

Information about the action

Title of the action : « The Experts from Charmes, the scientifically revisited British detective short story »

Nancy-Metz Academy

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ZEP(designated area with specific educational needs) : yes

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Involved Classes : 3^{ème} Découverte Professionnelle 6 heures (6 hours of vocational training)

Subjects : French, English, technology, art , histoire - geography, vocational training

Written in June 2007

Summary :

The annual project « The Experts from Charmes, the scientifically revisited British detective short story » run in this particular class is meant to help pupils with specific needs, it involves many subjects at the same time. This is a vital lead for these pupils to visualize the link between learning and doing and to motivate them.

First, we wanted to join in a national contest organized by Foucher publishing, to give a realistic background to our story using the vocational module : each short story had to take place in a specific sector and we had to identify the two characters by their jobs. Then, our second goal was to work in pairs to word process the stories in order to read them in front of an audience and finally, the idea was to sell these stories to finance a school trip at the end of the year.

All these activities gather different goals : ease the acquisition of general knowledge to build the final product (the short story) , get over the difficulties related to written and oral expression and therefore get one's confidence back after constant underperforming at school, develop their public-spiritedness thanks to group work and reading sessions, and naturally motivate pupils by making them the main protagonists of their project.

Three steps in the making of the project :

- First term: make a realistic data base : they look for sectors and jobs to find a spatiotemporal context and to elaborate the characters' profile ; study of the detective short story in French ; study of the British civilization and intervention of the criminal and scientific investigation department to explain the different clues and evidence used by the police (DNA, fingerprints, photophit, narcotics,...)
- Beginning of second term : use the data and write the short stories in groups, make the covers in Art and wordprocess in technology. The best four are sent to Foucher publishing to enter the contest.
- End of second term and third term : the short stories are read by the pupils in front of a large audience (primary school pupils, college, old people, parents, hospitalized pupils) ... We look for partnership to be published and distributed.

Key-words : detective short stories, public reading.

| STRUCTURES | DEVICES | THEMES | SUBJECTS |
|---|---|--|---|
| Indifferent 3 ^{ème} à projet professionnel (DP6) ZEP-REP (educational area with specific needs) | Educational Diversification Partnership | Citizenship, public- spiritedness Breaking behaviour Knowing the business and job world Scientific Culture School problems Documentation Evaluation Mastering languages | Art French Geography ICT Interdisciplinarity Modern Languages Biology |

I. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

The annual and multi subject based project « The Experts from Charmes, the scientifically revisited British detective short story » was implemented in a class of 17 pupils (3^{ème} Découverte Professionnelle six heures » last year in secondary school involving 6 hours of vocational training and information, also called DP6).

It was meant to make pupils write detective short stories in groups of two in order to enter the contest organized by FOUCHER publishing. It was also meant to build a book and share the stories with a very large audience of all age.

The main goals of this action were to :

- Motivate pupils and get one's confidence back in general subjects,
- Get over the difficulties related to reading, writing and speaking,
- Set up a creative dynamic by involving all subjects,
- Make pupils understand how concrete and complementary what they learn can be,
- Learn to work together including partners not belonging to the school.

II. CONTEXT

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the work done with the police to change their negative perception of this job. They learn what the citizens' rights and duties are.

III. EVOLUTION OF THE PROJECT

After 4 years of teaching at Maurice Barrès, I noticed that the main difficulties of my pupils were the lack of motivation and their poor written expression. In June 2006, I was proposed to be head of the DP6. Seen the difficulties of the pupils, I focused on these two in the preparation of my annual project.

At that time I heard about the national contest Foucher organized thanks to the school librarian and it appeared to me it was a great source of motivation for my pupils to try and win the contest. This strictly codified genre was already known by the pupils as we had studied detective stories the previous year and it allowed me to impose very precise writing instructions to make up for my pupils' lack of imagination.

However, I had to add a few instructions to link this project to our « vocational training » module. Therefore, I asked the pupils to identify the two characters according to a precise sector (primary, secondary or tertiary sector).

The multiplication of these scientific kind of detective stories on TV was a great help as it made this project very concrete from the beginning. Very keen on watching these series, they would easily link their work to the vocational world, Sciences to Arts, and they would have enough knowledge to build their own plot.

Finally, I wanted to center this project around French in order to control its evolution and its finalization. I also wanted to use all the hours I was given with them as a teacher and as head of the class to win their trust.

IV. STEPS

A. Create an imagination

- Cross-subjects

The research stage took place during the first six weeks of the school year in the following subjects : they gathered information about :

- British civilization during the English lesson : names, firstnames, maps of the main cities, food, media, British judicial system, clothes, detective...
- Jobs (they made job-cards) and sectors during the vocational training module.
- Genetics, DNA and narcotics during the biology lesson : This study led to the writing of an official letter to the scientific police to ask for their intervention (dog-trainer, narcotic specialists..).
- Chemical analyses during the physical Sciences lessons
- British Economic and Geographic data during the History and Geography lessons.

