Universal Film Study Guide

I. Audio-Visual Education (incl. Film Education) in Primary and Secondary Education:

Development of social and cultural skills. Is this enough?
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. Truly, students collaborating in small groups around creative tasks develop their skills of cooperation, communication and respect for the others, self-esteem etc. as well as their aesthetic and cultural awareness that, hopefully, should characterize any mature citizen who is an active member of the society. However, the truth of the matter 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 'arts' option for the students. Why then would the Education authorities support the AV Education projects?

An innovative way to promote language competences?
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! The direct bonds of audiovisual expression with the teaching of national language 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 then, which we would -hopefully- trace is increase of students' interest in their language lessons and a higher degree of language and expression competences.

Focusing on the ways that Audiovisual Education projects may contribute in national language teaching, let us define possible dimensions of film education competences

which would characterize a film-educated student and -at the same time- could be related to the development of general language competences :

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 the quality of argumentation (use of language) 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. Overlooking indicators referring to the quality of cooperation and group dynamics within each production team, language competences could be traced 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:
   - *Overall awareness of how meaning is created in films through the use of different means of filmic expression (framing, length of shots, camera angle, lighting, color, sound, editing).*
   - *Overall awareness of 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.*
   - *Overall awareness of the personal pleasure derived by watching films and by developing unique personal interpretations of the films.*
   - *Overall awareness of 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.*
   - *Overall awareness of the 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.

- *Overall awareness of 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, complementary film education activities that can be systematically integrated in every film education project.

II. The concept of a Universal Film Study Guide:

As a start, we may explain that this film study-guide is not a tool devised for focusing to a particular film. Usually, educational material is being designed for each specific film the assumption being that after studying in depth a number of selected films, a critical film consciousness is being developed. In this proposed study-guide we try to come up with a list of questions that would be applicable to any film thus making it possible to compare the students' competences of analysis as they gradually develop in time or even comparing the views of a number of groups from different schools studying the same film.

A fundamental pedagogical choice is that the activity is run in the form of small focus groups. Research has confirmed that, mostly, the discourse and argumentation between the group members in order to decide the answers of their group, is of higher educational value than the actual answers themselves. As the questions are open, groups may freely express their members' opinions. We are not 'teaching' some special 'high value' knowledge about a film but, instead, we offer to the students opportunities to gradually develop their own criteria and arguments for film analysis and to build their own method for studying cinema, transferable to their own future film experiences. Another pedagogical choice for designing such a Guide is that it should be handled by non-cinema-specialized

educators who may be part of the procedure acting as 'ignorant' contributors who will coordinate or even facilitate the groups' answers.

III. The Questionnaire:

Small focus groups of 3-5 students are formed. After viewing, the members of each group discuss and decide their group's written answers to each question. The discussion for each question and the formulation of each answer should be, more or less, limited to the time suggested for each question.

Question 1 (10' min. max.):
According the group's opinion, please record some identification characteristics of 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: 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 less interest).

Moving on, your answers should mostly reflect your group's opinions. To achieve this it would help if, for each question, you discuss and come to a consensus expressed in the group's written answer. It would also help if you could support your answers with specific examples from the film.

Question 2 (10' min. max.)
The group's general opinion about the film.

....

↑   ↑

We feel that the film   *We enjoyed watching*
was boring.   *the film.*
Not much to remember   *Lots to remember*

Which of the following means of film expression were the most powerful to make you feel that way:

- ☐ The story and the characters
- ☐ The overall atmosphere (images, sounds, costumes, locations)
- ☐ The music
- ☐ The acting
- ☐ The rhythm
- ☐ … (other, please specify)

Question 3 (10' min. max.)
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.

Question 4 (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 to the film's main theme? How do they resemble (and how do they differ) to the film's main theme? Choose and give one such example in 2-3 lines. One personal example:*

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

(Evaluation criteria: 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 personal experience. Right or wrong answers in this question are of less interest).

Question 5 (25' min. max.)

Fill in the following table by dividing the film you have just watched in titled entities (phases, sequences), and time each entity's duration 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 do appear in each separate entity?

Titled entities	Duration in sec.	Most important entity (*)	Heroes appearing
1. …	MIN. SEC.		…
2. …		(*)	
…			

(Evaluation criteria: Reasonable division in entities, explicit titling, fairly acceptable timing and reflecting the group's opinion in a clear way. Right or wrong answers in this question are of less interest).

Question 6 (25' min. max.) A very short sequence or segment of the film (at most 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: 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).

Question 7 (10' min. max.)

In the above film segment, would you specify a particular sound or sound level or presence of music or even suggestive silence (not considering dialogues) that, in your group's opinion, is the most determining in creating the segment's overall impression?

(Evaluation criteria: The most important criterion is to specify a distinct sound or characteristic sound level etc. present in the particular segment according to the group's opinion. Right or wrong answers in this question are of less interest).

Question 8 (15' min. max.)

Would your group recommend this film to your friends, and how would you support your recommendation? or alternatively:

Would your group discourage your friends from watching this film and how would you explain your opinion?

(Evaluation criteria: The most important criterion is to reflect the group's opinion about the film in question in a consistent way. Right or wrong answers in this question are of less interest).

Question 9 (10' min. max.)

For which age-group would your group suggest that this film might be most suitable?
- *4-7*
- *8-11*
- *12-15*
- *16-20*
- *21-30*
- *31-50*
- *51-90*

If this film was to be broadcasted, which would be the most suitable time slot?
- *Early morning*
- *Morning primetime*
- *Noon*

- *Early afternoon*
- *Evening primetime*
- *Late night*

(Evaluation criteria: The most important criterion is to reflect the group's opinion about the film in question in a consistent way. Right or wrong answers in this question are of less interest).

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