### 3.2.2 How successfully the children accessed the films and their contents

#### What the medium of film offered

- the films triggered a series of associations.
- colours and music carry a lot of emotionality and thus offered a bridge to verbal expression.
- children responded to audiovisual material in visceral ways to express feelings.
- knowledge was linked to visual, acoustic and emotional experiences: 'Film makes it all more real for me. It has a greater impact on me when I can see it happen than when I read about it in a book.' (Denmark, Year 3 student, 8 years old)
- emotions became more concrete and thus more memorable and personally relevant.
- suspense and fun were two important components in gaining access to a film.
- with the visual language of these films, students with a limited vocabulary gained experiences and insights.
- bilingual aspects made the film accessible: 'I understood the language (Turkish) better and it's better for me than to read.' (Denmark, 7th grade)
- film itself is not language-heavy, but it can certainly inspire talk.
- the films offered opportunities to talk about personal impressions.
- even young children were able to follow the film language: 'And in the beginning they (the children) found everything in the house so oppressive, also the colors, the rain, which came then, when the mother died. (...) Then one child said to me: Don't you think: It is as if it had to be like that – it had to start raining right then (when the mother died).'

#### What the teaching material offered

- haptic and linguistic possibilities were used for participation (world map or globe).
- children made intertextual links and identified cultural influences.
- the materials offered a mixture of action and reflection.
- role play was found to be one of the most emotional introductions to the film.
- debriefing without words.
- body-active interactions.
- material inspired both drawing and writing, and so everyone was able to participate, even pupils who were not reading and writing fluently yet.
- using visual language to express children's own feelings: 'Amazing, how he [child] processes this and always paints the same picture, I think that helped him... his thoughts/feelings can't even be put into words.' (*Paddington*)
- production of collages made working with the film accessible.
- discussion suggestions after the film for reflection.
- Film talk represented an important opportunity to develop critical thinking rather than the negotiation of a 'hard conversation' for which the teacher might feel ill-equipped. (UK)



### How the classroom became more inclusive through working with film

- enabled a high level of participation by all in the reflection process.
- film's audiovisual qualities enabled reserved quieter children and children with English as an Additional Language to have a voice.
- even pupils with poor language skills or learning disabilities were able to comment on the film afterwards, even though their understanding remained mostly at a very superficial level.
- a basic understanding was present in the vast majority of pupils in a rudimentary form.
- a boy from Syria was able to compare the migration background of Paddington with his own. He could understand the fears of arriving in a new country. Although he spoke little German, he was able to tell something.
- the project created a sense of community and inclusion: 'It takes time, it takes years of nurturing and trusting, and always going that extra mile to make sure that people believe in something.' (UK)

### 3.2.3 What the students learned through film

#### What the film as a medium offered

- film as a 'common' or 'third space' that does not touch on mutual relationships: 'The thing that film can do is to create a 'common' or 'third space' to speak from. And that opens up much easier conversations about difficult topics because it comes from a different starting point and isn't directly about themselves (the students)'. (Denmark)
- a special chance to connect the world on the screen and the world of the children: 'And then we also asked H. how he felt. Whether he escaped alone or with his mum and dad and who helped him. So that he can tell us something; 'My parents don't react that way. Although we are Turkish and Muslim, they try to understand me.' (Denmark, 7th grade)
- sparked 'great conversations' about history, cultural processes and social identity: 'It is possible to be a part of a family even though you weren't born of the parents you live with. I think it's about being in a place – a place you belong to.' (Denmark, 3rd Grade, *Paddington*)



