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Citizenship, arts and culture education on the web: what projects are mediated by the ‘virtual space’ for teaching practice and children’s activities?

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One of the greatest benefits of using the Internet in citizenship and art education is to provide educational opportunities for students based on their abilities and interests. At present, ICT can be used for activities which lead to active learning for citizenship: project-based education is especially useful as we use the Internet in our classrooms. Although the use of websites as a source for citizenship projects can be invaluable, teachers should look to more innovative uses of the Internet in their citizenship provision. When using existing web services or school intranet, teachers can:

- use networked communication packages to promote citizenship disputation and discussion both within and between schools,
- use online software which simulates social situations with the aim of engendering discussion among learners,
- help learners produce citizenship materials; project-based production of cultural artefacts such as websites, photos, paintings, videos and animations focusing on citizenship issues is always time-consuming and technically challenging but the process of active production often offer more valuable citizenship learning experience than the passive usage of products,
- use the Internet/school Intranet for whole school citizenship project activities and practices.

With regards to citizenship individual, classroom or virtual community project online activities, we have a current development, *Současného vývoje, pokroku*, which offers various examples of good practice, such as web-based projects connecting students across Africa, South and North America, Australia and the Middle East, and facilitating discussion and the exchange of resources relating to the different histories, cultures, governments and geographies of the learners involved. This paper indicates some categories of citizenship and art education projects supported by the Internet, with examples in English, which help teachers and students experience the joy of learning for themselves. The Internet presents a vast array of different projects and only a limited range of some important ones can be introduced in this paper.

The use of projects is one of the most motivating teaching techniques. Projects provide students with choices, meaningful context, and valuable learning time to make sense of the information they are learning (Kommers et al, 1996). When students solve project tasks, they strengthen research and organization skills while being responsible and self-motivated, all the skills they will need in the Information Age. In the context of culture/arts and citizenship topics we can divide the web-based projects into several different categories, all of which can be used to enrich the curriculum or/and provide integrated and thematic learning opportunities. Each type of project can be structured as individual student projects, in-class collaborative learning groups, or class-to-class interactions. Furthermore, Internet and computer networks offer more interesting online

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community building and the aggregation of knowledge in computer-mediated spaces, such as 'computer-assisted group mind' or 'online brain trusts' (Rheingold, 1993). In the eyes of many technologists online communication is a powerful medium to form democratic 'virtual communities', providing mutual support, advice and identity (Gates, 1995). But it is necessary to look at the virtual communities in terms of the citizenship educational facility. We can neither overestimate nor elevate it over other ways of learner's communication. Excessive using of web-mediated communication can lead to a dissipation of the educating potential of web-based projects including the Internet services. Note that because the characteristics of web-assisted educational project are very complex, the author is able to describe only some of the essential features.

Web assistance for classroom and individual projects

Curriculum and theme-focused projects based on the citizenship/arts education curriculum content areas are designed to enrich and teach students about a specific subject/theme: for example, a selected political period might be a theme in which one could ask students to analyse the causes of policy development and make a presentation on this. Students could be provided with a list of Web sites that can help them complete their project (e.g. *Citizenspace*¹ web has excellent fact banks that offer government policy in a readable format, *Count Me In Calendar*² is a useful resource which has information on a huge range of events and activities across the UK). In addition, there is a variety of news-oriented organizations and companies that have created media and web resources designed for classroom project use. These include *Cable in the Classroom*³, *CNN Student News*⁴ and *National Student Television project*⁵. Another U.S. source for teachers that links civics education to media analysis and media education, *School City*⁶, offers free web-based tools and curriculum-focused content along with online projects and ideas. Especially classroom collaborative web projects provide wonderful opportunities to work with other classrooms throughout the world on a common project.

From the methodological point of view, as teachers search for the right project they must keep the curriculum and learning objectives in mind and always analyse the main features of the Internet portals and web designer's objectives. In the context of web assistance for classroom and individual projects we can find the following types of projects:

Electronic correspondence projects. *ePALS*⁷ is the world's largest online classroom community and provider of school-safe email and collaborative technology, and connects over 100000 classrooms, 4.6 million students and educators in 191 countries into classroom-to-classroom projects and cross-cultural learning. For example, *The Way We Are*⁸ stimulates participation of alongside 40 ePALS classrooms from Canada and the developing world. Students from both French and English worlds get to know one

¹ <http://www.citizenspace.co.uk>

² <http://www.countmeincalendar.info/countme/CMHome.nsf>

³ <http://www.ciconline.org/default.htm>

⁴ <http://cnnstudentnews.cnn.com/fyi/index.html>

⁵ <http://www.nationalstudent.tv>

⁶ <http://www.schoolcity.com>

⁷ <http://www.epals.com>

⁸ <http://www.epals.com/projects/thewayweare>

another via email and moderated discussion board. Topics for discussion include school life, friends, family and community, discrimination, human rights and children's rights, health issues, economics and international development issues. *The KeyPals Club*⁹ is another place for young people, teachers and students to locate and correspond with other youth and students around the world. The service provides an incredibly easy-to-use interface and database to quickly locate and contact a student or a class from around the world.

