



Position

Shaping Digital Culture

Youth-centred arts education and cultural learning in the digital society

The BKJ position papers comment on social challenges from a cultural education perspective. They present relevant arguments and explain why cultural education practitioners are calling for educational and participatory equity for children and young people.

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Introduction

In the last 25 years, over the course of a generation, the means by which people, groups and communities communicate and negotiate with each other or organise the way they live together has changed dramatically. Digitalisation is a key factor in this transition and consequently also a cultural process. Digitality defines the lives of children and young people. It influences and changes subjective perception and reasoning as well as communicative practices and forms of social expression. Social relationships and community development are organised and formed through

digital communication, especially via social media. The internet of things is increasingly becoming a natural part of young people's lives. Like all of us, children and young people live in a digital-analogue world. It takes specific abilities and navigational skills to shape this world in a self-determined and effective manner. Issues such as data protection, personal rights, copyright, and the prevention of violence and addiction play a crucial role in this.

In the digital society, cultural media education is both an interdisciplinary task of arts education and cultural learning and an essential part of general education. Its primary aim is not employability, that is, training young people for the digital job market. Instead, the aims of cultural media education are creativity, independence, empowerment and judgement. It contributes to shaping the culture

of digitality. Digitality as understood by the BKJ refers to the multitude of conditions under which people live in a culture defined by digital media and describes a new form of culture that is developing under the conditions of digital changes. With this in mind, the German Federation for Arts Education and Cultural Learning (BKJ) as the umbrella organisation for over fifty national and regional professional bodies and associations calls for and promotes a discourse on digitality as an important mission for society. •



Recognising and promoting new forms of culture and expression

Digital spaces, technologies and communication have led to the development of forms of culture, action and expression, and production processes that often completely rely on them. This creates new cultural tools that demand and promote new knowledge and skills, for example, choosing has been turned into a constructive act because the volume of information has become unmanageable. Whatever is chosen and shared with others determines how the world is perceived, experienced and interpreted. These processes are determined and facilitated by networked digitalised communication, which provides access to resources (knowledge, networks, support) and like-minded people and so offers opportunities for social participation and personal development.

Empowering children and young people

Digital environments are often dominated by commercial interests, groups or platforms and follow the principles of the data economy. Automated statistical models (algorithms) “decide”, for example, on who can find or not find specific information. Private data can be made public at any time, which harbours both opportunities and risks. It is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between true and false information, genuine and fake forms of participation, or genuine and fake interests. Creative talents such as setting up, interpreting, telling and questioning a story, creating and interpreting an image, or writing a coherent script, become necessary everyday skills for growing up successfully in the digital society.

New artistic forms

Digitality influences the traditional artistic genres and opens new possibilities for artistic expression. Immersive art productions offer completely new aesthetic experiences. Artistic innovations include the use of media, the integration of software programs and artificial intelligence in productions or projects, the use of artificial neural networks as “partners” in the artistic process, and the application of augmented or virtual reality systems. Participatory creative internet culture is defined by sampling and remixing, which involves blending different artistic genres and transcending the boundaries between them.

The result is a new digital aesthetic that changes the modes of reception and expression. This means that the ability to recognise, decode and create forms and symbols is becoming more and more essential while the ability to understand the context of mediated communication or to make this context transparent is more imperative than ever. One of the strengths of arts education and cultural learning is putting this across and placing it in its media and social context.

Creating contemporary learning spaces

Children and especially young people approach cultural education practitioners or institutions with expectations which they derive from their networked everyday life and which correspond to the core principles of social media. They increasingly expect non-hierarchical networks, cooperation, openness, flexibility and participation. Cultural education practice must respond to these changes with a range of activities and methods. Permanent

innovation is an essential component of (network) culture. The key aspirations for modern arts education and cultural learning are a willingness to experiment and an open mind for new ideas.

Informal (lifelong) learning is based on interests and largely dependent on socio-economic conditions. Cultural education must create educationally guided, didactically sound and flexible learning spaces for experimentation and experiences that consider the learners’ level of proficiency in order to develop media skills and access that go beyond self-taught user and application expertise. Cultural education programmes must therefore be individual, participatory, autodidactic, self-regulating, motivating, networked and performative. •

The ability to recognise, decode and create forms and symbols is an essential skill. And the ability to understand the context of mediated communication is a fundamental imperative.



