



Pop Up Lab 2017

A Transbook Conference

10/11

2017



PETERBOROUGH, ENGLAND
Peterborough Central Library

BROADENING THE DISCUSSION ON NEW MEDIATION PRACTICES:

On 10 November 2017, the team at Pop Up (a non-profit cultural organisation based in Peterborough, UK) hosted education and cultural mediation professionals to discuss creative ways of encouraging children to read and what role visual narration can play in this learning process.

Dylan Calder de Pop Up - pop-up.org.uk, ENGLAND
Sam Arthur de Nobrow - nobrow.net, ENGLAND
Gerhard Jäger de Art Basic fo Children - abc-web.be, BELGIUM



“Visual narration is essential to discovering literature . Image-based narration is the most inclusive form of reading and writing. It is both complex and accessible: children at all levels can read and tell a visual story”

THE SUPPOSED PRE-EMINENCE OF TEXT OVER IMAGES :

Sometimes pictures speak louder than words. Tutors, teachers, activity leaders – everyone is aware of how important visual impact is for messages aimed at students. Despite this, text has traditionally taken precedence over images in the learning process and this has been recognised for years. To better explore this imbalance and determine whether it is justified, Pop Up organisers chose an intentionally provocative postulate: “visual narration is essential to discovering literature”.

Dylan Calder, Pop Up director and festival organiser, provided context for this choice. “Image-based narration is the most inclusive form of reading and writing. It is both complex and accessible: children at all levels can read and tell a visual story”. In his view, visual stories are a way to create narrative sequences using images. A single image can contain an entire story.

One of the main questions examined during the event was the role of the comic strip at school. For Dylan Calder, comic strips are still too often considered a sub-culture in educational environments. But comic strips can be complex and challenging works. It is a medium that allows a story to be worked on and expanded to then be deconstructed. It is a perfect laboratory in which to study the different stages of a story and understand how to tell a tale while re-inventing the traditional story arc structure (introduction, rising action, conclusion). In addition to its visual component, a comic strip is also an exercise in writing and in no way can be considered a lesser form of literature.

IMAGE AS A VECTOR OF TRANSMISSION

Should images be put front and centre? This idea was the central force behind the creation of “Alpha: Abijan – Gare du Nord,” a best-seller by Bessora and Barroux. The script writer for this project, who attended the first Pop-Up Lab, told the audience how this illustrated book came into being. In her view, it is important to “provide breathing room in a text, and give an illustrator a chance to express him or herself.” She finds it necessary to hand

over her story completely to Barroux, her illustrator. They have presented the book in several countries, an experience which showed them how a story can be understood through pictures. Certain ideas and feelings in the book are so universal that every culture perceives them, even when they are expressed solely as images.

This notion was further discussed by Asa Alfasi, a young English-Libyan actress who works with Positive Negatives. This association uses educational comic strips inspired by real stories to explore a range of international, geopolitical and social issues. This medium was chosen for its ability to express the extreme seriousness of certain situations while protecting children from their sometimes shocking nature.

For Delaram Ghanimifard, comic strips are an excellent way to share a cultural aesthetic. He himself discovered Anglo-American lifestyles through the comics he read when he was younger. Through his work with Tiny Owl, a UK publisher specialised in Iranian work, he helps young British readers discover different cultures.

REINVENTING THE VISUAL NARRATION EXPERIENCE AT SCHOOL :

Incorporating images into the learning process can be done in as many ways as there are teachers. The task can be made easier by overcoming traditional barriers: a lack of time, of resources, and guidance. Faced with a substantial academic programme and scepticism from certain colleagues, many teachers feel unable to venture into more creative teaching approaches. Many teachers and parents lack confidence in their ability to teach creative subjects, and as a result do not defend image-based education. This is where professionals in the world of children’s literature can help. Illustration is not only a matter of aesthetics: it is first and foremost a question of communication. Beyond the drawing itself, the message it conveys is most important. de littérature.

The team at Pop Up wanted to invite teachers, cultural mediators and children’s literature professionals to the same table to discuss ways of promoting the potential of image-based education at school. One approach is to invite authors and illustrators into classrooms to show students and teachers alike how writing and the visual narration

process develops. In terms of resources, students need high-quality illustrated books from all horizons to be inspired and develop their imagination. These initiatives may look rudimentary, but they are indispensable to stimulating interest in students and helping them overcome the barriers which sometimes prevent them from developing their artistic skills.

The first edition of Pop Up was globally a success. Though questioning creative educational practices in Britain remains a challenge, the event was well appreciated by participants, 94% of whom said they had learned something in the different sessions. Better yet, 100% of the teachers in attendance confirmed that they would use one or more of the discussed methods with their students. One outcome of the event was the drafting of a manifesto listing a dozen focal points. It will serve as a foundation for the development of a full-blown educational philosophy promoting visual narration education at school.



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Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union