First Grade students expressing memories of the film *Ernest & Célestine*

- brought up questions about war and flight/migration: 'A girl, eight years old, asked a boy whose parents come from Albania what war is meant to be. He answered: 'War is when people from different countries fight and when they also say swear words to each other. Then they argue with tanks.' (*Paddington*)
- fostered reflections on the homeland of the children: 'Then a child noticed during the lesson that Germany should avoid having wars at all. It was one of the best class conversations I've ever had. They then looked at their own world in comparison with the others: they came to the conclusion that they were doing well here in Germany.' (*Paddington*).
- opened up conversations about fleeing one's home: 'It's so sad for some people that they cannot flee because they don't have enough money. I wonder how it would be if it were Denmark being bombed by Norway or Sweden.' (Denmark)
- made it possible to talk about generalizations: 'Are the peculiarities of a mouse those of all mice?' (*Ernest & Célestine*), and deepen the reflection in the group discussion: '[we] clarified that a child of Italian origin '... does not eat pizza all day long.' (*Ernest & Célestine*). In this way references to the children's world could be made.
- Dialogic 'literacy events' brought to light some powerful observations in terms of how children view others and the ways in which they think others should be treated: 'the film(s) made me think how children accept newcomers far more easily than adults'; 'children don't see colour... they're accepting of each other', suggesting that seeing difference is not necessarily innate, and that it is a learned behaviour emerging from processes of socialisation in particular environments: 'they just saw two children going off and playing', 'they don't see race as we do.' (UK)

## How the children worked with film

- they shared with each other where they came from.
- they showed empathy with the perspective of migrants and their problems when entering a new world: 'Many of the children had a great deal of sympathy for *Paddington*. And they could easily identify with the many problems he encountered by being in a new place. I felt they had a lot of empathy for his situation and couldn't understand why people weren't more welcoming towards him.' (UK)
- they showed empathy with the children who lost their parents: 'I remember well the moment I broke down (started to cry). It was when he read the letter from his mother. It is just incredibly sad to lose your parents.' (*Billy Elliot*)
- they compared cultures (the ritual of the tooth mouse in comparison with the ritual of the tooth fairy in Germany).
- they shared different perspectives: 'I was very surprised at how varied the result was after all. That everyone took something different [from the experience]. Sometimes you see what the others are doing... That the film has appealed to so many emotions in the children. That's what I found so impressive in the end.'
- learned how film expresses perspectives through certain angles and 'point of view' shots: '*Jemima and Johnny* was shot in the way that children see the world... it makes it relevant to them, grabs their interest and ties them into things.' (UK)
- thought about foreign and self-perceptions, stereotypes and prejudices: 'I thought it was exciting to learn about the family relations that were different from my own family. It was interesting to see how the main character lived within that culture.' (Denmark, 7th grade)

# ‘It is possible to be a part of a family even though you weren’t born of the parents you live with. I think it’s about being in a place – a place you belong to.’

Pupil, UK

- were able to speak freely about subjects that are often categorised as sad and embarrassing: ‘I thought there were a lot of topics in the film, we don’t really talk about, as they can be embarrassing. It was also very much about what other people think, and those kinds of problems still exist.’ (Denmark, 12 years old)
- reflected their opinions after watching and talking about the movie: ‘And after the whole thing they (the students) took up the subject again by themselves and said: ‘That’s not true at all what we wrote down there, because Billy could dance really well and he is a boy. [...] and a few hours later four guys from my class came and wanted to join my dance club.’ (*Billy Elliot*, Germany)
- shared internal statements and attempts for interpretations of the film as a whole art work and in the context of society: ‘The dance that Billy performs in front of his father, they (the students) found a bit strange at first, but afterwards they understood that it expresses his joy of life. I really liked the way they put it in context. [...] The core statements they collected afterwards were also: ‘Not only girls can dance, but also boys’ and ‘Everybody can live out his passion.’ (*Billy Elliot*)

## 3.3 Obstacles and challenges with regard to teaching (European) film

The cinema and film reception has seized the children. On the one hand, the children felt for the characters and enjoyed themselves with them. Emotions and identifications became clear. On the other hand, the selection of films also posed challenges for everyone.

