Dagmara Ausekle, Lolita Steinberga
ANIMATION AND EDUCATION: USING ANIMATION IN LITERATURE LESSONS

Abstract. The article describes the use of animation as one of the ways, how to reduce the tendency of dehumanization in literature lessons and seek for solutions of challenges which brought new communication technologies in the 21st century: information technology, virtual environments and new media. Meaningful watching of animation and its processing can be used as a tool that provides a variety of learning through words, images, motion and sounds. Animation in literature lessons improves learners’ intellectual, emotional and social experiences. Participants in animation making process have a possibility to promote their creativity and knowledge in collaboration with each other in the value oriented learning process.

Keywords: media literacy, dehumanization, literature lesson, animation.

Introduction

Digital technology rapidly invades more aspects of human life and culture than ever before. Nowadays most of the people under age of 25 live in the environment of digital technology. Our contemporary children spend a lot of hours in front of their television and computer screens — in the virtual space constructed by new media, actually they use digital as a second language. So, digitality for all aspects of their life is important, may be we can call them “Digitalized Kids”. “Whether we call them “digital native”, “screenagers” or “digital kids”, they live in an age in which they are immersed in computer and digital technology. It is part of their everyday existence as constant navigators in a digitally landscape” [6, p. 84]. Contemporary children see themselves now as the character on their computer screens-avatars, characters of video games, movies or animations. In this respect, it is important to develop critical viewing practice of popular and visual culture; children should learn how to deconstruct cultural identity representations in the digital media that they can become informed citizens in their state. It is essential to know that at present children process information through images. In other words, lecture, readings and simple research assignments are not sufficient for teaching digital kids and their learning. It challenge educators to provide multimedia learning environment - to consider images, objects and sound in learning process from everyday life such as television, the World Wide Web, video games, cartoons, animation to explore the world. „Like it or not, textual practices such as e-mail, online shopping, webcams, messaging and games using avatars online are part of young people realities. It s time to take these forms into our schools and use them” [5, p. 71]. Besides in the contemporary world, where the amount of information is increasing day by day, media play the key role in dealing with information For that reason authors consider that media education and media literacy should soon be establish in classroom practice.

Animation in education practice

During theoretical studies and pedagogical practice, authors discovered that animation can be an effective and successful learning tool in education, which improves different kinds of skills and knowledge, sometimes even better than the traditional way of teaching. Animation is a good communication tool which could be used in the education system; it gives opportunity for children to speak about their problems in universal language - picture, image language. Besides in our global world picture and image is the most important communication tool, pictures talk in international language. For that reason it is important that children in school work not only with words and numbers but also with pictures, images and objects. Animation is sequential images shown in a fixed frame, usually 24 frames per second; it is the illusion of movement. Since a long time ago people have wanted to express the movement in pictures, “We’ve always been trying to make the pictures move, the idea of animation is aeons older then the movies or television” [12, p. 11]. Caveman painted animals with more than four legs on the wall in caves to show the movement, after people paint sequential pictures to tell the story
on walls of the church or other buildings. In 1839 Theodore von Grothuss discovered basic principles in photochemistry; it allows creating movement from a photographed picture sequence. The first animated film was created by Charles-Emile Reynaud, he is the inventor of the praxinoscope, and optical theatre. He is the first, who used sequence of 12 pictures per second to show the movement on the screen. In the 20th century with Walt Disney animation commercial entertainment industry come. It means that animated characters become products of market. In the 70 of the 20th century animators (Y. Anderson, J. Bourgeois, A. Hobson, M. Hobson, A. Cleave, B. Godfrey, A. Jackson, Y. Gross, J. Halas, B. Privett and others) published books, articles for beginners, which illustrate simple steps, how to make animation. The animator discovered that also children can create moving images.

The word animation comes from the Latin word animare — relive; animation is the wonder world, everything is possible, everything can be life. Thus animation encourages creativity, fantasy, imagination of children. Practical experience of schools and animation workshops show that animation can be useful in different age groups and different areas of education.

