



New Perspectives on Teaching Film Education

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Abstract

In our presentation we want to introduce the audience to new perspectives on teaching film education, which we developed in the framework of a Master module on film education held at Bauhaus-University in the summer of 2013. In this module, the central question was: how can film be taught and how can the teaching of film be taught to teachers and students.

Film education presents a relatively new field in Germany. In order to develop our own conceptualisation of film education we draw upon our experiences from the Master module yet also upon the longstanding film education traditions from France (Bergala, Bourgeois), and from (Aidelman and Colell) and connect those with the works of German film educators (Pauleit, Henzler, Pantenburg and Schlüter, Wegner, Zahn). Moreover, philosophies of education are joined with the practice of film education in order to develop a theoretical and practical concept of film education and the teaching of it. In the framework of the taught Master Module we developed a series of methods with which research based and practice based teaching and learning can be brought together.

The module was on the one hand based on the reading of (traditional) philosophies of education, which discuss concepts such as the relationship between subject and world, aesthetic experience, medial composition and acquisition of culture in educational processes (e.g. Humboldt, Adorno, Horkheimer). We also addressed questions such as (de-)subjectivation, gender, alterity and self and other (e.g. Butler, Ricken, Wimmer). Theories of filmmaking, the spaces of film and knowledge about it (the cinema, festivals, internet) as well as the central aspects of film production also played an important part in the module.

On the other hand, together with the students we organised firstly a symposium to which we invited film educators to speak of their work, secondly an expert talk with two directors of children's films and thirdly a workshop with children of a primary school to make films. We were also able to visit a children's film festival with our students and observe how children react to film in the cinema and how such a festival is organised. After the Module we published a collection of essays on "FilmBildung" (Film education) including a co-written paper by our students.

Through our research and practice based teaching method we were able to combine a number of different approaches to film (and) education and could develop those into new perspectives on teaching film education.

1. Introduction

Our contribution investigates the question of how to teach film to students, teachers, educators, and others. More specifically: How can one enable people with different professional backgrounds and without prior training to educate children about film? To show children what is special about perceiving films, how films function, how they are made, and how films change views about the world?

We explored these questions in a Master Programme study module, which we gave at the University of Weimar in Summer Semester 2013. [1] The module consists of several theoretical and practical segments, which are described in detail below. First and foremost we sought to instruct students, and in the process help them learn how to instruct and guide.

Texts studied in the module were by Humboldt[2], Adorno[3], Horkheimer[4] and Butler[5], plus recent approaches in the education sciences (such as Norbert Ricken[6], Pazzini/Schuller/Wimmer[7], and Wimmer[8]). We discussed theories on desubjectivization, internal and external determination, alterity, and being-in-the-world. Here we focused on issues concerning the interdependency of humans and the environment, aesthetic experience, media-specific constitutedness, and appropriation of culture in education processes.

Additionally, we engaged with education theories through thematizing theoretical framings and practical methods of film education. After providing an overview of the most important theories and practices of film education in Europe, the sites of film knowledge (cinema, festivals, Internet, etc.) as well as introducing the main aspects of film production, we developed independent concepts of film education and tried them out with pupils of a primary school. Integrated in the module were guest



lectures by education theorists, film educators, and film directors as well as a visit to the Erfurt children's film festival *Goldener Spatz*.

2. Persons Involved

The teachers of the module have very different expertise, but both work in the interdisciplinary field of film education. Lena Eckert is a gender studies and literary scholar, and Silke Martin is a media scholar with a focus on film aesthetics. In recent years we have undertaken various projects together in which our interests combine. We have published and lectured, for example, on queer theory, aesthetics of the media landscape, and aging research in connection with film studies. Currently our main interests are educational theories and theories of film education.

The students who took the module had first degrees in a range of subjects, including communication studies, communication design, informatics, cultural studies (media), and literature. All had prior experience of media studies, and some had worked previously with children (for example, for the children's TV channel of Germany's public broadcasters). All were senior students, and some came to the course with very definite ideas about what film education might be. Several planned to make practical use of what they learned in the module in their future professions. However, since the Master programme at the Bauhaus University is almost entirely theoretical, we felt the need for practical experience; the students get a good theoretical education, but because of the gap between theory and practice, they lack the courage to develop their own concepts and put them into practise.

With our module we intended to bridge this gap. We focused on approaches to film education in other European countries and treated them at length. In France (Nathalie Bourgeois[9]) and Spain (Núria Aidelman and Laia Colell[10]) well-formulated and tested concepts exist, which we evaluated in a seminar. Additionally, we introduced the students to the work in Germany of Winfried Pauleit[11], Bettina Henzler[12], Volker Pantenburg/Stefanie Schlüter[13], Wenke Wegner[14], and Manuel Zahn.[15] Thus the approaches of these leading exponents of film theory and film education became important factors for engaging with theory but also with regard to practical implementation.

