

„THE USEFUL AND THE STRANGE“ CULTURAL EDUCATION AND THE TRAINING OF APPRENTICES

During their vocational training Austrian apprentices are in general only supplied with vocational knowledge and working skills. Unlike young people of the same age attending secondary school, many of them hardly get the chance to become acquainted with a variety of cultural experiences and to discover their own creative potential.

Taking account of this, the free-lance team "EigenArt/museum" developed in 1989 a pilot project especially designed for the Austrian system of dual apprentice-education (education in the company **and** in the vocational school). The aim was to familiarise the apprentices with a site, which they regard in general as being a strange and odd place - the museum.

After the success of the initial start in the museum, the project then expanded to various other cultural spheres. At the moment there are more than 45 variants of the project-series to be chosen from across Austria. These include: *Monochrome Bleu und Remanenzanker* (a project on pictorial art and the museum), „*Hitfabrik*“ (producing their own songs in a professional sound studio), *Theater & Film* (drama and video), *Farbe - Klang - Bewegung* (painting, music and video), *Bausteine des Lebens* (sculptural expression with clay), *Die ZeitungsmacherInnen* (production of a newspaper, writing articles, editing, printing), *Wahr ist viel mehr* (experiments on sensory perception), *Erzpeditionen* (meeting foreign cultures by preparing and eating their typical food) and so on.

There have been about 3800 apprentices from 1900 companies and 38 vocational schools, as well as 130 cultural workers and mediators participating in the project-series all over Austria. The team „EigenArt/museum“ was awarded the “Ludwig-Sackmayer-prize for arts mediation“ (ATS 50.000,-) for THE USEFUL AND THE STRANGE in 1995.

□ Starting from the reality of work and life of apprentices THE USEFUL AND THE STRANGE intends to initiate a dialogue between them and the cultural workers which will stimulate the creative activity of the apprentices. It is important that all individuals involved in the project are able to exchange their experiences on an equal level (cultural mediation must not be missionary work!). Cultural workers and artists as well as apprentices (and sometimes even their trainers) are equally confronted with the another point of view.

□ The project series has the longterm educational-policy goal to integrate the right of apprentices to enjoy cultural education within the dual educational system.

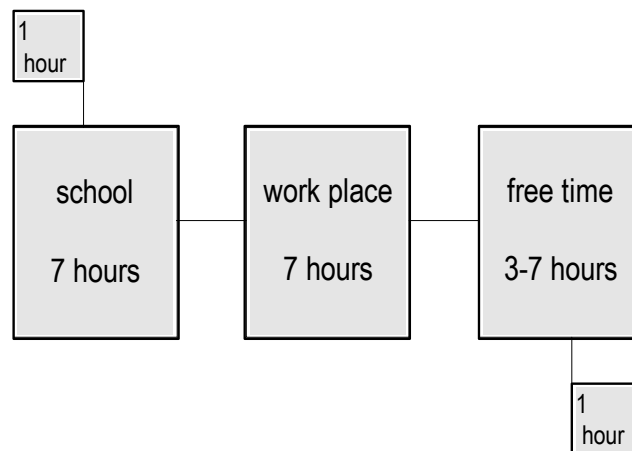
The average costs for one project amount to about ATS 50.000,-. THE USEFUL AND THE STRANGE is organized by the *office for cultural mediation - Büro für Kulturvermittlung* – and funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs to provide free attendance for the apprentices.

Well experienced cultural mediators initiate, organize and supervise the communication process in the projects, which last 3 days each: 1 day from school (all students of the class are included), 1 day from the place of work (sometimes the permission is given rather reluctantly) and 1 day from the free time of the apprentices.

General education and cultural education should be part of the vocational training, which means school and company alike share the responsibility. On the other hand every person is responsible for her/his own education, therefore the third part of the project is taken from the apprentices free time.

Time-table

18 - 23 hours
(in the course of 1- 2 weeks).



Cultural mediation methods applied in the projects are characterized by high personnel intensity emphasizing activity and communication among the participants (that is why the working group size is limited to 9 persons). All variants of projects provide time and space for new ways of encounter to occur. *Cultural mediation* thus means „creating relations“ between different cultural spheres and ways of life, that do not normally meet without assistance in our society. The mediating process pretty often starts with the organization of the projects by contacting the vocational schools and companies where apprentices are trained.

Culture may be a space for the discovery of the non-functional, of the non-utilitarian that is not to be commercialized immediately, of the free imaginative form shaped by creative power, of pure beauty - still *culture* is work as well. Involvement in the project helps apprentices to acquire skills like „social ways of acting“, „team-work capability“, „creativity“ and has, therefore, a further impact on the apprentices that may be essential for their future profession and life.

Available material: a brochure entitled THE USEFUL AND THE STRANGE, flyer, folder, videotapes, different project descriptions as well as a CD „zaubersaft“. The project-series has been evaluated by the University of Klagenfurt (report to be finished shortly).

Contact adress: T.E.A.m, p.A. Dr. Gabriele Stöger, gabriele.stoeger@chello.at

An exemplary process: The project variant “*Monochrome Bleu und Remanenzanker*”^{*)}

As a result of their former experience young people frequently regard the museum as a strange place, especially this can be stated for the museums of modern art. On the other hand apprentices cannot be seen as the favorite target group for museums as well. Usually the institution gets helpless and disturbed finding it difficult to address their range of needs. Works of modern art cannot be judged easily by criteria like „beautiful“ or „true to nature“. Many apprentices in these institutions become silent and discouraged not knowing what to make of the art. During the course of the project new rules are set up: the works of art and their presentation have to stand the apprentice’s questions.

