

Suggestions for Measuring the Impact of Audiovisual Education Projects

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This is a very rough suggestion of a proposed research methodology. A more elaborate and detailed research outline can be developed. Special thanks to Mark Reid who kindly acted as a critical reader and contributor.

I. Theoretical discussion:

To measure impact one has to define the possible directions towards which the expected impact would occur. Methodologically, it wouldn't be wise to measure the impact of an audiovisual education project to the ... nutrition habits of the participating students.

A widely accepted direction of the possible impact of AV Education projects is thought to be the development of social skills and competences as a result of the AV group activities. We expect students collaborating in small groups around creative tasks to develop their skills of cooperation, communication and respect for the others, self-esteem etc. as well as their aesthetic and cultural awareness.

However, the truth is that such skills may anyway result from any creative, collective activity like theatrical play, music events organized by small musical groups, collective visual arts creations, publishing a youth newspaper, youth radio productions, STEAM projects, involvement in history projects etc. In other words, this kind of impact may result from activities already integrated in Primary and Secondary Education, leaving to the AV Education projects the role of just one more option for the students. Why then would the Education authorities support the AV Education projects?

Well, the specific and unique contribution of AV Education projects can be nothing less than the development of skills and competences related to learning a new, contemporary system of universal communication much similar to the learning of a new language! A direct connection between audiovisual expression and the teaching of national language (or 'mother tongue literacy') would contribute a completely new dimension in language teaching, attracting young students who can immediately realize the extent of applications of AV expression in their everyday life. The impact which we would – hopefully - trace would be an increase in students' interest in their language lessons and a higher degree of language and expressive competence, or capability. This sort of impact however, could only be measured through a wide and long term research project on a national scale.

On the other hand, the evaluation of an Audiovisual Education project could evaluate the level of skills and competences developed by the students in a context of understanding (comprehension) and expression through images and sounds. A traceable impact in this direction could be further correlated to students' overall motivation for the study and use of language related to creative expression and communication. Thus, the impact of an Audiovisual Education project would seek changes related to critical film and media understanding, as

well as the development of skills of expression through the creative use of images and sounds. More specifically, the impact of an Audiovisual Education project would possibly focus on:

1. The level of students' competence to view a film critically expressing personal opinions and arguing about the film's content, structure and use of filmic language, sharing these opinions with others as well as supporting them by using examples from the film. Growth of such competences can be evaluated by comparing (as explained in section IIIb. below) the quality of argumentation in relevant discussions.
2. The level of students' competence to express their ideas and feelings about an issue by creatively using images and sounds structured in the form of an audiovisual text which is communicated to an audience. To develop such competences, creative activities (like producing a short film in a given context) should be introduced. To evaluate such activities' impact, the final product can be analyzed evaluating only the specific dimensions that indicate growth related to the intended concepts. That is, overlooking indicators referring to the quality of cooperation and group dynamics within each production team, evaluation should focus on dimensions such as:
 - *Relevance to the given theme*
 - *Structure of the film*
 - *Clarity of audiovisual arguments*
 - *Creativity and originality in the use of filmic language*
3. The level of students' overall awareness of specific concepts that generally characterize the filmic experience:
 - *how meaning is created in films through the use of different means of filmic expression (framing, camera angle, lighting, color, sound, editing).*
 - *the film director's role as an audiovisual story-teller who, using the means of filmic expression in a personal way, develops a distinct style of film expression.*
 - *the personal pleasure derived by watching films and by developing unique personal interpretations of the films.*
 - *films being cultural products that, regardless of the context to which they refer, they inevitably reflect the social, historic and cultural context in which they have been produced.*
 - *films as works of artistic expression that can be categorized in different genres with distinct characteristics and in other categories according to each director's personal style, to their nationality and their production context.*
 - *films being audiovisual products which are usually produced by audiovisual industries and are therefore subject to financial priorities. Also that films are distributed through different media (cinemas, TV, Internet, cine-clubs etc.) determining the context of the filmic experience as well as the specific characteristics of their audience. As a result, films can be characterized as mainstream products or products produced and distributed by independent filmmakers, underground films, video-art, experimental films etc.*

All these concepts can be gradually developed by students through specific, supplementary film education activities that can be systematically integrated in every film education project. As in (1) above, the impact of such supplementary activities would only be traced indirectly in discussions about films and cinema using indicators (use of arguments related to these concepts as explained in section IIIb. below). For evaluation purposes such discussions may be triggered in focus groups in order to trace these indicators.

