IMPLEMENTING FILM, MUSIC AND COMICS AS AN INNOVATIVE POSSIBILITY OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS¹

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Abstract

A lot of experts and professionals from the upbringing and educational sector work on the improvement of all aspects of a school day. Whether they are legally structured or personally defined implications, they all strive towards a qualitative upgrade, both of the student and the teacher, who are in the parameters of the upbringing and the education.

The best and the most effective of them will be set apart as working methods and will be used as a framework for the future generations in the school benches. In this work, the attention is directed towards several chosen arts, which the students will get to know better during the teaching, but also outside of it. Film, music and comics are chosen as an alternative and aiding means, because they can grab the attention of the individual most easily, but in the meantime they offer a lot of possibilities for an exploitation of the material which is being covered. For a proper implementation, a few criteria need to be met, which are crucial for the success of that implementation.

One thing is certain - students and teachers both benefit, as does the innovative side of the education in general.

Key words: film, music, comics, educational process

INTRODUCTION

The core meaning of the term upbringing, as well as its processes, is the way that a person is built, formed, the way that the person matures and grows. By that definition one’s intellectual, physical, moral, aesthetic and working side makes one person whole. During this task there is a certain process that’s happening which is inclined towards an aesthetic, moral and emotional aspect of a person. This doesn’t mean that the fundamental tasks of the upbringing can stand alone and are independent from one another. For example: when a person starts to understand and starts to create their own moral opinions, those opinions have to previously be based on facts, knowledge and information, and only after, the process of forming this person morally starts using specific methods and takes certain steps. The process of education is contained as well in this process of upbringing the person.

This process of upbringing acts on a bigger scale than the educational process. These two, functioning with one another, aren’t enough to complete all of the needed tasks. This means that the educational process is not the only thing that can create or make a person a person whole. Simply put, education can help a person to form their opinion on the world (scientific opinion), it can help the person in a variety of understandings, basic terms, comprehending

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with some procedures, subjects or events. Upbringing however, conducts with the moral dilemmas of a person, with their motivation, as well as forming some ideals, persuasions and reassurance, etc. Teaching holds these two processes together. Teaching is a process that has plans and programs that are fixed beforehand, with carefully constructed tasks and goals, with methods and tools that can help in the accomplishment of said tasks and goals. That being said, through teaching both the upbringing and the educational processes are being accomplished, even though for the layman the term “teaching” just means a process in which a person acquires some knowledge. Practice shows that the teaching process is inclined more towards education rather than the upbringing, which is set aside. There is a logical explanation for this: its way easier and more susceptible to just teach some facts and see to what degree they are acceptable. What’s way harder is to determine the effect of all of that; to come to positive, emotional and willful components by shaping a character; to find all of the acceptable types of behavior etc. Upbringing as a task can’t stand alone and independent from education, and vice versa: a person can’t have much use of facts and information if they just have them as a list of facts and they don’t know how to use them. They come “alive” only after the person starts using them to build their own character and behavior.

DEFINING THE FILM AS A PART OF THE SEVEN ARTS

Known as the seventh art, the film “a series of moving pictures“ (Dictionary, Meaning of “film” in the English Dictionary) is a type of communication which uses motion pictures and sound to tell a story or to bring new ideas to people. The majority of the films are initially filmed to be shown on the big screens in cinemas. There are many types of genres: drama is a genre of fictional stories or stories based on real events which represent certain characteristics of the main characters and their deeds; action based films tell stories which are filled with fight scenes, explosions, daring escapes, etc.; comedy movies intend to make the audience laugh; horror movies are filled with tension and terror; cartoons are either hand-drawn or animated by a computer - the majority of cartoons are made for younger audiences… (Dirks, 2018)

The Frenchman Louis Le Prince is said to be the “father of cinematography” with his first short film “Roundhay Garden Scene” in 1888, even though 10 years earlier there was a short segment called “Sallie Gardner at a Gallop” by Eadweard Muybridge. The brothers Lumière are one of the pioneers of the film industry with one of their first movies “Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station”. (Lumière, 2007)

IMPLEMENTING THE FILM AS PART OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

Films can be very helpful during classes in many ways. Films don’t only have to be used during linguistic classes, they can also be used in different classes as long as they correlate with the given material. But still, films can’t be overused and can’t dominate over the regular, normative ways of teaching. That being said, films can, on occasion, be more dominant (if it’s an interactive class, or the students visit a cinema) over the other activities. Teachers have to have in mind a couple of indicators which would put the films in good use during classes and would make sure that the student’s experience will be positive and that they would want to see more films which would expand their point of view on how a class should look like.
SELECTING THE GENRE

