

Information about the action

Cyber-workshop of artistic practice , acquiring an artistic culture thanks to the web
File name : 57CDemange03-04

NANCY-METZ academy

School : Victor Demange

18 rue robert Schuman 57220 Boulay

Phone number : 03 87 79 35 96

Fax number : 03 87 79 29 52

School web site : <http://ciel5.ac-nancy-metz.fr/570010B/artochat/>

Contact person : Andre.Lozano@ac-nancy-metz.fr

Classes involved in the project : All 4^{ème} and 3^{ème} (3rd and 4th year in secondary school)

Subject : Art

Written work : may 2004

Local education authority guide lines n° 5: Axe 1 :

New ways of organizing things to improve learning skills

INNOVATING TEAM :

Name, firstname	school	Role in the action
André Lozano	Collège V. Demange	Art teacher and writer
Duret Alain	Collège V. Demange	Physics teacher and writer

Project Summary

Introducing Art and especially contemporary Art is a real problem in a rural area. That's why internet represents an extraordinary tool abolishing distances and allowing a direct contact with creators. Therefore the school developed chat sessions on its website in order to talk to artists.

In an artistic practice workshop, pupils discover art websites and try to get in touch with the authors by mail, which is something they have to learn.

Key words

STRUCTURES	PRACTICAL DETAILS -DEVICES	THEMES	SUBJECTS
School	an artistic practice workshop	Internet - ICT	Arts

Writing about the action

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School : Victor Demange

town : Boulay

County : Moselle

Author(s) : André Lozano, Alain Duret

I DESCRIBING THE ACTION

The main goal is not to make them computer-wise(computer skills being necessarily developed) but to make the best of these technologies to discover the artistic work of living creators and communicate with them. Introducing Art and especially contemporary Art is a real problem in a rural area. In our educational activities, our only resources are videos and reproductions. Going out with the pupils and visiting museums ask for money(40 to120 kms by bus) and we can not afford this on a regular basis, that's why internet represents an extraordinary tool abolishing distances and allowing a direct contact with creators.

Thanks to our chat <http://ciel5.ac-nancy-metz.fr/570010B/artochat/> directly homed on the school website (first chat written in Perl) we fulfilled our goals.

II REMINDER OF THE CONTEXT

This action was implemented at the Boulay school in Moselle, in a rural area, more than half of the 600 pupils live in small towns around and take the bus to school. Few pupils go to living performances (theatre, concert, dancing), and those going to Art exhibitions are even fewer.

Being acquainted to all these works is nearly impossible for teenagers living around because of

The poverty of the cultural offer in this area

The distance to cultural institutions (museums,galleries,Art centres)

The low bus frequency towards these institutions.

Without a driving licence and a car, your cultural horizon stops at the hills of the neighboring village.

III GOALS OF THE ACTION

As stated in the action description, here are the goals of our workshop:

- 1) First and main goal : introducing contemporary Art to our pupils and mainly Art on the web, this to develop their readiness to criticize, their erudition, their sense of communication and of responsibility.
- 2) Breaking their cultural isolation, dynamising the exchanges with the outer world (Arts and culture from all over the world) and stimulating exchanges between pupils and staff.
- 3) Developing an intelligent and responsible use of ICT.
- 4) Fighting against school failures (for some pupils) and developing socialisation.

IV PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The main goal being « an introduction to Art and Culture » as part of the Art curriculum (knowing Art), this action focused on « exchange » and « communication » in different forms, being limited by our technology means.

We can say that this type of action is not demanding as only a few computers with an internet connection are needed. No software is needed.

The chosen demarches present like a FAQ (frequently asked questions) :

- A) Where to look for interesting artists' websites on the net?
- B) How to navigate ? What to keep ? How to value the arborescence, the articulation and the content?
- C) Getting in touch with the creators by mail and exchanging ideas.
- D) Organizing a chat with many guests.
- E) Writing your exchanges with the creator and presenting his work on the school website.
- F) Participating in a workshop animated by an invited artist.
- G) Participating in a workshop-visit thanks to our cultural partner (The Delme Art centre).

A) Where to look for interesting artists websites on the net?

Avoid non-specialist search engines

From our experience we can say that Google or Yahoo won't help you much as they can't make the difference between a non-professional artist and the artist engaged in a search for quality, it's the same problem for some specialized guidebooks like arttotal.com where no sortings are possible and this to take up a bigger audience.

To conclude we advise you to look for information on the following websites and not on regular search engines.

<http://www.provisoire.com/realartist> : The biggest guidebook for french artists' websites, with comments and evaluation by the author

<http://www.uyio.com> by Nicolas Frespech who not only records and indexes websites but also lists Art-work on the web.

