



Video library

Video production

The language problem

When in the spring of 2005 a number of sequences filmed by several partners on the topic of “Values in Lessons” were available, it became increasingly obvious that a filmed discussion, whose basis is language and argumentation, was comprehensible only to a minority.

Consequently subtitles, either in German or English, or in some cases in both, were added to the videos. These however allowed audiences to follow only the gist of the debate, nuances remaining buried if the language of the pupils was unfamiliar.

In the course of the Conference in Bierun (April 2005) further solutions to the language problem were therefore sought. If the videos require subtitles in order to be understood, then these should be added to the succession of images in all languages spoken within the Network. This would

- be a fundamental space problem
- demand the presence, during work on the video, of partners whose languages are uncommon, and
- would finally prove laborious, through selection of the appropriate texts from among 10 languages.

For this reason, the Network partners decided that language should as far as possible play no role at all in the production of further film sequences, communication of essential content taking place in the main via the images themselves.

This approach provided satisfactory results in only a number of cases, such as in the depiction of values like

- love
- honesty
- respect
- readiness to help.

With more abstract values such as

- justice
- equality
- freedom

it proved difficult to make out conclusively which particular values the video sequences portrayed.

It was therefore decided to provide audiences with a degree of anticipation at the start of a fresh stretch of video, by means of a symbol or caption, to set viewers on the desired path as regards interpreting the images that then follow.

Examples of such symbols, some of which were created during art lessons at a number of partner schools, can be found in the Images Archive.

Yet even symbols may sometimes be ambiguous. There was, for example, discussion among the partners as to whether a police officer can serve as a suitable symbol of the value “Security”. In countries in which corruption among the police force is known to be prevalent, a police uniform may well not evoke associations of “Security”.

At the COMCULT Conference in Sofia (October 2005) the problems of encoding abstract concepts in illustrative motifs were again discussed. Around the turn of the year 2005/2006 – particularly during discussions regarding the provision of a path for guidance through the video film – it became increasingly obvious that certain values are more easily accessible to audiences for the understanding of particular scenes if given as words in print.

Multilingualism was technically achieved through the fading in and out of values in a variety of languages. But even this approach is not totally free of a degree of fuzziness, as the values, when reduced to mere verbal symbols, may not denote the same in all languages. It is also by no means certain whether a value in a particular language may have attained negative connotations, such as “tolerance” in the Netherlands, which is now equated with “ignorance”. Or “Toleranz”, standing without further context in German, may denote a passive attitude implying indifferent sufferance or forbearance, or it may signify a positive, active affirmation of singularity or uncommonness. In some instances however, specific video sequences make non-ambiguous statements in combination with particular values.

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