

Education for the Audiovisual Expression: a teaching proposal

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Abstract: Film Education cannot be just a neutral term with an absolute meaning. Depending on the kind and the extent of student populations to whom it is addressed, the intention for film education raises several questions whose answers define its content and character. The inclusion of film education in formal education on a national scale sets a number of considerations as to its distinct character: will it appear as a distinct art subject which might be clearly differentiated from media literacy and other related topics? Or, alternatively, will it be integrated in a media literacy subject mainly aiming to the critical consumption of cinematic texts? Will it be addressed mainly to students with a special interest in cinema? Alternatively, what would be the implications of addressing Film Education to the whole of the student population, even in remote or culturally deprived areas? To what degree of sophistication will it be taught? Who would be teaching it? Our effort is to develop some basic key-concepts around which a national curriculum would be structured offering a realistic teaching proposal of Education for the Audiovisual Expression that could be integrated into formal Primary and Lower Secondary Education.

Good morning!

First I would like to thank the Fest of Fests Organizing Committee for inviting me as a keynote speaker. Also I would like to express my gratitude to "granny Athena" for guiding my pathways in education. Finally I would like to thank you all for being here today. As I can't risk delivering this presentation without a written text I would like to ask for your active collaboration on all levels of communication.

Questioning modes of Film Education:

Considering our background experience, Karpos and the Audiovisual Expression laboratory of the 'MELINA project – Education and Culture', we developed theoretical views on some of the basic Cinema Literacy and Media Literacy issues thus willing to raise a few questions and suggest possible realistic answers. Such questions may hopefully trigger fruitful discussions and counter discussions leading to the formation of conscious pressure groups acting towards national, education-oriented decision-making boards.

Initially, one would argue that it is almost outdated to remind how very differently young critical viewers are conceived by film literacy and by media literacy educators. Film literacy educators, more or less, conceive young critical viewers as young cinephiles: being aware of the main cinema history trends, having some personal preferences of films, film artists and their symbolic universe, realizing possible interpretations of a specific cinema text and reflecting on it, being aware of the expressive means and their use as well as possessing a relative knowledge of film production and distribution methods. Media literacy educators on the other hand, conceive young critical viewers as critical readers of media texts: being able to recognize and analyze the parameters of a media text's creation, the possible motives of the text's production as well as realizing the various ways that different audiences may respond to each specific text. Also to be able to critically make use of audiovisual texts according to their needs. If however one is facing these two tendencies in a context of a national educational implementation, such differences become pertinent and still current. In our case it may be provocative but nevertheless useful to start from the very beginning:

Education! There can be several 'shades' of education:

Education ABOUT Cinema? In other words, we may refer to an 'elective' (Secondary education school subject, offered to interested students who can choose it among different subjects according to their own, personal preferences). Also, Education about Cinema could be offered by national-state organizations (BFI, Cinemateque Francaise, Austrian Film Museum etc.) or private institutions in cooperation with schools addressing to interested young people. Certainly, since it would not address to ALL students of National Education but specifically to the ones having some inclination for cinema, a lot of thinking and discourse could be devoted to the content, priorities and levels of Education about Cinema. In that sense, no limits should be imposed to what education about Cinema should be in order to finally achieve a certain level of knowledge, skills, competences, attitudes etc. at different age-groups. True, in the direction of a distinguishable art education subject, Cinema Education refers to a separate subject not necessarily related to other relevant topics such as media literacy and critical reception of audiovisual texts.

On the other hand, we may conceive of Cinema AS PART OF General Education. That is some basic awareness which EVERY new citizen should have about Cinema, as part of his/her personal cultural consciousness. How would the aims of such Cinema Education be integrated to the National Curriculum together with relevant knowledge from theater, visual arts, music, performances, literature, philosophy, history, language, mathematics, sciences etc.? We have to consider that -due to practical and educational limitations- it may not be possible to fit dozens of screenings (that would be attended even in remote areas by all students on a national scale). It may not be possible to fit hundreds of student film productions (where all students would participate) within the available teaching time during students' schooling life. Considering then a **basic** Program of Study (addressing to all new citizens) what would be **the absolutely essential concepts, competences and experiences in developing the new citizens' cinema awareness?** And -inevitably- how would these cinema concepts merge with media literacy concepts, competences and experiences into an integrated whole of education for audiovisual awareness (perhaps called Education for the Audiovisual Expression or just Wider Literacy)?