- From a Literary point of view

My first sessions dealt with detective stories (cf. [Annexe 2](#)). I wanted the pupils to know the precise characteristics of this genre, and I also wanted to propose them various plots to help them build their imagination. To do so, I divided my sessions in two :

- **Collective work** : The study of three short stories *Coup de Gigot* from Roal Dahl, *Les Poissons rouges* from Didier Daeninckx and *Mort dans l'ascenseur* de Stanislas-André Steeman. The first one helped us build a synthetic grid (generic data about detective stories)(cf. [Annexe 3](#)), tackle the spatio-temporal notion which is essential to suspense and work on reported indirect speech during interrogations. Thanks to *Poissons rouges* from D. Daeninckx, I introduced the ideas of point of view, temporality and punch-line. Thanks to the last story I introduced the notion of wrong track and its importance in the building of the plot. This suspense is necessary to the readers' pleasure. The essential idea was the reading in front of an audience and we could not forget this even at a preliminary stage. At the end of these sessions we compared the three stories, we studied the synthetic grid, the British elements we could find. The pupils could therefore use these many grids during the writing stage.

During these first sessions, the short writing exercises progressively allowed the pupils to prepare themselves to the requirements of a short story writing. The frame description, M. Maloney's revelation, the writing in pairs of the grocer's and Mrs Maloney's interrogation in *Coup de Gigot* and the summary of the different short stories were the different activities proposed to the group (cf. [Annexe 4](#)) . Evaluating these activities allowed me to make pairs: one person for his writing skills and the other for his imagination. The synoptic work on the short stories was presented orally to the rest of the class to discuss the coherence and the relevance of the plot. From these exchanges the pupils had to amend their synopsys to be workable during the writing stage.

- **Individual work** thanks to cursive reading of many short stories, some from *Piégés* from George Païta, but also those written in 1997-1998 by Sarah Garon's upper secondary pupils with the participation of Jacques Mondoloni in lycée Bichat in Lunéville. These stories reassured my pupils as they were written by other pupils. They could see it was possible to write and to finalize their work. Each pupil made an oral presentation of their readings while the others filled in the synthetic grid about the detective genre.

B. Writing the short stories

- Writing and rewriting in groups

From November on, my pupils wrote the plot in pairs and in class from their synoptic grid. Many hours were needed for this stage, and only the drafts were corrected by the pupils at home. Each week, I took the pupils' work to amend them, to correct the spelling mistakes and to tell them what to get rid of and what to add. I also made propositions for the wrong tracks and the hints. My main concerns were :

- **The language used** : The fact that I made propositions for correction helped the pupils become actor of their learning and progress. Gradually, the short stories gave evidence of the pupils' efforts. (cf. [Annexe 5](#))
- **The reading** : The regular criticism from the other pupils, from me or the scientific police helped them amend their short stories.

By Christmas, five short stories out of eight were nearly finished. We had to send four for the contest. A final reading allowed us to choose the four to send.

The writing stage was long and laborious because of their difficulties but the many interventions from the scientific police kept on motivating them.

- Role of the criminal and scientific investigation department

The letter, written by the pupils in October, received a positive answer (cf. [Annexe 6](#)) from Captain Munoz. He proposed the intervention of the criminal investigation technicians (C.I.T) to give information and the documentation we asked for. This meeting was organized on December, 8th 2006. Two crime scenes were reconstructed to show how a criminal investigation went. The pupils tried to solve these crimes with the help of the technicians (cf. [Annexe 7](#)). This activity concretely helped them amend their own stories and correct the scientific incoherences to make their plot more realistic.

This exchange was very positive and we decided to have an other meeting in January to reconstruct their own crime scenes (cf. [Annexe 8](#)). Two scenes were reconstructed from the most accomplished short stories. The pupils tried to finish the writing of their stories hoping to be chosen by the criminal investigators. With the help of Officer Menuge, the authors presented the situation they had imagined. Each crime was studied with a scientific point of view using the evidences left by the murderer. Then, a presentation on narcotics and on photofit pictures ended this second meeting.

This work confronted the pupils with the police force in a way they had not expected. It was warm and friendly and very different from the repression context they always had in mind. The representation they had definitely changed.

