

Teaching media literacy with magazines and comics: a case study from Austrian primary schools

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MIVA (Media Education in Primary Schools) is a three year research project, which aims to develop a 'dynamic' model for media education and multimodal literacy for Austrian primary schools, currently in it's second year. Drawing on international research concerned with media education, media literacy and multimodal literacies, (Buckingham, 2003, Kress, 1996) we also consider literacy as a situated practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) which means that local social, and cultural perspectives have to be taken into account.

During the academic years 2009/10 and 2010/11 action research projects are carried out in collaboration with 9 primary schools with a diverse set of students in Vienna (including a large number of children from ethnic minorities, children with German as second language, special needs children and gifted children) and 18 teachers. In the first year teachers and children aim to develop an understanding of a range of fictional and factual media text, such as picture books, children's magazines and comic books, maps and diagrams with a focus on the complex relationships possible between image and written language, while in the second year the emphasis will shift to the moving image and to multiple languages in the classroom.

To include both a critical-analytical and a creative-practical dimension into the class work while at the same time enabling adequate learning progression poses a considerable challenge. Rather than attempting to cover a fixed body of knowledge (e.g. a canon) or a set of skills, the model of 'key concepts' (representation, language, production, audience) places an emphasis conceptual understanding and on principles of enquiry, which can be applied to all media, and learning takes place through the exploration of case studies. (Bazalgette 1989, Buckingham 2003) These concepts can be applied to both creative and analytical activities in the classroom, allowing for a diverse range of pedagogic strategies. (BFI 2000, 2003; Buckingham 2003, 2007, Burn & Durran 2007)

A 'dynamic' model of media education proposes a staged approach to teaching and learning whereby students progressively move toward increasing competencies and complexity of thought (Buckingham 2003). Students move back and forth between action and reflection, between engagement and media production on one hand, distanced analysis and critique of media text and reflection of their own production processes on the other. This 'dynamic' approach advocates a dialectical relationship between understanding and participation; between the critical study and the actual use of language and multimodal literacy practices, between the abstract and the concrete. It is also 'dialogic' as it moves between students' prior experiences and existing knowledge and new scientific concepts and analytical tools provided by the teacher. It offers a dialogic negotiation as the cultural worlds of children and teachers meet in the classroom and the progression of critical understanding and the continuous exploration

of semiotic resources, materials and tools and their affordances. (Buckingham 2003, Burn & Durran 2007)

In my presentation I will be able to present some of the first findings of the MIVA study from the first phase of action research with a focus on the reading and writing of comics.