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## The Educational Approach of Active Media Work

### *Accepted Didactic Guidelines*

In the 1920s, school teachers began to organize “photography workshops” for pupils, mainly because many teachers had become hobby photographers. They tried out their new-found experiences at school and used them didactically. Thus, a teacher’s private hobby developed into a tentative form of active media work for pupils. Essentially the didactic guidelines established at that time are still valid.

### *The Educator’s Media Competence*

A teacher or social educator - in the role of the craftsman, as it were - applies his knowledge of the media and thus gives children and juveniles the impetus to work with the media that the teacher is most familiar with. The personal qualification of the teacher in handling the medium and his/her interests and inclinations are of decisive importance for what happens in media work with children and young people. Anyone who has experience with video productions, with professional radio or another medium or media production presents this experience to the juveniles.

### *Media Work in Form of Projects*

Since the “photography workshops” of the 1920s, media work has taken on the form of media production, which is integrated into the scheme and thinking of “work”. Didactically this happens in the form of a project.

### *Public Presentation and Communicative Integration*

The photograph as a result of media work was, at the time, integrated into the teaching aid as part of the demonstration material to be used. The result of photography work was thus meant for the school as public and thereby integrated into this concrete context of communication. The integration of media work and also their media products into communication contexts of children and young people is taken for granted today and generally accepted.

### *Living in a Network of Media and Consumption*

These three didactic guidelines of the earliest form of active media work alone do not suffice nowadays to justify this media pedagogical method for children and young people. The issue is no longer that of “hobby media” but of children, who - as a matter-of-course- grow up in a media and consumer network. An environment that is set up by consumption and mass communication, and the imagery presented by the media which the children and young people have assimilated, demands a new educational concept. When in the late 1960s TV became a staple household appliance, educators started up a (somewhat convoluted) discussion on how this development should be evaluated. Although in a culturally and arts-educationally oriented public the idea of an imminent cultural decline began to gain ground, media educators increasingly agreed to accept the children and young people as they thought, felt and acted. Hence especially the media educators have to study the media-determined environment of the children and juveniles and accept that media and consumption structure their world of experience. Only at a second stage can there be a criticism of the cultural development, which, in a genuinely educational form, must enhance and encourage the “identity” of the children and young people.

### *Identity as Media-Educational Perspective*

In active media work, as in media- and organisation-critical methods of media education, it is primarily a matter of encouraging and supporting people in such a manner that they continue to develop their communication, their ability of expression, their critical receptivity in order to shape their world, their mode of life and life perspective.

In the last few years the discussion turned to the “personal identity” of children and young people. A theoretical attempt started, for example, with the “action motivating topics” (“handlungsleitende Themen”). The purpose of life and the topics of communication of people in the perspective of their personal biography and age structures the mode of their reception and their expression, of their acquisition and their externalisation. They also become an educational perspective. Education should support children and young people to live their personal lives in the complex systems of the industrial society.

Moreover there are attempts to gain the gender-specific, social, religious and cultural identity as a perspective of active media work. The center of media work is then the fact that young people live in rural areas or in large cities, that children of emigrants find themselves on a cultural limb, etc. Especially this cultural identity is a genuine media educational perspective, because mass communication as an inherent homogenisation is in direct contrast to the

regional and linguistic identity of man. In order to examine this problem sphere practically and theoretically, a lot of time will have to be spent on diverse attempts and different experiences.

### ***Didactic Questions and Concepts***

On the agenda of media-educational theory the long overdue discussion concerning one's own didactic method should be included. As of yet, the personal media competence of the media educators and their institutional integration (school, social work etc.) constitutes the guideline for the didactic method of media work in each case. Thus, quite arbitrarily, curricularly detailed projects are to be found next to artistic work, documentary research using media next to professional broadcasting productions, the workshop next to the educational course etc. There is no way out from this arbitrary happenstance if one tries to revive the old didactic controversy between process or product orientation. Mass communication and its specific quality, life, activity, perception in the media- and consumer-network are the phenomena or problems along which the didactic method must be orientated.

Some brief points:

- *The "world of images" of mass communication has fused with the activities, experiences and communication of man to a natural unit, to "media communication".*

- *Media production and mass communication are no longer oriented primarily along the guidelines of the intellectual ideals of enlightenment (education, experience, criticism) but along individualised action and experience modes in a similarly structured style of living and getting experiences. This style of life and experience is orientated towards availability, acceptance and a momentary, rapidly changing intensity.*

Can a didactic concept of work and intellectual criticism help? Does not the quality of experience of mass communication present a better didactic standard? Seen thus, primarily the images of fantasy and theatrical productions of media depictions are the corner stone of didactic planning.

How this can be carried out in schools will be outlined after a sketch of the didactic concept ("directing space for associative imagination and expression") by one teaching example.

### **Directing space for associative imagination and expression**

The didactic task, especially also that of the school, is to deal with the fantasy processes and the associative imagery of children, even if it does not really fit the syllabus. First of-all one has to start with completely different didactic

planning models than those used for target-oriented teaching. Such a planning model can be the theatre and its typical mode of production and direction (mise-en-scène). The theatre is always concerned with associative fantasy processes and “cognitive images”, which are put on the stage by means of a script. If a teacher now assumes the role of an art director, he can offer spaces of fantasy to the imagination of the pupils in which they move associatively and can express and process their personal topics, concepts and requirements.

### *Didactic “Tools”*

It is important to offer a script that can be realised by the actors on stage. The children generally have already their script in mind. The teacher should work out or clarify a common script in order to prevent the children from counter-acting each others’ efforts.