3. Film Education Workshop at a Primary School

After studying the texts and theories and the introduction to film analysis and film production, the students developed a concept on their own for a one-day workshop, which was held in July 2013 at a primary school in Erfurt with ten first and second year pupils. The morning was devoted to introducing the children to film montage: using film stills, the children thought up stories which they then told in front of the camera. The afternoon was reserved for producing a short film. The results astonished the students and the children were very satisfied: three short films were made, which the children developed and produced themselves in front of and behind the camera.[16]

The first meeting with the children in school took place around four weeks before the workshop, and we prepared for it with a film screening and a chat afterwards. This gave the students the opportunity to get to know the children and observe their reaction while watching a film. Equally, the children got to know the students. The first occasion when we experienced children's reactions to a film was at the Erfurt children's film festival. As part of the preparations for the school workshop we invited four leading German scholars to Weimar to present their approaches and discuss them. The work of organising this workshop was done mainly by the students, and thus they played an essential role in the success of the event. Additionally, an encounter with children's film professionals fed into the preparations for the school workshop: the script writer and producer Hanna Reifgerst and the director and script writer Markus Dietrich. Reifgerst and Dietrich described the processes involved in making a movie for the students and explained the special situation of filming with children.

4. Theoretical and Didactic Basics of Teaching Film Education

Paolo Freire described the traditional understanding — also prevalent in Germany — of didactics and pedagogy as “a banking system”[17]. He thus criticises a model of education based on conveying and consuming facts and information. The critical pedagogy that Freire proposes is based on the assumption that various competencies feed into groups that are made up of diverse and heterogeneous members. Learners can bring their own knowledge, which is proven to advance the learning process (cf. recent German research on didactics in universities[18]). Here learning is understood as a social process. bell hooks, an American author and feminist, writes of responsibility in the education process as “bearing witness to education as the practice of freedom”[19]. She advocates “striving not for knowledge in books but knowledge about how to live in the world”[20]. These positions differ from traditional didactics approaches — particularly behaviourist — and are consistent with the new insights of constructivist and gender-sensitive didactics. According to Gayatri



Spivak[21] it is necessary to develop pedagogical approaches, which organise the structures of desire in teaching events in a new way. Particularly, it is necessary to involve students in the learning process and to support them to unlearn familiar frames of reference, “unlearning our privileges”). In connection with the “affective turn” it must be assumed that people learn affectively; that is, the facilitation of certain situations, atmospheres, and spaces particularly advances the learning process (cf. also Watkins[22]). Especially in pedagogy, work with the affective turn can be more productive than was possible in our case. Following Spinoza and Deleuze, Elspeth Probyn recognised that the question of the body in learning–teaching situations has been seriously neglected[23]. According to Watkins[24], affects that accumulate in the body can be understood as memory and learning processes. Children, especially, react to film in a very physical way.

We wanted to explore this with our concept and combine content and method. In this sense the teachers must also practise a decolonialising approach in their teaching[25]. To understand pedagogy as practising freedom, like Freire[26], also means to include the experience of the students in the course and open up curricula to integrate this experience. We attempted to do this by including the students’ prior experience with children as an important factor in the concept, and by reactivating our own first experiences with film — in everyday situations, school, and professional contexts, for example, in internships or while at university. Further, we sought to apply the knowledge gained from studying theoretical texts in the seminars to the practical pedagogical work in the workshop.

One important aspect was that the students reflected on their own roles within the group, became aware of how they influenced group dynamics, and perceived us, the teachers, as equals. Through being free to structure the module sessions themselves, as well as the fact that the entire module design was multifaceted and experimental, the students could contribute their own ideas and realise and implement them. When the module began, we informed the students that our concept involves research-oriented teaching, and that this was a new departure for us; we find it very exciting, but at the same time it is impossible to know what the results will be. Thus we emphasised that a successful outcome would depend largely on the efforts and creativity of the group. On the theoretical foundations provided, on the one hand (classic) education philosophy and on the other the approaches described by our guests, our students designed, organised, and accomplished two workshops, a discussion with filmmakers, a film screening with children, and several seminar sessions.

5. Five Perspectives of a New Film Education

The five perspectives, which we developed theoretically and practically in our module, intersect on various levels.

First, like Bettina Hentzler[27] we recognise that film must be taken seriously as material and its special character integrated in the film education process. Thus we worked continuously and variously with film; we watched films together, we produced films, and we talked about films. An approach that the students developed for the primary school workshop was telling stories through montage. By telling a story through different arrangements of film stills, we worked out with the children how a film is based on the montage of individual film shots. The children experienced how different arrangements of individual images generate different stories. Thus the film material itself became a mediator — for us as instructors, for the students, and for the children.

Second, following Pantenburg and Schlüter[28] we have a specific perspective on the perception of film. We assume that children perceive film physically. This way of perceiving is accorded particular attention because it takes place outside of narration and sense-units; a different way of communicating knowledge is not necessary, or the communication of knowledge at all. At least not verbally; only through film.

Further perspectives in the film education process concern the instructors. Third, they stand back as *passeur* Bergala[29] and fourth, they stand back within the affective web of film education[30] and leave their function as instructors mainly to the film itself, even to the extent that the film itself becomes a *passeur*[31]. With colleagues, students, and children we thus developed an approach to film education, which centres on film in its specificity and attributes to film the potential to communicate itself through its own materiality.

Fifth, we assume that we, as teachers of film, do not possess superior knowledge to the others involved and we meet others encountered in the process of our own acquisition of film knowledge on an equal footing. Following the maxim “If you want education you must not want education”, we entered the film education process and attempted to take students and children to places they (and we) had never been before. The intersection point of all five perspectives is where we granted space to our own desires and those of all other learners and where we stayed together with the film.

References

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