### Challenges relating to the pupils:

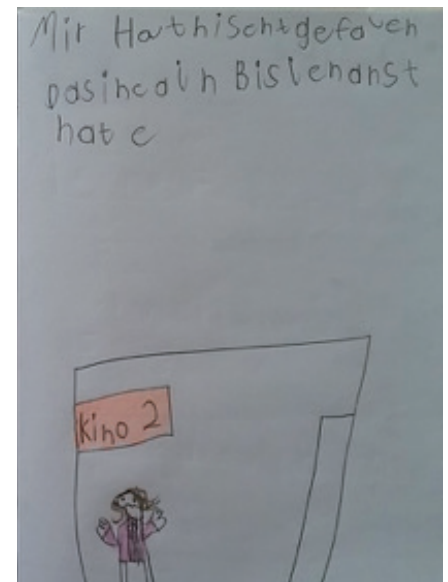
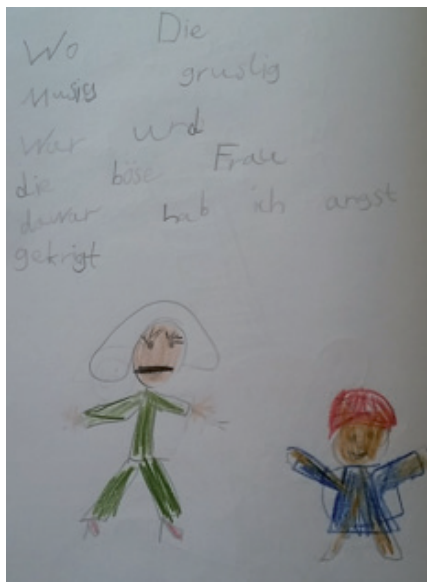
- the emotional maturity of the pupils is a huge factor, because for many reflection tasks the ability to change perspective was a prerequisite.
- *Billy Elliot* in particular caused not only positive, but also negative reactions, especially from the pupils in Grade 5: Already during the screening of some scenes with sexual content there were strong reactions of rejection: ‘[...] the boys and girls in the cinema got really excited and asked: ‘Is the film really suitable for our age?’ And they found that a bit disgusting.’ (*Billy Elliot*, teacher)
- While some children wrote about the films subsequently as ‘dull and boring’ some teachers were still prepared to take further ‘risks’ by exposing more children to similar texts in the future (UK).
- for some children in first grade it was their first cinema experience.
- Primary school children displayed various emotions while watching the film: they cuddled up with each other and even with the teacher when scenes caused anxiety; tears of joy and relief were visible from both, boys and girls. Uncertainty was also expressed.

## Challenges relating to the material and classroom management

- What the teachers have in common is their regret about the time limits on their possibilities to work with European film. The teachers noted the challenges of time needed to implement all the suggestions.
- 'I wish I'd had more time to explore the project in class but that's the problem with primary school at the end of the year – everything is such a rush.' (UK)
- Teachers wanted editable material so that they could adapt it to their class situations. There may also be less material per film, especially for the post-processing lessons. The lack of time does not make everything possible.
- Primary school teachers asked for more practical work with scissors and glue or other material, e.g. Paddington as a figure to cut out or rebuild.
- Some teachers were uncertain as to whether the tasks could stand for themselves or were meant as a catalogue to follow lesson after lesson.
- Sometimes the teachers felt that the material for preparation came a little late into their hands and their own preparation time was too short to feel safe. This in turn is a prerequisite for a class atmosphere in which it is possible to reflect on one's own feelings or uncertainties: 'It was clear to me: I had to prepare it well. I had to be very careful and go in again and again, i.e. check the emotional world and think in advance: But if this happens? What do I do then? And if that happens, what do I do then?' (*My Life as a Courgette*, teacher).
- Teachers reported that a visit to the cinema is a very personal experience with the class which is also a personal challenge for them as teachers.
- Hurdles that don't concern the film, but the possibilities of deepening the film experience are the external technical circumstances in the local schools. In Germany, not all primary schools have interactive whiteboards or color printers covering the entire area. Some teachers downloaded the material using their private technology because there was no WLAN in the school. Streaming offers cannot therefore be used. The fact that Germany has the lowest use of digital technology in teaching in an international comparison finds concrete expression here.
- In Denmark, short films are favoured in practice and the participants to a high degree find and use material from Filmcentralen.dk. The short film format is highlighted as particularly manageable and useful in classes for recently arrived foreign pupils.
- Not a real hurdle but rather an addition is the repeatedly expressed desire for films that are also available as a book to continue working with.
- Student recommendations (Denmark): When you work with film it is great when: The assignments are engaging and interactive; you make your own films or recreate selected scenes; you work with theatre in groups where you perform scenes from the film, e.g., or create a continuation; the assignments are interdisciplinary.
- Teacher recommendations (Denmark): Add educational goals within the educational material; continue to develop educational material for short films; continue to focus on the more interactive and engaging assignments; consider the possibilities for interdisciplinary film courses; use films in different foreign language to motivate bilingual students; differentiated teaching is a fundamental challenge, that especially comes into play in classes for newly arrived foreign students. Make it convenient for the teachers to adapt different teaching strategies to the students' diverse needs.
- no teacher mentioned language obstacles for children and young adults while working with the film.