II. Methodology:

The idea behind this example of impact measurement is to compare small groups' outcome before and after the proposed treatment (namely the specific audiovisual education project). The groups' outcome refers to each group's written answers to a questionnaire. For each question, the answer would represent the group as a whole and would be the result of a short discussion in the group. The answer as well as the recorded short discussion that led to it, would be evaluated by assessors.

In each pre- and post- testing phase, two tasks would be assigned to small focus groups of students:

- Task 1: After watching a given short film or an excerpt from a film, each group has to hand in written answers to a specific questionnaire. Each answer would represent the group as a whole and would be the result of a short discussion between the members of the group. The discussions would be sound-recorded and, together with the written answers, would be evaluated by trained assessors according to specific criteria (discourse analysis). A possible example of the questionnaire is given in IIIa. below.
- Task 2: Each group has to produce a three-minute video which would record and present a nearby place or room (school garden, a specific classroom etc.). Each group's production would be evaluated by trained assessors according to specific criteria. Examples of the evaluation criteria are given in IIIb. below.

III. Step by step procedure:

IIIa. PRE-testing phase:

- Small focus groups of 3-5 students are formed
- All groups view a selected short film or a selected excerpt from a film (not longer than 9-10 min.). After viewing, the members of each group discuss and decide their answers to each question. The discussion for each question and the formulation of each answer should not exceed the time suggested for each question (totaling 90' minutes for all five questions). All discussions would be carefully recorded.

Question 1 (10' min. max.):

According to the group's opinion, please record some details from the film you have just viewed (if necessary, the educator can orally provide the answers and the group members may just write down the answers in the correct spaces). This question only aims to establish a standard frame of reference:

Title

Film director:

Year of production:

Nationality:

Some names of actors or other contributors:.....

.....

.....

B&W

Silent

Color

Silent with music

Sound

Production techniques:

Filming (through analogue or digital photographic recording)

Animation

Genre:

Fiction

According to its theme this film would be characterized as:

.....

(Comedy, Western, Adventure, Detective, Thriller, Children or any other category you name)

News Reporting

According to its theme this news reporting would be characterized as:

.....

(Political, Economic, Police, or any other category you name)

Documentary

According to its theme this documentary would be characterized as:

.....
(poetic, sociological, ethnographic, historical, ecological, educational, industrial, touristic, medical or any other category you name)

Advertising

Video-art

Video-clip

Other kinds of films

(Evaluation criteria for assessors: The most important criterion is to reflect the group's opinion about the film in question in a consistent way. That is, putting forward one agreed characterization whenever required and not marking mutually exclusive categories. Right or wrong answers in this question are of no interest. Possible evaluation marks: Well presented, Acceptable, Poor)

Question 2 (10' min. max.) This question aims to trigger some discussion between the group members. During the recorded discussion, if any arguments are raised, specific references to the film should be appreciated (evaluation criteria in IIIb. below):

According to the group's opinion, please mark any of the following characteristics that were somehow included in the film you have just viewed:

- Commentary, that is a voice guiding the spectator
- Moments from a hero's everyday life. Who is this hero?
.....
- Moments from a city's or a community's social life
- Conflict between heroes. Who are the conflicting heroes?
.....
- Narration of a true story that was filmed as it took place.
- Narration of a fictional story that was filmed with actors who play the heroes of the story
- Songs and music
- Interviews
- Statistical data and information from research.

(Evaluation criteria for the assessors: The most important criterion is to reflect the group's opinion about the film in question in a consistent way. That is, putting forward one or more agreed characterizations and not marking mutually exclusive categories. Right or wrong answers in this question are of no interest. Possible evaluation marks: Well presented, Acceptable, Poor)

Question 3 (20' min. max.)

