Creating Machinima Empowers Live Online Language Teaching and Learning

5.1 Evaluation Framework

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Evaluation Framework

Deliverable Number: 5.1

Deliverable Name: Evaluation Framework

Description: A framework for evaluation has been developed in collaboration with the project partners and informed by extensive discussion and semi-structured interviews.

Dissemination Level: Public

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Background

Facilitating machinima will help teachers to make informed choices to use virtual worlds for their specific language teaching purposes. Creating machinima engages students to take an active part in the learning process through role-play, visiting places and reflecting on their activities afterwards (Rainbow & Schneider, 2014). Constructing their own narratives as part of a project based approach and by being involved in the planning, preparing, filming and editing their own scenarios, learners are enabled to develop further skills apart from the traditional linguistic structures, such as intercultural communication and digital literacy (Thomas & Schneider, 2014).

There are several case studies (Case Studies, 2014) on learning and teaching in virtual worlds, provided as results of the EU-funded Euroversity Project (2011-2014) and the Avalon Project (2008-2011), giving evidence of the affordances of learning and teaching in virtual worlds including highlights and pitfalls. These serve as examples of good practice to be built upon for further research in relation to the creation and use of machinima.

The aim of the CAMELOT Project is not simply to provide visually appealing, authentic conversations in the target language that teachers can readily use, but to provide the know-how, both technological and pedagogical, for teachers to create and adapt their own machinima to their own particular teaching environment. By providing samples of good practice including guidelines for the technical practicalities necessary to create machinima and how to use them, the CAMELOT Project offers a range of educational benefits for language teachers and learners.

Evaluation concept

The evaluation of the CAMELOT project assesses the design of machinima created for different languages, genres and levels in virtual worlds and their usability for language teaching and learning guided by the following research questions (Schneider, 2015).

To what extent does the creation and use of machinima affect the following variables?
- language learning
- students' motivation
- active participation
- learner autonomy
- learning outcome

Furthermore, the following question will be addressed:

To what extent can machinima be utilised for self-reflection, feedback and assessment?

This includes learning in virtual worlds following a task-based approach, using machinima as evidence for students' breakout groups, capturing the results and evaluating them.

The evaluation framework provides guidelines for the objective assessment of machinima created during the project, their implementation and their relevance, effectiveness and impact for language learning. This also includes technical challenges, pitfalls and the lessons learned. Finally, the evaluation framework will determine the significant impact of results and their sustainability.

Core areas and evaluation methods
The core areas of the framework are:

1. The application and use of machinima created for field testing within educational sectors (e.g., schools, higher education, adult education, CLIL and vocational learning).

2. Developing a teacher training framework for teaching how to create and teach with machinima in a virtual learning environment.

3. The use of machinima as an evaluation tool for analysis, reflection and feedback.

For this research a mixed method approach was chosen, composing several case studies, using observation and both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Such an approach is particularly useful to answer the questions that cannot be elicited by the use of one method alone (Creswell, 2014).

The project started with a preliminary quantitative evaluation in form of a questionnaire, addressed to groups of learners and teachers selected for this project, in order to collect data about their language level and experience, digital literacy and familiarity with the concept of machinima.

Furthermore qualitative data were selected through the use of interviews and focus groups during a series of introductory seminars, offered to familiarize teachers with the concept of machinima. The needs analysis survey predominantly served as a first orientation as regards to tendencies and possible challenges in order to set up criteria for an evaluation framework.

Another purpose of the needs analysis survey was to identify what kind of questions should be asked in the follow-up questionnaires and further interviews of the teacher training pilot groups and the field testing groups and how detailed they needed to be.

Ethical principles and considerations
Consent forms will be required for interviews, questionnaires and reports that are not anonymous. Participants need to give their permission when they share information and experiences. Such permission is usually provided in form of signed agreements which guarantee anonymity and allow participants to withdraw from the project at any time. Such signatures can be obtained physically, for example, when the teacher meets the students in a classroom.

This procedure may be different in a virtual environment, where participants might not want to reveal their real life identity. Here the researcher(s) must make sure that participants will provide their avatar names to identify them in-world and sign a notecard to act as a consent form. For later contact it might be necessary to collect email addresses or telephone numbers in case ethical questions relating to permission arise during the course of the research.

It is important that teachers and learners are aware of ethical considerations and procedures, as well as copyright issues, when creating machinima in virtual worlds and other immersive environments. There are standards and regulations for machinima recordings in Second Life® provided by Linden Labs (2014) that researchers can refer to.

