Information about the action

Writing of a tale parody

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Involved Class : Seconde (1st year class in upper secondary school)
Subject : French
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Summary :
    Seeing that pupils neither reread their works, nor made an outline, or a draft, I tried to find ways to make them understand the true importance of **rewriting**. The idea of this rewriting project came after the release, in 2001, of Shrek, Jenson and Adamson's parodic cartoon : I therefore decided to make pupils write a parody of a **magic tale**, working on two axes.
        ⬧ First, they had to read different tales and use their readings to write a new tale, integrating characters they had encountered and obeying the tale conventions.
        ⬧ Then, this writing stage was followed by many rewritings, using their drafts.
    At the same time, I wanted to integrate ICT in this project, word-processing above all, as it is a wonderful tool for rewriting.
    Finally, to make this project more lively and more original, I thought about a « **two hands** » rewriting with a seconde in another school, making the use of e-mails possible.

Key-words :

STRUCTURES	PROCEDURES DEVICES	THEMES	SUBJECTS
Upper secondary school	Cultural and artistic projects based classes : PAC class	Arts and culture Mastering languages ICT	French

Writing about the action

Writing a tale parody

Writing a parody of a magic tale project
School years : 2001/2002, 2003/2004, and 2004/2005

I.   INTRODUCING THE PROJECT AND ITS GOALS

Project : writing a parody « with two hands» (2 classes).

Niveau : 1st year in upper secondary school.

Pupils : Each class is divided in two semi-groups (modules).

Time schedule : half an hour a week per pupil from November on + individual work or group work(2 to 3 pupils).

Goals :

- Favor each pupil personal development in mastering the language, thanks to a constant link between writing and reading and a constant thinking about their personal oral and written works. Bring each pupil into structuring his thoughts, his ability to judge things and his imagination. Help him analyse and master the processes needed in writing texts (studying the various states of a literary text but also comparing the variations in a work).

- Improve the pupil's mind by reading significant literary works. Making them aware of their cultural heritage.

- Knowing what their cultural heritage is allows the pupils to be better citizens, to be able to argue and to be autonomous thinkers.

- Learn to get information and to appropriate knowledge.(the use of ICT)

Equipment : networked computers, word processing software, internet access.

II. PROJECT REPORT

Project genesis

From the beginning of my career as a Modern French teacher, I realized that pupils attached no importance to rewriting and that they wrote no outlines nor drafts : according to them, their "first go" was always the right one. From this statement, I decided to find a way to make them understand the true importance of rewriting, outlines and drafts.

The idea of this rewriting project came after the release, in 2001, of Shrek, Jenson and Adamson's parodic cartoon : I was then a French teacher in Grand Air High school in Arcachon. I decided to make pupils write a parody of a **magic tale**, working on two axes. First they had to read different tales and use their readings to write a new tale, integrating characters they had encountered and obeying the tale conventions. Then, this writing stage was followed by many rewritings, using their drafts. At the same time, I wanted to integrate ICT in this project, word-processing above all, as it is a wonderful tool for rewriting.

Finally, this project made the pupils write all year long and it made their writing practise less dramatic.

To make this project more lively and more original, I thought about a « **two hands** » rewriting with a 1st year class(upper secondary school) in another school, making the use of e-mails possible. I sent an e-mail to the list of French teachers I had subscribed to, and I got a positive answer from Mrs Legoff-Ravilly, she worked in La Croix-Rouge High school in Brest.

After many transfers, I finally arrived in Jacques Callot High school in Vandoeuvre-lès-Nancy where I started this experience again in 2003, and in 2004 with a new French teacher, Mrs Thomas from Louis Aragon de Givors High school and with more subventions.

The 7 stages of this project :

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1. Reading tales

Pupils start working on the incipit of different tales. I read the tales, preferably tales they don't know, like the oral version of the « Little Red Riding Hood » to show them the different possible interpretations and also the fact that this tale was not originally intended for children (quick history of the magic tale). Pupils find out what the tale conventions are.(« Once upon a time », vague spatiotemporal situation, stereotyped characters…). We go over the narrative schema again.

Then, I hand out books of tales to the pupils(from the school or the town library) (**cf. Annexe 1**). All year long, once a week, I record all the books borrowed by the pupils. Therefore they can give me their books back whenever they want and borrow others the time they want.

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2. Creating an e-mail address : ICT

Each pupil creates its own e-mail address on a partner website (Laposte.fr) . Parents have to sign an authorization for this creation. (**cf. Annexe 2**).