Projects stimulating information exchanges and data analysis. These projects ask participants to participate in the collection and analysis of data. This can be an online activity, such as *Explorer's Ocean Life!* in *Scholastic's News Zone*¹⁰. In this students have the opportunity to use the knowledge they have gained about fieldwork to explore a water ecosystem of their own. They make observations and collect field samples. Another project, *First Peoples Project*¹¹, links indigenous students around the world in an exchange of art, writing and culture. In summary, these projects classes could contribute to compilations of information, research, games, jokes, tales, and other things.

Student publication projects. As a rule, participants can publish their original work - poetry anthology, photography, paintings, drawings, posters, greeting cards, textile designs, paintings and magazine - in an online newspaper, schedule or exhibition. Students can visit *Stone Soup*¹² for an example of a student publication and children's art international collection. In *Creative and Visual Arts Gallery*¹³, the learners are encouraged to submit scanned/computerized graphics or photographs (in electronic format) of creative and visual artworks. The Czech alternative of the same project is the website of *Prague-Golem*¹⁴ which offers to children the possibility to upload their computer based works of art and show them to others by means of the virtual gallery on this server.

Virtual Adventures, as online field trips, bring students into situations they would otherwise never participate in or learn about. On the Internet, teachers can find a wide variety of virtual adventures. Some focus on a particular location, others are more general. For example, online activities of Scholastic, the global children's publishing and media company, offer *Global Trek*¹⁵, a simulation of visits to countries around the world, and *Endangered Ecosystems*¹⁶ in which learners may examine the environment topics.

Some websites surveying and descriptions

The number and quality of web resources continues to grow. There are many websites containing worksheets, searchable databases, lesson plans and publications as well as information about websites, books and games - all relevant to educational activities in

⁹ http://www.teaching.com/KeyPals/about_us.cfm

¹⁰ <http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews>

¹¹ <http://www.iearn.org/projects/fp.html>

¹² <http://www.stonesoup.com>

¹³ <http://www.iearn.org/projects/creativeandvisualarts.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.prague-golem.cz> or http://www.prague-golem.cz/admin/gall_page.asp

¹⁵ <http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/globaltrek/index.htm>

¹⁶ <http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/explorer/ecosystems/index.htm>

many countries. In the context of civic and art education we may point out just some of them:

Consultation webs e.g. *CitizenSpace: Let the UK government know what you and your students think*¹⁷ is an Independent service aimed at engaging the general public in the democratic process.

Campaign webs focused on schooling e.g. *Feed me Better*¹⁸ web supports a campaign to get fresh, tasty and nutritious food back on the school dinner's menu.

Web calendars of events and activities in the world, national or local context e.g. *Count Me In Calendar*¹⁹ is a comprehensive free to use calendar of charity awareness and fund-raising campaigns across the UK.

Websites with practical activities for young people e.g. *Heads up*²⁰, political discussions webs to help young people build up the skills and know-how needed to participate in politics. Sstudents can regularly take part in online discussions and debates with (very) important persons etc.

Specific citizenship educational webs e.g. *BBC education 'get involved' campaign*²¹ is full of practical ways in which they can get involved and make a difference in their schools, in their communities and even in the world.

Youth forums e.g. *Highland Youth Voice*²² is an elected parliament of 70 young people from throughout the Highlands ensures young people have a say in issues that affect them and take action on issues that they think are important.

Kids advisory zones e.g. *Kids Zone – NSPCC*²³ as area of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children website written specifically for children and specialises in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children.

Websites of specialized organisations with relevance beyond the local community and with research work, practical toolkits and useful resources. They can offer programmes, services and publications to enable young people to develop their personal, social and career development. For example *UK Youth*²⁴ website stimulates support and development of high quality work and educational opportunities for all young people. *TAG Theatre Company*²⁵ is a Scotland's national theatre company for young people.

¹⁷ <http://www.citizenspace.co.uk>

¹⁸ <http://www.feedmebetter.com>

¹⁹

<http://www.countmeincalendar.info/countme/CMHome.nsf/frmMainHomepage?ReadForm>

²⁰ <http://www.headsup.org.uk/content>

²¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/citizenx/internat/index.shtml>

²² <http://www.highlandyouthvoice.org>

²³ <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/homepage2>

²⁴ <http://www.ukyouth.org>

²⁵ <http://www.tag-theatre.co.uk>

There is information on TAG's exciting performance projects and plans, their drama workshops and training programmes for young people etc.

Web projects with dominance of virtual environment can provide sustainable and meaningful opportunities for learners to engage in local, national and international democratic processes, inspiring community programmes, youth parliaments etc. For example, *The Children's Parliament*²⁶ provides sustainable and meaningful opportunities for children of 14 and under to engage in local, national and international democratic processes, the *International Teledemocracy Centre*²⁷ aims to develop and apply advanced information and communication technology to enhance and support the democratic decision-making process. Based at Napier University, the centre considers best practice in electronic participation and develops ICT tools to engage Scotland's young people in debate and discussion.