1) When the main aim is to acquire knowledge about animation, we use disciplinary approach, as example in interest education and professional animator education.

2) Media like animation are playful art and media form and it encourages playful representation in children's own productions. Then we can use integrated approach and consider animation as a learning tool to acquire some other educational goal. As an example animation can be used in general education as a learning method in different school subjects: in languages, music, art, history, math and also literature. Animation making process encourages children's motivation to learn and provide opportunities of self-expression and self representation - the learning process is diverse and creative. It develops different dimensions of communication competence:

 Interpersonal communication skills, because animation making process usually is group work;

 It encourages communication with the author and text;

 It is an opportunity to discover the meaning of visual language in the communication process.

Mass media have an enormous impact on people, it is important to develop critical thinking skills to process all information around of us. When children have the possibility to create his own animation movie, he learns how to use visual metaphors and symbols to speak with the audience, he develops media literacy. “When children have practical experiences in making cartoons, they also honor an understanding of the message behind the content of any animation” [8, p. 42-43]. It is the one of the challenges in schools today involving media literacy in the school curriculum and encourages children as makers of visual and textual meaning.

Animation is blended media because it is visually and materially constructed by other artistic media including photography, theatre, painting, sculpture, image, text and sound - it is a good way how to connect words, pictures and music. “The design modes are various: visual design to make the artwork of the animation and to draw the storyboards; written language to design the dialogues and write the script; music to compose sound track” [1, p. 45]. Literature is an art form and animation provides significant link with other art forms. In this case authors propose animation as a successful learning tool in literature lessons. In Master's thesis “Animation as a learning tool for creativity development in education process” [9], of L. Steinberga (scientific advisor Dr. prof. D. Auskle) it is proven that animation can be a successful method in literature teaching process.

Literature lessons and animation

One of the topical issues in modern education system is the problem of dehumanization of the humanitarian subjects. It clearly touches also literature as one of the subjects of the humanitarian cycle. In Latvia as in other post-socialist countries, literature studies have become a peculiar area where the tendencies of the day meet. On the one hand, it is the conditioned totalitarian thinking of the dialectic materialism philosophy and the deriving consequences (the overcoming of its influences will take time) and on the other hand, it is the features of the new post-modernism age. Postmodernism as the sum of the age trends create negative changes in culture thus also in the whole life of the society. The intellectual skepticism and apathy, the lack of moral and social criteria, relying on somebody else's mind and subjugation to the interests of transnational corporations on which the theoretician of postmodernism Ihab Hassan says “It is rather the denaturalization and the end of humankind” [10, p. 98].
The attacks of post-humanism on the personal identity and common human values are especially menacing to the supple minds of the youth because “the governing psychological mood of the postmodern culture is panic, “free fall”, which is created by the “disappearance of external societal standards of behavior <...> and disintegration of the foundations of internal identity. - Cynicism to external social standards is accompanied by the loss of internal social personal standards [11, p. 85].

Taking into consideration the postmodernists' statement that "except social roles, there is no any other identity” the style becomes the most important essence and the external more significant than internal. This explains the desperate desire to follow the leading trends in fashion: selection in clothes, behaviour, music and even food. Following fashion is the sign of status. “Adolescents whose personal identity is only developing, naturally desires the sense of belonging. As they lack strong self-identity, they adjust to the group identity” [11, p. 89].

Modern technologies play an important role in the formation of postmodernist views. Through television the entertainment industry encodes postmodernism ideology in the consciousness of every viewer and he often is not even aware of it. If one needs active participation of mind and continuous attention in reading a thick book then television programs provide the information fast and do not demand special effort on the part of the viewers. Television makes viewers’ thinking part of the mass thinking and accustoms them to fragmentarism because it gives a possibility to switch channels and to watch several programs simultaneously.

The consequences of these impacts are obvious nowadays. The international studies at the turn of the centuries (1998—2001) indicate alarming trends in the field of humanitarian education: the study of IEA (Internacional Association of Evaluation of Education Achievements) on students' achievements in CIVIC and the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment). The aim of this program is to assess the participants' quality of basic education on the basis of comparison. They analyze students' reading literacy, knowledge and skills in mathematics, science and other spheres. 32 countries, including Latvia participate in Program for International Student Assessment.

