

Using audiovisual media in nursery school, within the framework of the interdisciplinary approach

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Synergies Sud-Est européen n° 2 - 2009
pp. 65-76

Résumé : *Il est bien connu que les vues contemporains au sujet de l'école maternelle soulignent l'approche interdisciplinaire à la connaissance. Dans ce cadre, les moyens audiovisuels sont utilisés dans l'éducation préscolaire sur la base du nouveau programme analytique des études pour l'école maternelle et suggèrent un cadre d'activités appropriées à l'éducation préscolaire. Il faut mentionner que dans notre étude par moyens audiovisuels on se réfère à la télévision et la video, interprétées comme une entité unique, car dans la pratique quotidienne de l'école maternelle elles sont interdépendantes et complémentaires.*

Mots-clés : *Moyens audiovisuels, École maternelle, Approche interdisciplinaire*

Abstract: *Contemporary nursery school theory places great emphasis on the interdisciplinary approach to knowledge. Within this framework, audiovisual media are utilised in preschool education to a significant extent. The present paper investigates ways of utilising audiovisual media in preschool education in the context of the new preschool curriculum and recommends a framework of activities suitable for preschool education. Within the context of our study, by audiovisual media we mean the TV and VCR/DVD; these are perceived as a single unit, since they feature as inter-related and complementary in everyday nursery school practice.*

Key words: *Audiovisual media, Nursery school, Interdisciplinary approach*

Introduction

Contemporary nursery school theory places great emphasis on the interdisciplinary approach to knowledge. The new nursery school curriculum promotes the teaching methodology of the interdisciplinary approach, stressing that knowledge should be presented as a whole, not broken down to different subject matters. Most importantly, the interdisciplinary approach reflects a view of learning in which children are actively engaged in the learning process (Dafermou et al., 2006).

The interdisciplinary approach, as a way of selecting and organizing knowledge, must and should promote the connections between different subject matters, helping students gain a more holistic approach to knowledge, by relating, composing, and generalising it (Matsaggouras, 2002). In this context, audiovisual media play a significant role in the education process, particularly when used extensively by both teacher and children. Audiovisual media provide children with many stimuli, due to their nature (sounds, images). They enrich the learning environment, nurturing explorations, experiments and discoveries, and encourage children to develop their speech and express their thoughts. They also favour the children's harmonious co-existence, promote interaction, solidarity, cooperation and communication, and permit children to express their creativity and autonomy (Vryzas, 1997).

The power of audiovisual media stems from the impression of reality. They display a cunning verosimilarity; what isn't real appears real. Audiovisual techniques (the angle and depth of field, the close-up and background shots, the lighting) construct a new reality, which looks quite real without necessarily corresponding to actual reality. Audiovisual communication is a complex phenomenon, a game of messages consisting of words, sounds, and images. The language of audiovisual media has its own conventions, symbols, and codes. It introduces new ways of perceiving and recording reality, new ways of educational expression. However, the introduction of audiovisual media in schools throughout Europe and America did not produce the expected results, mainly because they were integrated in traditional teaching, while their distinct features and potential in terms of expression were ignored (Vryzas, 1997).

The present paper investigates ways of utilising audiovisual media in the day-to-day educational process, in line with the underlying perceptions of the new preschool curriculum, and recommends a framework of activities suitable for preschool education. Within the context of our study, by audiovisual media we mean the TV and VCR/DVD; these are perceived as a single unit, since they feature as inter-related and complementary in everyday nursery school practice.

Audiovisual media in the nursery school

It has long been accepted that the language of audiovisual expression relates not to technological but rather to social and cultural issues. Not knowing this language is a major problem for whoever attempts to incorporate audiovisual systems of communication into educational practice (Koronaïou, 2001).

The need to incorporate television in the educational system has been stressed by a wide field of social sciences (including Psychology, Sociology, Pedagogy, Communication Science, etc.). Television as a medium communicates its message by using a variety of different systems, symbols, codes, and presentation modes. It is characterised not by the content, but by the form of the message. The way television programmes are presented is inter-related with the techniques used. For preschool children, the programmes' technical features are independent entities, which capture their attention because they are so special and unreal (Simatos, 1995).

