

Wioletta Kwiatkowska

ORCID: 0000-0001-8374-1370

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland

Małgorzata Skibińska

ORCID: 0000-0001-8972-7529

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland

Kamila Majewska

ORCID: 0000-0003-3513-4503

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland

Cultural Animation in Educational Practice: Selected Activities for Students of Primary Schools in Toruń

Animacja kulturalna w praktyce edukacyjnej –
wybrane działania na rzecz uczniów toruńskich
szkół podstawowych

ABSTRACT

This article is devoted to the issue of cultural animation in educational practice. The authors share their experiences in the field of animation of educational activities for regional and global education of students of primary schools in Toruń during workshops carried out as part of the Toruń Science and Art Festival. The active and committed attitude of the participants in the classes was intensified by information and communication technologies constituting a specific transmission channel of the cultural components and elements of nature. The aim of the presented text is to popularize initiatives that stimulate socio-cultural and educational activity of citizens confronted with the emerging civilizational challenges of the 21st century.

KEYWORDS

animation, cultural
animation, socio-cultural
animation, information
and communication
technology

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

animacja, animacja
kulturalna, animacja
społeczno-kulturalna,
technologia informacyj-
no-komunikacyjna

SPI Vol. 21, 2018/3

ISSN 2450-5358

e-ISSN 2450-5366

DOI: 10.12775/SPI.2018.3.008

Submitted: 23.08.2018

Accepted: 09.10.2018

ABSTRAKT

Niniejszy artykuł poświęcony jest zagadnieniu animacji kulturalnej w praktyce edukacyjnej. Autorki tekstu dzielą się swoimi doświadczeniami w zakresie animacji działań edukacyjnych na rzecz edukacji regionalnej i globalnej uczniów toruńskich szkół podstawowych zdobytymi podczas warsztatów realizowanych w ramach Toruńskiego Festiwalu Nauki i Sztuki. Aktywną i zaangażowaną postawę uczestników zajęć potęgowały technologie informacyjno-komunikacyjne stanowiące swoisty kanał transmisyjny składników kultury i elementów przyrody. Celem prezentowanego tekstu jest popularyzacja inicjatyw pobudzających aktywność społeczno-kulturalną i edukacyjną współczesnych obywateli w obliczu pojawiających się wyzwań cywilizacyjnych.

Introduction

The unambiguous definition of the term “cultural animation” carries with it a certain difficulty due to the multitude of aspects and the variety of approaches in the light of which it is considered. The practical nature of the animation, as well as the various factors that make up its image, mean that elements within the definition include elements from: sociology, ethnology, ethnography, psychology, and art. The word “animation” itself derives from the Latin *anima* (soul) and *animo* (to enliven). In English, the verb “to animate” means “to give life, inspire, encourage, motivate.”¹ According to the definition from Wincenty Okoń’s *New pedagogical dictionary*, animation should be understood as “stimulation, encouragement, or support of a person or group in working on oneself or on solving some tasks.”²

It is worth noting that there is no specific date that could mark the birth of the term “cultural animation.” The first mentions of the subject date to the 1940s, when in France works on *animateur*—a person who stimulates to action—began to appear. The development in the field was associated with the fact of growing interest

¹ “Animate,” in: Dictionary.com, <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/animate?s=t>> (access: 15.06.2018).

² W. Okoń, *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny*, Warszawa 1996, pp. 20–21.

in the idea of participating in culture and promoting cultural actions and activities among wealthy classes.³ Parallel to the aforementioned group, as Wiesław Żardecki emphasizes, the community of people “culturally passive, unable to actively participate in the production of real cultural values; capable of only inertially acquiring the values developed by others and adapted to receive”⁴ developed.

With time, a conviction began to spread that the inclusion of cultural elements in the lives of citizens may result in the increase of its quality as well as general satisfaction. As a result, it became popular to make cultural products available to a wider audience.

