

TURNING THE SWITCH (NO REWINDING POSSIBLE)

MULTIMEDIA CHALLENGES FOR CULTURE EDUCATION

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Reaching out to a diversity of socio-cultural contexts and specificities

3. Digital media, popular culture and arts education

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TURNING THE SWITCH – MULTIMEDIA CHALLENGES FOR CULTURAL EDUCATION

This contribution focuses on the trajectory which the CANON Cultural Unit of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training started some years ago with regard to multimedia literacy. This trajectory led to a profound rethinking of the aims and methods of arts and cultural education.

Creativity is a matter of showing respect for the language which most closely matches your personality. We live in an age which over-valorises the merit of verbal communication. Whoever is able to talk fluently possesses a clear advantage in our modern world. You have to talk about your feelings, explain your ideas; formulate your points of view. In reality this skill is very unevenly distributed. There are many young people who feel most comfortable if they are able to express their emotions in dance, music, song or visual imagery... But in daily life these are languages which we tend to relegate to the sidelines. If someone is clumsy in relationships and makes few friends on the playground, we will usually advise them to follow social skills training. Little effort is made to explore the type of language with which youngsters feel most at home. This offers a great opportunity for creative education. Because afterwards, they will often also learn how to communicate better through speaking.

The digital revolution is currently going through a second wave: the majority of multimedia users are no longer just consumers of new technologies, but are now multimedia literate

people ready to appropriate these media, to use them for their own self-development and self-expression. Because children and young people today are growing up in an IT society, they have a different way of processing information (creative, multi-disciplinary, lateral) in comparison with previous generations (logical, rational, linear).

The manner in which this “Einstein generation” (after the title of the book by Jeroen Boschma and Inez Groen: *Einstein Generation: cleverer, quicker and more social. Communicating with the youth of the 21st century*. FT, 2007) thinks, looks and reasons is so completely different from their teachers and educators that it is possible to speak of a new paradigm.

Using a multimedia approach in the educational context reflects more closely the living environment of the young people, and therefore offers more opportunities to motivate them to learn.

In addition to the absolute need to open up school culture to multimedia literacy, this trajectory highlights the need to build up a multimedia curriculum, and to train teachers to be able to create a place for multimedia literacy in their daily teaching programme.

In other words: how do we go from media as an arts education discipline to multimedia literacy from an arts educational perspective.

History of media-education in Flanders

In 2003 the debate about audiovisual education became more and more important in Flanders.

The real need to turn a (mental) switch emerged from the study “*Audiovisual training in Flemish education*”, carried out by Annemie Goegebuer in 2004 on behalf of the **IAK** and the **CANON** Cultural Unit. This was a research project to investigate the current state of audio-visual education within the Flemish educational system.

The following conclusions emerged from her study:

- There is an enormous need for audiovisual and multimedia literacy in all classes and at all levels of Flemish education;
- The education system itself (e.g. teachers) does not currently have the know-how to meet this need. Teachers are, however, willing to receive training.
- The use of visual language is a rarity in classrooms; when it is present it is used illustratively, embedded in a literary account and exclusively intended as illustration.

In addition to the absolute need for school culture – which in 2003 was still exclusively oriented towards literary literacy – to be opened up to multimedia literacy, this study highlighted the need to build up a multimedia curriculum, and to train teachers and assistants, so that they can also create a place for multimedia literacy in their daily teaching programmes. In striving for equal educational opportunities, we should not forget the group of students who will still need encouragement to develop this new kind of literacy. Assisting students in this manner is also an important educational assignment. This should allow space and attention for reflection, which is still often lacking, on (the use of) audiovisual resources and language.

On a more semantic level, we wish to point to the fact that in European studies and publications the term “digital literacy” is commonly used. However, we have chosen the term “multimedia”, since this focuses not on the technology itself but on the possibilities it generates for expressing one’s self differently.

When these research results were presented, on 17 February 2005, the Flemish Minister of Education, Training and Work, Frank Vandenbroucke, indicated in his speech to the “Audiovisual Media and Education” Conference Day that solutions needed to be found for the policy recommendations of the study. He ended his speech with the following comments:

“What became clear to me is how all inclusive, far-reaching and enriching this investigation must be. In the past – like many of you, I imagine – I was inclined to regard multimedia largely as a matter of technical wizardry and button-punching dexterity, or as a didactic method for making lessons more attractive and contemporary. I now have a better appreciation of the scope and impact of audiovisual culture. It is indeed necessary to give audiovisual teaching a proper place in our education system. Not only on paper – this has already been done, with the setting of basic standards and development objectives – but also in practice...”

(Frank Vandenbroucke, Minister of Education and Training, Flanders)

Following this conference on audiovisual education in Flanders in the spring of 2005, the CANON Cultural Unit devised practical materials for compulsory primary, junior and secondary education (INGeBEELD 1, 2 and 3).

