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AMORES: Discovering a love for literature through digital collaboration and creativity

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Keywords

European Union, United Kingdom, literacy, literature, e-learning, digital literacy, Comenius, pedagogy, information literacy, e-artefacts.

Introduction

The AMORES project was awarded €299,500 under the European Union Comenius Multilateral funding stream of the Lifelong Learning Programme. It is a two-year project which started on December 1 2013, with the primary aim of creating a new teaching methodology to increase literacy levels, by engaging young people in their national literatures. Presently, across the EU, more than a fifth of children and young people (22 per cent) rarely or never read in their own time and nearly a fifth (17 per cent) would be embarrassed if their friends saw them reading. Many school students lack knowledge of national and European literature. Teachers find it hard to interest children in reading literature but agree that the use of ICT could help raise the level of students' interest.

The project team believe that this issue can be addressed by using digital tools to give pupils the opportunity to talk to fellow pupils in the partner countries and share the e-artefacts that they create during the project – these could be a video, podcast, filmed play or animation about a legendary character such as Robin Hood (or Jánosik, the Polish Robin Hood). During the project teachers and pupils will use their new information and digital literacies to create e-artefacts for sharing with partner schools and beyond.

Figure 1: The official logo created by Logo Competition winner Rafaela Familia (1st Model Experimental Primary School of Rhodes, Greece)



The workshop



Figure 2: The team and workshop participants, Staffordshire University, March 18 2014.

In the first phase of the project partner teachers from schools in Croatia, Denmark, Poland, Sweden and the UK came together in Stoke-on-Trent for a three-day workshop hosted by Staffordshire University on March 17–19. The team met to discuss how teachers can work with their pupils and students to discover a love for literature

through digital collaboration and creativity. The workshop was led by Janet Hetherington (Staffordshire University), Dr Mark Childs (Coventry University) and Dr Geoff Walton (Northumbria University). Its aim was to foster a working relationship between participant teachers - our experts from across the partner EU countries. The common theme for all of the workshops was ways in which teachers can encourage pupils and students to engage in their national literatures and enjoy reading.

As tea and biscuits were consumed, friendships, conversations and ideas emerged. Teachers had the opportunity to meet each other, share experiences and have a rare opportunity to reflect outside of the classroom and start to generate some new and exciting ideas to help support reading in their schools.

As part of the workshop the team visited St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School in Newcastle-under-Lyme. This provided an opportunity to talk to children and meet teachers. Through doing this, the team shared differences and similarities between schools and education across the partner countries, and considered some of the practicalities in developing a reading project which used online tools.

There were also opportunities to learn more about e-artefacts. The workshop participants (facilitators and teachers) started by agreeing that an e-artefact is anything digital; a photograph, video, blog entry, tweet or Facebook post. The conversation was continued by discussing what the preferred teaching and learning methods might be, what online tools teachers could use to achieve them and how existing expertise of online tools could be shared. This information was reviewed by all participants and used to start to make decisions about what teachers might do and use to help achieve the goal of getting pupils and students to engage in reading literature. Participants also thought about how pupils and students wanted to engage with their peers from other countries and about the sorts of technology and aspects of reading which they were most interested in. Participants agreed that they wanted to demonstrate how this new approach, through the production of e-artefacts, can be shared with other pupils and students in both their own school but also with their peers in Europe.

Finally, participants discussed and identified teachers' training needs, which informed the creation of an online training course to give teachers the digital capabilities to help their pupils create e-artefacts to share with their fellow learners across the EU. The facilitators received very positive feedback from teacher participants.

Feedback and evaluation

Below is a sample of emails received after the workshop:

'Thank you dear Janet, Geoff and Mark for taking so good care of us, and for the interesting and inspiring programme at the university.'

'How great time it was! Thank you for all your welcome... You taking really so good care of us! Programme was very, very creative.'

'Thank you for the opportunity to work with such a lovely group of people. We are very much looking forward to taking part in this project and having more contact with our European friends'

The team also collected formal feedback asking participants the question: 'What did you like about the workshop?' Below is a sample of the comments:

'I enjoyed meeting and talking to teachers from different countries. There was a very relaxed atmosphere.'

'Quickly got to know the other participants and share experiences of education/school life.'

'The games that lead into good discussions managing to mix us and creating new groups, new ways of thinking.'

It is clear that the teacher participants thoroughly enjoyed the workshop and the facilitators (on behalf of the project team) achieved their primary aim of creating a cohesive community of practice. The team hope to continue in this spirit of collaboration through the online workshop and into the pilot implementation.

Next steps

An eight-week Moodle course for teachers began on the May 5. The programme includes: using Moodle; videoconferencing; Edmodo (a social network, similar to Facebook, for schoolchildren); and other interactive online tools.

The pilot implementation of the new teaching methodology (pedagogy) will take place from September 1. The project team will be evaluating the ways in which pupils' and teachers' information and digital literacy capabilities change during the course of the pilot. This will be carried out by using a range of techniques such as semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, direct observation, and by analysing online communication and the e-artefacts themselves.

As well as enhancing literacy, we believe that one of the possible emerging new areas of research will be the information literacy of fiction. Current thinking is that for readers to be able to comprehend a fictional text, certain pieces of information about character, location or plot can be considered as factual, akin to reading a historical text. Clearly this is at the pre-theoretical stage but appears to be a promising line of enquiry. Developments of this theory and any relevant research outputs will be published as they arise. For more information please visit our website at <http://www.amores-project.eu>.