Picking the right type of film is affected by several factors: connection with the theme, levels of intellectual difficulty, attracting interest and attention, knowing a language and having a suitable translation, the age of the students etc. The genre should be in correlation with a certain part of the material; if it’s a linguistics class the students should be learning a new vocabulary or processing through a text. It would be harder to pick a film based on grammatical subjects, not unless it’s a part in which the students can take in consideration an element of the language. Animated movies or cartoons are more suitable for younger generations, whereas for the adult audience genres like unobtrusive comedy, classic history movies, or documentaries can be shown.

Watching a full movie vs. watching parts of a movie

The teacher makes this separation based on the given program which s/he has to fulfill and integration of any possible free activities within the given time. Furthermore, depending on the idea of the teacher, s/he can prepare segments and cutouts which would be shown on the beginning of the class with the intention to fill-in the students with the up-coming activities, or to motivate them to think about the material, the teachers can also project whole movies that would incite other activities which would conclude the material.

Structural design of the scenario and the dialog (formal and informal version)

This type of use of films is very helpful when there is a case of some linguistic forms which need mutual engagement of vocabulary and grammar. Depending on what they’re watching, films can offer a verity of linguistic variations that are unknown to the students. The teacher should separate these types of terms beforehand if s/he thinks that they will be a problem for the students to understand. This can also be used to study the complexity of sentences, their way of pronunciation etc. The differentiation of formal and informal versions is of great contribution to the correct way of determining the linguistic standards which the students constantly run into.

Comparing the eras of cinematography

The teacher shouldn’t really go into depth about the essence of this task; rather they should point out the main characteristics of an era. Here are some of them: distinction between genres, black and white color technique, the way of portraying the roles, everyday life of the characters, the level of understanding the dialogs etc. Comparisons can be often made between two or more movies that have already been seen by the students or the students themselves can suggest a film that they have seen before. The teacher can inflame interest for an additional research by students that show curiosity for the material.

Favorite characters and favorite actors

This is an activity that will surely give a lot of feedback from a lot of students. Every generation can talk about their favorite animated character; they can also talk about the moral dilemmas of the anti-heroes of the stories or they can indicate the qualities of their favorite actors and actresses. Portraying the characters and the actors is of great importance to the students because they often look up to them; they follow their actions and idolize them. The teachers have to be careful that the students don’t over-do the imitations of their favorite characters, and, if necessary, to normalize them.
Other activities during classes

Picking the right task to complete the circle of activities associated with the film is of interest to the students and their opinion on the matter. That way a theme for an essay can be chosen that was most talked about during the film; and students can form individual opinions about the content of the film; they can also impersonate and act out characters and parts of the story; games and quizzes can be played that are connected with the film or same parts of it etc.

DEFINING MUSIC AS A PART OF THE SEVEN ARTS

The first art whose medium is sound organized in time is defined as music. The elements of the sound in music are: pitch (which governs melody and harmony); rhythm (tempo and meter); and the vocal qualities, such as dynamic articulation and texture. (TRIPOD) The creation, performance, significance, and even the definition of music vary, according to culture and social context. Music can be divided into genres and subgenres, but the dividing lines are open to personal interpretation. There are three types of music by the matter it’s performed: vocal (singed music); instrumental (played music) and a combination of these two. Given the name of the song, music can be divided into commercial - in which the title of the song gives away the content of the song, and absolute – a composition whose title does not give anything away. Usually these types of compositions only have a mark for tempo such as Allegro, Presto, and Rondo etc. (Colles, 1978, 4th and 5th chapter)

Implementing music in the educational process

Same as the film, the music can help in motivating the students in class, and can innovate the educational process, but in a different dynamic. The nature in music is different from the one in the film because it leaves more to the imagination as well as the personal preference in interpreting the melody. When it comes to implementing music in classes, the teacher has to be weary of the length of the musical act, and when it will be presented during the classes. During the class activities music can be a primary activity or a secondary, or it can be just played in the background, which will help the students to be more relaxed.

Next, I’ll give you a couple of examples that show a good use of music in the educational process.

Fill-in the blanks

This exercise can only be done with music that has both the vocal and instrumental aspects of a song. The teacher picks a song that is adequate to the student’s level of linguistic knowledge; also s/he has to pick words to be filled in which are easily understandable. If it can help, the song can be replayed so that the students can check their answers. This type of educating is often used when new types of linguistic structures are being taught, and also it’s a fun way of teaching and it breaks the monotony in the class room.

