

What's in a name?

Talking about museum education and cultural action – words and meanings reflecting views on our profession

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Since 1963 CECA has its name, standing for *Committee for Education and Cultural Action*. Most CECA-members however are not sure what the words *Cultural Action* mean today. Therefore it was chosen as theme for the 2018-annual conference of CECA in Tbilisi, Georgia, last month. This Asia-Pacific regional meeting is also dedicated to the meanings of education and cultural action.

I was invited to present an introduction in Tbilisi and today I will speak to you about the same topic, including input I collected during the Tbilisi-conference. I will start by sketching the pathway towards these conferences, including the informal survey among CECA-members, and recently the Vocabulary project. I will present the first draft of the Vocabulary and share my thoughts after reading it. And finally I will share with you what I learned in Tbilisi.

To start with I must say that being focused on words and terms is beyond my comfort zone, I usually choose topics rooted in daily practice, like the Education Toolkit in yesterday's workshop. Words are so abstract, but we need them to get closer to the thoughts behind them.

First let me introduce myself: since June I am manager/director of a modest city museum in a beautiful building, the old town hall of Woerden, an ancient city between Utrecht and Rotterdam. At the same time I started my own business, delivering trainings and workshops and supporting processes in the field of culture and museum education. An interesting combination, offering me a wide outlook on my subject area. In my former positions I always have been involved in museums and education.

The meanings of *education* and *cultural action*

Let's start by looking at the two parts of CECA's name.

Most of us are familiar with the concept *education*. I was searching on the internet and several sources told me that this word has two different Latin roots: *educare* and *educere*ⁱⁱ.

The term *educare* means 'to bring up', 'to train' and 'to mold'. The teacher has to bring up the child, a bit like a plant in the garden. Its potentialities should be developed with proper care and nourishment.

The term *educere* means 'to lead out' and 'to bring from', 'make someone grow'. Each and every child has powers in him- or herself. These innate powers should be properly cared and given scope to develop.

The meaning of these two words are quite different and seem to reflect two different concepts of the roles of the learner and the teacher or educator. On one side education is understood as passing down of knowledge and the shaping of youths in the image of the older generation. The other side sees education as preparing a new generation for the changes that are to come. Do we also recognise these two understandings of the word education in museum education traditions in different times and places in the world?

The second part of our name is 'cultural action'. Today I will not go deeper into the word 'cultural', as we all know that thousands of publications have been written and an endless number of conferences have been held to define the word *culture*. It is used in so many ways, at so many levels.

Stéphanie Wintzerith writes in her introduction to ICOM Education 28: 'At first sight, 'cultural action' is simply the combination of a common noun and an adjective to characterise it: the action, in other words the fact of doing something, and the field in which this takes place'ⁱⁱⁱ, in this case culture.

But this combination of the two is puzzling us and within CECA we often get the same question: *education* we know, but what for heaven's sake is *cultural action*? That is why this CECA-Board decided in Milan in 2016 to start a project to find out more both about the background of this term and about the connotations it has in the museum education field today.

ICOM Education 28

I want to point your attention towards the recent issue of ICOM Education 28, edited by Stéphanie Wintzerith with help of Wencke Maderbacher and entirely dedicated to *cultural action*. I was already quoting from the introduction. You can download it for free on the CECA-website.

It contains wonderful contributions, like the review of the available literature written on *cultural action* in France, Spain, Argentina and Canada^{iv}. It offers interesting notions of the development of museum education in these countries, including the changes in vocabulary through time. The authors also compared the outcomes in a synthesis.

The second part of ICOM Education 28 holds contributions by colleagues who deal with cultural action on day-to-day basis. This is illustrated by two examples and a set of short contributions in a kind of Market of Ideas format. I am quite sure this issue of ICOM Education is going to be on the reading list of many future students in museology.

The issue opens with an article by Nicole Gesché-Koning on CECA's history^v. She describes how the word 'Education' is used since the creation of the first ICOM international committees in 1948, two years after the start of ICOM. Among those committees were two dedicated to education: one for Children's museums and one for educational work in museums. No mention of cultural action. Nicole quotes the draft agreement between ICOM and Unesco in which ICOM agrees:

'to co-operate in furthering the programme of UNESCO by securing technical advice and aid for museum educational services and programmes, including activities in connection with formal and informal education for both adults and children'.

It struck me that informal education is mentioned there already.^{vi}

The two committees merged in 1953 into the *Committee for the education of children and adults*. This committee was dissolved in 1962, leading to a change of leadership and firm discussions in 1963. A new committee should cover wider fields, including *'a whole new sphere of cultural action'*^{vii}. This was the very first time *cultural action* was introduced. Subsequently the title of *CECA Committee for Education and Cultural Action* was chosen. The meaning of *cultural action* was not explained clearly though.