- Write down a short list of the different social issues (political, cultural, moral, issues of human relations, protection of environment etc.) that are raised or implied in the film you have just watched.
- In your group's view, out of the many different issues that are raised or implied in the film, which one would be the most important and would be identified as the film's main theme characterizing the film as a whole?
- Can your group think of examples of specific personal experiences that resemble the film's main theme? How do they resemble (and how do they differ from) the film's main theme? Choose and give one such example in 2-3 lines. One personal example:

.....

(Evaluation criteria for the assessors: The most important criterion is to reflect the group's opinion about the film in question in a consistent way. That is, naming reasonable issues, clear group's opinion regarding the main theme, reasonable reference to a relevant experience. Right or wrong answers in this question are of no interest. Possible evaluation marks: Well presented, Acceptable, Poor)

Question 4 (25' min. max.)

Fill in the following table by dividing the film you have just watched in named sections or sequences (scenes, phases, sequences), and time the duration of each in the film. Some may be very short and some may be long. According to the group's opinion, which entity is the most important for the development of the story? Which heroes appear in each separate entity?

Named section or sequence	Duration in sec.	Most important sequence (use a *)	Heroes appearing
1. ...	MIN. SEC.		...
2. ...		(*)	
...			

(Evaluation criteria for the assessors: reasonable sense of the different sequences, explicit titling, fairly acceptable timing and reflecting the group's opinion in a clear way. Right or wrong answers in this question are of no interest. Possible evaluation marks: Well presented, Acceptable, Poor)

Question 5 (25' min. max.) A short sequence or segment of the film (1'-2' min. long) is chosen and given to the groups to view it carefully on their laptop.

In the segment you have just viewed, please list the succession of shots, making very primitive sketches of each shot's beginning (arrows indicate the direction of looking). You may also add the dialogue corresponding to each shot (not required).

Example:



(Evaluation criteria for the assessors: accurate recording of shots, acceptable sketches of each frame's content and position of items in each frame. The quality of drawing and detailed representation of the sketches is here irrelevant. Possible evaluation marks: Well presented, Acceptable, Poor)

IIIb. General evaluation remarks for the assessors:

Groups may not manage to answer all five questions. Unanswered or half-answered questions will be marked as Poor. From each separate question, a mean score from all groups will be calculated (PRE-score and POST-score respectively).

Evaluation of recorded discussions:

For each group, all five discussions (totaling 90' min. at most) should be evaluated as one. A crude discourse analysis will be conducted counting the number of occurrences of the following terms:

Shot/s, frame/s/ing, high/low angle, lens/s, camera movements (any kind), photography, lighting, editing, flashback, actor/s/ing, sound off, dubbing, cinema,

Also the quality of discussion and communication between members of the focus group could be evaluated as: Sophisticated (clarity of arguments using specific examples from the film, structured arguments), Decent (vague references to the film, stereotypic and vaguely formulated arguments), Poor (mostly irrelevant).

Evaluation of the videos:

A 3-minute video which would record and present a nearby place or room (school garden, a specific classroom etc.) can be easily arranged and created in 2-3 hours. The skills that would be evaluated refer to a simple audiovisual text. A description that would be acceptably accurate, explicit and possibly creative. Use of the AV technology can be appreciated if it doesn't hinder the text's straightforwardness.

Also appreciated would be, the focus on the place presented, the structure of the film (organized in specific items, not repetitive), the audiovisual clarity and straightforwardness as well as the creativity and originality in the use of filmic language.

Possible evaluation marks: attractive-fascinating presentation, structured around one main issue which is thoroughly presented, understandable presentation, confusing, poor (as these do not necessarily constitute an ordinal scale, some further elaboration may be required).

Treatment phase (according to the specific AV Education Project under evaluation)

IIIc. POST-testing phase (at least three months after the completion of the treatment):

Use the same focus groups. A new short film or a new excerpt from a film (not longer than 9-10 min.). Same tasks and questions. Same procedure. Same 3-min. video presentation of a place (other than the group's first video). Same assessors. Same evaluation criteria.

Hopefully an increase in evaluation marks would occur, signifying development of critical competences, effective use of language during the communication between members of the focus group, effective use of audiovisual language.

If during the PRE-testing high scores occur, then – obviously - students have already achieved a satisfactory level of AV awareness and the questionnaire should be tuned to a higher level.

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