The AIR project involving Eboman was inspired by the doctoral research of AHK lecturer Emiel Heijnen into changing artistic strategies among young people and artists. Heijnen explores contemporary informal and professional art production and the possibilities it opens up for education in the arts, particularly the visual arts.

Artistic strategies in the network society

By Emiel Heijnen

What is happening in professional art practice? What are my students interested in? What are the latest theories on learning and teaching? One could argue that these are the three essential and recurring questions to which every art teacher should find answers. Over the course of my four-year research project I have focused primarily on tackling the first two questions, working within the theoretical frameworks of authentic art education – a framework that I have previously discussed in this column. Authentic art education was introduced to the Netherlands in 2001 by Folkert Haanstra. Emerging from a socio-constructivist theory of learning, authentic art education sets the founding belief that art education is put to its best advantage in complex, lifelike learning situations that connect to students’ experience and to utilise various skills. Furthermore, online networks make it possible to interact and cooperate with people all over the world. Traditional art education is usually based on individual development and one-to-one teacher-student relationships. There is little opportunity for cooperation and interaction with others.

THE ERA OF THE ARTIST AS A LONE GENIUS HAS PASSED

In my follow-up research I will further develop the theory of authentic art into a didactical model that art teachers will be able to use to underpin and structure their teaching practice. The practical testing of the model will take place in the context of a design-based study involving international art teachers joining the Remía Culture summer school. Teachers attending the summer school use the didactical model to develop a series of lessons that they will subsequently be able to use to underpin and structure their teaching practice. The empirical studies of these practical applications will be used to finalise the didactical model and its effectiveness.

Emiel Heijnen is teacher and researcher at the Amsterdam School of the Arts. Currently he works on a PhD at the Radboud University.

José Antonio Vega Macotela: Time Exchange

I interviewed Mexican artist José Antonio Vega Macotela in 2012. Between 2006 and 2010, he realised his project Time Exchange in collaboration with inmates of the Santa Marta Acuña prison in Mexico City. The project consists of extensive documentation of objects, drawings and photos. This photo shows a prisoner who Macotela asked to mark each scar on his body with an explanation of its origins. In return Macotela attended the birthday of the prisoner’s mother.

stimulate interdisciplinary production

Young people and artists alike often mix a variety of media and art disciplines to express themselves. The rise of easily accessible multimedia technology has made a huge contribution to this development and stimulates the potential for merging existing art disciplines. Traditional art education is often presented in the form of mono-disciplinary, ‘analogue’ subjects such as drawing and handicrafts. This offers few opportunities for interdisciplinarity.

Encourage collaborative production as well as online and off-line interaction with people outside the classroom

The era of the artist as a lone genius has passed – if indeed it ever truly existed. Artists and young people alike use networks and collaborative productions to share expertise and experiences and to utilise various skills. Furthermore, online networks make it possible to interact and cooperate with people all over the world. Traditional art education is usually based on individual development and one-to-one teacher-student relationships. There is little opportunity for cooperation and interaction with others.

Encourage students to establish meaningful connections between professional art, popular culture and real-world and global issues

Young people develop expertise and artistic proficiency based on specific areas of interest derived from popular culture. Their cultural production is not aimed solely at artistic development; it is fuelled by an urge to communicate or to explore certain problems or interests. This broad approach is also evident among many contemporary artists who examine social issues through their work. It is possible to create an individually significant learning path for students by allowing them to respond in their work to topical issues (whether remote or close at hand), and to acquire inspiration from both popular culture and ‘high’ art. In traditional art education, learning is mostly focused on ‘high’ art, popular culture and personal reflection on social issues are generally viewed as less relevant.

The mastery of analogue and digital techniques is instrumental rather than a goal in itself

Technical skills increase the potential for creative expression. However, young people and artists generally learn these techniques as part of the creative process, driven by the urge to make meaningful work. The learning of a technique is very rarely a goal in itself. Traditional art education often embarks from the isolated acquisition of techniques and skills, with students only experimenting with creating personally meaningful work in later years.

Sharing, copying and remixing are seen as artistic processes

Art critic Claire Bishop points to selection as a key activity in contemporary image production. The search for and recycling of existing imagery and audio material plays an important role in the practices of contemporary artists, and it is also a prominent feature in the informal artistic production by young people and amateurs. The availability of the Internet (the archive and digital technology (samples and remix tools) are important stimuli for these developments. In traditional art education, the recycling of existing imagery is often discouraged because students are required to think of ‘something original’.

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IvE.S-One: Michael Jackson

IvE.S-One is a street artist from Amsterdam. I interviewed him in 2011. He has never studied art, but learned everything as part of the graffiti scene. In 2009 he was planning to make a stencil of Michael Jackson holding hands with a small boy. When Jackson suddenly died, IvE.S-One decided not to use this critical image but to honour him through a stencil of the young Michael. This image received a great deal of publicity and still appears in the public space of Amsterdam.