Media Education in the Danish Folkeskole

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Abstract: From 1987 to 1991 thirty-five media education projects were carried out in the Danish primary and elementary schools. This article describes the aims and practices of these projects. Categories were determined by the way media education was organized In the various schools. The results of the evaluation point to the need for changes in the present division between subjects In the school, toward cross-curricular teaching, and toward Integration of media education within several school subjects.

Resum6: De 1987 d 1991, trente-clnq projets portant sur l'etude des medlas ont ete menes dans les ecoles primalres et elementalres Danoises. Get article decrit les objectifs et les pratiques de ces projets. Les categories ont ete determlnees selon l'organlsation de l'etude des medlas dans les diverses ecoles. Les resultats de revaluation montrent : qu'il est necessaire de modifier la division qul exlste actuellement entre les diverses matieres au programme scolaire; que nous devons dorenavant nous doter d'un enselgnement Inter-dlsclpllnalre; que nous devons Integrer l'etude des medlas d plusieurs matieres au programme.

During the past 10 to 15 years media education has gradually gained status in many countries, although only a few countries have integrated it into the curriculum of the school. (Masterman, 1980, 1985, Alvarado et al., 1987, Media Development 1, 1991).

Until recently, however, a major thrust of media education has been moralizing and playing the part of a guardian that sees the media as cultural deterioration. This is partly because many of the teachers who have been in the front line of media education originally belonged to the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and therefore emphasized critical awareness. Furthermore, the framework of media education has often been the informative, book-oriented culture that has been, and still is the culture of the schools. Media education has

often been carried out as literary analysis, which means that the analysis has had the same goal as that of traditional analysis of literature, i.e. to teach the children to appreciate the classics, to foster good taste, and to teach the children to see through inferior products such as popular culture.

However, the new media education — as it was discussed at the media education conference in Toulouse (New Directions in Media Education, 1990) - has a different approach, which is not based on moral panic. The new trend emphasizes a more relaxed, pluralistic and cross-curricular approach to media teaching — often undertaken on the initiative of enthusiastic and committed teachers, but without policy statements calling for the provision of media education.

In Denmark the development of the media could be characterized as a revolution. Until 1988 there was one public service TV channel. Now, only four years later, half of the population is^able to watch between twelve and thirty-six TV channels. Accordingly, there has been debate about children and television, and there have been numerous committed teachers who have incorporated aspects of media teaching into their curricula in Danish, history, art, and social studies. In this article I shall describe and discuss thirty-five media education development projects which have taken place in the Danish Folkeskole (primary and secondary school) from 1987-1991. (Tufte et al. 1991).

Which Kind of Media Projects?

The thirty-five projects classified by the Council for Innovation and Development as media education development projects were categorized by the evaluation team in terms of the organisational form the various projects employed. It must be emphasized, however, that a certain amount of overlapping and border-line crossing occurred. The categories were as follows:

> media as a separate subject
> media integrated in existing subjects
> media workshops
> media in school and local community
> interactive media

Who are The Teachers?

Regarding their professional preparatory background for media teaching, questionnaires revealed that approximately one third of the teachers were self-taught, while a small proportion of them had had some media training in their specializations during their teacher training, such as, for example, media analysis in Danish. Somewhat more than one third of them had attended courses at Country Media Centres or at the Royal Danish School of Educational Studies.

Judging from the collected material, the typical Danish media teacher could be described as being 30 to 50 years old, with 10 to 15 years of teaching experience. Both sexes were equally represented. He or she had specialized in Danish and

possibly also taught social studies or mathematics. He or she was either self-taught or had been to a media course and was either alone in media education work or had allied him/herself with a colleague.

Aims and Motivations?

In the project descriptions, teachers have formulated their motivations regarding the aims of the project and regarding development work in general. In some cases it was difficult to separate the two. Motivations had three main concerns:

> children's use of the media
> the media and the school
> the media in relation to culture and society.

The majority of teacher motivations were concerned with children's use of media - particularly television. Characteristic - and in line with the moral panic trend - television was considered partly to be dangerous for children and partly undesirable in its effect and passivity-inducing function.

Regarding the second concern - the media and the school - several teachers argued that media education is a neglected area in school, that instruction in the subject is necessary to enable children to process media images and to use media actively, to strengthen its practical and creative aspects, and to break down traditional borders between subjects.

The relatively few motivations comprising the media in a cultural and social perspective were concerned with exploiting the opportunities that exist in the Cultural Centre idea and in local TV and radio networks. Accordingly, most of the teachers involved in the projects formulated goals that were concerned with:

> acquiring an understanding of and an insight into the function of the media and its role in the society today in order to
> maintain a critical and selective approach to the media.

The aims and goals are thus characterized by an analytical approach whereas there are not many projects that specifically emphasize the importance of media production. Nevertheless, media production, especially of video, is included in a number of projects, mainly as a part of the analysis.

What Were the Outcomes of the Projects?