The official presentation of the data of OECD study took place on December 6, 2001 and received a controversial response in many industrial developed countries, showing that the education system that is considered good actually hides in itself many problems. Researchers of education in Germany concluded that many students almost do not read and they have difficulties to concentrate on the perception of a longer piece of text [3, p. 68]. Also in Latvia the fact was taken with concern that a part of our 15 years old students understand what they have read poorly, that they have difficulties to perceive important information and to interpret adequately. This part of the study treats also the teaching strategies and the obtained data allow concluding that in Latvia and in other countries the best achievement in reading is for those students who have chosen a certain teaching/ learning strategy in comparison with their peers who do not have such a dominant strategy [4, p. 68-71]. It means that the teachers of these adolescents are methodologically well prepared and know which strategy is to be used at a certain age group and in acquisition of particular material, and not trying out different strategies accidentally as it often happens in our schools.

Two spheres should be singled out of the many factors that are connected with the dehumanization process of literature as a school subjects as the most important:
1) the selection and development of the content,
2) selection of the teaching/learning methods and forms of organizing the teaching/learning process.

They both are closely rooted in the current traditional education system in the country as well as are subjected to the changes dictated by the global processes - both positive and negative.

The regularities which determine the principles of developing the teaching / learning content are closely related to the status of literature as the form of art in the contemporary society.

The postmodernists’ view on art is no longer so much the expressions of human mind as the ordinary consumption merchandise therefore we do not concentrate on the art object as a separate finished piece of work. This justifies also the fragmentarism in school text books and the whole teaching / learning process which in the end leads students to the inability to perceive the literary work as a unity and disables them of what actually literature is taught at school - the common esthetic emotional feeling.

The postmodernist approach also introduces corrections in our conceptions about authorship. It gained special popularity in theater art. It is considered that plays should be developed by a group of authors and that actors do not memorize the text but improvise. The producer Alvis Hermanis in Riga New theatre has implemented this approach.
succeeded in several very popular performances. If the production is on high artistic level and creates adequate reaction in the audience then there is nothing against it. However, it is different if this destroys one of the best works by the classic of the Latvian literature Rudolfs Blaumanis which is also included in the content of literature studies at school as it happened in the National theater when the audience was asked during the break to make telephone voting and decide with whom the main heroine Kristine should stay together — Edgars or Akmentips.

Similar methodological approaches are offered to students in literature classes often without explaining the essence of it and without a serious study of the obtained results.

The dehumanization trends in the pedagogical literature in the post-socialism countries are connected with the uncritical taking over of the methodological ideas that have increasingly entered education due to globalization, being unaware that these ideas should be arranged in a common system on the philosophical basis of the emergence of these ideas. As in the society also education places postmodernist emphasis on groups stressing the cooperation in the teaching/learning process and forgetting that this form of organizing the work along with the positives aspects presents also the negative ones, especially as regards literature studies because reading the piece of art is a profoundly intimate process and the group work can not only disturb it but also totally destroy. Also the group mark is the questionable issue.

The new technological environment has a deep influence on modern art. “Reproductive media, like, photography, film, sound recordings and television may become the dominant forms of art” [11, p. 110]. There is an opinion that the mass-scale production of art is dehumanizing but it could also be considered a positive due to the uniting global reaching and broad influence.

Animation, too, belongs to the genres of art that are most closely connected with the modern technologies and without them cannot exist. What is then the theoretical foundation of the view that animation in literature classes can promote deeper perception of the art works by helping to overcome dehumanization trends in the teaching/learning process?