Watching television is an active and conscious process of decoding and processing the information presented. It involves constant decision making, through which the child determines what to notice and what to process mentally. The way children-viewers approach a TV programme depends on their mental development, their family and social environment, the content of the programme watched, and the situation in which this takes place (Anderson et al., 1981).

Television is a major audiovisual medium used in the nursery school. Of course, when television is introduced into a school, the teachers are required to change their attitude towards the educational process. They have to accept that television functions as a “parallel school”, providing students with knowledge (Porcher, 1974). Already in nursery school, all children share the experience of television, since it is an experience obtained within the family, regardless of the children’s environment and origin. Both the relationship between children and television and the knowledge thus obtained create contradictory feelings for parents and educators, who often feel their power and influence over the children threatened, while at the same time nurturing great hopes for the role of television in the children’s education.

The arguments in favour of using television in education can be summed up as follows (Diamantaki et al., 2001). Television:

- opens a gateway into the world,
- displays great potential in terms of expression,
- nurtures the children’s observational skills and complex thinking, helps children visualize abstract concepts, and provides them with concrete material,
- can attenuate the gap between isolated schools in the countryside and “privileged” schools in urban centres,
- can facilitate the creation of special programmes for children with learning disabilities.

The integration of television in the nursery school can take the form of critique or of learning material or both (Koronaïou, 2001, Vryzas & Tsitouridou, 2005). Television is integrated as an object of critique through television literacy processes (Kourti, 2003). Television literacy is defined as the skills necessary for the children to access, analyse, evaluate and produce TV-related audiovisual messages. That is, television literacy relates to any type of study, learning and teaching regarding the history, creativity, use and evaluation of this medium, or its position in society and its social influence and consequences (Morsy, 1984). The training of children in television discourse, aiming at the creation of critical TV viewers, poses a challenge for schooling. Schools must attempt to live up to this challenge from the very first rung of education, as television constitutes a most powerful and resilient mass institution regarding children’s socialisation (Koronaïou, 2001).

As a learning tool, television is utilised in various forms in the nursery school. These forms consist mainly of “school TV” and educational documentaries. Television is also used as a screen for showing videotapes and DVDs, the content of which is in line with school objectives. By school TV we mean an actual TV

device located in the classroom, which transmits material that is related to the curriculum. This material can be transmitted in a single classroom, or a whole school, or a group of schools in a region, or even throughout the country. The school TV programme can be produced by individual educators in a single school, or by regional or national education services, or even by non school agents, either public or private, including television channels, mass media, relevant organisations, etc. (Moss et al., 1991). It should be pointed out that the concept of “school TV” does not feature in the Greek educational system.

By documentaries we mean the educational programmes of regular TV (digital or analog), targeted at a general audience. These programmes are usually produced by specialised agents, either public or private, taking account of school curriculum to a greater or lesser extent (Pleios, 2005). The use of television in teaching mobilises the students’ interest and curiosity, as an everyday medium introduced into the educational process. Television gains the young children’s trust and reinforces their self-esteem, since they can master knowledge and implement their learning through a known and familiar medium. The integration of audiovisual media in the nursery school classroom depends on the educators; their role is vital (Kersh, 1999, Wright, 1998).

Of course, television cannot replace the children’s personal experience. However, through careful selection and appropriate use, it can enrich and implement it (Clements, 1999). Television is an inseparable part of the reality in which we live, and of the reality that permeates us, that is our internal world (Navridis, 2001). The school ought to seek the right ways to utilise the children’s existing television experience, so as to serve their educational needs.

The VCR is without doubt the audiovisual medium most commonly used in the educational process. It constitutes a great revolution in audiovisuals. It is used both for receiving/recording on tape and for projecting videotapes on television. It is an ideal educational audiovisual medium; in fact, several training and practice centres have established video libraries, making videotapes a major medium for watching animated images.

The VCR is a useful educational audiovisual medium, recognized and promoted as a major educational tool, thanks to its extensive potential. Apart from utilising ready-made educational videotapes, educators can:

- use a video camera to record their own tapes, and show them on the classroom television, whenever deemed necessary, without further processing,
- record a TV show and air it on the classroom television, whenever deemed necessary,
- record a TV show while absent from home, and air it on the classroom television, whenever deemed necessary (Zeukilis, 1986).