Evaluation of field-testing
Prior to the field testing each of the partners involved in this phase of the project provided machinima which were evaluated by the consortium before being implemented in the real life or virtual classroom. The testing groups recruited by partners of the project consortium were military staff from the National Defence University (NDU), Erasmus students at the University of Istanbul (UIST), university students at the University of West Bohemia (UWB), school children at a secondary school in the Netherlands and learners in vocational education (UWB) focusing on specific areas in different language levels, like specific vocabulary and grammar, intercultural differences, provided in Polish, Turkish, Czech, English and German. The field testing groups used machinima in their language lessons, regardless of whether the teaching took place in virtual worlds, 2D environments or in a physical classroom.

Even though the field testing was originally meant to take place in virtual worlds, as a result of the needs analysis, it was considered that some language teachers might not have had experience with teaching in immersive environments or creating machinima. In this case the machinima was provided by professional machinimatographers in accordance with their lesson plans and course curriculum. As a consequence, some technical challenges were also to be expected depending on location, equipment and bandwidth.

To conduct the research, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to gather information about the number of learners, their age, language of communication, competence levels, and familiarity with virtual environments (Moschini, 2010, p.32). Questionnaires completed by teachers and learners prior and after the course provided evidence of the effectiveness of the machinima tested. In addition, a qualitative analysis, in the form of interviews and focus groups, was used to explain learners' and teachers' experiences with machinima and explore what they learned and how this differed from other forms of learning in more detail. Furthermore, discussions in focus groups as well as individual interviews were conducted during the field testing phase.

The combination of both research methods (Creswell, 2014) provided first responses to the research questions posed. The results of the field tests will affect the next steps, and will build the basis for guidelines and the parameters for the teacher training courses.

Teacher training

A framework for a teacher training course will be established to facilitate teachers who are not familiar with virtual worlds and 3D filming to create their own machinima. The course is scheduled for five weeks, using a blended approach utilising the Moodle platform for general discussions and exchange, tasks and interaction, Adobe Connect for live online sessions, where trainees can present results and exchange tips and ideas, whereas the creation of machinima will take place in Second Life®.

The course will provide teachers with the know how to use Second Life® confidently and with the knowledge needed to make simple machinima. The first two weeks will give teachers the opportunity to get acquainted with the virtual learning environment of Second Life®. In the three weeks to follow participants will examine how to make machinima in more depth, critique existing language teaching machinima and finally create their own machinima. Participants will receive a Certificate of Completion (CAMELOT, 20013-2015).

Again, a mixed methods approach will be chosen for the teacher training research. The researcher will collect data through quantitative and qualitative methods such as initial and final questionnaires and interviews and use observation methods during the training in form of observed participation (Boellstorff, 2008; (Cohen et al., 2007).

The most important results of training research will be to find out whether the trained teachers see the value of creating and using machinima in their teaching and if they did how they would apply these newly acquired skills in their everyday teaching.

For the results of the research project it is essential to observe how teachers immerse themselves in virtual worlds and engage in creating machinima and how enthusiastic they have become about filming in these environments. The researcher, who will be part of the course facilitating team, will carry out the observation process (Boellstorff, 2008; Cohen et al., 2007).

Furthermore the research results will be utilised to specify the guidelines provided for the first phase of the teacher training and adapted where necessary, applying lessons learnt. This can result in changing materials, methods and tools for the second five week teacher training course to follow. For the second teacher training course the same research methods and approach will be used. According to the findings there may be more interviews or focus group discussions required than in the first course.

Significance of the research

Machinima produced within the research project aim to promote learning in virtual worlds, make access easy through simple and visual instructions, trigger interest in learning and teaching in these environments and demonstrate what can be achieved by learning and teaching with machinima. The objectives are that teachers and learners understand the benefits and challenges of learning in 3D worlds and gain further knowledge to add to their digital skill set.

The project consortium sees a great educational potential for language learners producing machinima in virtual worlds, as they can boost learners' confidence in communicating in the target language (Schneider, 2015). With the research results we hope to demonstrate that machinima can be utilised as a tool for reflection, assessment and feedback.

Furthermore we anticipate that the research will showcase how the process of creating machinima collaboratively, in a virtual learning space, will motivate learners to interact and learn autonomously, while improving their language as well as digital skill set.

The results of the findings will be disseminated via several channels, at conferences, via publications, websites and social media.

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