There appeared to be considerable overlapping in the first two organisation forms, comprising media as a separate subject and media integrated in existing subjects. In most of the projects in these categories, media studies were organised within the already existing framework of the curriculum, either by being integrated into existing subjects or by constituting a new subject. In some projects, however, the existing framework was restructured by having media education form a separate course, cutting across the school's traditional sharply

divided subjects. It was characteristic that many of the projects comprised both media analysis and media production.

Most of the teachers said that the media education project had been extremely significant for them, both from the perspective of the learning process and new conceptions of the teacher's role, and from the perspective of the subject specifically. Several teachers pointed out, for instance, that they had acquired an amount of theory and practice relating to the media which also benefitted their teaching of other subjects; for example the production skills typically being developed in collaboration with the pupils, who are not afraid of the equipment and who—more so than adults—are prepared to experiment through a trial and error method. In this sense the production process can pave the way to breaking down the traditional authoritarian role of the teacher.

Some teachers felt that they had experienced problems with colleagues because — as media teachers — they were working innovatively, using the school's video equipment more than the others, and needing a media classroom. Also, more significantly, the pupils enjoyed the lessons, which in some cases led to their pressing other teachers also to teach about media. It would seem that the teachers whose aim was to make themselves superfluous were those who felt this derision from colleagues least, probably because they saw their function mainly as helpers and advisers to pupils and to colleagues alike.

On the question of what the pupils gained from these projects, it is clear that media production gave pupils a new means of expression. When pupils work with media over a longer period, they develop a competence that enables them to select the medium appropriate to the content, and to produce a piece of work independently.

Regarding the ability to analyze, which was the basis of many teacher motivations, teachers say that pupils have begun to look at television in a new way. They have gained insight into the way television programmes are made, and this has led them to see TV as a construct of reality. With regard to the academically weak and/or shy pupils, it is not completely clear what effect media education had or might have in the long term, since the projects were conducted over a comparatively short period. In some cases it appears that media education, particularly media production, could strengthen them. These pupils have often felt hampered by language, especially in writing, but in media production they have found an alternative mode of expression.

The following patterns were observed regarding gender differences. At the youngest level there was no marked difference. Boys and girls approached media work and equipment in more or less the same way. At the 13 to 14 age levels there were some changes noted in sex roles; for instance boys were more interested in the technical side of the equipment while the girls mostly regarded the equipment as a means of expressing meaningful content. Girls were usually more painstaking when it came to working out a shooting script or storyboard and more willing to undertake it. Boys started shooting at once, and only later realised the need for planning a production sequence and constructing a storyboard.

Media production was included in a number of projects, indicating that the media workshop also functioned as part of the development work. However, it is the category specified as media workshops that contains a precise description of the way a media workshop both can and should function in school. In all the projects evaluated, the idea of establishing a media workshop arose as the result of in-service courses at the School of Educational Studies - either in a course on school libraries or a creative arts course.

There are two forms of media workshops, arranged either as part and parcel of the school library or situated close to it, so that the school library's resources of materials and technical know-how can be exploited. The media workshop teachers indicated that they learned a lot from their development work, but their requests regarding the media workshop were all for more time, more money and in some cases more and better space. Pupils also expressed a great deal of enthusiasm for the media workshops.

The category specified as Media in School and Local Community has its roots in recent years' idea of opening the school to the local community. The typical teacher taking the initiative for a project in this category would be a local enthusiast who could ally him/herself with, for example, the head teacher, colleagues, parents and like minded co-workers outside the school. These projects usually had a double aim, namely, the external - concerning the school as part of the local community, and the internal - comprising a pedagogical aim regarding the school and the pupil group. The practical work in this category took various organisational forms, reflecting to a greater or lesser degree the external and the internal aspects.

These projects had a number of problems and barriers. For instance, the local authorities were not always willing to give their financial support. Although the development projects might have been successful, this did not guarantee the economic basis for continuing the work once the grant from the Council for Innovation and Development was depleted. One particular project was the subject of an intensive evaluation. The conclusions indicated that the project represented a thematisation of a democratic media and cultural pedagogy which could be significant for future practice of media education. Despite the findings it was not easy to draw the surrounding community into the project work. It would appear to be easier for school people to break through the school walls with their media messages than to establish a dialogue on and with the media beyond. Building cooperation around a democratic use of media would appear to be a long term affair. However, the process has been set in motion.

Development work in the category of Interactive Media was confined to interactive video. The videodiscs used were partly Danish productions (storage media for large amounts of photographs, texts, pictures of objects and shorter film sequences) and partly English language material. The latter were made for teaching in English, one for Physics including filmed experiments, and the other for History giving pupils, sequence by sequence, the opportunity to see various models for the solution of socio-historical problems played out.

Evaluation of the use of the videodiscs indicated that interactive video is still in its infancy in the Folkeskole, the present material being partly hi foreign language and therefore neither immediately lingu istically available to pupils, nor of relevance for teaching in Denmark, and partly in Danish but with relatively primitive interactive possibilities.

In the project work, the videodiscs were used as one of a number of information sources in a group work situation where the normal timetable had been suspended. The relevant pictures were usually selected in advance by the teacher, and the pupils retrieved them with the aid of bar codes. The videodisc thus played a limited role in the teaching, and the possibility of a dialogue on any level above the most elementary was only exploited sporadically in a few learning sequences.