The world's largest global non-profit network *iEARN*²⁸ is well-known project-based web that enables young people to use the Internet and other new technologies to engage in collaborative educational projects that both enhance learning and make a difference in the world. It offers in total more than 170 webs, inclusive of about 140 projects focused on creative language activities, arts, environment and social studies. For example, *Creative and Visual Arts Gallery* is a centre of web-based publication of creative and visual arts images/writings that appeal to young people generally (children and youth).

Web communities, simulations and games with master role of web communication environment. Closed multi-user online environments with online simulations and games are very modern technology tool to solve or discuss citizenship topics inside the virtual world (Ellis & Bruckman, 2001; Wadhams, 2003). The possibility to design and live in the environment through an 'avatar' is frequent MUVE feature. *Electronic United Nations*²⁹ is a website specializing in promoting and supporting educational simulations, encouraging role playing models to help students construct their own knowledge, empower students through hands-on participation, seek solutions to real global problems, link classrooms and students around the globe, explore the thinking of students in other countries, allow students to explore national and global politics. A new online community, *There.com*, exists as an online gateway where players can hang out with their friends and socialize with others in a 3D environment. In an experimental project, *Myzel.org* from Vienna, Austria, the rules of the game are created by the players themselves. Players define what is allowed and what is not, and see firsthand complex interconnections of economy, politics, and society. The latest game to hit the market is the *Sims Online*³⁰. Players have control over a character and act out real-life fantasies. Students can built in-game restaurants create several radio stations and even a newspaper. *Global SchoolNet Homepage*³¹ is an ultimate resource for global project-based learning, problem-based learning, and online collaborative learning. Global SchoolNet's free membership program provides project-based learning support materials, resources, activities, lessons and special offers from Global SchoolNet

²⁶ <http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk>

²⁷ <http://itc.napier.ac.uk>

²⁸ <http://www.iearn.org/projects>

²⁹ <http://www.simulations.com/eun/overvie.htm>

³⁰ <http://www.eagames.com/official/thesims/thesimsonline/us/nai/index.jsp>

³¹ <http://www.gsn.org>

partners. Global SchoolNet Foundation (GSN) provides collaborative educational, scientific and cultural learning activities which help students become literate and responsible global citizens. *MundoHispano*³², a community of native speakers of Spanish from around the world, has the most important cultural context. It brings together teachers and learners of Spanish, and computer programmers, all of whom volunteer their time and talent to make this a dynamic virtual world.

Methodological websites for teachers

Through methodological websites teachers have access to a variety of practice examples, namely teaching ideas, school web sites and projects. Furthermore they can use a guide to collaborative projects to help them join or coordinate web-based classroom projects. *myEUROPE*³³ offers an important civic European context. It focuses on European citizenship and intercultural education through online activities and classroom practice examples at primary and secondary level. During the past four years, it has become one of the largest networks of schools in Europe. It has encouraged contacts between teachers and their classes from member states, new member states and candidate countries, involving students in collaborative educational projects and activities. Art web methodological resource *Art Teaching*³⁴ is designed for all art teachers and students of primary, secondary, further and higher education. There are numerous student galleries, lesson plans, project ideas, links to art galleries, art reference sites, art colleges etc. In the Czech Republic, a centre for creative teaching and use of ICT at schools *EDUART*³⁵ is newly originated. This centre is considered to be the first server for teachers of art education who will have the possibility to share their experience and methods with other teachers. In the future it should be an open space for discussing actual problems of teaching process in all aspects.

Conclusion

To sum up, the use of web assistance or latter-day closed web communities/games could provide study within meaningful, authentic, and information-rich contexts and promote student's participation in activities that contribute to high-level thinking processes (problem solving, experimentation, original creations etc.). Furthermore, we have to be aware that web-assisted classroom projects move to an increasing emphasis on building web teaching/learning communities with its shift from the transmission of complete information to its own ways of thinking and knowing. We can reasonably assume that project-based learning/teaching with assistance of web services offers a wide range of opportunities for citizenship, arts and culture education. It could stimulate the process of the integration of groups with different cultural, religious and other backgrounds (Petrućiová & Meciár, 2003) valuably, it might as well contribute to research of adolescent's attitudes and opinions in the context of effective education for citizenship (Vacek & Lašek, 2002) and also especially to learners' understanding the role of engaged citizen (ODPM, 2005). We must note, that:

³² <http://www.umsl.edu/~moosproj/mundo.html>

³³ <http://myeurope.eun.org/ww/en/pub/myeurope/home/others/about.htm>

³⁴ <http://www.artteaching.co.uk>

³⁵ <http://www.eduart.cz>

- all these projects could be determined by controlling all stages in the information literacy skills (Slavík & Novák 1997),
- using the Internet widely as an information retrieval medium has a number of pedagogical benefits when used in combination with (not instead of) other information sources (Bruckman, 1999),
- all educators and web developers of learning materials must rather find balance between the 'on-screen' and the 'visceral' activities (Mašek, 2000) in real project performance.

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