Enriching the vocabulary of the student

A lot of musical tracks, that are not included under pop music, can have deeper meaning and deeper ideas. The words and the phrases with which these tracks are being presented can sometimes be daring to the students, especially if they never heard them before. The teacher has to be careful that the vocabulary that’s being used is not filled with lots of new terms, and, if so, s/he has to limit their number so that the student can get the gist of the song, and then they can slowly implement these terms in their vocabulary. (Cox, 2017)
Aid with studying grammar and finding a suitable translation

It’s not unusual for grammar to cause problems when remembering its rules and putting them in use. By selecting the right tracks the teacher can help the students to easily interpret grammatical rules (such as phrasal verbs, conditionals etc.) and later on help them find that rule in the lyrics of the song. We also have to mention the idioms that have a figurative meaning. The teacher first explains its meaning and then, if necessary, finds a suitable translation. Translation of lyrics is welcomed if something is unclear to an individual; if there is a full translation of the lyrics, the songs’ original meaning is lost and the whole dynamic of the order of the words in the verses is lost.

Collecting data for modern music

This includes studying accompanying information about a certain style, song or an artist from the modern era. The English language is “carrying” today’s modern music so if the students listen to a certain song in English, the teacher can give-out notes that contain interesting facts about the performer. The British and the American music histories are very rich, and a lot of trends have come out from them that are stylish, that are being cared for, and that are evolving. Even though this is a very passive way of studying, it can expand the student’s musical horizons, and maybe they will find a new favorite artist or a group.

Writing essays with instrumental music in the background

This is one of the most creative ways of teachers using music during classes. The teacher does not determine the theme of the essay, but s/he just plays the instrumental music (one on repeat or a picked selection) and lets the students express themselves through the music. That way, the students’ fantasies and imaginations that are corresponding with the idea of the music come out in the light. They can either dedicate a whole class to writing (depending on the student’s imagination) or a segment of the class towards “dreaming upon words”. The materials that the teacher can use are abundant, and there’s a lot to choose from, depending on the mood.

Background music assisting in the focus during classes

Last but not least, music can be used to help the students focus during classes. It’s scientifically proven that music helps to stimulate the brain and to improve the mood. When the music is not the main fuse in the classes, sometimes it can be played in the background. The teacher has to be weary that the music that’s being played isn’t obtrusive and it’s not disturbing the main activities. It has to flow in with the class and to serve as a toll for bettering the mental capacity of the students.

Defining the comic book as an art

There is one main distinction between the term comic and comic book according to Francis Lacassin. He says that a comic is a concept or art (the ninth art) and a technique that allows that type of art to be created, while the comic books are a medium through which that art is being presented. According to Eisner, these days the comic book is the main application in sequential art that’s being put on paper. (Eisner, 2008, p. 7, 8)

The comic first appeared in Switzerland during the 1830s with the appearance of the first albums of Rudolf Tepfer. The comic experiences its true expansion towards the end of the 18th century; in the US it appears in different forms (one of the most famous ones is the comic strip); while in Europe it was considered as a text for children. It was more dominant
in the press for children, but after the 1930s, through special magazines the comic started to appeal to teens and adults. That way during its development the comic contributed in the forming of three main centers: France/Belgium, USA and Japan. Every country has its own comic tradition. France/Belgium nursed the artistic side of the comic and after the 1960s and the appearance of Bande Dessinée (strip-cartoon) it was considered a real art. Usually the comic in France is in an album form, with 40 big pages, hard covers and quality paper. One of the most famous artists in this area is the Belgian Hergè, the creator of “The Adventures of Tintin”. (Sabin, 1993)

The structure of the comic book is unique and it is different from the other cartoon based arts with a couple of features that make it stand out:

- The frame is used when a picture is shown in a square or a rectangle, but it’s not always put to use – depending on the author or the story the pictures can be shown on the background without any frames.
- A track is a row of frames put next to each other that show a consequential activity, and capture the movie side of the comic book.
- Recitative is a panel that’s used for silent comments, especially when the author appoints the time and the place of the story, or giving information that is curtail to the story.
- Speech balloons (initially known as phylactery) are circular or elliptical forms which contain dialogs of the character on whom they are attached to. When the character thinks or dreams these are drawn on in a form of a cloud.
- Onomatopoeia is a type of word or an icon that suggests some kind of external sound or a thought/information with a phonetic, graphic or iconic imitation. (McCloud, 2001)