According to Allen (1979), the video enjoys certain significant advantages: it is direct, familiar to children and educators, and quite easy to use or watch. During the teaching process, the VCR can transmit knowledge and images that are hard to transmit by other educational audiovisual media. It offers ready-made teaching sessions, recorded on tape by specialised educators. It also enjoys an educational

advantage when necessary to show activities taking place in facilities that the children cannot visit or that do not provide visitors with wide visual access to what is taking place. Moreover, the VCR is an important medium that supports the children's activities; these are recorded on tape, and can be shown in the classroom, providing the learning process with useful feedback.

The video camera is related to the VCR. From an educational perspective, the video camera is a valued tool, because the production of educational material favours active learning and promotes research, collection of data, and the recording of facts and behaviours (Koronaïou, 2001).

It nurtures the children's creative development, by offering them the opportunity to record and show reality as they see it. Its potential combines the sound of the recorder and the image of television. If television is a show, then the VCR is both show and action, since the user is not only a viewer, but also an active participant/creator of the image shown (Aslanidou, 2000).

The video camera allows for a creative relationship between knowledge and audiovisual techniques. It is therefore a means of collective expression. Through it, children can visualise the abstract concepts they are taught. The images they create help the teachers verify the extent to which the children have understood these abstract concepts. The video camera is an efficient educational tool, in which the students are not only consumers but also producers of messages (Vryzas, 1997).

Technological progress has led to the creation of new products to replace the old ones. The VCR is now being replaced by the DVD, which is different in terms of its use and offers enhanced image quality. Thanks to its potential, it is a useful educational tool. In the nursery school, it is used both for entertainment and for educational purposes.

Interdisciplinarity in the nursery school

Interdisciplinarity was introduced to education for a variety of epistemological, psychological, educational and socio-economic reasons. More specifically, according to the dominant epistemological views, only unified interdisciplinary knowledge is meaningful to real life situations and proves useful and efficient in problem solving (Matsaggouras, 2002).

Individual and social constructivism, a theory supported by a number of schools of psychology which features as the dominant theory of learning today, points to unified schemes for teaching approaches and the curriculum. The main idea of constructivism is that learning takes place in authentic situations, and that knowledge is not transmitted from educators to students, but is rather constructed by the latter, by integrating new information on pre-existing representations and modifying these representations in the light of the new data. Another psychological theory that supports the interdisciplinary approach is Gardner's theory of *multiple* intelligences, according to which the school should address all kinds of intelligence, instead of its usual practice that is

limited to the verbal-linguistic and the logical-mathematical intelligence (Matsaggouras, 2002).

From an educational point of view, it is widely believed that interdisciplinary curricula can easily have a positive influence on both students and educators. On the one hand, students develop their critical and creative skills, becoming better able to successfully deal with problematic situations. On the other hand, interdisciplinarity is also beneficial to educators, who develop a more positive relationship with their students, gain a general flexibility that allows them to adapt to changes and develop a collective, cooperative and responsible attitude in the school unit, while at the same time enriching their teaching strategies (Matsaggouras, 2002).

In contemporary social conditions, schools cannot be limited to promoting academic knowledge, but should attempt to manage the pressing social problems through an extended curriculum. In this way, new interdisciplinary subject matters are created.

According to the views expressed in the new curriculum (Dafermou et al., 2006), interdisciplinarity refers to the general principles that organize the school, eliminating subject matters as frameworks of organizing school knowledge, reviewing the school's priorities and internal structures, and attempting to approach school knowledge as a whole, promoting a broad study of issues of common interest and utmost importance to civilisation. In interdisciplinary curricula, the borders between different sciences fade out. In contrast, school knowledge is organised around the themes under study, as these relate to the children's interests, needs and lived experiences. The question is what knowledge to choose, from which subject matter and with what methodology, so that the students will be able to understand the themes under study, in the short run, and construct solid knowledge on how the world works, in the long run (Tchudi & Lafer, 1996).