Specialists in education and (audiovisual) training, assisted by several audiovisual artists, developed (www.ingebeeld.be):

- Through a series of five short films, **INgeBEELD 1** (3-8 years) familiarises young children in a creative way with the different building blocks of audio-visual media.
- **INgeBEELD 2** (6-14 years) introduces a learning package which structurally provides an audio-visual language. This learning package is a solid stepping stone towards a systematic and well-considered delivery of audio-visual teaching at school, which is adapted to the living environment of different age groups. Once again, the basic starting points are imagination, observation and experience. However, in this second phase the focus is shifted to experimental film, video art and shorter audio-visual creations, rather than on narrative audio-visual products. These 'out-of-the-ordinary' image constructions ensure a more direct confrontation with the different building blocks of audio-visual language. Moreover, this cross-media and cross-curricular approach provides sufficient space for introducing the basic principles of network culture and the new media. The omnipresence of the various media resources (mobile phone, mp3 player, computer games, etc.) is integrated into all elements of the package.
- **INgeBEELD 3** (12-18 years) consists of an electronic platform (website) and contains challenges and materials for all courses of study (mainstream secondary, technical secondary, vocational secondary, part-time vocational secondary education and secondary education in the arts).

Pupils and their coaches can visit, consult and use the website free of charge. By simply clicking buttons, coaches (teachers) can find many ideas and have access to a range of audio-visual tools, which they can use to set up or complete their activities.

Next to the development of INgeBEELD1, 2 and 3, a project was started in which trainers are first trained in-house and then go on to set up regional further education programmes within a specific, agreed format. From 2007 onwards, special customised INgeBEELD-training was set up for teacher training institutes.

In addition to the pilot project INgeBEELD 4 – “*The history of the view*” - an assignment was also written for teachers in training and in practice. The goal was to make this target group more multimedia literate via a “media wisdom” platform, developed by the Flemish organisation “Ambrosia’s Tafel”. Visitors discover the possibility of working on their own multi-media education via five different worlds (an *inspiration globe*, a *neighbourhood TV*

globe, a *learning* globe, a *dialogue* globe, and a *view* globe). The idea is to develop an educational audiovisual circuit and discourse, which will help educators, teachers, tutors and social study teachers to train their students in the different aspects of media wisdom and thus, over the longer term, achieve complete integration of this wisdom into the Flemish education programme. The implementation of the project was monitored by a steering group made up from representatives of different educational networks, different education levels, education policy-makers (curriculum, ICT policy) and cultural educators (social-cultural work, media and e-learning). The platform went online in April 2009, and is continuously evolving and growing.

Furthermore, in 2006 a project appeal was launched called *Audiovisual educational support for teacher training institutes*. Teacher training institutes are a fundamental link in developing audiovisual skills. This appeal was sent to all Flemish universities, colleges and adult education training institutes. Eleven proposals were sent in, ten from colleges and one from an adult education institute. An independent jury selected five proposals based on the criteria in the appeal. These five proposals, which most closely matched the policy recommendations from the study, were given the green light.

Teaching audiovisual language has strong parallels with the teaching of mother tongue didactics. In his "*Plea for a philosophical history of the media*", philosopher/journalist Paul Bottelberghs has the following to say:

"In terms of the mother tongue we teach young people in secondary school that this language – for which they learn the basic grammar in junior school – is much more than a vehicle for concrete communication; that you can do much more with this language than simply send out messages. That this language is also a means of expressing yourself: in diaries, in poetry, in essays. But also, and above all, this language is a medium, the gateway to the huge cultural realm of world literature. We can do the same in secondary school in terms of multimedia literacy, with all the media that are currently available to us."

The fact that the integration of audiovisual training in education still comes up against a number of important barriers should not be regarded as a surprise. Our education system still gives "writing" an important place, even though our society is becoming increasingly

“multimedia”. There is still some work to be done before we can achieve a complete integration of audiovisual training in education. INgeBEELD 1, 2 and 3 are a first step in the right direction. With INgeBEELD 4 we are searching, together with the users (bottom-up), to find solutions to the challenges of the post-digital revolution.

The quest for effective modern education is, of course, much more than a matter of switches and buttons. Our fascination with technology has created important questions:

- How do we use the resources?
- How can they benefit the quality of education?
- How do they arouse the (creative) talents of children and young people?

During the test phase of the *media wisdom* platform (www.ingebeeld4.be), another discussion also emerged, a discussion which sought to define intelligence more broadly and once again aroused our amazement at the scope of the available possibilities.

What all this demonstrates, is that the transformation from media as an arts education discipline” to “multimedia literacy from an arts educational perspective” represents a major challenge for contemporary education policies and systems.

This means there are no standard solutions and no standard working methods. It also implies that the focus must be set on expression, and not on technique. And, last but not least, it means that all types of media must be involved: not only the “new media”, but also singing, writing, drama, dancing, sculpture, painting, etc.

Why must this be done? Because there is a strong belief that both teachers and (arts and cultural) education need “knowledge”, “competence” and “skills”. Secondly, they need to be ready to adopt a personal approach within a social context. With regard to the life-long learning of teachers, it is also important that the concept of “coaching” is incorporated into their career planning, rather than “leading” or “directing”. Moreover, students prefer authentic presence to high-tech absence. Education can only benefit by allowing greater room for intuition and inventiveness in the dialogue between different (ethnic) groups (Colpaert, 2009).

Finally, we must never forget that:

“Creativity is a matter of showing respect for the language which most closely matches your personality.”

(Peter Adriaenssens, child psychiatrist, during his presentation to the Conference on Cultural Education, Innovation, Creativity and Youth, Brussels, March 2009, www.cicy.eu).

In the most recent policy note on education - *Broadening the horizon for every talent, 2009-2014* – issued by the current Flemish Minister of Education, Pascal Smet, it is underlined that:

“Arts and cultural education are an essential part of the personal and social development of children and young people.”

This is a promising note for the future, as it points to a political awareness of the importance of these issues. The story of multimedia literacy continues.

References

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