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A Case Study From Estonia

Title: Animated legends

Summary: Children learned animation techniques so as to present more well-known Estonian legends to children from other countries

What was done: In cooperation with Nukufilm's children's studio, two workshops took place. Children learned about different stages in animation as well as the requirements applied to material used for an animated film.

How the learners were involved:

The first workshop was hosted in our own classroom by an instructor and cameraman from Nukufilm's children's studio. They gave a presentation of animation techniques. The children as a group had the opportunity of working together in preparing a script as a series of pictures. Each child started a series of events the way they imagined and the others had to continue the story.

Based on a recording of the children being active, an animation was put together by using photographs, giving the children an experience in depicting movement in animation. The second workshop took place three weeks later at Nukufilm's children's studio where a number of worktops and camera-connected computers could be used simultaneously. To make efficient use of their time at the studio, the children had to prepare all of their relevant material beforehand.

The animations were prepared as group work projects. The class was divided into four groups of five children each.

The children themselves had to choose a story to be animated. With help from the teacher, the children recalled the most well-known Estonian folk tales and studied folklore publications. Once the group selected their story, an eight-part content description was put together with help of the teacher.

Working as a group, the required background and characters were drawn within the course of a few weeks and subtitles were prepared. Each group was responsible for their own division of work. It was interesting to observe the children discuss what should be drawn and how, allocate tasks, and learn to consider each member of the group.

At the studio, the children's groups had two and a half hours each to animate the material of their story and record such animation. Text and sound effects were recorded for the animation with help of a Nukufilm instructor.

The children comment:

When we got to school in the morning we started drawing our characters right away. We drew some in each class after classwork was done.

We animated the story of 'Toell the Great' because it's awesome. We really like the book and we wanted to draw pictures that would be just as good.

It was totally exhausting to move these little parts for hours on end and keep filming. But it sure was a proud feeling once it was all done.

We had to make sure we had a grasp on what happened in the story. We all know 'Old Thomas' stands on top of the Town Hall spire but we had never actually read the story for ourselves.

A parent: Thank you so much for organizing interesting events like this for our kids.

Motivation and aims in this activities have been:

- Familiarize the children with animation techniques in order to enable them to express whatever they can imagine in an art form they love
- Provide an experience in cooperation
- Provide better knowledge of Estonian folk traditions/folklore and through that strengthen the children's cultural identity
- Teach the children how to consider the addressee of their creation – children from other countries must understand our work

Successes and lessons learned:

It was fascinating to watch the children understand so quickly how a storyboard – a preparatory tool for an animated film - is made; how the camera-connected computer should be used; and how tasks should be allocated within a group.

A good short animated film takes days of preparatory work, drawing of characters and background (the technique used was cut-out animation). The children were happily submerged in the activity, using every free moment in their school day to make their film.

As the actual filming time consisted of 2.5 hours of intense work due to the studios' high workload, it was evident that not everyone can work at the same pace and under the same amount of pressure.

This taught the group members to share responsibility and organize their work accordingly.

Transferability:

A similar activity can be implemented in any school; if a partner like Nukufilm's children's studio in Estonia is not available, Internet-based videos and animation-making environments can be employed.

Further information:

The source material consisted of publications of Estonian folk tales. All completed projects (four animated films) are available on the Estonian Reading Association's home page.

Location of practice:

Estonia, Estonian Reading Association, Pirita MG, grade 3, students age 9-10 years.

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Date:

Activities were completed during April 2016.

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Photo: pupils in Nukufilm's children's studio

Pictures: 1) details for the puppet, The King; 2) screen shot from the animation "Old Thomas".