Implementing the comic books in the educational process

As an interactive task based on linguistic and drawn structures, the comic book has a lot to offer during the classes. Its primary use is to attract the attention of the reader, usually the younger population and also it’s a fun read. That being said the comic book can be used as a toll to break the monotony that can appear during a class, especially if the theme in progress is dull and without contrast. Comic books can also be used as an extracurricular in a form of homework, bearing in mind the concept and the grammatical structure. (plasq, 2017)

Here are some implicates that will help to ease in the comic books during classes:

Picking the right language and the suitable context

This doesn’t mean using mother-tongue or a foreign language that the students understand, but a language that can equate with the viewpoints of the students and their age, and is inseparable with its context. Plenty of comic books that portrait the famous cartoon heroes are suitable for students in primary schools, whereas high school students should want some comic books that incite deeper analysis of the events of the story. In any case, those selections need to be fun, “grasping” the children’s attention.

Picking a comic book that correlates with the linguistic unit during the class

Depending on the linguistic segment that’s being developed during the class, the structure of the comic book should vary, according to the needs of the linguistic unit. Often the necessities can’t be satisfied with only one comic book, so the students will have to do a separation between one or more comics that will capture the essence of the material. The
teacher may lose the meaning of the story, but will gain a lot in the field of internalizing if the students get the gist of that class by carefully processing the comic-sequences.

*A suitable length of the material that was picked*

As a suitable content for a certain age is previously picked, the teacher, parallel to that, has to be careful with the length of that content. The material shouldn’t be very long with a lot of time spent on it, but it shouldn’t be short either, because that way it will lose the vital information that the teacher was trying to teach in the first place. Time based, the material should be around 10 minutes long and used at the beginning or the end of the class; that way it can serve as a warm up at the beginning, or as a relaxation for the students at the end of the class, as similarly done in sports. The teacher can use up a full class dedicated to comics, in the time period designated for exercises or some additional activities.

*Comic books created by the teachers themselves*

Nowadays this task is simplified, because the teachers have a few technological types of aid that will ease their work. S/he has to know beforehand what the purpose of the comic will be, how will the storyline go, who will the characters be, what will be the length etc. There are a lot of internet sites that are capable of constructing comic books, and the teacher can also check in with his/her art colleagues. They can more easily construct the picture in mind of the teacher, and can also create color editions that are property of the school.

*The students constructing a story based on pictures*

Similar as before, the teacher can create a comic book, but only with pictures, and s/he could leave the speech balloons blank for the students to fill them in with phrases and sentences which they think are most suitable for the story. The story can be given beforehand for an easier work, or no information can be given related to the pictures. This would surface the imagination of the students, and in the end they could compare their stories, which will excite interest between them. As an accelerator to this task, background music can be used and the whole classroom will get a new more relaxed mood, which the students will appreciate and will seek for more classes like those.

**CONCLUSION**

These innovative educational alternatives can really help out in the classroom and stimulate the individual’s interests as well as make them invest themselves more into the classes. The arts that we talked about here – the film, the music and the comic books “shatter” the more traditional way of lecturing and studying, and they spark a different kind of energy during the classes that could be the new driving force of education.

Movies and music are a new habit of the students nowadays, and combined with computer technology they take up most of their free time. When the teachers start injecting these student’s occupations in small doses during their classes, the student’s interest will increase and in correlation with that, they will subdue the material more easily. It looks like the comic books are falling behind (even though there are people who are dedicated to them), but if the teacher makes good use of them they can appeal to the students very easily.

A lot of attention has to be put towards this new kind of education, and it has to be given some time before its true goal is reached. This kind of attention is especially increased when
a new educational prototype is put to use and it’s in an early access phase. The teachers can also implement some of their own ideas to help complete the student’s understanding of the material, as long as those ideas are part of the primary educational plan.

The reaction of the students and the way that they internalize the newly made situation is another very important factor that the teachers need to be wary of when they are making these projects. The implementation has to be gradual, and in correlation with the needs of the class. If the students have some difficulties, let’s say that they don’t understand the task at hand or the material is very dull and repetitive, the teacher will have to revise his/her methods of working. Then, if there is still no collaboration, the teacher can terminate the whole process and start over with a new more productive and more interesting process/method.

For a successful completion the teachers will have to find all of those “little openings” in the educational plan and begin initiating their own activities which will renovate and upgrade as time passes. That way every new generation of students is going to have a different story and a different experience of the creative aspects of their classes, and maybe they themselves can construct an image of how they think the school should look like.

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