

Synopsis

All over France, there are still examples of what are known as "single-class schools" that bring together all the children of a village around one teacher, from kindergarten to the last year of primary school.

Between isolation and opening up to the world, these eclectic little groups share everyday life, for better and for worse.

This film was shot in one of them, somewhere in the heart of the Auvergne.

104 min - 35 mm colour - format 1:66 - Dolby SR

Press

Marie Queysanne
21, avenue du Maine - 75015 Paris
Tel (33) 01 42 22 06 62
Portable (33) 06 80 41 92 62
Fax (33) 01 42 22 11 41

Production

Maïa Films
9, rue René Boulanger - 75010 Paris
Tel (33) 01 53 72 84 00
Fax (33) 01 53 72 84 01
maiafilms@maiafilms.com

World sales

Mercure Distribution
27, rue de la Butte aux Celliers - 75013 Paris
Tel (33) 01 44 16 88 44
Fax (33) 01 45 65 07 47
www.mercure-distribution.fr
infos@mercure-distribution.fr

© Maïa Films, Arte France Cinéma,
Les Films d'ici, CNDP - France 2002
French release certificate N° 101033 - Copyright 2002



Être et avoir

(To Be And To Have)

un film de Nicolas Philibert



Sélection officielle Cannes 2002



Director's notes

"TO BE AND TO HAVE" isn't a documentary in the traditional sense, with a demonstrative and didactic approach. I wanted to tell a story, provoke emotion and stay close to the characters in this adventure in order to share their trials, joys and minor dramas, the whole range of feelings that we experience along the rocky path of learning to read, write, count... and, in the end, grow up.

I wanted the film to be set in a reasonably mountainous area, with a tough climate and harsh winters. **Before choosing this particular school, I contacted more than 300 establishments and visited a good hundred of them.** I wanted a school with limited numbers (10 to 12 pupils), so that each child would be easily identifiable. I also wanted the fullest age range possible – from kindergarten to the final year of primary school – to show the atmosphere and charm of these small, eclectic communities and the very specific work required from the teachers.

I realized, of course, that a great deal would depend on the choice (and the shoulders) of the teacher, but I remained very open on this vital point. It could be a man or a woman, young or nearing retirement, with experience or not... I was aware that the final film would not be the same but, on that level, I didn't have any preconceptions.

During scouting, that lasted around five months, most of the teachers that I met seemed extremely involved in their work. Their methods and educational ideas varied greatly but, since I was unqualified to judge such aspects, I left them in the background. The teacher that I chose, Mr Georges Lopez, had been recommended by the local educational inspector. Despite his slightly traditional approach, he appeared as the right man as soon as I stepped through his classroom door. I never had cause to regret my decision. **Beneath his slightly authoritarian airs, I soon discovered a subtle and modest man, closely focused on his pupils. The film owes a great deal to him and I think that is obvious.**

When I met him, he was surprised that someone would want to make a feature film on such a fragile, unspectacular subject. I talked to him about my approach and my conviction that filming a child struggling with a subtraction could become a real epic...

In turn, he told me about his class, about his attachment to this small group that obliged him, even after 35 years of experience, to adapt his work methods incessantly, without concealing that he himself found them a little too classical, suggesting several times that I pick someone with a more modern approach...

I tried to reassure him: I didn't intend to carry out an in-depth examination of the way he taught fractions or the past participle. Of course, the whole film would revolve around him but, despite being in the camera's eye at all times, he would be part of the whole. Little by little, he started to feel comfortable with the idea... At 55, he had a year and a half left before retirement. A chance perhaps, through this experience, to round off his career before moving on to something else.

The parents, in turn, quickly gave their agreement, probably because of the trust and respect that they feel for this teacher who has been among them for the last 20 years. **Even so, I felt it was necessary to tell them from the outset that their children wouldn't be filmed equally nor shown in the most flattering situations. Otherwise, there would be no film and certainly no story.** I also anticipated the issue of editing, telling them that it would be necessary to do away with hours and hours of footage, possibly sacrificing some magnificent scenes, since the final cut isn't a "best of" but a construction that obeys its own rules as much as the director's wishes... In short, to rule out any ambiguity, I wanted to assert the subjectivity of my vision and of my future choices from the word go.