According to the humanistic psychology and pedagogy, the education process should be voluntary, conscious and joyful. The teacher has to reach the learner’s desire to educate, setting the 112 development of a harmonious personality as the key aim of education. Making an animation film in literature classes, the basis of which is a literary work, students are involved simultaneously in a primary and secondary creative activity. They delve into the literary text, thus developing the skills of perceiving the art work and involve in the innovative work searching the possibilities to transform the newly gained emotional and intellectual experience in other images of art. Unconsciously they learn and do it willingly and enthusiastically revealing in them new abilities and feeling satisfaction about it; and these are goals put forward to modern education by A. H. Maslow:

* to educate a good person, striving to self-actualization and self-transcendence of the child,
* to help the child to look into oneself and reveal the set of those values which are agreeable with his human essence,
* to help to comprehend that the moments of higher flying and emotional experience are needed in life because the moments of extreme intensity feelings are those which make life important and valuable. [14, p. 192—207].

These ideas agree with the optimal experience or “flow” theory defined by Hungarian psychology professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. “Situation in which attention can be freely invested to achieve a person’s goals, because there is no disorder to straighten out, no treat for the self to defend against. We have called this state the flow experience, because this is the term many of the people we interviewed had used in their description of how it felt to be in top form: “It was like floating”, “I was carried on by the flow”. It is the opposite of psychic entropy, fact, it is sometimes called negentropy- and those who attain it develop a stronger, more confident self, because more of their psychic energy has been invested successfully in goals they themselves had chosen to pursue” [2, p. 40].

Making of animation films is a collective work during which students learn to cooperate and at the same time analyze also their inherent talents and learn to compensate the lack of particular skills and abilities as it is offered by Howard Gardner in his Multiple mind theory.

Psychologist Lev Vygotsky paid much attention in his studies of pedagogy and psychology of art to the issues of the construction of the literary work and its perception as well as the tasks related to students’ aesthetic education. He talks about the perception of the piece of art as an intensive and tense mental activity because the studies of the form of art prove
that in the feeling of art we deal not with simplified but just on the contrary burdened reflection of the reality. The art work is constructed so as to avoid automatic perception of its elements therefore in order to reach aesthetic experience we need creative effort. There is a misleading conception that the skill to listen, watch and in the process of perceiving art to feel enjoyment is self-understandable. L. Vygotsky indicates three main directions of aesthetic education at school:
1) development of children’s creative activity;
2) acquisition of professional technical skills to create the respective kind of art;
3) development of aesthetic judgments, i.e., the ability to perceive and feel the works of art [13, p. 11].

The use of animation in the teaching/learning process ensures the cooperation between students and the teacher in all these directions. In the same time animation develops media literacy in school because on the one hand animation is the ability to decode any media message in critical view, and on the other hand it is the ability of creative production of children. In this case animation in literature lessons first of all is a possibility of using animated films made by professionals to acquire some learning goals. Visual narratives make the learning process more varied and interesting. It is a successful way how to use entertainment industry to serve educational goals. Secondly, children can create their own media product, they can illustrate the story with pictures (as example comic, manga, flip book) or children can transform the literal text into audiovisual form, they can create an animated movie based on literal story; or children can make their own animated movie based on his cultural experience as P. Bourdieu call “cultural capital”. And teachers should be aware of the influence of popular culture context and encourage children’s own expressive purposes in making their own movie. Animation in literature lessons improves learners’ intellectual, emotional and social experiences. Participants in the animation making process have a possibility to promote their creativity and knowledge in collaboration with each other in the value oriented learning process.

Conclusion

In conclusion authors want to emphasize that animation in literature lessons improves learner’s intellectual, emotional and social experience. Animation can be a successful tool in any teacher’s hold; it develops visual literacy, linguistic literacy and musical literacy; it helps to support childrens competence in interpreting literal text with visual images and sound. Children can find the use of visual and audio resources to share information, knowledge and ideas not only in the lesson but also in their own daily life, it is a possibility to express and improve their own knowledge and skills in the learning process.

References

Santrauka

Dagmara Auseklė, Lolita Steinberga

ANIMACIJA IR EDUKACIJA:
ANIMACIONOS TAIKYMAS
LITERATŪROS PAMOKOSE


Esminiai žodžiai: medijų raštingumas, dehumanizacija, literatūros pamoka, animacija.

Latvijos universitetas Jekabpils 2011 m. gruodžio mėn.