Themes function as an axis, around which the learning process is organised, and appear in nursery practice in various forms. By elaborating a selection of themes, children undertake a series of activities and develop skills and concepts, under their teacher's guidance. That is, they do not perceive the theme under study as abstract and isolated, but relate it to something concrete and tangible (Barab & Landa, 1997). Each time, educators can select the approach best suited to their planning, the learning objectives, the theme under study, the children's interests and the educators' own abilities. Whatever the approach chosen, it is most important that the educators should focus their attention and interest on what the children are saying and doing and bear in mind that this way of working in the classroom can cover a wide variety of content and meet the most demanding challenge regarding the syllabus and the development of curricular skills (Helm & Katz, 2001).

Recent theoretical analyses demonstrate that interdisciplinarity relates to a wide range of activities and processes that serve to unify all parts of the curriculum. According to current theory, the interdisciplinary approach is implemented in the nursery school:

- by approaching a variety of themes, guided by the curricular objectives selected by the educator,
- by conducting projects, the selection of which depends on the children's interests and lived experiences, since the children plan, discuss and determine the course of the projects, with their educator's support,
- by using interdisciplinary or fundamental concepts, which can function as a horizontal axis that interconnects different subject matters.

Educators approach a variety of themes by suggesting specific theme activities, determining their course and duration, and selecting the learning objectives to be mastered by the children. In contrast, projects are theme activities that stem directly from the children, who determine the projects' development in discussions held with the educators' support. Both themes and projects place emphasis on interdisciplinarity, the holistic approach to knowledge and the need to utilise the children's interests, ideas and lived experiences during the learning process (Gliaou, 2005). The important distinction between themes and projects lies not with the initial decision-making (Stupiansky, 1997), but with the extent to which children engage in deep study (Helm & Katz, 2001). In the case of themes, emphasis is placed on the learning objectives selected by the educators, while in the case of projects, the educators' planning focuses on capturing and preserving the children's interest; emphasis is placed on the children's contribution to the planning and development of activities (Dafermou et al., 2006).

In the context of interdisciplinarity, assessment plays an important role in the nursery school. It constitutes a significant stage of any systematic and organised process, characterised by designing, planning and implementing. Conducted by educators, assessment is internal and formative in nature, and is aimed at:

- enhancing the school environment,
- offering feedback on the teaching process and helping improve the education provided,
- developing the educators' professional skills (Altrichter et al., 1993).

In the nursery school, assessment is a constant part of everyday processes, and is based on the total assessment of the programme. The assessment process takes account of each child's individual and social characteristics. During the school year, educators monitor the children systematically. Initially, they determine the children's lived experiences, knowledge, and interests (initial or diagnostic assessment). They then check on the children's progress (gradual or formative assessment), while at the end they assess the degree to which the programme's objectives have been met (CTCF, 2003). Assessment techniques should be suited to the children's age, learning needs and lived experiences. According to contemporary theory, preschool education has no place for traditional assessment forms, which evaluate cognitive performance. Alternative assessment is more appropriate, focusing on the processes of mastering knowledge in creative environments, bringing out the children's communication skills, and nurturing their sense of responsibility through collective work, research and critical thinking. Alternative assessment includes:

- the course and results of projects,
- group assessment by the children themselves,
- children's assessment portfolios (CTCF, 2003).

The assessment results - notes and observations recorded by the educator - constitute each child's assessment portfolio. By studying these portfolios, educators can monitor the children's individual progress in terms of mastering knowledge and developing skills, so that they can provide support according to each child's learning needs. In the context of interdisciplinarity, educators focus on what the children have accomplished, not on what they haven't yet achieved (Dafermou et al., 2006).

Using audiovisual media in the nursery school in the context of CTCF (Cross Thematic Curriculum Framework): A proposal

Before making a specific proposal on the use of audiovisual media in the nursery school that conforms to the underlying views of the CTCF (Cross Thematic Curriculum Framework), it is important to determine the objectives of any related activities. Taking account of the level of development of preschool children, it is deemed that any recommended activities may be oriented towards:

- helping children perceive the nature, potential and use of audiovisual media in the nursery school,
- encouraging them to use audiovisual media in activities that cover the full range of CTCF objectives.

The activities aimed at helping children understand the nature, potential and use of audiovisual media in the nursery school are crucial and of outmost importance. In light of interdisciplinarity, the subject under study is investigated by approaching themes or conducting projects.

