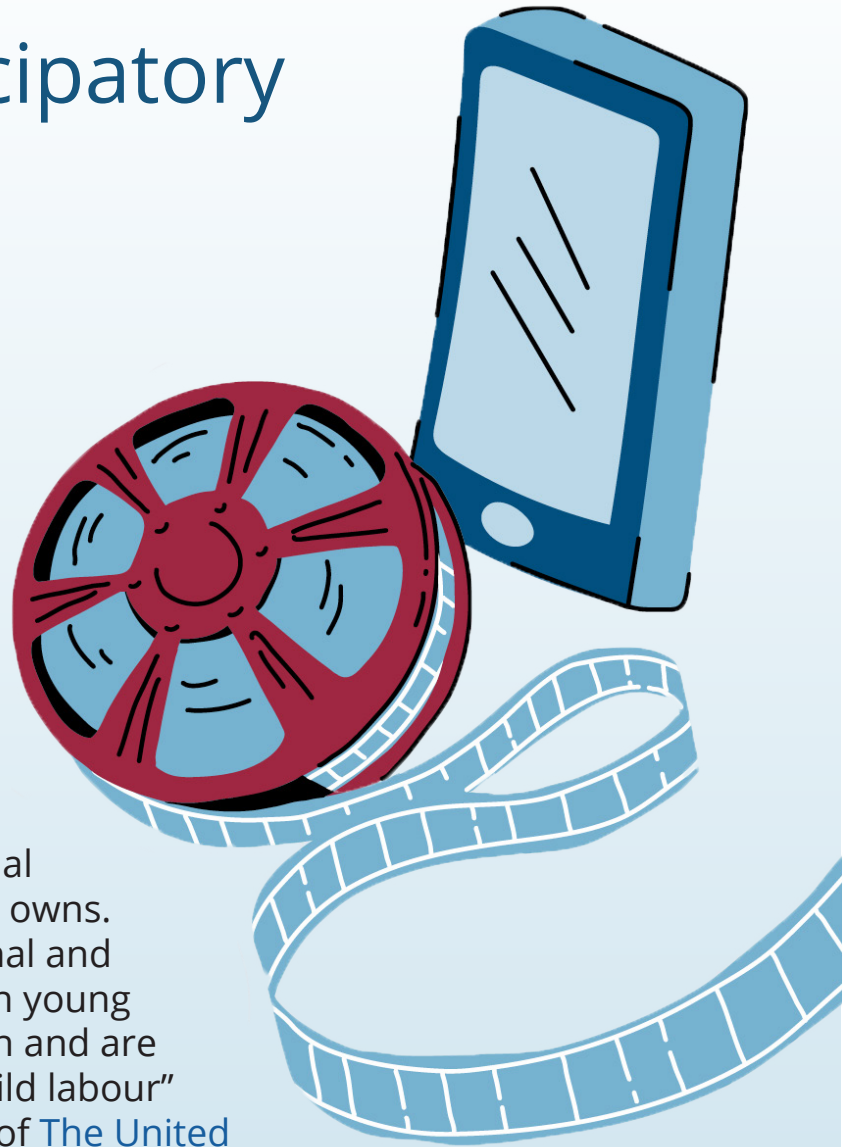


Cellphilm, a Participatory Visual Technique for Human Rights Education



Human rights are rights and freedoms that belong to all people, they are fundamental, universal and unconditional entitlements that every person on Earth owns. When human rights are violated, personal and social issues emerge. For example, when young children cannot continue their education and are forced to work, social issues such as “child labour” emerge. Child labour violates Article 32 of [The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), which emphasizes protecting children from economic exploitation or any act that can interfere with their right to education as specified in Article 28. This goes to show that social issues and human rights issues are congruent, and as such, when we aim to address the former, we automatically address the latter.

While there are various ways to address social/human rights issues, Participatory Visual Methodology (PVM) has offered some engaging, immersive, interactive and bottom-up techniques, not only to raise the voices of affected groups but also to contribute to finding solutions to social issues. The cellphilm technique is but one example of a PVM that will be briefly introduced here.