The main purpose of the animation is to stimulate and develop creativity, interpersonal communication skills, cooperation and active participation in activities.⁵ Eduard Limbos in one of his books indicates, that: “the animation consists in breathing the soul, sense in a group, community, society and inducing a revival and activity. Animation is definitely oriented towards the future, towards changing people, groups and structures. There are no ‘animators’ on the one hand and ‘animated’—on the other: animation is done together.”⁶

When talking about animation, it is worth remembering the social and cultural aspects as well. As a consequence, many authors consider it more correct to speak about social animation, cultural, culture or socio-cultural animation than about animation itself. Many of them consequently use these terms interchangeably. Józef Kargul, however, points to factors that differentiate cultural animation from socio-cultural animation.⁷

³ B. Jedlewska, *Animatorzy kultury wobec wyzwań edukacyjnych*, Lublin 1999, p. 53.

⁴ W. Żardecki, “Dylematy przemian animacji kulturalnej w perspektywie historycznej,” in: *Dylematy animacji kulturalnej*, eds. J. Gajda, W. Żardecki, Lublin 2001, p. 64.

⁵ K.J. Szmidt, “Problemy twórczości pomocy w tworzeniu w teorii działalności kulturalno-oświatowej i animacji społeczno-kulturalnej,” in: *Akademickie kształcenie animatorów i menadżerów kultury w Polsce: koncepcje, doświadczenia, wyzwania*, ed. B. Jedlewska, Lublin 2006, p. 87.

⁶ É. Limbos, *Animation des groupes de culture et de loisirs. Connaissance du problème et applications pratiques*, Paris 1977. Cited in: M. Kopczyńska, *Animacja społeczno-kulturalna*, Warszawa 1993, p. 37.

⁷ J. Kargul, *Od upowszechnienia kultury do animacji kulturalnej*, Toruń 1997, pp. 104–105.

Barbara Jadlewska understands direction, form, process and method of action under the concept of cultural animation.⁸ Social animation is connected with the phenomenon of participation and mutual activation with the use of social and cultural potential. In the case of social animation, the importance of the presence of an animator within the environment, excluding his role as the main mentor, is emphasized.⁹ Meanwhile, socio-cultural animation is understood as:

a cultural education method. It is a way of influencing the education and training of individuals, groups and communities (societies) through culture and into culture in its broad sense. It involves the use of a series of treatments that release creative potentials, stimulate and motivate creative activities that integrate people with each other, and with the surrounding world (products of culture, nature), supporting spiritual development, self-creation, stimulating cognitive curiosity and the need to create culture (local, national, global), supporting and promoting cultural and social activity.¹⁰

According to Kargul, socio-cultural animation has enormous stimulating and motivating power, enabling transformations, changes of economic, social and cultural character, which may facilitate harmonious development at all levels of life.¹¹ In one of his works, Aleksander Kobylarek calls for the socio-cultural animation and the activation of local communities not to be identified with each other. Although they may seem synonymous, “but it would be too simplistic, considering that the activation of local communities was usually associated with pro-social activity, whereas animation with the organization of amateur artistic movement and the promotion of culture.”¹²

⁸ B. Jedlewska, *Animatorzy kultury wobec wyzwań edukacyjnych*, op. cit., pp. 136–137.

⁹ J. Klimczak-Ziółek, “Animacja społeczna w teorii i praktyce. Wybrane zagadnienia,” in: *Praca socjalna wobec współczesnych problemów społecznych*, ed. S. Pawlas-Czyż, Toruń 2007, p. 87.

¹⁰ B. Jedlewska, *Animatorzy kultury wobec wyzwań edukacyjnych*, op. cit., p. 173.

¹¹ J. Kargul, *Od upowszechnienia kultury do animacji kulturalnej*, op. cit., pp. 104–105.

¹² A. Kobylarek, “Animacja społeczno-kulturalna jako metoda aktywizacji środowiska lokalnego. Techniki animacji,” in: *Tworzyć, zmieniać, aktywizować... Animacja społeczno-kulturalna jako mobilizowanie potencjału indywidualnego i przeciwdziałanie bezradności społecznej*, ed. E. Zierkiewicz, Wrocław 2006, p. 35.