In the framework of interdisciplinary activities, children can approach the television, the VCR, the video camera and the DVD. They could study the history of television and collect information from various sources with the help of their parents. Under their teachers' guidance they perceive how the television functions as a device (turning it on and off), its constituent parts and its actual content (shows, ads, etc.). With their teachers' help, children can also familiarise themselves with the function and use of the VCR, videocamera and DVD, understanding how these relate to television and each other. The children's active participation in constructing knowledge allows them to approach audiovisual media experientially and gain a holistic understanding of their usefulness in both the nursery classroom and the outer world.

Audiovisual media can be utilised in the nursery school in the context of the interdisciplinary approach in a number of ways.

Educators can study the educational documentaries shown on TV and select those that serve curricular objectives. Documentaries may refer to various subjects, like environmental protection, proper nutrition, health, consumer awareness, traffic

education, etc. Educators can post a monthly programme on the classroom's information board to help children engage in the documentary process. By watching documentaries, children can express their ideas, listen to the ideas of their peers, interact and cooperate. The discussions emerging from the children's involvement in audiovisual activities can lead to the development of new projects and theme activities. Documentaries should be of a short duration and shown once or twice a week, so that the children do not tire and lose interest.

The use of VCR and the video camera in the nursery school provides young children with many opportunities to develop their creativity, research abilities and curricular skills. For instance, educators can tape educational school visits, or children's activities in and out of the classroom, recording how children engage in these activities. These tapes are then shown on the classroom television, offering children the chance to express their views, concerns and proposals. This provides the programme with feedback, linking it to interdisciplinary activities involving all subject matters (maths, language arts, environmental studies, arts, computer science) that relate to the theme under study. Experience dictates that when children are offered the leading role, they participate actively and enthusiastically in these activities.

As time goes by, children familiarise themselves with using audiovisual media and educators encourage them to act as cameramen, that is to record their interests in their own perspective. Such experiences mobilise the children's interest and will to learn. Relevant research findings (Dodge & Colker, 1998) demonstrate that children develop a positive attitude towards learning when actively involved in the learning process and when enjoying sufficient opportunities to interact with their natural and social environment.

In the context of linking school to family life, educators can collect video material from the children's activities and present it to the parents at the monthly meetings in the nursery classroom. It is believed that educational programmes that involve parents in their children's learning process are more efficient for early childhood education (Dombey & Meek Spencer, 1994). The more aware parents are of what takes place in and out of the classroom, the more they can help their children and understand the work conducted in the nursery school.

This knowledge mobilises parents, who can offer their valuable help. A parent who is a dentist may help inform children on the importance of taking care of their teeth and on the kinds of food that can make their teeth stronger, by showing a relevant DVD. The parent can then be available to discuss any questions with the children as an expert. This could go on throughout the school year, with a variety of documentaries that can be shown in the nursery classroom, supported by the parents' professions. Without doubt, the use of audiovisual media can support and contribute to the implementation of such activities.

Regarding out of school activities and the link between school and home, educators can recommend a weekly show that the parents can watch with their children at home. This provides parents with the opportunity to comment discuss and communicate with their children around the recommended show.

The children can then bring their experiences into the classroom, and enrich them by discussing and communicating with their peers and educator.

Audiovisual media are also very important for the educational process as assessment tools. Video recordings of the children's narrations, discussions, argumentations and activities in and out of the classroom can constitute an important part of assessment, and may be selectively placed in the children's individual portfolios. By observing the children's behaviour as recorded on tape, educators can adapt their teaching strategies to the children's needs, interests and particular characteristics. In a nutshell, audiovisual media provide teaching with feedback, help educators improve their professional skills and enhance the school environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that the content of the recommended activities includes only some tentative ideas on the use of audiovisual media in the nursery school in the context of interdisciplinarity. Preschool educators can draw on these ideas, in order to develop and enrich them. We believe that the ideas mentioned here can contribute to the ongoing debate on the role and place of audiovisual media in the nursery school, in the light of the interdisciplinary approach.

Utilising audiovisual educational media promotes the objectives of the educational process, increases the children's learning opportunities and supports the curriculum. It can well be said that audiovisual media contribute significantly to the quality enhancement of all dimensions of the educational work.

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