Both in her London-lecture and in her article in ICOM Education, Marie-Clarté O'Neill^{viii} describes how the choice for this term was interwoven with developments in French culture politics at the time and deriving straight from the vision of Mr. André Malraux, the minister of State for Cultural Affairs.

Nicole writes in her article how during the CECA 1968 conference a French historian, Jean Favière, explains *cultural action* as all activities organised in museums following the creation in France of the *maisons de la culture*, a kind of multi-purpose centres^{ix}. A perspective directly stemming from Mr. Malraux's policy. Nicole also shows a list of the main topics CECA was concerned with in 1964, showing a wide scope^x of items which are still surprisingly actual! Here *cultural action* has a different connotation: it is referring to recreational activities for young people (out of school) and adults.

Please do read ICOM Education 28 for a deeper understanding of how CECA got its name in 1963.

What struck me, after reading the articles in ICOM Education about the development of museum education in the four different countries, is the fact that many sentences and words written in policy papers over 30, 40 years ago sound so actual and modern. Also in my own country you can find policy papers from decades ago that call for an active dialogue with society, involvement of audiences and other very modern phrases. In the meanwhile I did not recognise much of this modern attitudes while visiting museums in those years. For a long time curators were in the lead and visitors a kind of side effect of being a museum. Do you recognise this difference in language between policy papers and the daily work environment? How long does it last before visionary or even utopian concepts reach the museum floor? So let's move now towards the understanding of words on the ground.

Survey on the understanding of *cultural action*

Already in 2016 Board members Jorge Albuja and I started a survey among our members to find out what *cultural action* means to them. Jorge launched two social media campaigns. In addition we collected input during our poster presentation in London last year. We noticed the great differences in the understanding of words, but also how this reflects the situation of museum education in each part of the world. Some of the outcomes:

- Several responses to the first social media campaign were interesting, but not about museum or education at all! *Cultural action* was linked to culture in general. So we started to stress the connection with museums.
- It became very clear that *cultural action* is not recognised as a term in most countries.
- The most common understanding is that *cultural action* refers to activities run by education departments in museums which are not dedicated to schools. Many make the distinction between educational activities for schools = *education* and for other audiences / general public = *cultural action*. Luciana Conrado Martins called the latter 'spontaneous audiences'.
- Some link the term to activism through or with cultural institutions. They think of museums involved in protest movements, with a political connotation.
- In Latin America *cultural action* is linked to cultural management, which covers almost all programs for public in museums and cultural spaces. Often education is not defined separately, but included in cultural management.

Towards a CECA-Vocabulary

During last years' Board meetings in London we decided to dedicate the 2018 conference and a whole issue of ICOM Education to *cultural action*, but also to take a wider perspective by looking at all the words we, as museum educators, use to refer to the kind of work we are doing in our daily practice. What does the choice of these words tell us about underlying perceptions in different parts of the world?

So I accepted the task to compose a kind of CECA-Vocabulary and started to collect words. Last April I prepared a survey for all CECA-National Correspondents and asked them to describe the four most common words in their own language, to indicate their work. And I asked for the most common job title for the profession of museum educator.

In addition I was invited to lead a workshop on this theme in April, during the European regional meeting in Lisbon. The participants there discussed in groups about the vocabulary they use in daily live and came up with valuable input and inspiring discussions.

It took me a lot of patience to collect the demanded input, some of you probably felt hunted by my emails...

Often the answers are given by one person only, so we have to be careful in seeing it as representation for a whole country. I do want to compliment the colleagues from Italy and Ireland, since in those two countries the entry was based on contributions of a groups of colleagues. And I want to mention Stéphanie Wintzerith, Nicole Gesché and Jorge Albuja who helped me.

Now I am happy to present to you the CECA-Vocabulary as it is today in the English version – I hope French and Spanish versions will follow.

Today's version covers 19 countries and we will not to stop here, but continue to collect words. The Tbilisi conference provided new insights and I expect that this conference will help as well to improve the CECA-Vocabulary. Only one Asian country is represented so far – Korea – so I hope there will be more following soon. The Vocabulary-document includes a form you can use to send entries for countries not represented yet. Please go to the CECA-website and look for the form. Fill it in, preferably with a group of museum educators in your country, and send it to me. I will me most delighted to add your countries page in the second edition of the CECA-Vocabulary! Of course comments on the present text are most welcome too.

My first thoughts based on the CECA-Vocabulary

At this point in my presentation I like to share some of my own outcomes about the CECA-Vocabulary. This Wordcloud contains the words listed as word 1 and word 2 in the responses.

