LEARNING THROUGH SHARING :
OPEN RESOURCES, OPEN PRACTICES, OPEN COMMUNICATION

Using Web-based Alternate Reality Games
for Developing Foreign Language Open Educational Resources

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the opportunities provided by Alternate Reality Games for the purposes of integrating learner-generated content into online games-based foreign language learning as well as for promoting learner communication in 'open' environments through online gaming and international discussion boards. Alternate Reality Games (ARGs) are interactive narratives, often involving multiple media and game elements used to tell a story that may be affected by participants' ideas or actions (Connolly *et al*, 2008). Another important aspect of ARGs is multi-channel communication between speakers and learners of different European languages, which can be used as a powerful tool for encouraging peer-teaching as a new component in foreign language acquisition across Europe as well as a method for getting students involved in generating learner content that meets their educational needs in a particular subject field. One of the most important points about ARGs is that it can accommodate the learning needs of hundreds of students simultaneously, which makes educational environments based on ARGs a suitable arena for developing learner-oriented teaching content as well as learner-generated educational content. ARGs can be used to teach not only the language itself but also other subjects through a common language medium in a field known as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). The findings that are reported in this paper were observed within the context of the *Tower of Babel* ARG developed as part of the EU Comenius project '*ARGuing for multilingual motivation in Web 2.0*' and it must be noted that the outcomes of this project can easily be transferred to other levels of education, namely university studies and to other subject fields as well. The pilot phase of the project showed that ARGs can present a working solution for educators who believe that students can be trusted with the task of generating their own learning content based on teamworking, discussing and negotiating in an open learning environment, unobtrusively guided and supported by language trainers who act as 'puppet masters' behind the stage. The paper comments on some educational and social aspects of games-based learning and their implications for university level foreign language teaching and the questions that this poses. The conclusion is that ARGs can serve as a possible open educational resource with regard to the opportunities that it provides for creating high quality, relevant and up-to-date foreign language teaching resources for both language teachers and students alike.

Key words: ARGs, OER, learner-generated content, communication, social networks, foreign language teaching