## Challenges relating to the film content

- Many students stated that they did not understand the strikebreaker issue as historical context in *Billy Elliot*. However, even the students with special needs got the main point of the film (e.g. accept your own passion).
- Teachers and pupils were not prepared for the issue of sexuality in *My Life as a Courgette* and in *Billy Elliot*.
- Certain of the selected films (UK) contained challenging 'tricky' themes that might provoke 'hard conversations' for which teachers may not be adequately prepared.
- history is presented in biased and essentialised ways, so 'we should be talking about it more collectively and not be afraid to do some unpicking.' (UK)



First Grade students describe their emotions (from left to right):

Image 1: 'When the music went scary and the bad woman was there, I got scared';

Image 2: 'I liked it when the digger tossed dung over the woman';

Image 3: 'I did not like it when I got scared'.



# 4. CONCLUSIONS

#### 4. Conclusions: can film be a language without borders?

The satisfaction with the project was very high among the interviewed teachers. The project 'Film: A Language Without Borders' with its selection of high-quality European films clearly offered children and young people a variety of approaches to film reception and action to film. The study shows that films offered role models for children and young adults. Moreover, characters like *Paddington* or *Billy Elliot* actually showed alternative patterns of action for children. With the help of the teaching materials and tasks, the children connected the films to their real world: for example, they developed opinions on how to help an immigrant like *Paddington*. All children were able to understand the plot of the film, although certain subjects remained open, like the strike in *Billy Elliot*.

Charlton (2004)<sup>9</sup> distinguishes three dimensions of knowledge:

- procedural knowledge (e.g. drawing conclusions)
- declarative knowledge (e.g. knowing the properties of things)
- media-related knowledge (e.g. genre knowledge)

In this project, students showed **great abilities in procedural knowledge**, for example when they compared the situation in the film with their own actions in society. A next step would be to foster declarative and media-related knowledge which was expressed less because the teaching material had a specific focus on intercultural learning.

The study also shows that the project encourages the children and young adults mainly in these two **aspects of literacy** (see chapter A, Spinner 2006)<sup>10</sup>:

- Understanding the perspectives of film figures
- Becoming familiar with talking about film and literature

The interviews showed that the teachers seemed to enjoy talking about the films; but they also needed to become more familiar with a wider range of discussing film, describing this as a challenge. Instead of 'using' film for instrumental purposes (to stimulate interest in a topic, or to foster writing skills) the teachers and the classes had 'great conversations' about what the film itself offered (history, cultural processes, social identity).

Furthermore, the children and young adults got a stable understanding of the film narrative and dramaturgical logic of action. Through their drawings and the talking they documented subjective involvement which could be brought alongside more and more precise perception of film aesthetics (film form and language).