3. Getting in touch with the other school : writing,, arguing, and ICT

Writing a group letter

Each group writes an introducing letter to the partner group in the other school.One of the instructions, apart from respecting the letter conventions, is to add references from the tales they read

During the first session, the group is divided in sub-groups who all write a letter. They send it to the teacher by e-mail or they put it on a disk. Each letter is corrected and rewritten.

During the second session each letter is read to the whole group. Then, pupils vote for the one they prefer. Each sub-group works on a particular paragraph to make it better, adding, for example, elements from the non chosen letters.

Choosing the hero

Each pupil chooses a character from his different readings. He writes a quick physical and moral description and tries to convince the rest of the group that his character is the perfect hero for the writing of their tale. The hero is chosen by a vote.

Once the hero is chosen, the pupils try to improve their description to convince the other class.

At the end of this stage, we have four descriptions from the four sub-groups. A jury of French teachers and school librarians vote for their favorite description.

4. Writing the tale : writing, arguing and ICT(word-processing)

The group, whose character is chosen, starts writing the initial situation(who ? where ? what ? when?) and decides upon the hero's quest.

The writing is always the same : each pupil chooses a character from a magic tale, the hero will meet this character during the peripetia. He writes a physical and moral description of his character trying to be as convincing as possible. Pupils vote for the more convincing character. They either make him an adjuvant or an opponant to the hero.

From this point, the writing work can start. I write on the blackboard the main features of the peripetia. Each sub-group (2 to 4 pupils maximum) takes one paragraph in charge and starts word-processing it. At the end of the session, I get the paragraphs back for correction. I send the whole text to each sub-group which is supposed to correct its own paragraph. This is done as many times as necessary until the following session where the text is finalized.

5. Writing the tale : writing, arguing and ICT (e-mailing)

The document is sent by e-mail to the other school after a final correction and editing by the sub-group.

This stage of the project was only implemented the second year of experimentation because I noticed during the first year that some pupils never used e-mails because they didn't know how to join documents to their mails. That's why I had to send the texts to the other school myself. I tried to focus on the pupils who didn't know how to add a document to their mails. During the last year of experimentation, I had to do it myself again as my pupils were not used to ICT and were not very autonomous.

6. Oral

tales, but as we were both transferred the following year we coulnd't do it (though the answer was positive and we got the subventions).

During the second experimentation (Jacques Callot High school) I got in touch with a storytellers association, Two storytellers came during a session. The pupils loved it, and some of them even used part of the stories they told in their own tales.

During the last year I asked for subventions so I could have storytellers on a regular basis. But the meeting to get these subventions was late in the year and the storyteller came from December on, which was too late for such a project. Nevertheless, he worked with the whole class during a few sessions, then with semi-groups and at the end of the year only with volunteers. The other pupils organized the final exhibition with me (cf. 7. Finalization).

7. Finalization

Each final work was different depending on the pupils. Oral was always part of it. (reading tales, telling stories…). In 2002, a group organized an exhibition at the school library, the other group worked on a website. In 2005, a group worked with the storyteller, the other organized an exhibition at the school library.

- Exhibition of the work done, at the school library (2002 and 2005). The pupils had to figure out what was the best way to show the other pupils what they had done throughout the year (the parody of a tale). The help of school librarians was crucial.
- Creation of web pages on the school website(2002). The pupils had to think about the structure of their websites, creating links between those pages to show their work. This was to show their work inside but also outside school to their friends and families. Unfortunately, Arcachon High school website is not online yet…
- Theatricalized reading of the final tale for each group (2002) or of the written tales (2004). Each group read its own version of the written tale. The pupils shared the different voices (narrator and characters). During the second experimentation, some pupils were so enthusiastic that they also read the tales written the year before by another class.
- The tale show (2005). The volunteers who worked with the storyteller told the other pupils parts of the tale they had written.
- Work on a notebook (2005). Thanks to the subventions, I could print notebooks with the written tales and some illustrations. The pupils really liked these notebooks as it was the materialization of the work they had done throughout the year.

Evaluation

An evaluation questionnaire (**cf. Annexe 3**) about the use of ICT and about this project in general is handed out to the pupils in order to determine the positive and the negative aspects of this project.

III.   PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

The problems we had were very different from one class to another and from one year to another. The most difficulties I had were with my last group.

1. ICT

Concerning the ICT equipment in Arcachon, I was complaining about the lack of computers (8 computers with an internet connection for 950 2nd year pupils …) and the network was often malfunctioning (impossibility to get the peripetia from Brest…). In

Vandoeuvre, the equipment was good enough but the word-processing software was too old and had no spell checker. Moreover we had network problems at the beginning of the year. They were sorted out quite rapidly.

