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Academic research for schools

Ilya Leibo¹, Tatiana Fialkova², Irina Kaliteevskaya³

Moscow Institute for Open Education, Institute of Universal History of the Russian Academy of Sciences

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Abstract:

Academic subjects are usually extremely far from actual problems and questions of academic research. Material at school is often presented as a sum of fixed, immovable facts one has to learn, although in the world of research these facts may be regarded as questionable or even disproved. On the other hand, pupils rarely have an understanding of how facts are developed and understood. As it is impossible to bring a researcher to every school, we are working on the project that would help researchers to communicate with pupils and teachers via the Internet, as today's technological capabilities are able to facilitate new forms of learning.

1 A school and an academic research

School teachers in Russia, especially in the regions others than the capital cities, often suffer from a shortage of information. The main reason for this is lack of time and sometimes education, but also there are problems regarding library acquisitions. As a result there are teachers working with occasionally chosen text-books, usually depending on what a school library has. An average teacher likely had a connection with an academic research at best during his or her university studies. Some teachers collaborate with researchers and invite them to present a lecture or a series of lectures at school, but this is possible only in bigger university cities, or in special schools or classes, and only when there is an active and devoted teacher who has developed personal relationships with academics.

There was an attempt to create an educational television program which could be used in the course of school lessons, thus making them more alive and diverse. But because of the obvious problems of schedules and the general shortage of the school courses (they are constantly decreasing) this didn't work.

The problem became especially evident lately, specifically with history schoolteachers at the school conducted by Institute of Universal History of the Russian Academy of Sciences. They repeatedly asked about new discoveries, and questioned facts that are nowadays regarded false, but are still being repeated in textbooks. On the other hand the researchers who are usually writing textbooks for schools obtained the possibility to receive feedback concerning what teachers think about their production. All this demonstrated that some form of communication between teachers and researchers is necessary. However, a one-week school can, first of all, involve too few participants in comparison with the amount of schools and school teachers in the country, and, thus, every teacher may not participate in this kind of education. Second, this kind of course is too general to touch any question in great detail. A

researcher would get an opportunity to discuss only the most general questions, giving a teacher an idea of his point of view on the situation as it is at the moment, but not in progress. New Internet technologies definitely are at the moment the only and very effective way to solve the problem. Today the Institute of Open Education has commenced several projects with the Institute of Universal History and works on the other projects involving researchers from other fields. We would like to present a product based on the technology of podcast that we continue to develop together.

2 Lectures online

Our project "Lecture online" is made on the basis of podcasts. Researchers present lectures for school pupils on more or less general and disputable subjects that are then divided into smaller pieces. The podcasts are supplied with the multimedia hypertext structure that includes a text file with the transcript, encyclopaedic references, images and music illustrating the text, bibliography, and sometimes videofiles with a recording of the lecture or other materials.

All this gives a teacher the possibility to select the information and to incorporate it into a lesson. This structure also gives the possibility to put a question or to express an opinion, and makes the communication between a teacher or a pupil and a researcher permanent.

Moreover, the specificity of the product lets any user to be an active consumer of the information: one can decide on how deep he would like to get into the problem. The lectures are made in order to stimulate pupils to analyze, to speculate, and in order to demonstrate how researchers do their work, and where they gather their conclusions.

For the time being the project is at its beginnings. And one of its most important advantages is that it can never be finished. Thus, it may help the school to overcome its obduracy and to vitalize school subjects.

Authors:

Ilya Leibo, Vice-Rector
Institute for the Open Education
6 Aviatsionny pereulok, Moscow, Russia
leibo@metodist.ru

Tatiana Fialkova, director
Institute for the Open Education, Multimedia department
6 Aviatsionny pereulok, Moscow, Russia
fialkova@intmedia.ru

Irina Kaliteevskaya, research assistant
Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Universal History
32 a Leninskii prospect, Moscow, 119334 Russia
ira.kaliteevskaya@gmail.com