

Highlighting Cultural Roots or Rather Routes: Art educational approaches to diversity and migration at an international workshop meeting with Austrian, German and Swiss contributions

Martin Klinkner, Verena Widmeier

Abstract

In a collaborative workshop meeting at the University of Kreuzlingen/Switzerland in late September 2017, university lecturers, teacher trainers and school teachers from Austria, Germany and Switzerland presented their academic research papers and best practice projects, discussing new challenges and approaches to issues of diversity and migration, now drafting a twofold policy paper, meant to serve as a practical guidance for teachers and a joined political document. As chair of BDK - the German federal Association for Art Education, I was one of the initiators and hosts of this meeting whose insights and perspectives I'd like to share and discuss with you briefly. Due to today's tight time schedule, exemplary projects aiming at more awareness and competence concerning these issues on the part of teachers and students alike can only be mentioned briefly, pointing out practical challenges and opportunities behind key positions of a future "Lake Constance Paper".

1. Dealing with Diversity and Transculturality

As we all know, art education - seen as an interdependent process between the areas of art, of images in general and of pedagogy - develops in close ties and interactions with cultural and societal conditions. Art education takes place and operates in ties with these contexts. At the same time, our ultimate educational goal is to achieve a free and mature participation (of all those contributing to that culture and society), within and well beyond artistic and cultural settings.

Of course, culture and society themselves are subject to permanent changes, for better or worse. Their directions may appear at times straight and progressive, sometimes rather wavering slowly on its routes, or even heading back to concepts of the past. In the current situation, it seems, the dynamics of change are gaining momentum, in terms of speed and scale. The driving forces behind this increasing change are, among other things, the on-going migration of people, but also the on-going migration of cultural practices, of cultural ideas, narratives and of our human need of making sense of it all. These changes may be welcomed or rejected, they will happen anyway.

In the course of the dissolving borders and digital communication on a global scale, these complex migrations have not only become a new and unique experience of individuals and groups on their ways in and out and between places of origin, transit and destination, but they have shaped the lives of local, indigenous inhabitants as well, affect their everyday life, their self-understanding, their material and immaterial culture. Our popular practices and cultural heritage show manifold traces of migratory phenomena and transformation from the past to the present day. The speed and immersive quality of these changes may arouse unease and discontent, fed by a feeling of losing control. We clearly need change management. Today, all kinds of images increasingly spread beyond borders, they mix and merge in all walks of life,

creating new, hybrid and trans-cultural forms of expression.

Migration, flight and social differentiation bring together people with different aesthetic forms of expression, self-understanding, in villages and towns, via media interface or in person face-to-face. This may form a new complex transcultural mixture of roles and identities, but can also result in cultural conflicts and clashes, or it may even revive role-back-patterns of nationalistic inclusion and exclusion. Transcultural developments thus can be viewed as diverging processes between openings and closures.

In contemporary (Austrian, German and Swiss) art education, these complex challenges are dealt with in two ways:

On the one hand, phenomena of diversity and change are understood to address a growing number of subjects of education who are increasingly international and globally connected: art education tries to accommodate and integrate these pupils and students, by seizing transculturality as a method and perspective. Among them are refugees and people with migrant backgrounds, but even more a whole generation of so-called digital natives or digital immigrants, who have been socialized in a media world without borders and beyond limits – all those groups of people are growing in numbers and contribute to the apparently growing diversity and heterogeneity in school today. We understand that diversity is a given norm, not something special or exceptional at all. The cultural concept of a “melting pot” does not accurately depict the future, it’s more likely the image of the “salad bowl”, with lots of spices and dressing. This insight should make for a change in our daily attitudes towards diversity and may help to overcome our bias towards and our constant highlighting of concepts of “otherness”. And yes, at least it seems to me that we have been a bit further in Europe, until recently.

On the other hand, the challenges of diversity and transculturality lie and are perceived in the change and complexity of the objects of art education as a subject matter, that is, the change should be perceived, for example, in the images of art and visual culture which are increasingly

hybrid, hyperbolic and mixed and blended: art education tries to accommodate and integrate this expansive concept of culture, by seizing transculturality as a method and perspective that makes better sense if you wish to decode objects and representations in our everyday visual culture well beyond the meta-coded worlds of high culture and the fine arts.