According to the comments of Bogdan Idzikowski, the cultural animation should be oriented to the creative activity of the individual, because culture is “not so much a collection of social products as a culture of individuality—emancipated and reinvented entities.”¹³ In addition, especially among representatives of social sciences, it is emphasized that the activities undertaken as part of cultural animation are shaped by ambitious individuals, capable of self-education and personal development, prepared to express “own views, convictions and attitudes consistent with the accepted ideals, and thus above all shaping the character and the moral side of personality.”¹⁴

Animation models

Due to the dominant factors and forms of implementation, animation is given different names. The literature of the subject (especially foreign) mainly distinguishes between three basic models of animation:

- Creative and expressive animation, as part of which the animators encourage and help the participants to devote themselves to the propagated activities, for example designing objects, creating music, sports or other activities aimed at playing, as well as learning. The above form is mainly attributed to communities, youth groups, schools, etc. Currently, it is increasingly used by people involved in artistic education.
- Socio-cultural animation, in which animators motivate communities to act and manage them. In the above case animation is a stimulus to full life in a given area (emotional, mental and physical). The result of the above activities is a gradual, ever stronger involvement of the participants in the activity, which ensures a higher level of self-realization, openness, and also merges social groups. Socio-cultural animation stimulates individual and group development of local communities.

¹³ B. Idzikowski, “Teoria i praktyka animacji kultury w czasach ponowoczesnych,” in: *Animacja kultury. Współczesne dyskursy teorii i praktyki*, eds. D. Kubinowski, U. Lewartowicz, Lublin 2013, p. 44.

¹⁴ M. Dudzikowa, *Praca młodzieży nad sobą. Z teorii i praktyki*, Warszawa 1993, pp. 11–12.

- Free time animation, which is related to the development of children in pre-school and school age. It is implemented by undertaking mental and physical activity, inter alia, in playgrounds, in dayrooms, during sports activities. This form can be identified with work through play and adventure. Free time animation is often practiced in hotels, recreational or tourist areas.¹⁵

Regardless of the aspects highlighted in the context of animation, one thing is important—it facilitates the merging of communities, the development of individuals and entire communities. It strengthens dialogue as well as integration in the group. Thanks to it, people begin to share knowledge, skills and values, but also to learn and use mutual activities. The benefits of animation include, among others “on supporting and helping existing organized groups in the local community or (and) creating new ones that will actively participate in the life of the community.”¹⁶

It is also worth emphasizing that animation (especially its social form), thanks to bottom-up initiatives and the involvement of local groups, plays a significant role in the process of building a civil society as well as democracy.¹⁷

Creative and expressive animation and free time animation activities were attended by children participating in workshops organized by the employees of the Department of Didactics and Media in Education as part of the Toruń Science and Art Festival (2017 and 2018). It enabled the reception of cultural components and elements of nature and their remixing with the use of information and communication technology tools in the form of interesting artistic works. All activities took the form of learning through play.

¹⁵ M.K. Smith, “Animateurs, Animation and Fostering Learning and Change,” in: *The Encyclopaedia of Informal Education*, <www.infed.org/mobi/animateurs-animation-learning-and-change> (access: 15.06.2018).

¹⁶ P. Łukasiak, P. Rokicka, *Zintegrowana animacja społeczna na rzecz dobra wspólnego: społeczności lokalne a społeczności wirtualne*, <http://www.lokalne-partnerstwa.org.pl/file/fm/BiBLiOTEKA/manuale/Zintegrowana_animacja_spoleczna.pdf> (access: 15.06.2018).

¹⁷ D. Ilczuk, *Polityka kulturalna w społeczeństwie obywatelskim*, Kraków 2002, p. 27.

