

Ben Bachmair, 2011

T-shirt images: A scenario for learners at a distance to formal education

The workshop discussed in this section was aimed at a group of learners at a distance to formal education about to rejoin formal education in a college for young people aged between 16 and 20. The course focused on media design for students categorized as *Not in Education, Employment or Training* (NEET). The intention was to give participants the opportunity to gain a new and positive understanding of learning in the context of formal education. The *key to success* for such a new and positive understanding was considered to be to harness learning in school with the experiences of informal learning of participants in everyday life. The mechanism to achieve this was the mobile phone, which we consider to be a normalized cultural resource of everyday life of young people. By means of the mobile phone, participants can bring elements of their informal learning into formal education contexts.

The initial 2-day course began with an investigation of the college through the students' personal mobile phone. Students worked in groups. After the investigation, the teacher gave an introduction to the presentation software Prezi in the computer lab of the college. The students subsequently worked on a Prezi presentation of their photo investigation of the college. At the end of the second day the student groups were asked to present their results to the class. The teacher invited them to bring in other material from outside of the school, e.g. from the internet or from at home. Whilst working on the Prezi presentation, the students selected one image, a photo taken during the investigation of the school or brought in from outside of the school. This image was printed on a t-shirt. The obvious reason for the t-shirt was to show the student's personal identity by means of the selected image within the social unit of the new class. The social unit in turn was represented by there being a t-shirt for everybody. A second, didactic reason was to make visible the context in which the students stood in relation to the new college environment. Thirdly, the intention was for specific resources in the students' contexts to become visible, especially for the teacher.



Figure 5: The new class at the beginning of the one-year course with their t-shirts, which indicate communality and individuality

At face value, the different images signalize individuality; a second viewing, however, shows a variety of contexts, resources in contexts and accesses to contexts. The resources presented and the routes of access to the selected contexts are relevant, because they are part of individual students' self-presentation as part of their learning habitus.

The t-shirt images shown in Figure 6 originate from the investigation of the college. They are a result of the students' perspective of the college. The photos appear as still lifes, which convey an important message for these students, namely to see the college from the perspective of young artists. The images are not about teaching, learning or assessment but convey interests around media design. Furthermore, these four images give the impression of the students as people with a professional-orientation, not as beginners but as experts. The bearer of the t-shirt invites themselves to be addressed professionally not as unmotivated young person or as an outsider.



Figure 6: Images of the school in the style of artistic still lifes: a calm garden environment with bench and tree; details of the floor from the art studio; mannequins from the fashion department; toilet sign

The other implicit contexts in evidence, not depicted here, also carry messages about context relationships, which are of high relevance to the teacher, mainly: as media experts we are interested in media design. The students don't need extrinsic motivation, but professional equipment with reference to internet design, to social media within a professional context of fine arts and design. They expect, of course on a low level of awareness, a context for design and communication with media practitioners and it is important for students not to be patronised. Their t-shirts problematized the following themes:

- entertainment media: one t-shirt displays the faces of the two protagonists of a manga cartoon for young people, *L vs. Kira*. The girl who chose this image portrays herself as a media specialist. In so doing she refers to the media design focus of her course but with clear reference to media and design styles outside of school.
- internet and social media: one student presents himself as a dancer on a photo which he had downloaded from his Facebook site. A girl wears the well-designed characters MEHR on her t-shirt, another a stylish and also well-designed combination of faces and characters, one boy chose a photo of a fashion model. Perfection in the use of the internet and a world of design are the messages here.
- at home, family and peers: one t-shirt features photos with friends having a good time. The style is that of a photo album. The girl who wore this image on her t-shirt was probably looking for a familiar context with peers within the college context.
- national origin: one young man featured his national colour on his t-shirt; perhaps it carried the meaning of being politically aware as a migrant.