What does cellphilm mean?

The word “Cellphilm” is a combination of “Cellphone” and “film”. It refers to films being recorded with cellphones in response to a question, a prompt or a community issue. Other devices such as tablets can also be used. This technique highlights the use of cellphones because these devices are becoming increasingly popular every day, even in small villages in many countries. They might be more available and accessible to local communities if they want to record a video, without a need for sophisticated cameras.



What is the goal of a cellphilm?

Cellphilms carry and transfer their producers’ viewpoint to the audience. These viewpoints can be responses of the producers to a question or a prompt, or they can be about social issues that need to be addressed in a community. Cellphilms can also be a solution to a current issue or a call for action. Regardless of the format, style, or genre of the cellphilm, they can act as a vehicle to convey a message, raise understanding about a particular subject, and potentially encourage the audience to take action toward a change. That is why it is essential to recognize the audience of the cellphilm when it is being produced.

Cellphilms can:

- empower people
- promote critical consciousness about key challenges through group discussions in cellphilm production
- reach policy makers and promote social change



What does a cellphilm look like?

Cellphilms are usually short videos, only a few minutes long. They can be produced in any genre, such as melodrama role-play, monologue, interviews, documentary, media message cellphilm. They often follow a one-shot-shoot or no-editing-required process, or they can be edited. They can be silent, or have voice-over narrations or musical accompaniment. Cellphilms can be created collectively in a group or individually. They can include footage of the real world, animations, drawings or a combination of those.

Find examples of cellphilms on [McGill University's International Cellphilm Festival website](#).



What are the ethical considerations of a cellphilm?

When working with visual methods, especially photographs and videos, it is critical to consider the rights of the people involved in the project. Therefore cellphilms ethics could include various aspects, such as clarifying the ownership of cellphilms or collecting consent from identifiable individuals in the videos. It is about doing the most good with the least harm to everyone involved in the project, especially those who appear in the film. Specifically, it is essential to consider what is appropriate or inappropriate to film, as well as whom to ask permission to film. A “no face” approach can increase anonymity and lead to original, innovative and creative techniques, which can include, but are not limited to, filming objects, nature, parts of the body like hands or even shadows.

What can a cellphilm technique do for human rights education?

The cellphilm process is suitable for use in human rights training to help learners identify, think and reflect collectively about human rights issues, and potentially develop plans or necessary actions for a change that is culturally safe in their communities. At the same time, cellphilms create a platform that can be presented on different occasions to various types of audiences. For example, they can be screened to policymakers, who will hear directly from their communities; they can be screened to community members, who will become aware of each other's thoughts, and can be shared on social media in order to reach a wider public.

Cellphilm production usually entails several phases:

1. Brainstorming
2. Storyboarding
3. Filming
4. Film screening
5. Reflecting

This process engages and mobilizes people at the grassroots level and provides an opportunity for community empowerment through visual activity and opens spaces for participants to reflect, learn, and talk about issues. Because it facilitates participation at various levels, it is a very suitable instrument to use with the human rights-based approach.



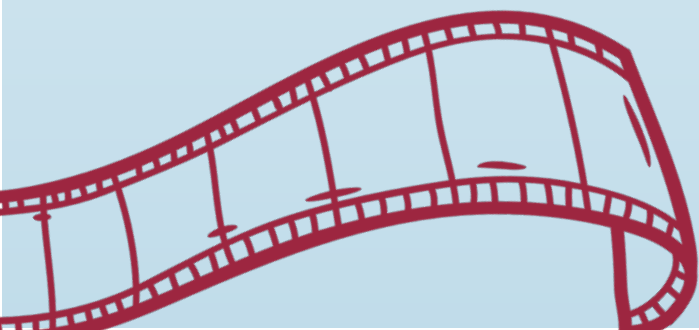
What does cellphilm have to do with NGOs?