<http://www.rhizome.org> An excellent guidebook for sites and works (in English)

Why this list ?

These guidebooks have three qualities :

- 1) The sites they propose are the assertion of a choice they assume and comment.
- 2) The guidebooks webmasters are artists or involved in the artistical world,
- 3) The guidebooks are often updated and new features appear regularly.

B) How to navigate ? What to keep ? How to value the arborescence, the articulation and the content?

Pupils make their own choices. They decide what guidebooks they will use among those we proposed.

Navigation on these websites is often puzzling because of their originalty, artists' sites are among the most beautiful and therefore deeply influence commercial websites, newspapers, industrial designers...

A complicated but amusing and poetic navigation

We have to develop the pupils'curiosity in encouraging them to wander about the screen (to find invisible links), to make them think about and look for navigation codes in a playful way. Like in video games they have to look at everything at the same time, work out strategies, avoid traps...

It's very important to be in front of the screen with them, to accompany them so that they should not discourage and share with them the pleasure of finding navigation codes, hidden meanings, animated games...etc. Overcoming these difficulties (technically advanced websites) favors mutual aid and solidarity between participants at the workshop.

What to keep ?

The pupils give their opinion. They discuss about the site making the difference between « works », « presentation », « works where presentation is part of the work », « interactive devices », « devices being part of the creative work » and « works developing thanks to the network itself" in order to specify what type of artists they are dealing with and to remember the striking elements of his creation.

Among the different types of artists we encountered, here are a few:

The plastic surgeon : the painter or the graphic artist who exhibits reproductions of his works.

The computer graphic artist : the artist who uses numerical technics to create images or animations.

The webdesigner : the artist who develops websites.

Le net-artist : the artist who uses the network and its technologic means to create works which could not be presented elsewhere and which sometimes call for collective participation.

It's very important to make these distinctions to give the pupils an exact description of all contemporary artistic fields for them to make the difference between conceptual and traditional art, painting and numeric art, ornamental and poetic art...etc.

We can't talk about all artistic practices on the net as they are numerous and often singular. Each teacher is free to make his own discoveries.

Annex 1 : a visiting card

C. Getting in touch with the creators by mail and exchanging ideas.

After visiting the different websites proposed in the guidebooks we invite pupils to get in touch with the artist. In general, it's quite easy to find an e-mail address on the site but it takes time to get an answer and sometimes it never happens. We noticed that "traditional" artists rarely answer because their site is only a display of what they do and their e-mails are not working. Computer graphic artists and webdesigners are open to mails but their conversation sticks to technical problems and software issues which are inaccessible for teenagers.

The most interesting and motivating artists for our kids are the net-artists because they answer our mails and they enjoy exchanges; they often ask the pupils to participate in their creation.

As they are not very much in demand, these artists are easy to contact and willing to take part into chat sessions. They even come from Paris to meet our pupils.

Writing a mail is an art in itself.

Pupils write their own mails so that it should reflect their personality: It's preferable to be natural in order to be convincing. In general pupils work in pairs. We create a common mail box for the exchanges that occur during the workshop and we avoid private e-mails. Each mail is approved of by the teacher before sending, the mails are printed and archived.

We did not prepare an editorial frame to write mails because it usually depends on what interests the site aroused, but we can give them guidelines to write this type of mails.

The need to be clear, concise and concrete.

Filling the « object » field correctly with words like « school artistic workshop ». This clearly indicates the content as these artists must receive dozens of mails every day. It's the first thing they read.

Introducing yourself directly after the polite phrases: « Paul and Virginie third year pupils... in the art workshop... at ...School... » the school website address with an introduction to the teacher who coordinates the workshop.etc.

Showing that you visited the artist's website and that you find it interesting : « We visited your website... (description of what stroke you)... compliments on his 7343 470.30145 2ar 5 0 12 39.

D. Organizing a chat with many guests

After a few exchanges with an artist we invite the pupils to talk about him and to organize a chat session for the other workshop members to know him and to see his work. (on our website <http://ciel5.ac-nancy-metz.fr/570010B/artoachat/>)

Finding a date

We must find a suitable date for everyone, teachers, pupils, artists considering the workshop hours. We had a problem once, with a canadian artist who had to wake up at 5 am for a chat session in France at 1 pm.

In general the teacher sends a mail to the artist to confirm the session and the pupils send the real invitation because they always remain the initiators.

Preparing the questions

The week before the session, all the pupils at the workshop visit the website and prepare questions about the content, the works display and other questions about the artist and Art in general ; we use cards to help them formulate their questions(see below).

The pupils who first got in touch with the artist know him better so they can help the other pupils prepare questions as well . The information is shared.