2. Tri-national meeting at Lake Constance (“Bodensee Tagung”)

The focus of the a tri-national meeting at the university of Kreuzlingen/Swiss at Lake Constance in September 2017 was to explore and discuss how a successful teaching in dealing with phenomena of transculturality, diversity and in the context of flight could be developed and made available for our colleagues at school.

A series of about 20 workshops addressed two different starting points, namely the field of transculturality and the pedagogical work with refugees alike. Various routes or roads were explored, rather than highlighting ethnic, religious, cultural roots.

German colleagues Ansgar Schnurr and Ernst Wagner, among others, have pointed out that a transcultural mediation of art requires a real change of perspective - from the origins of the "roots" to the life-world developing "routes" of the subjects, and progressing from a closed canon of iconic western masterpieces of art to a much broader, inclusive concept of art and visual culture.

The meeting aimed at drawing up a practical theory helpful in the effort of expanding our competence of dealing with diversity and cultural variety. This, again, had already been one of the central recommendations of the so-called „Nuremberg paper“ in 2012 (<http://bit.ly/2yLSC4v>), whose theses were now applied to the practical field. At the centre of a common interest was the examination and evaluation of tried and tested projects from school, university and extracurricular initiatives. The idea was to filter out guiding principles, methods and so-called “stumbling blocks“, a term coined by Prof. Dr. Ansgar Schnurr.

Of course, this area has already been worked on before in many other art educational school projects, extracurricular projects and university related projects. And in many cases, recent pedagogical efforts have already provided viable insights and sound methods. However, so far, such projects have not yet been systematically collected, researched, discussed and modelled systematically. So, what still is missing is a somewhat broader, applicable theory and methodology (borrowed directly from educational practice), which helps to develop an art-pedagogical ability to deal with cultural diversity.

The main aim of the meeting was to improve this situation by comparing relevant art educational practices in the three neighbouring countries and by analysing approaches and routes chosen. We asked ourselves which are the creative concepts and ideas in art/design educational or cultural practices in schools, at universities and in the extracurricular area? (How) could they be categorized, evaluated and then put back into practice? And: which basic “theories of action” and “guidelines” could be derived from this, if any? Therefore the focus was on the reflection of *concrete projects* in working groups, interspersed by short topical keynote presentations. In the course of the three days of that meeting, concrete pedagogical projects from school, university and museum were examined in some detail, their perspectives and possibilities were discussed and further developed in order to derive important features of a topically more sensitive, successful art education. Through this joint reflection, the participants in the workshop could sharpen their view on the two-fold topic, hopefully expanded their pedagogical repertoire – ultimately contributing to a viable theory of practice.

3. Some Projects and Presentations

The limited space (of time) given here allows for the presentation of only a few projects. Abstracts and material of more of those projects – most of them exemplary, a few others problematic perhaps (which is OK!) – are made available on the website of the meeting at Lake Con-

stance (<http://www.transkultur-bodensee.eu>). The website has been designed and maintained by Prof. Franz Billmayer (University of Salzburg). Many thanks for that!

In a workshop unit belonging to the area of secondary education, **Carolyn Wiese** from the University of Bielefeld, Germany, shared her teaching experiences in the fields of film, art and music education with participants of so-called „preparation classes“ at a public grammar school in the town of Minden. Such ‚prep classes‘, primarily aiming at language acquisition, have been devised and implemented (in Germany) in order to „prepare“ new immigrants or rather refugees from various origins for a regular attendance of German advanced schools, especially in its system of dual education (which, by the way, badly needs and attracts willing trainees from all over Europe and beyond). Miss Wiese’s concept and its results were discussed from different angles, focussing on participation, attributed and mirrored role patterns, and of course, on skills and competences gained or missed.