Apart from the script, the accessories have the task of creating a space of fantasy, within which the children and young people act with their imagination and symbolic media material which they acquire every day from mass communication.

### *Didactic Aims of a Production*

What should be the aims of the teacher and his planning? What is the purpose of a space of expression and imagination?

In my opinion the following aims are important:

- *Integrating TV and film experiences into everyday life and into personal feelings and thoughts. This is an active process in which the images and stories presented by mass communication are integrated into the young peoples personal topics, modes of thinking, imaginary worlds. It presents an active process of an adaptation of images and stories of mass communication into their personal life.*

- *With the help of technical media, images and stories of mass communication one’s own essential and action motivating topics can be acted out.*

- *Supporting the differentiation of the subjective modes of experience, in order to contribute to a cultivation of the associative imagination.*

*Example: examining art by means of tape recorder, photo and video (see below)*

The constantly changing picture and consumer world of media begins to become more important than the (formerly) “objective” matters and events. Thus mass communication and its world of images is going to become the determining social world. As the media themselves contribute little to a media and communication culture, it is the vital task of the school to cultivate the associative imagination of the children and young people. Here the creative

and reflective handling of technical media, as well as the use of technical media as a personal means of expression and shaping is important. Active media work is essential because the media are used for cultivating the ways of personal expression.

### **Example: Investigating Fine Arts by Means of Tape Recorder, Photo and Video**

In an exhibition of contemporary avantgarde art, young people look for ideas and picture and sound material to create their own objects, that are to be presented - four weeks later at the end of the project - to the public in a big tent on the fringe of the exhibition. The artists are invited and they can then discuss their own works and presentations with the young people.

The boys and girls walk through the exhibition with cameras and tape recorders or with a video camera on the look-out for things and events they find attractive, annoying or provocative.

#### *Leading them to the Objects - from "Ain't that Cute" to Active, Playful Dispute with the Objects.*

Here also 15 and 16-year-old girls participate who seem to be interested in everything except art objects. The tape recorder enables a way to take their spontaneous and evaluation commentaries seriously. Photography enables them to see objects dispassionately, in order then to let themselves playfully in for offerings for action on the side of the art objects.

#### *Distancing and Disparaging Comment*

Without giving much thought to a dispassionate examination, the girls refer to art as "trash" and are quick off the mark with stereotype comments like "fab", "cute", "cool", "great" and "sweet". There are comments like "I wonder if this is part of the exhibition?" "We mustn't damage this rubbish." "I wonder if that's art?"

#### *Drawing Attention to Illustrative, Concrete Exhibits that can be Integrated into their own, Everyday Experiences.*

A second phase of the exhibition tour begins when the girls use the photocalera and the polaroid camera. They photograph primarily those objects that are partly or wholly realistic or concrete and which they can integrate into their everyday experience. They stop in front of a vast wall relief (Robert Morris) and talk about details such as "petrifications" and "screws". When encountering Anselm Kiefer's huge pictures, they notice details such as

“wires”, “electricity cables”, “skating runners” and “roller skates”. With objects made of several plant pots and wooden figures that are overgrown with green plants (Giuseppe Penone) the girls list identifiable details (plants, greenery). In several funnel-shaped forms they see “cooking pots”.

They now see realistic, concrete objects and make comments without immediately being derogatory. Instead of asking: “is that art?” they now enquire what the meaning of the art objects might be and begin with questions like “I don’t understand.” “Have you looked at what it says in the catalogue?”

Activities	Time
Introducing project ideas, compiling groups and ideas, testing media technology	3 double lessons at school during three days (during fine art and German lessons)
Investigating the art exhibition with tape recorder and camera	one afternoon after school lessons
Producing their own, presentable object or performance from their own photos or tape recordings	2 double lessons during two school days. 1 to 2 afternoons after school hours, to edit the tapes and photos etc.
Arranging the objects or the documentation of happenings etc. in a circus tent and presenting them to the public on a Saturday	Arranging the projector or the objects (about 3 hours. Presentation 1 hour) Dismantling (app. 1 hour)
Presenting the documentation in school	Approx. 3 hours in the afternoon, after school hours

*Table 1: Overview of the lessons*

### *Joint Playing with Exhibits*

Subsequently they approach the art exhibits and play around with them spontaneously. The girls enter a gigantic steel spiral welded out of an overwhelming, approximately two metre high, steel wall (Richard Serra). They stand, pinned in between the wall of the building and the steel wall. They experience the situation as being stifling and free themselves by trying to climb over the steel wall and looking over. Because the steel wall pins the visitors in, the girls also get this feeling of being imprisoned, they react to this work of art in a commensurate way: they try to overcome the steel wall by climbing up the wall and looking over the top.

Thus they had found their very own, dynamic access to art exhibits - from a tape recorder and photo, resp. the relevant statements and modes of experience to their independent, playful activity as a reaction to the room experience. Subsequently they approach art exhibits playfully, try them out, touch them, play around with the directed art situation and take virtual possession of an art installation (Jenny Holzer).

### *The Role of the Photo Camera and Tape Recorder*

The girls use tape recorder, photo camera and polaroid camera in such a manner that they can differentiate their perception and mode of experience. From their banal and derogatory commentaries (here the tape recorder is important) they come to a differentiated mode of access. In the second step they discover in the art exhibits details of their everyday live. The photographic gaze through the camera helps them. After that they are able to integrate art objects into their own games with the help of physical, sensual perception.

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