Annex 2 : question cards

The freedom to improvise

During the chat sessions, the teachers supervise the exchanges and control the questions. We noticed the pupils asked too many questions at the same time ; They've prepared the meeting long ago which is not the case for the artist. Accordingly they must wait for the latter to answer.

The advantage of chat sessions is the ability to answer right away and to improvise according to the answers we get ; The prepared questions are just a working foundation, and we don't strictly stick to them, One day a chat happened to turn into a literary game using word puns etc.

Pupils are quite free, they can ask the questions they want, but the teachers keep the right to exclude a rude pupil.(We advise you to install a chat software on your school website for the teacher to moderate it. Numerous scripts exist on hotscripts.com for example.)

Do not exceed half an hour sessions

The chat session usually lasts half an hour. We think it's enough. A longer session would bring boredom and the pupils would send off subject messages to each other.

After the chat session we draw a few oral conclusions to see what we learned (all sorts of knowledge : conversational or artistical.

E. Writing your exchanges with the creator and presenting his work on the school website.

The pupils who invited the artist to the chat session must create a web page about the artist on the school website (workshop rubric).

Thanks to logz (logz.org : online website editor) the pupils can put the whole conversation, some of the artist's works and a few written comments online.

The existence of the workshop website is important for the success of the project because people have an idea about what the school undertook. You can easily understand that, in the artist's mind, the more chat sessions and guests there are, the more convincing we can be.

How to introduce the artist ?

Our own experience made us realize that there were no rules as all artists are different. Therefore, the pupils in charge of introducing an artist use their question cards and the discussions they have with him. They write a final synthesis and concentrate on what makes the artist original... etc.

We encourage the pupils to use all relevant information found in press books, resumes, works descriptions, in their final synthesis.

We also ask the pupils to express their personal opinion because they must feel they are the initiators and the actors of this action.

The pupils choose illustrations from the artist's works according to their synthesis and not the contrary. This to show they master their topic and they know the artist's website deeply.

When this is done, the teacher has a look at the whole work (he reads the comments, reorganizes web pages and add information if necessary) to validate it. This is appreciated by the pupils because they feel it brings some professionalism to their work.

F. Participating in a workshop when animated by an invited artist.

In the educational and administrative framework of an artistic workshop, see the academy website : The academic delegation for Art teaching and cultural action.

An example of a session.

In April 2003 the workshop welcomed Christophe Bruno. The morning, he presented his recent works and the way he worked to the pupils; the afternoon, he ran a workshop around an idea inspired by his work on the last Madonna album and also around the processes used by major disc companies to avoid piracy on the internet, one of these processes being "spoofing".

Annex 3 : Who is Christophe Bruno

Annex 4 : What is spoofing ?

The session :
time : 3 hours
pupils : 24
Computers : 8

Diversion :

They had to insert sounds from different songs (musical extracts or noises), either downloaded on the web (MP3 format) or taken from CDs (WAV format). This was possible thanks to Sonic Foundry (software treating all sounds format). Using Music Maker School Edition is possible but it does not treat the MP3 format.

This was to tackle two important notions in Art : « diversion » and « copyright », as stated by Nicolas Bourriaud in his essay "postproduction", contemporary artists do not think about "what to do next?" but about "what to do with?" understood as "with what already exists". This demarche comes from "the sampling culture"; recycling works, quotations, everything that can be ... while there is an anglo-saxon copyright crises.

Reconsidering laws and regulations, defining a frontier between the plunder and the clever reusability of works in personal productions are part of our concern in a new way of distributing Art. Our main goal is to make pupils aware of this for them to adopt a fair and respectful attitude towards the artists' work.

Following the same demarche we invited the artist Antoine Moreau who introduced in France a new concept in Art : "copyleft" (<http://artlibre.org>).

Development :

The first constraint was to respect the exact sound file length (and not the sound file size). The final montage (the song plus the insertion) had to be just the same length as the initial song.

The second constraint was to give some coherence and unity to the final montage : the sound cuts **had to** be smooth and the different atmospheres in the initial song and in the insertion **had to** be logical according to what the pupils had defined (document distributed at the beginning of the session).

Annex 5 : work file

G. Participating in a workshop-visit thanks to our cultural partner (The Delme Art centre and the "Provisoire" association)

As soon as you have many workshops with many interfering artists, you need a partnership with the Ministry of Culture (Drac) and the cultural institutions in your area. It is advised to ask associations linked to the cultural environment, which can accompany your projects (ACP : artistic and cultural project, workshops) and either help you with administrative formalities (eg: paying artists) or with the implementation of your pedagogical actions.