Since the establishment of the first “preparatory classes” in the autumn of 2014 at the grammar school Minden, film groups have successfully tried out different cinematic formats, ranging from small animated films with different techniques and simple videos dealing with learning German as a language, to collage-like group films and atmospheric cinematic city explorations. In those film projects of different audio-visual quality, the camera was mostly used as a medium for language acquisition purposes rather than grasped as an opportunity for experimenting with film aesthetic and design tools. Nonetheless, the videos clearly show the extensive, time-consuming use of animated film editing techniques.

In addition, the individual film projects differed widely in terms of their process or product orientation as well as their subject or object orientation. Filming their new environment and various migrant and indigenous people without having to produce a formally convincing video or narrative, turned out to be a casual, uncensored and productive way of getting in touch with new surroundings and customs, in apparently authentic images and speech, recorded by the

newly arrived themselves – ‘writing’ a perfunctory visual diary and memoir of informal usage, prior and parallel to the more controlled use of verbal language. Moreover filming in teams skilled the personal, social and communicative competences of the youth, allowing for contacts between pupils of those preparatory and regular classes (via “filmic speed dating”) on an equal footing.

The workshop discussion following the presentation did not focus on instrumental or didactic questions, such as considering pros and cons of various film-pedagogic formats, not on the question which visual skills may have been taught in these courses of “film education”, or which art-specific or art-pedagogically specific elements had been used. The focus was on meta-contential questions: i.e., if and how much participation of the pupils had taken place in the course and which fundamental potential (photo and film) images may have for language acquisition?

In all workshop units, such same or similar „meta“-questions were discussed and reflected:

- What is unique about observing and describing this particular case?
- Which findings of this project can be fruitful in other projects?

In the given example, it might be the unforced participation and thematic openness, the visual directness and aesthetic spontaneity.

(Other) school and university projects that explored the riches of transcultural dimensions in art educational classes, deserve mention as well:

The workshop "North Sea meets the South Sea - home meets strangers", presented by **Werner Fütterer** from the European University of Flensburg, sensitized for the sometimes very different regional contexts and framework conditions of transcultural projects: In a Danish elementary school near the German border, projects on "foreignness" (between Danish and German children) have been realized. The focus has been on the approach to other cultures and

the development of openness and understanding by consciously addressing “otherness” and diversity, thus teaching to discover commonalities and differences, and to tolerate and appreciate both. Students of the Primary School Teaching Office at the European University Flensburg, Department of Art & Visual Media, therefore have developed concepts for the topic of "foreignness", which have then been tested in the classroom. Among those, a small project called "Opening doors to foreign countries" was presented and vividly discussed in the workshop with respect to its transcultural potentials and pedagogic perspectives, calling for a respectful recognition of the essential legitimate “otherness” of even adjacent foreign cultures as such.

Seemingly choosing an opposite route, **Jörg Grütjen** from the UNESCO School Kamp-Lintfort, a grammar school in the multi-ethnic city of Duisburg, Germany, used contemporary, distinctly hybrid works of art (Ai Weiwei) in his classes to show how students can learn to reflect and shape processes of hybridization and aesthetic appreciation, analogous to shaping their own cultural identity as a matter choice rather than fate. Like many other participants of the meeting, he opted for paying attention to what connects us and is common in all forms of cultural expression. (of art).

Austrian academic (and chair of BÖKWE, the Austrian Association of Art and design education) **Rolf Laven** from the Educational College in Vienna reported on communicating with the imagery of graphic novels in refugee camps in Algeria.

Swiss ethnologist and curator **Gaby Fierz** from the ethnological Museum of Cultures in Basel presented an interesting documentary media project (“YOLDA KIOSK”, the Turkish word “yolda” meaning: ‘in transit’ ; “Kiosk” meaning a free standing pavillon, standing open on some or all sides), based on video-graphed interviews with immigrants of Turkish origin, who are talking about their ties and transcultural experiences living in and between both countries, expressing their conflicting desires (to feel at home and to live an emancipated life). Those interviews had been shown in public spaces, both in Turkey and Switzerland.