2. Examples of animation activities for students

Activity 1: Quite reasonable stories

Bearing in mind the importance of educational activities for the local environment, academic teachers should feel obliged to actively initiate and animate the activity of people of all ages. Because animation:

releases the creative activity of the subject, brings out the potential in individuals and groups, strengthens the attitudes of creation, supports the involvement of entities in their independent creation of individual and collective strategies of their own lives, develops the creativity of the individual and introduces them to the process of seeking solutions in conditions of fast moving changes.¹⁸

So what can we do to make educational animation successful? The authors of this text believe that Krystyna Dachtera's statement may be extremely valuable and useful:

stimulate to activity, strengthen my motivation for effort, create a favourable, safe atmosphere, show me the way, give me methods and techniques, release creative attitudes, interest and encourage, never force, let me believe in myself and see myself among others, guarantee diversity, because only it gives a sense of attractiveness and resists boredom, eliminate competition for cooperation and collaboration.¹⁹

Undoubtedly, the animation initiative should be well thought out and planned, with the determination of the main educational goals, the place, the division of tasks and responsibilities, the gathering of helpful materials, devices, the choice of work techniques or the decision of their full freedom.

In the surrounding academic space, lecturers work on an everyday basis with adults, so contact with students at a younger age is quite a challenge and a completely different professional experience. An opportunity for this has been the Toruń Festival of Science and Arts for several years, as part of which are organized educational events for the benefit of the inhabitants of Toruń and the region. The employees

¹⁸ A. Schindler, "Czym jest animacja społeczno-kulturalna?" in: *Konteksty animacji społeczno-kulturalnej*, ed. K. Hrycyk, Wrocław 2004, p. 35.

¹⁹ K. Dachtera, "W kręgu pedagogiki zabawy," in: *Konteksty animacji społeczno-kulturalnej*, ed. K. Hrycyk, Wrocław 2004, p. 123.

of Toruń universities, including, of course, the Nicolaus Copernicus University, have active participation in this project, along with local enterprises and institutions that apply scientific achievements or activities related to art in their work. Such initiatives contribute to the restoration of the importance of scientific environmental activities in public awareness.

In April 2017, as part of the 17th Toruń Festival of Science and Art, a workshop entitled “Quite reasonable stories—picture comic” took place at the Faculty of Pedagogical Sciences of the Nicolaus Copernicus University. Participants learned interesting legends related to the Vistula River, e.g.: “How the name of Toruń was created,” “The Braid of Princess Vistula,” “The Legend of the Vistula.” They also learned to create picture stories in the form of comics. Each participant had a task to illustrate the chosen legend in the online Toondoo application (<http://www.toondoo.com>). In their works, the students made a kind of reconstruction, combining tradition with the present and thus preserving historical events as well as places and figures (true and fantastic). It is the legends that approximate the history of the region and teach proper attitudes and behaviours. Using information and communication technologies, they introduce participants to the world of fantasy and communing with the written and spoken word as well as text and multimedia image. As extra-curricular and voluntary activities, they favour the development of new knowledge and skills as well as the potential of young people.

The employees of the Department of Didactics and Media in Education of the Faculty of Pedagogical Sciences of the Nicolaus Copernicus University joined the preparation and implementation of this undertaking. It was rapidly apparent that working with students requires a lot of attention, full commitment and humour.

The use of modern information and communication technologies in the design of cognitive and social activity of learners has many benefits. In the case of the workshops, the students had the opportunity to show their own creative idea in the field of creating characters, storylines, dialogues, reflections on the chosen legend. It was also an opportunity to identify with the local community, place of residence, its culture and tradition. Many students during the work on the tasks revealed their passions, abilities, skills and talents. School teachers had the opportunity to have a different look at their students, get to

know each other better, and get inspired to do similar activities and methods of work.

The experiences that accompanied them, particularly the sense of openness and creative joy, was even felt by the teachers and school teachers who watched and supported the activities of the students. The meeting was accompanied by satisfaction with the implementation of our own idea and commitment to the creation process.