Overall, the study found examples of children learning to understand themselves (identity formation) and others better; that the films deepened their moral judgment (thinking about law and justice, guilt and forgiveness); and broadened their world knowledge (Spinner 2017, 144f.). On the one hand, the audiences of the project became familiar with the tradition of (European) film and the knowledge of canonical works, and on the other hand they used the knowledge of previous contents and experiences for their personal development (see Kepser/ Abraham 2016, 108ff.). Hence, **European film was a bridge (or a common or third space) to talk about their own experiences and political subjects (e.g. home, flight, nation) without touching the direct personal relationships in the class.** The power of the *Paddington* character is that he's a bear, rather than a human being, which removes the focus on ethnicity and makes it possible for the students to talk about the themes together in a less loaded manner.

In the project, the films worked as inclusive tools. Most of the children seemed addressed and attracted even if they were not (yet) able to read or write. In the project, drawing was used as a kind of writing, and this is a chance to include students who are not familiar with the spoken or written language of the classroom. The teachers did not mention language barriers at all, but bilingual children or children with another home language felt even more empowered when the film included their home language.

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<sup>9</sup> Charlton, Michael: Entwicklungspsychologische Grundlagen. In: Mangold, Roland/Peter Vorderer/Gary Bente (Hgg.): Lehrbuch der Medienpsychologie. Göttingen [u. a.] 2004, 129-150.

<sup>10</sup> Spinner, Kaspar (2006): Literarisches Lernen. Praxis Deutsch 200, S. 6-16.

**The audiences in the project**, and here we mean **not only students but also teachers, benefited from European film and the various abilities it could support**. A goal of the project was to investigate the extent to which intercultural learning in a migration society can be promoted through both viewing the film in itself and through the learning material offered by the project. Intercultural learning is a broad term and can take various forms: as learning about cultures to experience something new, transculturally, or in a special understanding that each family has its own family culture that exists on an equal footing with others. **The project made these various forms of cultural learning visible**: children compared their own family situation with the films; they compared their own opinions with those of classmates; they brought other cultures from today, the past or from fictional film into connections with their own habits and rituals.

**The study confirms that film can be a language without borders in the following sense**: it travels easily and attracts audiences, it tells stories and stimulates co-creation and dialogue. But it needs the support of teachers and teaching material to make this happen and to encourage students to watch challenging films like the films chosen in the project and to talk about perceptions, emotions and opinions. The study proposes that the open-ended, often non-verbal cues that film offers can act as a springboard to support more critical conversations and to build robust cultural repertoires. Still, we need teachers who are open and encouraged enough to do it.

The study also confirms that **European film culture can contribute to a positive integration process**. For refugees it could be a chance for better understanding of new communities and neighbours, wider traditions, cultures and values that we call 'European' and for local citizens it could be a chance for better understanding of the backgrounds, struggles, and aspirations of flight and migration. The study reassures us that the framework of the project was good to explore the potential of film to sensitize for tolerance, social values, empathy and global citizenship. But we should not underestimate that film needs preparation and follow-up like all other media. Teachers should be supported by their schools and curricula to have enough teaching time to integrate film in the school year. Teachers should be able to place European film culture not only in migrant and refugee groups but in their regular classes. European films should be mixed with films from the homeland of the students and of course with mainstream films to connect various film experiences.





# 5. FINAL REFLECTIONS

## 5. Final Reflections

Intercultural learning includes the ability to be aware of other cultures, to learn how to discover and interpret information about another culture and to gain a mindset of being open and curious concerning a diverse society. Topics for intercultural learning are implicit – and they were explicitly supported by the suggestions in the teaching material. Of course, a project that reaches students and teachers as a short programme cannot change people at once. But intercultural learning begins with perception and expression. The study shows that European film can play an important role by letting students perceive their own environment and the environment of others and to communicate personal impressions and reflections. Film as a multimodal medium, which addresses different channels of perception, can trigger emotions in children and young adults as well as in teachers. Moreover, films are a chance to gain experience, be it a visit to the cinema, a shared experience with the class, or impressions left behind by the film. A film offers impulses for thinking, feeling and communicating for its audience, which makes all pupils experts for their own perceptions. The meaning of one's own thoughts and feelings is strong and students are interested in sharing them when someone else (students and teachers) shows interest. The project fostered this interest in sharing perceptions and expressions.