The most advanced use of interactive video - pupils' own individual and systematic quest for knowledge and discovery in computer-guided discs and data bases - is not suited to the normal organisation of lessons within the framework of a school timetable. This type of activity would best be exploited individually, outside normal school hours. The pedagogical strength of interactive video lies in the fascination of its images and advanced dialogue which challenges the pupil to search on his own for facts and experiences or to solve a problem in a simulation,

What Was The Result?

Many of the goals that the teachers set themselves in their descriptions of aims have been unachieveable because of insufficient funding. Many of the most ardent teachers, out of sheer zeal for the cause, placed undue strain on their own resources, both personal and professional. In order to supplement the limited technical and economic means available, many teachers tried new technigues, by collaborating with local media and county centres for educational media. Budget cuts resulted in a number of projects having to be modified in relation to their original descriptions. This meant that in most cases the evaluation team had to evaluate reduced projects.

Within the five organisational forms there have been rudiments of media education practices that, if developed further, could be significant for media teaching in the future. Although the development projects cover a broad span, they have some similarities and certain general features in common, being all based on three criteria, including; a) media type (video, slides/sound, radio, TV; b) topic; and c) a mixture of media types, media genre, media specific discipline, topic and/or teaching form.

The teaching and working forms in the projects have been predominantly those involving media production, mainly of video, analysis of pupils' own productions and those of professionals. To a certain extent, teachers have also taught media theory on a general level. Production has taken up most of the allotted teaching time. Pupils have most often worked in smaller, independent groups in the production phase. Media analysis and theory have to a large extent been organized on a whole class basis with the teacher as central figure.

Relatively significant weight has been placed on the production process in the evaluation since this, more than media analysis, is a fairly new element in media education. However some teachers have downgraded analysis or even rendered it superfluous in favour of production. But production in itself is not sufficient. It is hi the interplay of production and analysis, both of pupils' own and of professional productions, that the critical approach is developed and media competence acquired.

Media Education of the Future

At an organizational level, the basis for a future model for media education could be to define media education as a separate area in which teaching could take various forms, and where one form does not necessarily exclude the other. These forms could include:

> media education as a separate discipline;
> cross curricular collaboration (integrated into different subjects and in collaboration with these) throughout the whole school year;
> day or week-long courses;
> both day or week-long courses and cross curricular (integrated) with several existing subjects.

The consecutive course type sequence would afford both specific in-depth study of the time-consuming production processes and also give pupils the necessary time to grasp new concepts and theories. The cross curricular model allows the possibility of working within a particular theme in a problem-oriented and less fragmentary way. There is thus an emerging model which embraces an interplay between the subject specific and the cross curricular, and which is profitable for media education.

Media education must comprise work with pupils' own production, their discovery, analysis and assessment of it as well as that of others, from both practical and theoretical perspectives. All types of media must be included (print media, radio, photography, sound/slides, TV, video, film and computer graphics).

From a democratic perspective, importance should be attached to the experience gained in the development projects, which have worked in collaboration with local TV and radio. Wherever possible, collaboration should be set up with local TV and radio so that pupils get the chance to produce for a larger public, which hi turn would enable them to experience first hand the conditions for public media production and an idea of its significance in the democratic process.

Any outline for future media education should also include a media wordshop, with the permanent assistance of one or more teachers with special expertise in media and media education. The media workshop should provide the framework for the use of technical equipment and for teaching, and could, for instance, be established in close connection with the school library.

A recurring theme, in interviews with teachers on the media education of the future, was that teachers felt ill-equipped to teach media, particularly the

electronic media. Teachers have repeatedly pointed out that competent teaching of media studies would require them to have had training in the subject at a qualified level as part of their basic training - that is, in the form of longer courses or specialization. A widespread need for in-service courses has also been emphasized.

CONCLUSION

Future media education must be based on a theoretical and methodical overall understanding of the function, structure and history of the media: an understanding which involves communication and media from the perspective of sender, content and recipient, with an emphasis on the last of these, and with focus on media production and media analysis. Media education in the school should be combined with media education in the local community. Based on the thirty-five media education development projects, the conclusion is that the overall goal of future media education is that the pupils obtain knowledge of the function and role of the mass media; the ability to use the media as a way of expression and a means of communication; and that media education should be defined as basic knowledge along with reading and writing.

At the beginning of this article I indicated that media education has gamed status during the past few years, although the status is not yet formalized in the school systems of all countries. In Denmark many committed teachers have been teaching media for several years, and the evaluation of these development projects point to various models and pedagogical approaches. While there is a great amount of experience regarding media education, media education is not yet compulsory as part of the curriculum in Denmark.

A new education bill is being debated at the present time in Denmark. We do not yet know if the educational decision-makers will continue to regard the media as the enemy to be fought with the book - and only the book - or if they are going to listen to the media education teachers and take into account the findings of the project experiences. We do not yet know if the decision-makers realize that the media education movement, internationally and nationally, is a new kind of grassroots movement that N. F. S. Grundtvig, our national father of pedagogy, would have enjoyed.

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