Events proposed by the employees of the Department of Education and Media in Education in the Faculty of Pedagogical Sciences of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń are becoming more and more popular among children and youth from schools in Toruń and are part of the tradition of the Toruń Science and Art Festival.

Activity 2: Around the world in 60 minutes

According to Barbara Jedlewska, the essence of animation is a specific way of interaction which aims to raise and educate individuals and communities through and into culture by means of a series of stimulating and motivating actions, activities of a developmental and creative nature, and at the same time integrating people with each other, and with the world around them. Integration, communication with cultural products and elements of nature should support and promote personal development as well as cultural and social activity.²⁰

The method of impact on the individual described above guided the authors of the article during methodological planning and organization of educational activities as part of the 18th Toruń Science and Art Festival. The goal set by the organizers of the Festival for themselves—Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, the City Office of Toruń and the Scientific Society in Toruń—is to popularize science as well as art among the inhabitants of Toruń and the region.²¹

On April 21, 2018, at the Faculty of Pedagogical Sciences at the Nicolaus Copernicus University, another workshop entitled “Around the world in 60 minutes” took place, where students of the second

²⁰ See B. Jedlewska, *Animatorzy kultury wobec wyzwań edukacyjnych*, op. cit., p. 53.

²¹ “Cele festiwalu,” in: *19. Toruński Festiwal Nauki i Sztuki. 24–28.04.2019*, <<https://www.festiwal.torun.pl/festiwal/cele/>> (access: 20.04.2018).

class of one of Toruń primary schools, under the guidance of the authors of the article, had the opportunity to learn about places inaccessible due to spacetime restrictions. Each student made a virtual journey around the world, getting to know new places, different times, various elements of nature and culture through webcams. Students planned their journeys on their own, guided by their own interests. The effect of the virtual journey, which participants of the class had, were personally created postcards and multimedia travel diaries.

The methodology of the described classes was based mainly on information and communication techniques, which Ezequiel Ander-Egg classifies into one of four groups of socio-cultural animation techniques. Information and communication techniques are divided into three categories:

- oral communication techniques: in a typical form, like: discussion, conference, conversation, or a special kind, such as: panel, symposium, “round table”, seminar;
- expositions: events involving visual means used to convey a message addressed to a certain group of people; showing a cultural product, fact, phenomenon, problem or situation. It is about displaying a certain fragment of reality, to draw attention to its existence or to the existence of a problem closely related to it;
- mass communication techniques: information is often given in graphic form, with the participation of text. The difference in relation to the expositions is that the addressees are all potential recipients. It is a kind of symbolic language, consisting of words, forms, space, colour. They may also be in the “written” form (with the participation of magazines, leaflets, graphics, bulletins or posters) or oral (with the use of magnetic tapes, megaphones, consultants) and not only audio-visual.²²

Such a selection of cultural animation techniques seemed obvious due to the natural and positive attitude of children towards the media, which intensifies their level of engagement and cognitive

²² E. Ander-Egg, *Metodología y práctica de la animación sociocultural*, Madrid 2000. Cited after: A. Kobylarek, “Animacja społeczno-kulturalna jako metoda aktywizacji środowiska lokalnego. Techniki animacji,” in: *Tworzyć, zmieniać, aktywizować... Animacja społeczno-kulturalna jako mobilizowanie potencjału indywidualnego i przeciwdziałanie bezradności społecznej*, op. cit., pp. 35–47.

processes during educational activities. The workshops were divided into three stages: exploration, interpretation and creation.

Exploration

In the first part of the course, students worked independently by exploring the Internet resources based on the exposure of video material available via web cameras in three thematic categories: Poland, World, Animals. Based on the list of available webcams enabling live broadcasts, little travellers chose places for their virtual journey, in which they observed elements of animate and inanimate nature as well as various elements of human material culture. At the same time, the virtual journey was an opportunity to experience various diurnal periods and atmospheric conditions resulting from differences associated with different time and climate zones around the world.

