EEPG Network meeting in Zagreb, 5-6 March 2009

Participants:

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Thursday 5 March

Topic 1: How do pupils react on different visual identities? Do they recognize style and design? And is that more important now in the time of visual media?

Ida Mati Loher presented the design considerations when planning books for visual arts. Graphic designers are a very important part of the staff – often they represent around 25% of the staff of a publishing house. Teachers are often rather critical towards brand new innovative design. The job is to make books that are both for the learners and the teachers. A good sentence is less is more. Some publishing houses have a special visual editor who is responsible for the visual identity of the company. Some times this job is also called art director.

Dejan Begović explained that in Serbia there is for primary school a list of texts that must be found in each reading book! Other requirements are in some countries (e.g. Estonia) the font size e.g. 14 size in grade 1 and 2, and font size 12 in grades 3-4.

Olivera Batajić gave a presentation (click to download the paper) about visual identity and discussed the concept of visual identity recognition. Many interesting points were presented e.g. about the selection of colours (the problems of using red colour in textbooks!), also fonts and illustrations were important aspects of the presentation. In addition the use of symbols and icons in their textbooks was discussed. Kreativni Centar’s visual identity is kind of soft (e.g. round corners of most textbooks for smaller grades), and as for formats they mostly use A4 and B5 – however, there are some few exceptions.

Margit Ross explained that the textbook approval system in Estonia is being abolished as of August 2009; one reason being that the politicians are inspired by Finland and its high quality of education.
Eva Postrup talked about the formats and sizes. Consciously, Natur och Kultur have chosen many different formats – maybe even too many (it is rather expensive in the printing phase). When they publish innovative formats or sizes or layout, the teachers are those who hesitate whereas the pupils love it – but unfortunately the teachers and not the pupils are the actual customers.

**Topic 2: How are seminars/workshops/courses to train textbook authors actually planned and organised? Are there specific tools to help educating authors?**

Maja Križman Roškar pointed out that there are actually associations for textbook authors in Croatia. Most of the authors working for Profil International are teachers; in some cases the editors are also authors. Eva Postrup told that Natur och Kultur tries to organise courses for authors where the company is presented and where the main topic can be to present the whole process from the idea to the printed book. In most cases new authors will come to the publisher with an idea or even a manuscript. Dejan Begovic presented a paper by Slađana Ilić about courses for authors and about how to locate authors. The approval system is carried out by committees that consist of high academic persons, which can be a problem if the authors of textbooks are not known and not academic. The main problem for Kreativni Centar is to find a well suited text from the start. It seems to be a good idea to organise in weekends real courses for coming/existing authors, maybe one can here use the persons working in the framework of IARTEM to give ideas and presentations regarding this issue. Kreativni Centar also produces manuals and idea containers on how to enhance the education system.
Licensed textbook publishers are a new concept in Serbia, although the requirements have not yet been formulated. All publishers in Serbia must have such a license - except the State owned publisher (click to download the paper). Margit Ross stressed that educating the authors is highly relevant and needed. One possibility could be to set up an advertisement in teachers’ magazines describing in detail the requirements, conditions etc. She explained an experiment carried out by Koolibri where they put advertisements in newspapers telling about arrangements that were open to everybody interested. They were looking for new authors for elementary schoolbooks, and at the first meeting 30 persons showed up. In the end six actually became real schoolbook authors. Eva Postrup mentioned that in order to raise the status of the authors Natur och Kultur is in some books presenting the authors with photos.

Friday 6 March

**Topic 3: Integrated textbooks and other educational materials – presentations by the participants.** Do members have integrated textbooks or some other integrated materials? How do teachers react on that kind of materials?

Maja Križman Roškar presented books for 1st grade where Math, mother tongue and Geography are integrated in books that present the hometown area of the pupils. Other examples show how mother tongue and physical education are integrated where the pupils create the letters with their own body. External evaluation after grade 4 and grade 8 are also examples: here is a photo of town X; find it on a map; what villages are in the neighbourhood? Write down their names.
with handwriting etc. Count the distance between x and y (Math tasks); list the towns by the size of population etc.

Dejan Begovic mentioned the situation in Serbia where correlation is happening and not integration and gave a detailed presentation of the concepts of integration and correlation.

In general it was felt by the participants that maybe integration is becoming a more and more focussed and important aspect of learning in general. Margit Ross added that integration is also important in Estonia and their coming curriculum. Health, technology and innovation must be integrated into the individual subjects.

One difficulty is however that on higher levels the teacher may have problems to integrate (lack of sufficient expertise in the different subjects) - and sometimes this forced integration can be rather artificial.

Eva Postrup showed a textbook grade 3 where a boy and a cat travel around Sweden and meet different things using language and geography.

Dejan Begovic showed an example of 5 thin workbooks for the last year of preschool for learning the letters, writing/drawing, the immediate environment (persons, nature, town/village etc.) and a simple math book (bigger smaller, more or less etc.). These are examples of correlation and not real integration.

Margit Ross finished by saying that one problem is also that many teachers do not like this approach because it requires more work from them. Therefore Koolibri has to offer Word files to download from their web site where teachers can get detailed plans for what to do when they are integrating.

As the last item on the agenda the participants discussed potential topics for the coming meeting(s) of the network:

- Changes in curriculum: Why do they take place? What are the reasons and the consequences?

- Structuring of textbooks in the different countries: How is the material structured for subject x in grade y? How is a book for mother tongue and literature organised/structured?

- How to motivate pupils to read literature from the lists from the Ministry? How to motivate the learners to read books at all?

- Navigation: How is navigation through textbooks facilitated for the learners?

- What is the experience with small schools that often will be closed down due to small number of pupils (villages, islands and other remote areas). how are these problems solved in the different countries?

- Success stories of books that sell well and the opposite?
- How is the national culture reflected in the poetry and songs presented in textbooks for primary level?

On behalf of the participants I wish to thank the organisers from Profil International for helping to make this another fruitful and enjoyable meeting of the Primary School network.

Preben Späth