Action Culturelle (French) only pops up once, as word 2 in France.

Many colleagues stress that this term does not work for their country. So: what to do? Should we change our committees name??

Education or *Education program* – of course written differently in each country – is still by far the most common word we use. Education often has a double meaning: the word itself is also used for bringing up children and development of people in general, a bit like the German concept of *Bildung*, that recently pops up regularly in art education.

But many colleagues write that *education* feels outdated, as it is often understood in a very narrow and 'schoolish' sense.

Variations of the term *Museum pedagogy* pop up in some countries. This is even stronger related to schools, but also refers to the educational value museums can add in shaping citizens for the future. Most of the countries who still use *pedagogy* are gradually exchanging this word for *Vermittlung / formidling*. It is not easy to translate this into English, a British colleague working in Norway suggested to translate it by *cultural interaction* (not action, but interaction, an interesting shift in meaning).

Literally it resembles another word that becomes current in countries in the Latin language family - we could discuss whether the meanings differ or not. I am referring to *médiation* (French), *mediação* (Portuguese), *mediazione* (Italian), *mediación* (Spanish), mentioned as word 2 or 3 in the list, and as number 1 in French Canada. *Médiation* expresses the bridge-building function of the educator, who 'translates' the content, the knowledge, to make sure that different audiences get it. It also can refer to dialogue, building a relation with the visitor.

By the way: the English word *mediation* is mentioned by nobody. It is more related to conflict-management, so take care in transferring the term into English.

In English I read *interpretation* for building bridges between content and visitor, *accessibility* to open up for everyone and *engagement* to indicate the involvement of the visitor.

During the workshop in Lisbon we discovered how the use of words is reflecting the cultural and historical background and the academic traditions of a particular country. For example the use of *pedagogy* in Croatia reflects the orientation on Germany in the past.

In the texts I could trace back developments in thinking about learning in museums and the role of museums in society, that occurred since I started to be active in CECA. It reminded me of the well-known model on the constructivist museum by George Hein, combining the theory of knowledge with learning theory^{xi}. The 'older' words like *education* and *pedagogy*, but also *service* reflect the upper left approach: a belief in the existence of a treasure of knowledge that is made available for the public, and of educators kindly waiting until someone needs them. More in the sense of the Latin word *educare* I was mentioning at the start of my presentation.

In words like *Vermittlung* and *médiation* I read elements of behaviourist approaches, working hard to provide tailored programs for each target group, to help them to digest the content. But there are also elements of constructivism, stressing the importance of facilitating learning processes of the individual and enhancing dialogue. This comes close to the other Latin root of the word education: *educere*, leading out, making people grow, preparing to create solutions to problems yet unknown. This may be an interesting item to study for a student in the near future, inspired by the CECA-Vocabulary...

Feedback from the Tbilisi conference, 24-27 September 2018

During the Tbilisi conference we discussed about the term *cultural* action, since it - as you heard from my report about the Vocabulary-project so far - does not ring a bell in almost any country. So: what to do? Skip these words in our committees name?? We could also consider this half of CECA's name as our own heritage... And - as always in good heritage education - it invites us to explore the stories behind it. And that is exactly what we are going to do here in Seoul!

I noticed that participants at the Tbilisi conference, who were puzzled by *cultural action*, started to think a lot about it. And so did many of you: in the abstracts for this conference many of you write about *cultural action* as if it is the most common word in the world. Therese Quinn said during the Tbilisi conference that she was not at all familiar with the term *cultural action*, but started to think about both words separately in the frame of the conference.

One common ground in all reactions is the notion that there is a distinction between *education* for formal education and *cultural action* for informal education – referring to non-school groups, spontaneous audiences.

In ICOM Education 28 a synthesis^{xii} is written by Dufresne, Émond, Hervas Avilés, Lاراignée and O’Neill, in which they reflect on their articles about the development in the countries they each describe. In this synthesis, they elaborate on the relation between education and cultural action in a similar way. They define *education* by the aim of learning: the outcome should be that visitors or users learn something. Whereas in the case of *cultural action* learning is, strictly spoken, not sought neither by the museum nor its visitors. It’s incidental and it just happens, when visiting exhibitions, viewing a museum website or participating in an event.

In her article about the development of museum education and cultural action in Quebec, Canada, Colette Dufresne-Tassé^{xiii} shows how broad the spectrum of cultural action can be, by mentioning the 7 most common roles of cultural action, as defined by academic specialists in the field.