- Making the book

In January, when all the drafts were finished, the pupils wordprocessed their stories during the technology lessons, thanks to Word. They learnt a lot about wordprocessing which helped them getting their ICT certificate (Brevet Informatique et Internet (B2i)). They had to respect the presenting instructions imposed by Foucher publishing. However, it was a relief to finally write the story and make it look like a “real book”

During the Art lessons, the pupils made the book cover which was scanned for future marketing. (cf. [Annexe 9](#))

C. Participating in the contest

On January, 29th 2007, we sent the four short stories to join in the contest. (cf. [Annexes 10-11-12-13](#)). The pupils kept asking for the results during the next two months.

At the end of March, we learnt we had not been accepted but we had a consolation prize : The book with the winning short stories. We will study it and compare our short stories to the winning ones in order to learn from them. Despite their disappointment, the pupils will, then, understand why they didn't win.

D. the end

It was too short to find partners to finance and publish the stories by the end of the year. Therefore, I decided to print the best ones thanks to the school equipment. Pupils will

sell the books during the school open day. The goal is to organize and offer these pupils a school journey to make them forget this failure and to reward them for their good work.

As far as the reading part is concerned, we are making contacts with the primary school teachers, the old people's home and the hospital for children.

V. LOOK ON THE ACTION

A. Making of the action

- Length, schedule of the tasks

This annual project is rich, complex and ambitious. It needs an efficient management, of the school calendar and a long term involvement of all. We didn't manage to do everything we had planned : the main tasks were successfully completed but the editing part and the financial part would have taken another year.

Moreover, joining the Foucher contest demanded a quick reaction from the pupils to write and wordprocess the stories. This was not an easy thing to do considering their school level.

For the different subjects involved, it was also difficult to schedule these sessions as it depended on the writing part. I could not give a precise date to my colleagues for their sessions to take place. Hopefully, their flexibility and patience made this project possible.

- Cross subjects project

When I introduced the project to my colleagues, I could feel their interest and enthusiasm. I was able to count on them when I needed them for their skills. The pupils liked the continuity between the different subjects.

- The school investment and involvement

To lead this action, I was not only able to count on my colleagues but also on my school which accepted the many interventions by the criminal investigators and which paid for the short stories publishing.

B. The pupils

- Motivation

This project was a great source of motivation for these pupils who were usually not very concerned by what school could offer them. The cross subjects implication, the criminal investigators interventions, the making of a book, the idea of reading in front of an audience made all this very concrete and helped them become actors of this project. The motivation also came from the participation in the Foucher editing contest: Being rewarded for a work they had done was not taken for granted for these pupils.

Nevertheless, their motivation started getting weak in December when it was time to correct their short stories : they had the impression they were stagnating. They were back on track when they started wordprocessing them. As soon as they had sent them to Foucher , they felt it was finished, it was therefore very difficult to obtain the book covers and to motivate them for the reading part. Selling the books was much easier as it was intended to finance a school journey.

- Group work

It allows them to respect the others' work, to use other people's skills and to accept differences. As they felt responsible for their group success they all worked on the plot, they tried to be as fast as possible in writing the story. Alone, they would never have thought it was possible to achieve such a project, so it made them more self-confident.

However, this work needs management because they easily chat or lose time which leads to a growing apathy. The further we go, the most difficult it is to put them to work, and it is even worse during the drafts correction part.

- Reinvesting what they learned

As far as the teachers were concerned, the project was evidently made to link knowledge to use them in the building of the plot. But the pupils didn't really succeed in reinvesting the tools each subject was offering them. The British civilization elements were only brought after the writing part. Therefore, they were not the foundation of the story and looked quite artificial.

- Knowledge in reading, writing and speaking.

It was not a readers class and we had to convince them with short texts first– the short story was an ideal choice- then with the detective genre and then with the idea of being an author and having an audience during reading sessions. The freedom to choose the short story they had to read, the possibility to change book or to stop the reading, the exchanges with other pupils being literary counsellor, all these elements favoured the reading. The pupils were not all enthusiastic, but the sight of books was not frightening anymore and didn't bring an automatic refusal.

The way they saw the writing evolved during the year. They didn't refuse to write anymore. Writing was very difficult for them but they were not afraid of the « spelling mistake » which made all literary creation impossible. The drafts correction played a great part in this. Working together allowed each pupil to bring its own language skills and knowledge and become more self-confident. Moreover, creating a detective plot developed their coherence skill and the building of logical sequences.

The oral work, in class first, then in front of an audience improved their ease to speak, their self-confidence, the exchange with the other.

VI. CONCLUSION

It was my first experience as head of this class (3^{ème} DP6) and also as head of an annual writing project. Even if everything was not seen through, if some tasks were done in a hurry

and perfection was not attained, the pupils we had made a large profit out of the work they did.

Of course, this report is not exhaustive and I'm willing to answer all your questions if needed.

Caroline CIOLINO
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