The need in this direction of Cinema Education would be to disseminate a wider media and audiovisual culture which would be the result of a national 'wider' literacy strategy addressing the whole school population much like the formal teaching of a language (it would be interesting to note that the term 'wider literacy' was introduced by the Northern Ireland Educational Working Group, 2004). Can we agree on some simple but crucial concepts of Education for the Audiovisual Expression that will find their way into the General Curriculum? Can we define what is so specific about cinema that all new citizens must be aware of, **regardless** of their special interests and talents?

In such a case can we conceive of Audiovisual Expression not as a special art subject but as an essential element of all new citizens' cultural consciousness much like the teaching of language? Can we develop ways that would make students realize that Audiovisual Expression can have structure, rhythm, punctuation, can make use of narrative techniques, create symbolisms, metaphors and of course develop recognizable narrative styles? Considering indeed that audiovisual expression attracts young people's attention much more than conventional literature, students can be initiated in issues of expression experiencing in an innovative way the ancient agony for message creation: **How can I phrase this in order to be more clearly understood?**

Let us then start collecting meaningful concepts that might form a body of Education for the Audiovisual Expression:

A concept of crucial importance for the active participation of new citizens in society would be the development of criteria regarding the value of the mediated information. Such a value could be unfolded in two directions:

On the one hand to realize that all audiovisual texts are skillfully constructed by using the audiovisual tools in order to express the mediator's personal views. In this direction, an analysis of constructional aspects of any audiovisual text is always revealing of the mediator's intentions, methods and social orientation.

On the other hand to realize that mediated views offer us an essential opportunity to broaden our understanding of the world we live in. All art, all education all exchange of information are aspects of mediated processes allowing the sharing of scientific knowledge, of personal views, of subjective visions of the world that can enrich our own personal views. Audiovisual texts are constructions but nevertheless can be proposals coming from sensitive creators calling for divergent looking at the world around us. This concept then, integrates in our Education for the Audiovisual Expression the appreciation of others' diverging views.

Another concept of crucial importance refers to the appreciation of artistic audiovisual expression and especially of the cinematic experience. Among the limited opportunities that students may have to watch full feature movies in a school environment we -as educators- should avoid any knowledge-centered educational outcome, but rather seek for acquaintance with cinema aesthetics and reflection of socio-philosophical ideas expressed by cinema artists. To this we should integrate a context of pleasure and enjoyment beyond any teaching priorities. Evidently then -like the teaching of language is rooted in acquaintance with literature- Education for the Audiovisual Expression would be firmly rooted in cinema and all forms of artistic audiovisual expression. In the students' eyes the cinematic experience would broaden the potential of audiovisual expression and would allow the meeting of students with different artists' idiosyncratic symbolisms and significations establishing a context of pleasure and development of critical understanding much more complex and rich than any critical analysis usually related to media literacy.

Furthermore, can we conceive of Education for the Audiovisual Expression as a framework encouraging children to express their own thoughts and views using pictures and sounds in the form of audiovisual texts digitally communicated through social media? Perhaps introducing elementary projects of audiovisual expression such as "how to water a plant in four photos", "my favorite corner in our home in 4-5 photos with commentary", "our visit in the museum in 20 photos supported by commentary and recorded sounds", "how is Evil Queen in Snowwhite different/similar from Cruella Devil in 101 Dalmatians? explained in a three minute video". This production of audiovisual language texts could also be integrated in all subjects of the general curriculum in small projects such as "how to explain Newton's concept of gravity in a three minute video addressing to classmates", "produce a three minute video as an excerpt from an imaginary dialogue between Cromwell and another historic person of his time" etc.