Participation and engagement in the digital age

The internet gives children and young people many opportunities to get involved in society and participate in decision-making processes. They can search for relevant information online and so find their own way, form their own opinions, publicly state their position, take part in or mobilise for political action with like-minded people from wherever they are.

These networking opportunities are particularly important to children and young people from minority or marginalised groups as they enable them to experience and emancipate themselves as part of a wider community irrespective of their personal environment and the local youth culture. However, digitality does not automatically lead to more genuine participation. It can also do harm as demonstrated by fake news, hate speech or social bots. The dark side of digitality demands a response from society and educational awareness.

Providing access and participation and dismantling barriers

Genuine online participation and involvement depend on at least as many factors as their offline equivalents. Children and young people need access to end devices and internet connections. They must be able to find, evaluate and understand relevant and reliable information sources and be familiar with and make use of the major communication channels to generate publicity and mobilise for their own aims and interests.

Comprehensive cultural media education as a goal

The internet offers children and young people a multitude of opportunities to experiment, express themselves and join the public discourse. However, the internet is not a non-hierarchical public space. Most digital spaces and social communication channels are commercial in nature and subject to economic rules and private sector interests. Children and young people often use platforms that do not protect them or their data and whose mechanisms and content are not suitable for them. At the same time, it is exactly these applications that have great appeal.

Cultural education programmes must recognise this fact if they intend to accommodate and engage with the diverse everyday realities of children and young people. One of the tasks of arts education and cultural learning is to highlight the risks and provide or develop alternatives. Another task is helping to design existing spaces, supporting children and young people using them and making sure they do so on the basis of self-determination. Genuine participation and involvement very much rely on a sound understanding of the relevant technology, both hardware and software, and its effects. Media competency includes symbolic language and imagery skills, perceptive and expressive faculties, linguistic and textual abilities, critical faculties regarding the media, and a basic understanding of coding and the mechanisms of algorithms.

To use the internet with confidence, children and young people need much more than just software application skills. They must be able to make careful choices, protect themselves and their data, and know and safeguard their own and others' rights on the internet. Cultural education programmes provide the important foundations and the impetus for the development of these skills.

All children and young people must be given the opportunity to acquire them regardless of their level of education or their social and family background.

Children and young people as producers

Today, the socialisation of children and young people and the formation of their political consciousness are largely defined by the media. Digitality is a natural and integral part of their lives. Cultural education that recognises this fact will adopt newly emerging practices and forms of expression and integrate them into its activities. Cultural education can and should help children and young people turn from mere media consumers into media producers who generate their own content and use the internet to assert their interests.

Enabling young people to change cultural education practice

Children and young people's user experience of digital spaces in turn also influence cultural education programmes because digitality implies the transformation of social and cultural practice. The liberalisation of access, the changing role of gatekeepers, new forms of communication and knowledge transfer, and various new forms of participation also change the expectations and demands of cultural education practice. •

Digitality is a natural part of young people's lives. Cultural education that recognises this fact will adopt new practices and forms of expression and integrate them into its activities.

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Resources for shaping the culture of digitality

Shaping the culture of digitality requires initiative and the development of new forms of cooperation, qualification, participation and activities from the field of cultural education for children and young people. Apart from artistic and scientific knowledge, this also includes knowledge of digital-analogue methods of participatory learning, media-political contexts, and a basic knowledge of media education.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the nationwide network of cultural education bodies and institutions developed many new digital activities, tried them out in practice with children and young people and so experienced a boost in digitalisation practically overnight. However, online activities are no substitute for face-to-face cultural education practice. Rather, this is about expansion and transformation into analogue-digital education practice. The challenge now is to build on the experiences of the Covid era and advance the digital professionalisation of the field in a systematic and imaginative manner to ensure that cultural education for children and young people enjoys a continuous digital-analogue transformation and growth process. This requires a broad and sustainable framework – technically, institutionally, politically and financially.