Institutions

In Lorraine, the best association to advise and accompany your « digital » projects is "Provisoire" <http://provisoire.org> and to a lesser extent the Delme Art centre and its ECM, our partner.

Organizing a visit to an exhibition.

We must always keep in mind that our first goal is to initiate pupils to « Art and Culture » and therefore, as stated in the Art curriculum, to help the pupils “meet a work of Art” when possible, in an exhibition for example. The action must be inscribed in the action itself, in preparing a research work with the educational team of the Art association.

We need to introduce the works and the theme of the exhibition to the pupils and prepare different activities for this exhibition : collecting information (documents, texts, reproductions), a question list for the guide (organized like a chat session as the pupils are used to it), taking pictures(easy with a digital camera), interview with a tape recorder, taking notes down.

As far as it is possible, it's better to prepare these activities with the team which is supposed to welcome the pupils during the exhibition. We can't sum up all the possibilities here but we advise you to use digital tools abundantly (camera, scanner, video camera) for a better efficiency in class (slide show, web pages).

Annex 6 : pedagogic outing file

V LOOK ON THE ACTION

The action was easy to carry on thanks to the numerous artistic web sites because the pupils never got bored, it took place during the whole school year and the computing equipment was adequate. But we also needed the pupils' enthusiasm and autonomy.

On the other side, the pupils' anarchic knowledge , their approximate lexicon and their distorted vision of the internet and of contemporary art were obstacles. Indeed, the pupils tried to elude some steps in the proposed demarche. Visiting a web site came down to a few clicks, without looking for the sense of navigation, without paying any attention to the creator's search. These difficulties showed us the importance to tackle this tool with a particular rigor.

There lied the main interest of our work. The difficulties encountered by the pupils made us develop this rigor. We had to use a precise and simple vocabulary, to accompany the reading of the visible datas on the artists' websites, to invite the pupils to take initiatives : to get in touch with the artists for example or to elaborate questions (this work is interesting and original as they are usually asked to find answers).

VI EVALUATION OF THE ACTION

A questionnaire is handed out to the pupils every year : it includes questions about Art and internet ; this questionnaire is intended to the pupils and to the parents because we'd like to evaluate the impact of such a workshop at home(increased interest in Art, computing equipment, Internet use...). It is also intended to the other teachers that work with those pupils (headteachers).

These people's remarks allow us to evaluate the impact of our action on the pupils' behaviour and work. We'd like to know if the workshop helps the pupils progress in spelling for example or if they gain self confidence and autonomy.

Annex 7 : evaluation files

VII PERSPECTIVES

They are numerous : they concern ICT, socialization, re-motivation, spelling but also Arts and particularly Contemporary Art.

Along the action we invited more than 30 artists in our chat sessions, and 7 of them intervened inside the school. We also sent thousands of mails.

An exotic somewhere else.

The learning situations inside the workshop are quite uncommon, neither school nor extra-school related, the main actors being teachers and pupils plus the contribution of a few artists. What is really original and uncommon is that the pretext for this action is somewhere else, in an exotic somewhere else : the information network and the existing interaction with the web actors.

A relationship through the web

This relationship with interlocutors through the internet is original because pupils are not face to face with an adult, it leaves time and does not demand immediate performances. The exchange is delayed and almost private.

These « delayed relational and educational devices » introduce learning perspectives in a different way : autonomy, wording and writing methods, research learning (nectar gathering), initiation to an esthetical look, learning how to compare and estimate (identifying form and style).

In fact these devices are even better than interactive cd roms because they imply a relationship with real people (the creators) and this is more impressive for pupils.

An exploration work

We must insist on the fact that the artists are discovered by the pupils themselves. It's a real exploration work which is proposed. There are no boundaries, no tracks to follow with clear references, on the contrary pupils must estimate, bring closer, identify the artists' work and the artists' style thanks to the form and the talk, this work relies on comparisons and estimations, it puts in perspective precise artistic knowledge and other general knowledge: social, cultural, technical, and even political.

Such an experience (the cyber-workshop) develops new vibrant learning situations that can be used, to a certain extent, for other subjects. Why not invite writers or scientific website webmasters to testify?

VIII TRANSFER/ BROADCASTING

The created documents (booklets, files, questionnaires) will be available on the school website(<http://ciel5.ac-nancy-metz.fr/0570010B>), these documents will retrace the evolution of the action.

We can also set forth this initiative thanks to mailing lists and other forums of discussions in the academy.

We also think about broadcasting this project more widely to the DRAC as they are involved in artists' interventions.

Chat sessions could be extended to many school, which would allow them to think about all sorts of invitations, distant or local, with specialists or passionate people ready to share their knowledge with youngsters.t