Moreover, with the visual language of film, students with a limited vocabulary can gain experiences and insights that may not be possible through verbal communication. Film in other languages besides English, German, or Danish, or films that combine one's own with foreign languages, can strengthen bilingual students' feelings of being a greater part of the community if their mother tongue is represented within an unfamiliar framework. As film is a resource for multilingualism, it could be worth in future projects to screen film also in other languages than German (or Danish and English) or to mention other languages in the teaching material. The levels of expression provided by the teachers range from the expression of emotions through movements, written statements and drawings and role-plays, to discourses and reflections. Emotion and cognition were activated at the same time and provide lasting experiences. Whether they were first graders or high school students, all of the students were able to find possibilities for identification in the films and were able to communicate about them. Of course, the reflection level differed. Language had not represented a problem in the classes of this study, presumably because it is easier to express personal feelings and impressions than to express declarative knowledge (which the material was

not focused on). There are hints in the interviews that even students with a low linguistic or cognitive level were able to receive the core messages of a film. But it should not underestimate the fact that talking about the film represents a high linguistic and cognitive challenge and that action-and production-oriented comprehension tasks must be combined with communicative skills in order to fully exploit the potential.

The study made us think about the role of talking and discussing at school in general: the act of encouraging children to talk seems to be becoming a luxury (shown in the reports of UK and GER) that is gradually being eroded: 'It always seems as though everything is crammed in, you don't have that time for discussion.'

The social and cultural practices around film viewing could foster both a collective sense of well-being as well as an arena for dissent: mobilising these practices can create a valuable sense of community in modern diverse classrooms.

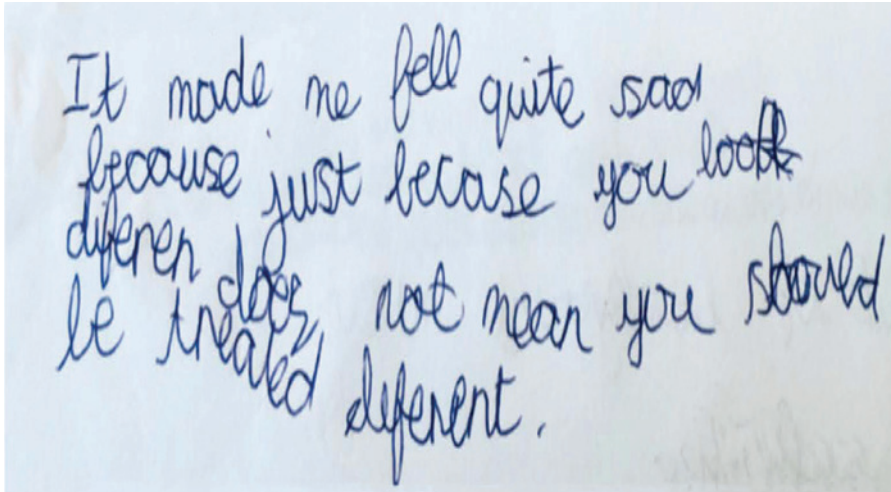
It should also be noted that children are still learning to adopt perspective and do not yet have it as a skill. That explains why most of the drawings to the films *Ernest & Célestine* and *Paddington* 'just' show what happened in the film, but do not interpret the characters or the plot in the drawing. In this respect, the preparatory work for the film is just as important as the follow-up work, so that the information from the film is not lost in the general lack of understanding.

Film can build bridges between the fictive worlds on the big screen and the lives of children in a 'migration society'. Film is an opener for discussions that would probably not pop up easily in the classroom. Teaching material with the focus on intercultural learning can build a bridge for the audience to act and reflect on their own environment and the actions of others and can finally help to build an open minded audience for European films. The deeper understanding of European film history and the film language itself should be considered as a goal for further studies. Film literacy is not a goal itself, but could be well connected to the emotions and experiences the students were already talking about within the project. The teaching material could widen out with questions about film language to learn more about how the film as a medium works and why it pictures a character like *Paddington* or a conflict like in *Billy Elliot* in that specific way.