Screenshot of the NGO Panel - Re-visioning Cellphilm Methodologies Virtual Symposium

The use of the cellphilm technique has moved beyond academia to the world of NGOs that use it to work with communities from around the globe on different projects across many subjects. The application of cellphilm in NGOs has been discussed in the NGO Panel of [Re-visioning Cellphilm Methodologies Virtual Symposium](#) organized by McGill University's Faculty of Education on June 9, 2022. In this panel, representatives of three NGOs, including [CODE](#), [Plan International](#), and [Oxfam International](#), shared their experience and reflections on using cellphilms in their projects and specifically answered questions about the role of cellphilms in an NGO's work and the usefulness of this tool and its contribution to monitoring and evaluation of the projects.

If you are interested in hearing the panelists' answers to these questions, please feel free to watch the [recording of this panel](#). There, you will hear panelists talk about the added value of cellphilms. Furthermore, they distinguish cellphilms from other qualitative research methods mentioning interviews or group discussions, as well as discuss their power to visualize the change. As the panelists expressed, cellphilms have the potential to empower participants and raise their voices, show the real impact of projects, be an excellent tool to educate donors, showcase the work, encourage them to continue to give, and enable NGOs to better fundraise.



What samples of cellphilms made at Equitas?

Some members of the Equitas team have created cellphilms to address issues in human rights education. Here are some examples :

All Children Have the Right to Play

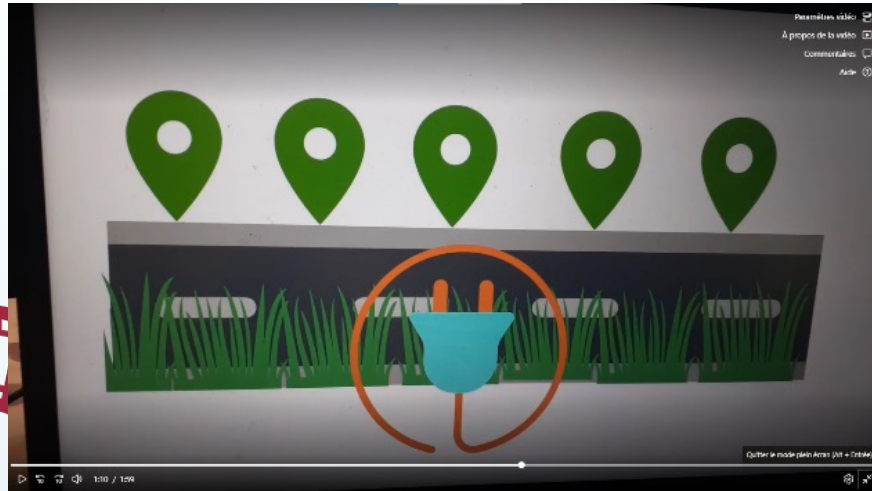
by Diane Tzovanis



"This cellphilme addresses children's right to play, and the notion of this being a communal responsibility. To produce the cellphilme, I simply put together pictures and video footage taken on walks to the park with my young daughter and her friends. Our daily walks and time spent in the recreational spaces of our neighborhood – spaces where my daughter can play freely and safely with so many other children – constitutes such an important part of her physical and mental well-being as a child. It is disheartening to know that safe public spaces (including green spaces), where children can exercise their fundamental right to play and to be children, are not accessible to all youth. In putting together this cellphilme, I was thankful that my own child and those she plays with, could benefit from spaces that are so crucial to their development as healthy and happy community members. I especially reflected on the actions I should be taking to help ensure that children in neighborhoods and communities other than my own also benefit from such fundamental rights: the right to play, the right to healthy and safe environments, the right to be children. If this is not my responsibility – as an adult and thus as a protector of children's best interest – than whose responsibility is it?"