1. cultural action as cultural development (linked to the official cultural policies);
2. cultural action as political action when it promotes, for example, regional development or urban revitalization;
3. cultural action as social action, when it leads to the improvement of the situation of disadvantaged groups;
4. cultural action as an educational action if it leads to the development of people;
5. cultural action as entertainment, this is often the goal of the production of cultural industries, like partners in the field of tourism;
6. cultural action as a source of economic development, a role often stressed by politicians;
7. cultural action as an instrument of diplomacy and international intervention, for example the promotion abroad of national cultural production.

Colette Dufresne adds that in reality often more of those roles are combined in one intervention. I show the seven roles here as an illustration of the great variety in the roles we may play in our work.

Talking about the relation between education on the one side and cultural action on the other, Marie-Clarté O’Neill noticed during the Tbilisi conference a difference between the Francophone and Anglo-Saxon tradition. For the latter education (or learning) is the big umbrella, covering all kind of activities, both for school groups or other users, whereas in the Francophone countries education and cultural action are two entities, parallel to each other. Several Latin American responses in our earlier survey told that cultural management or action is functioning as an umbrella

to them. So I perceive three types of relations between education and cultural action:

- education as an umbrella, with cultural action as part of it
- education and cultural action as two parallel concepts
- cultural action as an umbrella, including education (specifically referring to schools)

A few Latin American colleagues told us in Tbilisi that some of their directors state that *education* is not a task for museums anymore. There even is a lobby at the moment within ICOM, in the process to phrase a new museum definition, to skip education from the future ICOM-definition! This could stem from the third model, where education is not seen separately anymore. But I just showed you that *education* still is by far the most common word to indicate our profession. So what shall we do about this?

This brings me to a last point that came up during the Tbilisi conference: when talking about cultural action, many started to talk about museums and politics. What is the role of museums in actual issues that matter for society? 'Can museums be neutral?' was one of the questions. Should they be neutral? On the other hand: how dependent are museums on governmental money? Is it possible to play a role in enhancing an open dialogue with and among our audiences, if we also are firmly linked to political structures? This seemed to be a hot item for many participants, of course depending on the part of the world they came from.

Invitation

As I told you the Vocabulary is not ready yet and far from perfect. I applied a bottom-up approach, asking members to contribute. And you can contribute as well, of course by sending me information about your country, and right now by participating in the discussions.

It certainly is not my intention to get stuck in endless semantic discussions, about which word is better than others. Words in itself are tricky and they easily lead to misunderstandings or even irritation. The same word can be understood in so many different ways in different countries.

Look for example at the word *learning*. In United Kingdom this is by far preferred over *education*, which sounds too much like school, in the negative sense of the word. *Learning* however opens up for an active self-conducted process of any individual. At the contrary the similar words *lernen* in German, *leren* in Dutch or *apprendre* in French sound absolutely more school-like than *education* in those languages.

On top of that we never seem to be satisfied with the words we have been using lately. During the Tbilisi conference I heard that a UK museum is about to change the name of their Learning Department into 'Visitor Engagement'. Something new is needed all the time, in particular to please politicians and funders who usually have *innovation* as a dominant criterium for success. Therefore words of yesterday, or even today, are always wrong...

So words are tricky, especially when we are talking about abstract matters like the theme of this conference. On top of that, most of us do not speak in our mother tongue here, which makes us feel even more handicapped in expressing ourself. On the other hand: *what else* do we have than words when we want to exchange ideas? We just need them as transport mode for our thoughts... So I would say: let's be aware that each of us is trying to find words, to describe what he or she want to say. That is why I introduced this poster at the Tbilisi-conference as a kind of rules of the game for that conference. Maybe we can also apply this to our meeting here today? So I invite you all: Speak freely – no words are wrong! I hope this conference will help you and me to increase our understanding of the views on our profession, which lie *behind* the words we choose.

ⁱ Since June 1. 2018 Arja is leading Stadsmuseum Woerden, the city museum of Woerden (www.stadsmuseumwoerden.nl). In addition she is running her own business 'Arja van Veldhuizen – culture I heritage I education', providing services for museums and other cultural organisations (www.arjavanveldhuizen.nl). She also is guest lecturer museum/heritage education at the Reinwardt Academy since 2008.

Until June 2018 Arja worked at 'Landschap Erfgoed Utrecht' (Landscape & Heritage Utrecht), an institution supporting all heritage institutions – including museums – in the province of Utrecht. She was leading the team of educators and providing all kinds of advice to museums and heritage institutions. Between 2005 and 2008 she was Head of Education & Exhibits in 'CODA', the combined museum, archives and public library of the city of Apeldoorn. Her roots are in the Amsterdam Historical Museum, where she was museum educator from 1986-2005.

Arja has been involved in CECA since 1989, she is active member of the Board since 2004, now responsible for special projects.

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