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Paper presentation

The use of media-enriched text books in the music classroom:
examples from Greece and Cyprus¹

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Abstract

Introduction

The latest attempt in educational change in Greece is a multi-lateral and multi-level framework for reforms in various aspects of the educational process.

Digital School, a basic action within the 'New School' reform, is essentially an open source platform with web 2.0 tools, which can support a number of applications for a digital classroom.

This paper presentation focuses on one aspect of the Digital School action, the media-enriched textbooks, and more particularly the Music textbooks for high-school.

Rationale and Aims of the research

In the last three years the 'Aesthetic Education team' (a small team of specialists in music, art, education and information technology) created a 'media-enriched' version of the Music and the Visual Arts high-school textbooks. The aims and objectives of this innovative work were partly described by the particulars of the project which is co-funded by the European Union and the Greek Ministry of Education. Within this framework and its restrictions though, a number of aims pertinent to the school subjects of Music and Visual Arts were set by the team members that the creation of the learning objects and their characteristics were pursuing. What were these aims in the Music textbooks and how did the restrictions influence the final product?

Fundamental goal of the project is its use in the classroom in a way that would enrich teachers' choices and lesson plans. It was important therefore to investigate its use in different schools and by different teachers in order to discuss their opinions regarding its use in their classrooms as well as any problems they might have faced related to the technological and/or pedagogical aspect of the media-enriched textbooks.

Another key issue is pupils' response and motivation. How was this novel medium (the media-enriched textbook) accepted by the pupils? What were their responses during the lesson? Were they encouraged to use it outside the classroom?

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Methodology and Methods

In order to explore the above questions, an open invitation was sent to high-school music teachers in Greece and Cyprus for voluntarily taking part in this initial inquiry. Participating teachers were sent directions for self-monitoring and a questionnaire with open-ended questions. A two-three months application period led to the completion of the questionnaire which was then followed-up by an interview seeking to complete any gaps, interpret teachers' opinions and explore their ideas further.

Main research findings

This paper reports on two cases of music teachers (one in Greece and one in Cyprus). They were both frequent users of technology in their classrooms and incorporated the new 'media-enriched textbooks' easily in their lessons. Based on oral and written comments, their overall experience was positive. They recorded a number of aspects as assets:

- The 'media-enriched' music textbooks were easy to use in the classroom utilizing different technological mediums like the computer lab, an interactive smart-board or a single computer with a video projector.
- Available music examples for each lesson multiplied without the teacher having to spend the time to find them and record them.
- The 'media-enriched' music textbooks were used as a basis from which to explore further and add their own content.
- They provided a variety of activities and examples making the lesson more interesting for the pupils. Pupils participated more during the lesson, asking more questions.
- Pupils were happily using them at home as well.

Some words of caution and ideas for further development were also noted:

- Teachers need to spend a lot of time initially in order to familiarize themselves with the material available (videos, audio recordings, interactive activities, crossword puzzles, etc.) in order to incorporate it in their lesson plans.
- The use of technology and especially the internet requires caution and teacher control.
- More interactive activities would open it further to pupils and make it more useful for a practice-oriented music lesson.

Conclusions/Implications for Practice

This project, being a national priority within a major educational reform, aspires to transform the means used in every-day classrooms in all subject-areas.

This initial small-scale investigation on the application of the ‘media-enriched’ music textbooks, clearly indicates that it is an innovative, interesting and valuable tool for every music teacher. Teachers can use these ‘digital books’ in a variety of ways and teaching formats, with basic requirements in terms of technology. They are adapted easily to each teacher’s needs, knowledge and teaching style and they can liven up their lesson. However, a lot of work needs to be done in order for these opportunities to flourish. Challenges for efficient utilization include teacher training, technological infrastructure and current financial difficulties which impedes future planning and support.

This paper presents the results of the work undertaken under the project "DIGITAL SCHOOL: Specifying a Digital Educational Platform, Building and Operating an Educational Knowledge Base, Adapting and Annotating Learning Objects with Educational Metadata, Building the Infrastructure to Support Exemplary Teaching Practices and the Use of the Participatory Web", co-funded by the Greek National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF), No 296441 (2010 -2015), coordinated by the Computer Technology Institute and Press "Diophantus" (CTI).