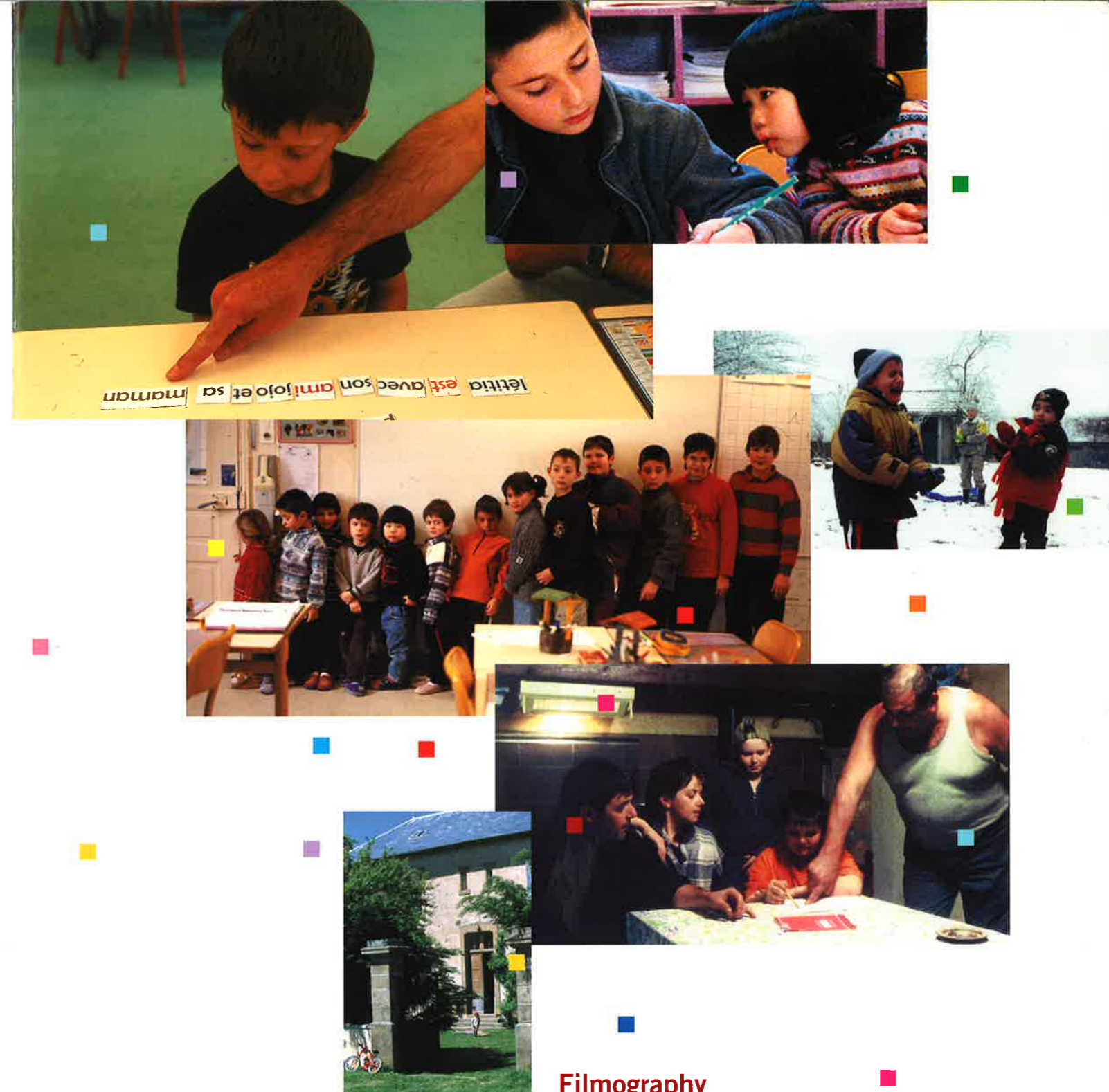
As for the children, since we also asked their opinion, they were proud to have been chosen but, to be honest, I don't think the younger ones really understood what was going on at first.

Shooting took place over ten weeks, between December 2000 and June 2001. On the first day, we took time to explain to them how we were going to work, what all our equipment was for... **Each of the children had a look through the camera, played with the zoom, tried on the headphones... Then the teacher took things in hand. They got back to work and so did we. After three days, we were almost a part of the classroom.**

There were four of us on the crew: a cameraman, a sound engineer, a camera assistant and myself. On a technical level, it was fairly complicated. The sound engineer had to cover the whole class and, by definition, we never knew in advance who was going to speak. For the image was concerned, there were countless pitfalls to avoid: we had to watch our reflections in the windows and the blackboard at all times. The decision not to add any additional lighting to the classroom's neon lights left very little depth of field and as a result, no margin of error for the focus. But that is part and parcel of this kind of shoot and forces everyone to do their best.

Throughout filming, we tried to remain as discreet as possible, so as not to perturb the daily life of the class. Moreover, I made sure that we adopted a sort of "benevolent neutrality", without which the whole thing would have fallen apart... One of the goals was to see how the teacher would manage to get 13 pupils of different ages and levels to work together at the same time. **There was no question of helping a child who might have asked us for assistance. No question of laughing if one of them clowned around... It was tough at times but we each had our roles to play. Each new film means finding the necessary distance. The footage is the direct reflection of this.**

In the end, I had almost 60 hours of rushes. The film came together in the cutting room. For me, it's a very open film, giving all viewers the chance to read into it what they like, notably their own childhood memories... Personally, I see a certain gravity and even a certain violence, even if this remains contained. Before making the film, I think I had forgotten how hard it is to learn and grow up. This immersion in the school world was a powerful reminder of that. And perhaps that's the film's true subject.



Filmography

Nicolas Philibert was born in 1951.

His feature films include :

- 1990 - **Louvre City** (La ville Louvre), 84'
- 1992 - **In the Land of the Deaf** (Le pays des sourds) ,99'
- 1994 - **Animals** (Un animal, des animaux), 60'
- 1996 - **Every Little Thing** (La moindre des choses), 104'
- 1998 - **Who Knows ?** (Qui sait ?), 106'
- 2002 - **To Be and To Have** (Être et avoir), 104'

Credits

director **Nicolas Philibert** photography **Katell Djan, Laurent Didier** assisted by **Hugues Gémignani** sound **Julien Cloquet** original score **Philippe Hersant** camera and editing **Nicolas Philibert** assistant editor **Thaddée Bertrand** still photographer **Christian Guy** production manager **Isabelle Pailley Sandoz** producer **Gilles Sandoz** associate producer **Serge Lalou** co-produced by **Maïa Films, Arte France Cinéma, Les Films d'Ici, Centre National de Documentation Pédagogique** with the participation of **Canal +, the Centre National de la Cinématographie, Gimages 4** and the backing of the **Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, the Conseil Régional d'Auvergne, the Procirep** with **Mr Georges Lopez, teacher and the schoolchildren of Saint-Etienne sur Usson (Puy-de-Dôme)** : Alizé, Axel, Guillaume, Jessie, Johan (Jojo), Johann, Jonathan, Julien, Laura, Létitia, Marie-Elisabeth, Nathalie and Olivier