

Kuyasa

Critical Analysis

This goal of this project was to produce a documentary that provided the viewer with insight into an often stigmatised part of society: intellectual and physical 'handicaps', and the special education that is provided for individuals who suffer from such limitations. Our aim, as a group, was to do this without degrading our subjects; we wanted to examine their so-called "special needs" while treating them with dignity and compassion, focusing on the unique lives that they lead, rather than the stunted existence that they are assumed to have.

In order to achieve this, there are a number of techniques that we employed. Firstly, we attempted to conduct interviews on eye level with our subjects, so that the camera would not appear to be looking down on them. We also avoided discussion (in interviews) as to the exact special needs of each child, focusing instead of what they enjoy and on what skills they can actually perform successfully. We tried to include a lot of footage of the children playing and laughing together, to show that their social dynamics don't necessarily suffer because of their 'handicaps'.

In each of the segments where we explore the lives of the individual children, we feature a lot of footage depicting them in their daily routines – cooking, doing their schoolwork, cleaning, etc. We wanted to do this in order to demonstrate the fact that people with special needs can still lead relatively normal lives. This is reiterated in the interviews with Jill and Zim, where they discuss the school's goal of training the children to be as self-sufficient as possible given their individual needs.

We wanted the documentary to convey hope and possibility; to focus on the variety of future pathways available to the children, instead of their limitations. For this reason, we tried to select positive footage and interviews; elements that would convey a new view of special needs education, instead of perpetuating the stigma about it.

Self-Reflexive Analysis

In thinking back over this project, I think the thing that stands out most to me is the fact that we approached our roles much differently in this assignment. In the past, we have been far more fluid about our roles, and in some ways that has been good because we were able to lean on each other and help each other where there were weaknesses, but it has also been detrimental to the workflow because things weren't as organised as I feel they should have been.

In this case, largely because our time constraints were a greater concern, we decided to stick very closely to our roles. For the first week, all three of us went to Kuyasa together for the initial research visits, but after that, we separated, and only Thami and I came to the school on a regular basis, as director and camera, respectively. Sarah was responsible for capturing footage as we gave it to her, and developing her gameplan as an editor, but beyond that she had all the time she wanted to work on her individual piece. Once filming was finished, we had a few brief meetings to finalise a paper

edit, and then Thami and I switched gears to work on our individual pieces while Sarah put all her energy into the editing process. There really was no mixing of roles – I did all the camera work, Thami was responsible for directing and organisation, and Sarah did all of the editing (with one exception – I helped her with titles at the end). I think this worked very well; we were far more focused and efficient than we had been on previous projects, and simply went about our individual tasks. I think becoming more rigid with our roles was definitely a step in the right direction for our workflow.

I found the project taxing and exhausting. I was challenged in my camera work, as well – most of the children were unable to cooperate to such a level where I could ask them to perform tasks, such as putting sequences together, so I had to improvise quite a bit to film usable clips. In a way, although it was frustrating at times, this was a good thing more than a setback, because in truth I don't think I'd have wanted to show the kids acting out sequences. It wouldn't have been true to who they were, or have done justice to their character, because their behaviour is so completely different from that of "normal" people who we can ask to perform sequences on film. I also wanted to avoid slotting them into "prescribed" behaviour of "normal" people, and rather highlight their unique lifestyles. So I watched them very carefully, looking for natural habits and behaviours that I could use in editing, and tried my best to capture those quickly on camera. I'm really pleased that we managed to put together a 24 minute documentary where only one brief sequence (where Thabisa walks down the road from her house in the morning) was staged – everything else was natural and spontaneous.