Thus, as part of the redesigned language-teaching, AV Education won't constitute a separate subject but would be infused in all subjects of the National Curriculum. That is,

in each subject of the NC, once a year, students in groups would be required to produce a three minute video supporting concepts of the particular subject. Surely some of these children will develop ways of audiovisual expression well within the domain of cinematic expression!

The two 'shades' of Education described above (distinguishable art subject or a language centered system of concepts of Audiovisual Expression for all students) are different, but not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Karpos's proposal for a National Program of Study (curriculum):

Facing only the second challenge for proposing a systematic Program of Study in Education for the Audiovisual Expression, our view in Karpos is that critical understanding of Audiovisual Expression surely should include some MEDIA concepts but such a challenge will never be truly faced and completed unless young students will become aware of the fascinating dimensions of artistic audiovisual expression (CINEMA). Unless, that is, they will realize the mechanisms of meaning-making and story-telling through the juxtaposition of separate moving images and the suggestive use of sounds. Indeed students, in their 9-year formal schooling, **together** with their non-specialized teachers, must experience several cinema screenings of carefully selected classical and contemporary non-mainstream films, both in the form of excerpts and in whole, to be initiated in the pleasures of watching films which they must be able to discuss expressing their personal opinions about the films they experience. Also students, in their 9-year formal schooling, **together** with their non-specialized teachers, must participate in small filming projects to experience the challenges of self-expression using image and sound. Thus, critical media understanding has to be educationally supported by aesthetic and semantic awareness. Just like teaching of any language requires, apart from reading and writing, careful systematic awareness of literature and of the many forms of written expression.

Trying to contribute in building a realistic national strategy for Audiovisual Expression 'Karpos' developed a proposal for a 'loose' Program of Study for Audiovisual Expression covering all levels of formal Primary and Secondary Education, to be integrated in the National Curriculum. Actually, it is a proposal commissioned by the Greek Ministry of Education which -due to the financial crisis- has not been implemented, but its translation into English signifies our aim to share it with the broader Film and Media Education community.

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The key concepts:

This Program would aim at the development of basic media and audiovisual expression competences by all new citizens. Reading and writing through images and sounds. The proposed Program of Study is structured around 20 elementary cinema and media literacy concepts which -admittedly- have been chosen by us and one may easily argue whether they represent the best possible selection, given the specific purpose. Also we should admit that our latent educational choice is rather the development of audiovisual awareness than the acquisition of specific knowledge.

The key concepts listed below should not be viewed as "chapters", but rather as latent concepts implied and recurrently combined within different activities throughout formal schooling and, if possible, in different topics of the General Curriculum. Several of these concepts are also supported by the Framework for Film Education Document (BFI, 2015). Each concept is characterised according to whether it refers to cinema aesthetics or media literacy and sociology of communication):

1. **Audiovisual narrative mechanisms** (audiovisual expression aesthetics). The linear narrative flow that results from juxtaposing consecutive images (stills in photo-narratives) or consecutive shots in time (in cinema and animation).
Activities such as basic photo-narration of simple actions using consecutive stills, recording of a familiar place using consecutive stills, narrating a very short fiction using consecutive stills. Care should be taken not to confuse the above narrative mechanism with the mechanism of successive frames, responsible for the illusion of movement in cinema.
2. **Semantics of rudimentary shots** (audiovisual expression aesthetics).
Activities such as shooting and using close-ups, medium shots, long shots within a simple visual text.
3. **The creator's mediation** (sociology of communication, critical analysis). A creator's subjective point of view expressed in his/her audiovisual product as a result of the selective use of audiovisual tools and audiovisual technology.
Activities such as shooting and recording the same familiar subject by different groups of pupils and then discussing the different recordings-versions of this same subject.
4. **Degrees of mediation** (to present one's personal view of "reality") (sociology of communication, critical analysis): Animation, Cinema Fiction, Documentary, Journalism.

5. **Created image content** (audiovisual expression aesthetics). Semantic interventions by including or excluding specific elements in composing an image.