Concerning pupils, despite the implementation of the B2i,(tests to evaluate the pupils abilities regarding ICT) I noticed that many of them were not well at ease with new technologies, word-processing above all. Therefore I wrote a document about the use of word-processing (**cf. Annexe 4**). From the evaluation questionnaire we got from the pupils, this document was apparently very helpful. I didn't give this document to the last class I worked with because it was the least of their problems considering what had to be done prior to this.

Concerning e-mails, many pupils didn't know how to join a document to their mails. Even after many explanations about how to do it and the interest of such a practise for the editing, some of them would continue copying and pasting their tale inside the body of the mail.

Concerning the creation of webpages in 2002 no pupils but one knew how to do it. The school librarians proposed the two semi-groups a training on Netscape Composer.

2. Year planner of the project

This work should start at the beginning of the school year because we are often short of time in May.

The first year, it took us two months to implement the project because I arrived quite late in that school to replace a teacher.

The last year of the project, the storyteller arrived quite late because the subventions were only decided in November. That's the most frequent reproach we had from the pupils in the evaluation questionnaire.

3. Reading

We propose a list of tales to the pupils. The idea is not to make sure they read the whole list but at least a few tales on the list. One year, my colleague had to test the pupils'knowledge about the tales because they were very restive concerning reading. Personally, I decided not to test their reading in such a project but it could be interesting to find a way to check the reading, in something like a reading challenge for instance. Do we have enough time to organize such a challenge ? When should we do it? Indeed, the handing out of books is already time consuming during the lessons.

4. Exchanging with the other pupils in the other school

Unfortunatley, very few pupils really felt close to the other class : on the contrary, they were suspicious : one group reproaching the other for not writing in the same direction…

This lack of true exchange was probably due to the way they communicated, the teacher being a filter for each mail sent to the other group. We thought about chat sessions but it was technically too difficult to implement.(working networks at the same time in both schools, pupils available at the same time, a dedicated room available at the same time.).

Whatever it takes, we should be able to organize an exchange based on the reading of tales (like the reading challenge).

5. Language

I quickly noticed in the written works that their vocabulary was quite limited, with the intensive use of terms like « say », « be », « have »… During our module sessions, the pupils could use all sorts of dictionnaries available at the school library. Moreover, I built a vocabulary file(**cf. Annexe 5**) including all the synonyms they had to use to avoid repetitions in their works.

As far as spelling is concerned, working in groups with spellcheckers (when available) allowed them to become more aware of their mistakes, and it allowed us to tackle the existing problems.

6. Pupils' motivation

This is the stumbling block of this project : I was confronted in the last year of experimentation to a non motivated group. The level was indeed very low (to give you an idea, 9 pupils were held back a year, 6 changed course and 7 went up to the next level but with no guarantee of success), and the pupils were not really interested in school matters. Nevertheless, I believed this project could change things in this group as it had done with other weak groups the previous years.

But unfortunately, the magic of the tale didn't work. In fact, these pupils worked quite well oraly, but writing things down was more than laborious, even in group sessions. I had to mark each individual piece of work I was asking them (physical and moral description of the characters, argumentation…), whereas I wanted no evaluation in the course of the project. Concerning rewriting, only a few pupils sent me their paragraphs whereas some pupils from last year sometimes rewrote their paragraph 8 times!

Despite everything, and from the questionnaire they filled in, 22 out of 27 pupils were ready to do it again. They really liked three elements in the project : sessions with the storyteller, the organization of the project and the exhibition and the fact they had to work in groups to invent a story.

7. Preparation and correction

Finally, this kind of project is very demanding in terms of preparation time and discussions,(the librarian I worked with in Arcachon all year long or the school librarians who helped me with the exhibition in Vandoeuvre, the teacher I exchanged with, or even the storyteller).

Moreover, correcting each written work from all the sub-groups asks for time. Not in the last year of experimentation where the gain in time was compensated by the organization of the exhibition and the realization of notebooks.

IV. CONCLUSION

No matter what, this project turned out to be extremely rich and motivating personally and professionally. Moreover, from the questionnaire we handed out it appeared that most pupils enjoyed this different way of working, and I hope they will benefit from it in their future school years.

Yet, I decided to stop this project as my last group was too difficult to deal with. Their writing difficulties were too heavy and they had no motivation at all.

But if any teachers are interested in this project, I will be glad to help and give extra information if needed. Don't hesitate to contact me.

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