Of course, interviews, student texts, drawings etc. are (only) excerpts of what is imagined and experienced in the teacher, child or young adult themselves in a much more differentiated way. Studies can only investigate the contexts of experiences rather than the formation and experience itself.



# **APPENDIX: QUOTES OF CHILDREN AND TEACHERS DURING THE PROJECT**



Taken from student feedback form

#### What children say:

- 'I knew what Paddington was thinking'
- 'the whole world is our home'
- 'the world belongs to everybody'
- 'anywhere could be your home provided you're safe'
- 'Without love you don't want to do anything with each other'
- 'I would bring Paddington to my house. Then give him something to eat. Then I'd give him some overalls.'
- 'The bear (*Ernest & Célestine*) makes music and nobody gives the bear anything, that was very sad; the bear was a good bear.'
- 'It's so sad for some people that they cannot flee because they don't have enough money. I wonder how it would be if it were Denmark being bombed by Norway or Sweden.'
- It is possible to be a part of a family even though you weren't born of the parents you live with. I think it's about being in a place – a place you belong to.
- I remember well the moment I broke down (started to cry). It was when he read the letter from his mother. It is just incredibly sad to lose your parents.

#### What teachers say

- 'great conversations about history, cultural processes and social identity.'
- 'the film(s) made me think how children accept newcomers far more easily than adults. Children don't see colour... they're accepting of each other'
- 'they don't see race as we do'
- 'an avenue... to enable children to talk more about their emotions'
- 'we should be talking about (history) more collectively and not be afraid to do some unpicking'
- 'by (putting) these resources in front of children, you get more questions than you can answer.'
- 'It takes time, it takes years of nurturing and trusting, and always going that extra mile to make sure that people believe in something.'
- 'I have thought many times about the film, refugees, and losing my home since the experience... watching the film with the discussions we'd had prior and following really deepen the impact.'
- 'Change has happened in history and change will happen again because of changes going on in the world... it's just part of a puzzle we were exploring this year... You could just keep picking up that conversation in different forms, that's what teaching is about really isn't it?'

- 'I'm wild about the parts about cinematic tools, which is very concrete. People often think children know a great deal about film because they see so many. But that's not qualified. They don't necessarily know very much about why it affects them in the way it does. So it's really important to give them a qualified vocabulary in order to decode and put into perspective the various filmic instruments.'
- 'Many of the children had a great deal of sympathy for Paddington. And they could easily identify with the many problems he encountered by being in a new place. I felt they had a lot of empathy for his situation and couldn't understand why people weren't more welcoming towards him.'
- 'And then we also asked H. how he felt. Whether he escaped alone or with his mum and dad and who helped him. So that he can tell us something. And did he do it? Yes. Not so much. Not so much. But that he got help quite quickly from others and fled with his family.' (L3 *Paddington* # 8:14-9:25)
- It was possible to talk about generalizations, like: 'Are the peculiarities of a mouse those of all mice?' (*Ernest & Célestine*)
- 'The student has modeled the pressure on the little mouse Célestine. Such a mini scene that actually transports so much that a child still knows that – that was really impressive. Amazing what the children still know after almost 4 weeks!'
- 'A project on 'Children in the World' was developed at the request of the children. They then looked at their own world in comparison with the others: they came to the conclusion that they were doing well here in Germany.'
- 'If I think how a film visit turned into a big project, then it was worth it.'
- For me personally, animated movies like that... I would never have gone in there... even if it was for adults. I was totally moved by it and I was surprised how much it could touch me, although it wasn't 'real'
- 'Many of my Turkish students expressed delight at the amount of Turkish spoken in the film. It really made an impression on them that it wasn't just one sentence in Turkish but whole episodes. I certainly felt that the bilingual students felt seen.'
- 'The thing that film can do is to create a common third to speak from. And that opens up much easier conversations about difficult topics because it comes from a different starting point and isn't directly about themselves (the students).'
- 'It always seems as though everything is crammed in, you don't have that time for discussion.'