➔ What we do: the BKJ's commitments

- 1.** The BKJ sees the internet as an important culture and experience space for children and young people and is committed to digital freedom, experimental learning spaces and diverse knowledge access for all children and young people. It has taken it upon itself to counteract the digital divide and social inequality on the internet.
- 2.** Cultural media education is a central task within arts education and cultural learning. The BKJ encourages and supports children and young people in creative and constructive media use. It practices and promotes cultural media education in favour of active participation, builds on the strengths and interests of children and young people, and aims at personal development and empowerment – also in view of online risks.
- 3.** The BKJ regards participatory creative internet culture as an opportunity for flexible, non-hierarchical communication and decision-making processes within cultural education practice, and a new self-understanding and role relationship between professionals and children and young people.
- 4.** The BKJ advocates a broad understanding of culture that includes all the arts, forms of cultural expression, play and learning spaces in their digital and analogue forms. It promotes new aesthetic forms of expression that are shaped by the media.

- 5.** The BKJ is committed to the strengthening of democratic decision-making and negotiation processes as well as online perspectives for action and forms of participation. Increased cooperation with players and initiatives from democratic civil society opens new possibilities for critical and constructive involvement in social change.
- 6.** The BKJ supports and initiates networks, collaborations, research projects and pilot schemes. It intensifies the interdisciplinary exchange between practitioners from cultural education, media education and other areas of cultural, educational and youth work.
- 7.** The BKJ represents the interests of all children and young people by campaigning for political and financial support for the digital-analogue development of child and youth education through digital professionalisation, organisational development and networking.

➔ What needs to be done: the BKJ's recommended actions for policy makers

1. For equitable and self-determined participation in society, children and young people need the freedom to use the media of their choice and the relevant structural means (spaces, devices, bandwidth, etc.).
2. Cultural education is an essential element of holistic personal development. It must be sustainably safeguarded and integrated within and outside school to promote and impart navigational and creative skills for the digital age. Digital literacy and cultural media education in formal and non-formal educational institutions must be more strongly supported.
3. Interdepartmental cooperation on youth, culture and school policies at national, regional and local level is essential for the successful management of the necessary transformation processes affecting culture and education in the digital age.
4. Following on from the DigitalPakt Schule (DigitalPact School), the BKJ calls for a 'Digital Pact 2.0' that allows for the creation and expansion of publicly funded activities, concepts and projects that incorporate media education and digitality-related knowledge in all cultural education programmes and institutions. Cultural education institutions for children and young people need public funding for additional spaces, additional technical infrastructure, additional skilled staff, and the needs-based qualification

of existing staff. The affordability of these measures and adequate compensation for any resulting loss of income are particularly important in the case of freelance workers.

5. The field of arts education and cultural learning must be given the opportunity to experimentally develop new, networked and digital-analogue formats with children and young people within and across all genres in a protected environment and explore them in an open-ended process.
6. Digitality as an interdisciplinary topic must be fully integrated in the training and development of cultural education practitioners. The resulting forms of art, communication and expression, and specific methods should be discussed and reflected upon. •

The challenge now is to advance the digital professionalisation of cultural education practice in a systematic and imaginative way.

Cultural education practice must be given the opportunity to develop and try out new, networked and digital-analogue formats with children and young people within and across all genres in a protected environment.

Imprint

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In the mood for more cultural education?



The **practical guides** show practitioners ways of incorporating topics such as inclusion, cooperation, funding, education for sustainable development, cultural school development, etc. in their cultural education practice.



The **position papers** illustrate the socio-political relevance of arts education and cultural learning. They present relevant arguments and explain why cultural education practitioners are calling for educational and participatory equity for children and young people.

In its publications, the BKJ sets out basic principles, concepts, reflections and suggestions for the theory and practice of cultural education.



The **studies** deal with issues relating to arts education and cultural learning from a scientific perspective. Recommendations and quality criteria show how to recognise good cultural education practice, what defines it, and what to bear in mind in its application.

Digital lives may easily be dominated by commercial interests and controlled by algorithms. This makes it more difficult to recognise reliable information. Artistic abilities, such as setting up, interpreting, telling and questioning a story, become necessary everyday skills for growing up successfully in the digital society.



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