Miss Fierz chose the kiosk format because it is traditionally a kind of mobile “third space” place of exchange and transnational and transcultural communication. The term third space was coined by Homi K. Bhabha in his book “the location of culture. Edward Willam Soja developed a theory of third space in which “. . . everything comes together objectivity and subjectivity, the abstract and concrete, the real and the imagined, . . . everyday life and unending history”. This is why Miss Fierz chose the Form of the kiosk.

In a workshop by **Nadia Bader** on “teaching comics”, the participants were asked to draw and to carry on little fragments of sentences in which they tried to make sense of what they read and saw in each others’ contributions. Let us take a closer look at one exemplary page. The first person wrote: “Rosa walks through the rain. She is going to shop in a supermarket.” The next person drew a sketch, illustrating this situation, which was presented to the third person without being presented the first sentence which was hidden from view by being folded away. The third person wrote the sentence: “May I find protection from rain at the supermarket Migros.” The fourth person then interpreted this new sentence by depicting a person, running through the rain towards an umbrella nearby the Migros. This again was understood to mean: “Rainy day, what’s left except for a mobile phone, umbrella and Migros.” The following picture shows a person under an umbrella running towards a big “M” sign which then again was interpreted by the following sentence: “Walking through the hard rain I barely made it to the metro station.” The last picture in this sequence shows a person without umbrella running downstairs into the metro. This example clearly shows the divergent nature of making sense.

The meaning the first sentence was transformed in the first drawing, which then again was retranslated by another person into words, and so on. This was very nice illustration of the permutations of meaning through different minds and different media of communication: There is no such thing as an objective, definite meaning, but a process of interactively making sense, resulting in inter-subjective and commonly shared interpretations. So, isn’t it a miracle that we

understand each other at all? And isn't that a source of creativity and wit? This insight should inspire more transpersonal, i.e. transcultural understanding and tolerance.

Feedback by participants of the meeting pointed to the synergetic networking of various professional experiences and to a surprising change in perspective, both stimulated by the multitude of workshops and encounters with international colleagues. The intensive discussion in the individual panels allowed for real controversies and for the recognition of incompatibilities as well which are needed to arrive at a responsible, differentiated treatment of transculturality, alterity, ambiguity and dissent.

4. Drafting papers

In a participatory process, begun during that workshop with clustering the recordings and notations of all presentations and discussions, a paper has been drafted (at the moment, it is only a first draft), to be published in the near future. Or, rather, we hope for two papers: one of them for external purposes, providing guidelines on action in the area of cultural politics, sending a message to e.g. the education policy, representing our concerns, concepts, ways of working and the associated social potentials and showing how art education in the context of the transcultural present can make a very own and effective contribution to shaping social and cultural change in a positive and constructive way. A second paper, for internal purpose, should provide guidelines on practical usage in the context of transculture and flight, addressing teachers, students and cultural agents in the field, thus serving as a kind of help for those who are confronted with diversity and transculturality in their daily art education or cultural work.

Recommendations of that paper will focus on some 5 to 6 crucial points:

Focus 1: opening up the iconic canon,

Focus 2: living up to transculturality,

Focus 3: using diversity as a fundamental principle,

Focus 4: encouraging participation and communicating on equal footing,

Focus 5: keeping in mind the contexts of flight in projects with refugees,

Focus 6: understanding the changing roles and tasks of teachers today

Of course, drafting, publishing and implementing these recommendations will be a rather slow work in progress, and it calls for lots of extra time and joint efforts from all parties, from many academic experts, chairs and members of our associations of art education, not only in Austria, Germany and Switzerland.

The challenges that come with cultural and ethnic developments, which we face and lie ahead, should concern us all, professionally and as citizens. But we should realise that change offer opportunities as well, if we are aware of them. I believe that we should not focus so much on highlighting diversity and otherness of cultural roots, but should rather focus on exploring viable routes to a transculturally competent concept of art education. Starting with playful preschool paths, such routes ought to be explored in normal lessons throughout school and high school years and may thus lose some of their strange appeal.

References

Tiborra, J. (2018). Von der „Weisheit der vielen“. Tagungsbericht zur „Bodensee-konferenz: Wandlungen gestalten“. *BDK-Mitteilungen*, 1.2018.