Activities such as shooting stills of an object in five different modes:

- "... the way we usually see it"
- "... the way we would never see it"
- "... as part of a social event"
- "... as an advertised object"
- "... as a fairy tale hero"

6. **Types of sounds** (audiovisual expression aesthetics, sociology of communication, critical analysis): Noise, Speech, Music, Voice-overs (off-camera commentary). **Types of speech:** Voice overs, newscasters' language, guests' language, actors in dialogue.

Activities such as creating soundscapes and simple audio walks.

7. **Human presence in images** (audiovisual expression aesthetics, sociology of communication, critical analysis): Documentary characters, actors (leading actor, supporting actor), animation or stop motion clay animation characters, anthropomorphism in animation.

8. **Aesthetic parameters resulting from technology** (audiovisual expression aesthetics, sociology of communication, critical analysis):

- Black and white films, colour films, cinemascope, 3D
- silent movies, talking movies, Dolby
- sets, portable cameras, mobile phones
- *Melies, Star Trek, Star Wars, The Matrix*

9. **News reports, Interviews, Data presentation** (sociology of communication, critical analysis):

Creation of simple, audiovisual texts integrating invited opinions.

10. **Advertising** (sociology of communication, critical analysis): the concept of targeted audiences.

11. **Literature – Cinema** (audiovisual expression aesthetics). Different ways of narrating the same story:

Activities such as studying and comparing excerpts from cinematic versions of classical works (e.g., Pinocchio, Oliver Twist, Dracula etc.) as well as corresponding excerpts from written pages.

12. **Film genres, the idiosyncratic universe of each film-maker** as it emanates from the creative use of expressive means and the subjective reception of

each particular reader-receiver (audiovisual expression aesthetics, sociology of communication, critical analysis):

Screening and discussing selected classical and contemporary non-mainstream 'films', throughout the students' schooling life.

13. **Shots (duration), rhythm, editing** (audiovisual expression aesthetics)
Activities of experimenting and re-editing given excerpts.
14. **Professional specialties in cinema and television** (sociology of communication, critical analysis)
15. **The production, distribution and broadcasting cycle of audiovisual products** (sociology of communication, critical analysis)

The following concepts have also been added to the Lower Secondary School proposed curriculum; they all refer to audiovisual expression aesthetics:

16. **Photography direction, light-engineering** (*shooting activity and study of excerpts*)
17. **Editing images and sounds** (*editing activity and study of excerpts*)
18. **Camera movements** (*basic shooting activity and study of excerpts*)
19. **Styles - Film-makers** (*as in 12 above, but considering more complex social parameters affecting each cinema artist*)
20. **Writing a critical review about an audiovisual text.**

All key concepts should be considered within a project-based educational context (i.e., group activities of producing and discussing simple audiovisual texts) as explained above. Once again this pedagogic choice represents a subjective choice. Surely some of the proposed key concepts could be replaced by others to end up with a different proposal. The point is however, to finally build and agree on such a synthetic list of concepts and support it to educational authorities. Also -most important- to develop practical activities based on a theoretical background bringing forward the agreed concepts at different levels of complexity and allowing all students to participate. Our Program of Study suggests very simple activities requiring minimum teaching expertise that can be provided by a comprehensive Teaching Guide and some minimal supportive educational material. Thus, the implementation on a national level would be handled by the already existing educational staff of all faculties.

As was repeatedly explained above, this paper should not necessarily be viewed just as a presentation of our proposal for a Program of Study. It rather is an urgent call for the development of similar proposals for national Programs of Study in the direction of Audiovisual Awareness.

The need for national scale initiatives:

A final point to be considered is that 'wider literacy' strategies cannot be just the cumulative result of different institutions' aspiring activities. Various institutions' activities and practices are indeed valuable but, as indicated above, are addressed mainly to particularly interested students (through available school electives) or to privileged children (or even schools) participating in innovative projects. The need is to disseminate a wider media and audiovisual culture which would be the result of a national literacy strategy addressing the whole school population much like the systematic teaching of a language. We believe that unless aiming at the inclusion of audiovisual expression activities into formal schooling, the mere implementation of innovative and well-designed media literacy and film education activities by public or private institutions (as we in Karpos also practice), will remain restricted within the limitations of exciting but ineffective educational activism.

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