

Workshop on Audiovisual Education, as Practised in Teacher Training
by the “Melina Program – Education and Culture”

“Beyond the key media concepts: Elementary Media Education activities related to forms of artistic audiovisual expression”

Presentation in summer-school workshop, Rethymno, University of Crete, 2005, by Menis Theodoridis, head of the Laboratory for Audiovisual Expression in the “Melina Program – Education and Culture”

Referring to programs of Media Education we may consider programs which, generally, aim at pupils’ acquaintance with forms of audiovisual expression. Furthermore, taking into account the various thematic areas which such programs may cover, we can distinguish the following three directions (types) of Media Education programs:

I. **Cinema or Film Literacy** programs, which may include one or both of the following kinds of activities:

- watching and studying selected films.
- using and studying audiovisual tools of cinematic expression, aiming at small school productions of films.

II. **Media Literacy** programs, which approach audiovisual texts through the methodological tools of sociology:

- classification of audiovisual products into kinds and genres
- study of the codes used
- study of the means, tools and methods with which media texts are being produced
- study of the representations created (stereotypes, ideological context, value judgements etc.)
- study of the special characteristics related to different types of media producers
- study of the special characteristics and reactions reflected by different kinds of audiences which receive the audiovisual texts.

III. Programs of audiovisual literacy or, as we (in the “Melina Program – Education and Culture”) call them, programs of **Audiovisual Education** which aim to combine a sociological approach of all audiovisual products, as well as an introduction to the many forms of artistic audiovisual expression. Through specially designed, simple activities, children of all ages may become aware and learn to handle the elementary parameters common to all forms of artistic audiovisual expression (still photography, cinema, animation, creative recording, video-art, computer arts etc.) as well as to recognize the very basic characteristics common to all kinds of audiovisual products (works of art, news coverage and journalism, TV programs, advertising etc.) which we daily consume.

More specifically, such activities can be of two, distinct categories:

A. **“Tools in the hands of children”**, where the aim is to encourage children to become producers of their own audiovisual products (simple audiovisual

productions in school, such as pupils recording their immediate environment in series of still pictures, short photo or video narrations, simple sound recordings of daily school life or of the immediate natural or social environment, sound staging of literature texts etc.).

*(An example of this category of activities is the **first** activity carried within the Summer-school Workshop, as described further bellow).*

Activities of this kind enhance the development of audiovisual awareness through active acquaintance with the tools and methods employed by the producers of audiovisual texts and messages. Working in small groups, children will realize the kind of decisions and choices involved in audiovisual production and will develop a minimum methodological framework enabling them to personally evaluate all audiovisual products which professional media producers address to them, using similar or analogous methods. At the same time, their active involvement in such activities, facilitates the development of skills for audiovisual expression as well as encourages experimentation with alternative ways of audiovisual expression through, possibly, unorthodox use of the common, audiovisual tools.

- B. “Study and development of already existing audiovisual products”** (simple activities of study, discussion and critical analysis of audiovisual products, such as events where specially selected films for children and youth are shown, assignments on these films, assignments on selected excerpts from TV programs, comparisons among different cinema versions of the same work of literature, inter-textual comparisons etc.).

*(An example of this category of activities is the **second** activity carried within the Summer-school Workshop, as described further bellow).*

Activities of this kind enhance the development of skills for observation, study, classification and critical analysis of the audiovisual products, but - above all- they establish a framework where children can “dominate” over the audiovisual products; a condition which very seldom occurs in their daily life. In other words, pupils discover that the same audiovisual work which -during its consumption- they enjoy (experiencing amusement, excitement, thrill, fear, joy etc.), can also be studied, its shots timed, its conflicts classified and its parts can be compared against those from another similar audiovisual work revealing peculiarities, virtues and flaws in its construction.

Conclusively, in all activities of Audiovisual Education, working in small groups should be regarded as a condition of primary importance. Each pupil’s personal reaction as well as discussion among pupils, facilitate children’s awareness of the “variance” (degree of variation) between different subjective interpretations of the same work presented to different members of an audience; the dialectics between total subjectivity and total uniformity!

Summer-school Workshop

1st activity: elementary semantics within a still-photo frame (example of an activity from the category “tools in the hands of children”).

Participants form groups of 4-5 members. Each group has to choose an item (out of its immediate environment) and, using a small still camera, picture the item in five different ways, according to given directions (all proposals are thoroughly discussed):

1. The item pictured “as we usually see it”(the decision as to how to represent the particular item “as usually seen” or, in other words, what is a “stereotypical” representation of the item and how can it be photographically created, is a matter of negotiation within the group).



2. The item pictured “as an element of social interaction”(again, a series of decisions have to be taken regarding the meaning of the terms used and the way they can be photographically represented. The inclusion of human presence within this picture, poses a series of particular issues to be discussed within the group such as “acting”, implication of human relations etc.).



3. The item pictured “as we would have never seen it” (this task orients the group’s attention towards imaginary, impossible situations and focuses on issues of creativity, originality, alternative thinking, humor etc. that can be reflected in the creation of an audiovisual product).



4. The item pictured “as a hero of a children’s fairy tale”(taking a further step into imaginary representations, this task confines the group’s thinking to signs addressing to a particular audience -children-, within a particular cultural context -fairy tales-).



5. The item pictured “as the object of an advertisement campaign”(here, issues such as originality, humor, surprise etc. have to “serve” concepts like target audience, impact, stereotypic thinking etc., thus establishing a framework of “profit” and “disciplined inspiration”).



After the completion of the above tasks, each group has to present its products untitled, to the rest of the groups and, through discussion, test the degree to which its photo-products have been identified as intended.

As shown in the examples of the group’s outcomes bellow, the group members may have realized in practice, that even the most simple photographic representation of a common object, cannot be an innocent, bias-free and intention-free situation, but it is the result of a series of conscious or unconscious decisions, reflected on the final audiovisual product. At the same time, this audiovisual product functions as a set of signs addressed to another group (audience) which, in turn, creates its own meaning (interpretation) out of them.

2nd activity: comparative study of excerpts from classical films, on a chosen topic (example of an activity from the category “study and development of already existing audiovisual products”).

Participants watch a series of excerpts from films of many different kinds and genres, made by different film directors. All excerpts however, are scenes chosen to show - each in its own unique way- a common topic (in our case, “people eating”).

After watching each excerpt, participants have to discuss and come up with answers representing the whole group, regarding a series of questions (e.g. how many people were shown eating? were they hungry? in what context of human relations, surroundings etc. were these people eating? were they also doing something else while eating? what kind of additional sounds could be heard in the film while they were eating? were these people acting or were they filmed in their daily life? besides each excerpt’s descriptive label, what could be a suitable “title” reflecting the particular mood of this scene? etc.).

After watching all excerpts, participants have to try grouping the excerpts under different criteria (color or black and white films, fiction / documentary / TV series / advertisement etc.).

Finally, participants divided in smaller groups have to make a proposal for a future project of a series of still-photos, showing people while eating.

During this particular workshop, participants watched, compared and discussed excerpts showing people eating from the following films:

- «Le Cirque», Ch. Chaplin



- «Le Voleur de bicyclette», V. de Sica



- «L'histoire du chameau qui pleure», B. Davaa, L. Falorni



- «Supersize me», M. Spurlock.



Generally, Audiovisual Education activities of may include:

- small groups of pupils who create several audiovisual products on a given topic or issue, by using the tools of audiovisual expression, and
- whole class elaborating on a given set of audiovisual products, through discussion and critical analysis.

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