Interpretation

After the expressive excitement of the virtual journey, the students pointed out some of the most interesting places visited from their point of view. The next task was to create a multimedia travel diary. Using the previously prepared multimedia presentation template, the students together with the teachers made a summary of the trip and interpretation in the field of similarities and differences of the observed places with their native, everyday spacetime. Each of the travellers defined the observed place in terms of elements of nature, elements of culture, weather conditions and time of day. At the same time, the children tried to verbalize the different and common features of “other” and “their” places. The summary of the journal entry was justifying their chosen location.

Creation

The aim of the last stage of the workshop was to activate the creative attitude of students using information technology tools. Adopting Jan Narowski’s narrow definition of creativity, understood as an “experiential-realization process subordinated to the product, while the product being created in this process is something relatively permanent, existing subjectively, new and valuable”²³ a task was planned

²³ J. Zborowski, *Rozwijanie aktywności twórczej dzieci*, Warszawa 1986, p. 20.

for the participants of the class. It involved designing and making a photo collage in the form of a travel card. Not only did the students select places, pictures of which were to be shown on the cards, on their own, but also, after the previous screening, they acquired selected frames from the video stream transmitted via webcams. Each collage is provided with an original entry relating to the personal impressions from the virtual journey. All cards were created using the Canva website (<https://www.canva.com>).

The workshop was an opportunity to develop curiosity, imagination and creative thinking of students, but it also benefited to the guardian of the group accompanying the class during the workshops. We want the teacher's thanks to be the best commentary and evaluation of the activities undertaken by the authors for the cultural animation of this small school community:

On behalf of children, parents and my own I would like to thank you Ladies for the workshops that have enriched children's skills in creating presentations, cards. I have to admit that as a teacher I have gained a lot from these workshops. It is valuable for me to learn from others. The children were delighted, the parents also when they saw the delight and joy of their children. None of those present and participating in the workshop regretted participating in them, even though it was a Saturday!

3. Summary

The examples of animation activities described permit the creation of specific rules for the organization of such projects. The following ways of interaction can be indicated:

- (a) voluntary participation: strengthens motivation and self-mobilization for work and activities, the attribute of extracurricular activities;
- (b) openness in communication: encourages the presentation and sharing of own ideas, views and feelings. During the educational activities, students develop the desire and ability to express themselves in speech and writing, and to interpret various visual forms. The better the contact with them, the more they become open and courageous in presenting their own opinions;
- (c) cooperation instead of rivalry: animation activities should be based on common goals and activities of the participants and

their mutual goodwill, which can strengthen the responsibility for the quality of the performed work. In such a community everyone is more eager to stay, cooperate and create;

- (d) freedom of choice of tools and work techniques: allows the freedom and choice of how to present ideas and effects of the action, and the personal selection of available educational materials, adapted to the individual style of cognition and learning. Greater freedom of choice affects the increase of commitment and a sense of responsibility for action;
- (e) attractiveness of animation: which is expressed through original content and forms of animation, motivating participants to be active and take action alone or in cooperation with other participants in the community, leading to greater integration and better communication;
- (f) accurate reading of the needs and expectations of the participants: it is worth emphasizing the need to reflect on the cultural potential and needs of people and communities to which the animation activities are directed. In this way, relationships are built, creating a sense of agency and being a member of the community. This involves the need to adapt the language of communication or the form of presentation of educational materials, as well as the nature of the animation activities undertaken.

Certainly, animation activities are labour-intensive but they give organizers enormous satisfaction and joy, above all contributing to the stimulation of agency and creative thinking of young people, as well as the sensible and valuable use of modern information and communication technologies. These jointly implemented projects have encouraged us to set new challenges and confirmed that, thanks to animation activities in education, it is possible to influence the individuals as well as their surroundings more fully.

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ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE:

Dr Wioletta Kwiatkowska
Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland
wkwiatka@umk.pl

Dr Małgorzata Skibińska
Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland
gosiek@umk.pl

Dr Kamila Majewska
Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland
majewska@umk.pl