Objects

Objects create the first link between the project-team and the apprentices as well as between the apprentices and the museum. To give an introduction, the team in charge of the project enters the classroom during a lesson and brings along a suitcase containing different objects: a rusty nail, a yesterday’s paper, an old hat, a Rembrandt-reprint, a fossil, a ceramic pot, a plastic duck and so on. The question is asked - which object belongs to the museum, which does not and why? In the opinion of the apprentices the purpose of the museum is to collect what is either old, non-trivial, beautiful or precious, no matter if they are interested in it or not.

Working and leisure time

The projects start from the point where the apprentices are experts: their work and their leisure time: For the first meeting in the museum each of them is asked to bring along one object related to his / her work and one personal object related to their leisure time. These objects represent something familiar and encourage the participants to speak more about themselves and learn more about each other. The apprentices often know very little of their colleagues, as they meet only once a week in the vocational school.

Communication

Where is the Museum of Modern Art situated after all? One day in the project begins for the apprentices with interviewing people in the neighbourhood of the museum to find out if the passers-by know the museum, whether they have been there, which artists they know and so on. The interviews and the following exchange of experiences help to overcome the own prejudice („... *I don’t know the first thing about it ...*“).

To make sure the communication between apprentices, on the one hand, and the cultural mediators and artists, on the other hand, is as intense and balanced as possible in the 3 days course of the project, the working group size is limited to 9 persons.

On the look-out

Many apprentices think that the „*museum is not for me*“. The project-team tries to give them the feeling of being welcome in the museum. The young people are asked to look out for an exhibit that could relate to the personal object each of them brought along. This could be something attractive, something disgusting, something that makes them curious, a thing useful, a thing useless. Searching for an exhibit the apprentices are forced to look accurately. Suddenly the works of art start to correspond with their own images. Each of the chosen exhibits is discussed attentively by the group. As there is no „right“ or „wrong“ answer, the apprentices are encouraged to express their personal thoughts,

Visual perception and body

Instead of being allowed to comprehend this unknown world the museum through all senses, we often only make use of your eyes to see an image of the world. The body feels bored quickly. The participants therefore are asked to act rather than to listen as often as possible. One of the apprentices for example leads his blindfolded colleagues to a museum object he / she has chosen. They sit, their backs turned on the object and start to draw it by following the description given by their colleague. The work of art has to be translated into words and the words are translated into a picture again.

There are other techniques of „reading“ an image employing the body like putting a partner in a position relating to the painting or forming the group into a sculpture „copying“ the picture.

Culture and work

Talking to the museum staff, having a look at the master classes in the academy of arts or visiting an artist's studio, the apprentices find out that both producing and exhibiting art is work professionals have to live on. What is the daily work of a museum guardian or of a curator like? What do the paintings cost and how long does the artist work on a piece?

Feedback

The apprentices are asked to reflect on their experience and to express their opinion. This does not necessarily happen verbally. Remarkable results have been achieved by drawing jointly in the group (as apprentices are often not used to express their thoughts in words, to analyse or to make comments, it is much more effective to use another medium for the feedback).

It must not be expected that at the end of the project they have all turned into experts or admirers of modern art. The way of cooperating, getting attention, much time to talk and to work together and a relaxed atmosphere have the strongest impact. And besides step by step the strange gets less strange and the unknown bears no threat any longer.

“It is up to us, what the future we are going to live in, will be like. We need to know our culture, if we want to live as a human being.” (Gábor Szabó, apprentice)

*) “Monochrome Bleu” is relating to the title of a painting by Yves Klein, made 1961, which is displayed in the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Vienna, “Remanenzanker” is a flexible part containing residual magnetism used in an electric switch gear mechanism.

“Programme K3 – cultural education with trainees / apprentices” three cultural cooperation models in the field of primary vocational training in Austria

During their dual vocational training (which means, companies and schools cooperate in the training) Austrian apprentices are in general only supplied with vocational knowledge and working skills. Unlike young people of the same age attending secondary school, many of them hardly get the chance to become acquainted with a variety of cultural experiences and to discover their own creative potential. Therefore “programme K3” - a special project series based on the experiences of more than 400 single projects since its start in 1989 - was evolved to support the development of interactive communication project prototypes in the field of primary vocational training. Nowadays “KulturKontakt Austria” initiates around 50 new individual projects per year within various cultural aspects.

There are three types of **cooperation models**:

- shorttime-modul: Four-hour short units as a cultural education offer for vocational schools or company training workshops
- leisuretime-modul: flexibly-timed leisure offers for apprentices/trainees in students’ homes at vocational schools
- longtime-modul: Two- to three day projects for apprentices/trainees of a vocational school class or company training workshop

In the center of each of this models stands one aspect: Starting from the reality of work and life of the apprentices/trainees “programme K3” intends to initiate a dialogue between them and cultural workers or artists which will stimulate the creative activity of the apprentices. It is important that all individuals involved in the project are able to exchange their experiences on an equal level (cultural education must not be missionary work!).

Goals:

- Exchanges with arts professionals
- Promoting individual creative activity
- Further development of key qualifications

Whether the apprentices are texting lines for a song, whether they take a gestus from their all day working life to develop a whole theater-scene, or whether they get in touch with museums by the using of modern methods of “arts and education” - one point is similar in all the different project types: they produce room and space for new forms of meetings between people, which usually would not interact in their daily cultural routine. And: this project type makes it possible for the young people, to get to know soft skills as “teamworking”, “creativity”, or “self awareness”, which are getting increasing importance in allday vocational life!

Contact:

KulturKontakt Austria
project manager: Roman Schanner
Universitätsstraße 5
1010 Vienna
Austria
Tel. ++43/1/523 87 65-37
Mail: roman.schanner@kulturkontakt.or.at