A call to action and ambition to protect our environment

by Laurence Bourcheix Laporte



"I discovered how interesting it was to use the cellphilm technique to share our ideas and opinions! My goal with this cellphilm was to communicate that in order to face the climate emergency, we need to think much more collectively and demand that decision-makers implement ambitious, even revolutionary programs! For example, this film proposes to invest massively in a car-sharing system to reduce the number of vehicles on the road, to increase more rapidly sharing of electric cars on our roads and to green the parking spaces that take up too much space in our cities, while contributing to heat islands. The film concludes by arguing that a human rights-based approach (HRBA) can contribute to such innovative measures by strengthening the capacity of communities to claim their right (and that of future generations) to a healthy environment and by demanding that decision-makers fulfill their obligations to protect and fulfill this right. In short, this film is a call to action... because ambitious, innovative and effective environmental action in our society is not optional: it is a matter of human rights fulfillment, it is an obligation".

Together for human rights

by Annie Pettigrew

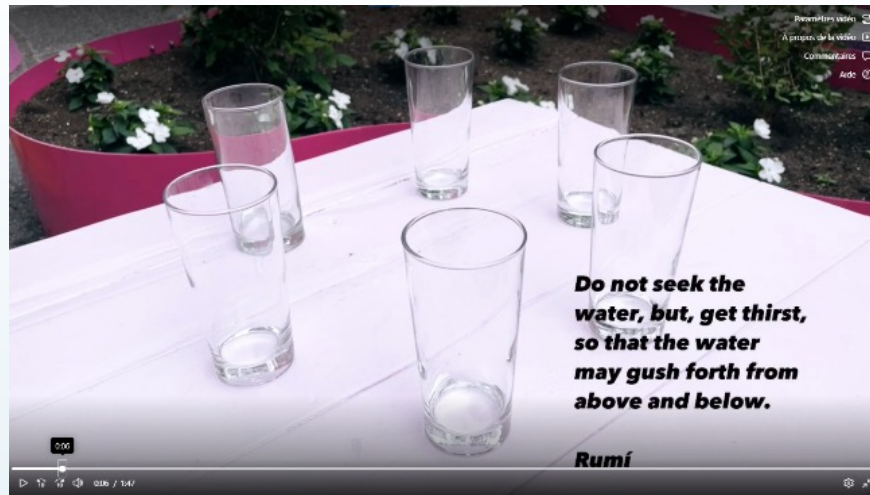


Annie has been a human rights educator for almost 20 years. For her first cellphilm, she wanted to express what human rights education means to her.

"For me, human rights education is not something theoretical. It is people who live or witness human rights violations on a daily basis. People who tell what they experience or what they see. What they wish for, too. Wounds and joys are shared. Bonds are forged. Alliances are created. Human rights education is first and foremost about being together. Learning together. Supporting each other. Dreaming together of a world where each person can flourish and be proud of who they are".

An Impact of Human Rights Education

by Nika Naimi and Hani Sadati



This cellphilm tries to reflect on the idea of participatory knowledge construction (versus one-way training) in human rights education.

"In discussing our work and what impacts it has, we realized that there is a process to it. The process relates to the PANEL (Participation, Accountability, Non-Discrimination and Equality, Empowerment and Legality) technique and how conversations around human rights tend to unfold with our partners. By breaking it down into steps, it became clearer that there is a process that leads to an interesting impact. It starts with raising questions (somewhat of a Socratic method). This is followed by us spearheading and convening discussions among our partners on issues that affect them. During these discussions that we host, there are reflections that are shared. This, in turn, helps to expand our mutual understandings. When our understanding expands, it creates an impetus to stir us and our partners into action. We (Hani and I) agreed that the process is kind of similar to watering plants. First, we thirst for water (these discussions we host around human rights), then those discussions create avenues to engage in critical reflection expand understandings (like water being poured into a glass). We took it one step further by thinking about how that glass of water eventually serves to water a plant (community actions). It was a way to visualize the impact of human rights education using a metaphor."

References:

- Mitchell, C., de Lange, N., & Moletsane, R. (2017). Participatory visual methodologies: Social change, community and policy. SAGE
- Thompson, J., Mitchell, C., & Starr, L. (2019). Cellphilm: A Tool for Addressing Gender Equality—Facilitators' Guide. Ottawa, ON: CODE.