

Inanimate

Teaching electronic literature in Russia: NSTU initiative project

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Pic. 1: Electronic Literature course, Novosibirsk

It is no secret that the digital native generation needs new ways of providing and presenting information, especially where it concerns the spheres of entertainment and education. In this regard, electronic text is a perfect medium, I believe, to push the limits and boundaries of a classroom. It suggests a modern, accessible, user-friendly and gripping resource for teaching and learning a mix of skills on a multi-disciplinary basis.

However, there is a significant gap between the technological advancements of rapidly upgrading digital communications that embrace the digital arts (including electronic literature) and teaching methodologies for the understanding and integration of digital communications into the educational environment. As Nicolaescu Madalina and Mihai Adriana asserted “the supra-departmental nature of digital literature and its institutional in-between identity runs against the discipline-based departmental model of most European academic institutions” [\[Madalina, Adriana\]](#).

Our project “*Inanimate Alice*: electronic literature in educational and research context”, which started in the fall term of 2017 at Novosibirsk State Technical University, is aimed at presenting *Inanimate Alice* (Episode 3: Russia) and associated educator guidance to Russian students. The initiative helps Russian learners improve their multiliteracy skills which are of crucial importance to everyone living in the 21st century.

Our *Inanimate Alice* project is a three-week undergraduate module, taught as a literature course during the fall semester and as the English as a second language course over the spring term. These sessions have been repeated each year since the outset in 2017. The module is designed as series of seminars focused on electronic literature analysis, as well as multimodal narrative strategies. The course is aimed at identifying and building multiliteracy skills as well as improving traditional literacy skills with the help of electronic literature. The first week focused on the basic concepts of electronic literature and the structure of digital works; the second week was devoted to reading electronic literature (close reading of 'Inanimate Alice: Episode 3'); the final week called for critical reflection of the experience gained as a result of reading electronic literature. The module's weekly meetings were 1.5-hour seminars in a computer lab (for interactive exercises, mind-map tasks and workshopping).



Pic. 2: *Electronic Literature course, Novosibirsk*

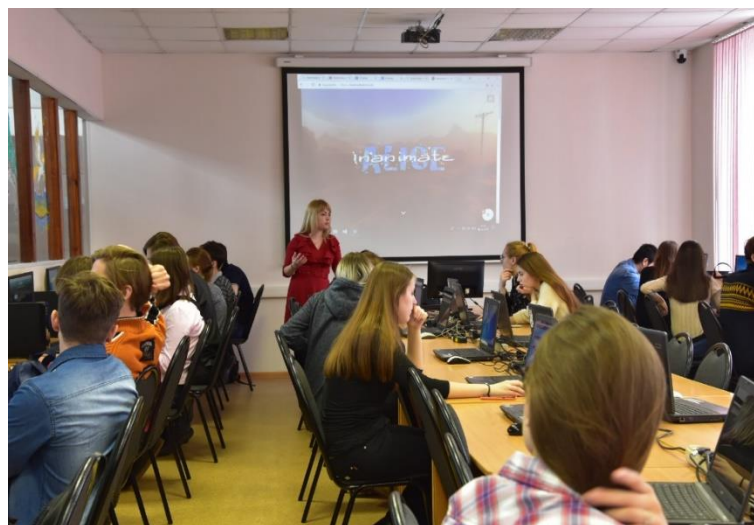
Electronic Literature Introduction Seminars 1st week / 2 academic hours	Inanimate Alice's Close Reading seminars 2nd week / 2 academic hours	Electronic Literature Reading Reflection 3rd week / 2 academic hours
<p>Pre-Classroom activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrance Questionnaire • Online exercises <p>Classroom activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completing Mind Maps (Mindmeister online service) • Open Discussion 	<p>Pre-Classroom activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading research papers <p>Classroom activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion (multimodal narrative) • 'Inanimate Alice' presentation • Reading Log Task <p>Home assignment (English class):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Autobiography Planner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blog Entry (Literature Class) • Multimodal Autobiography Stories Presentations (English class) • Autobiography Reflection handout (English class) • Final Questionnaire

Pic. 3: *Inanimate Alice: Electronic Literature in Educational and Research Context': Module Structure*

According to the curriculum, we had only three classes per electronic literature module. Considering that I wanted to spend much more time on the construction of meaning rather than information transmission, I decided to schedule the assignments in such a way that all vocabulary training tasks and the reading of research papers on the topic were planned as homework. This is arranged in the just-in-time teaching strategy (JiTT) [Novak], which unites elements of the flipped classroom [Baker] with technological web-based assignments to create an active learning environment for students. This approach was possible as each exercise contained a self-control option which also enabled students to undertake tasks by themselves.

Those who failed to complete the interactive tasks (only three students from more than one hundred and thirty) had an opportunity to consult with me online and complete the exercises once again.

On completing the first course back in 2017, I received a great deal of positive feedback from students participating in the project. Many of them asked about continuing with the work and the possibility of participation in the next stages of the project. However, for me, positive feedback was not a sufficient basis for evaluating the project, so I decided to conduct a survey that provided the following results: most of the learners (87%) found that electronic narrative was a thrilling and easy to perceive resource because it has integrated audio, video, graphic and animation components that help the author to reveal the thematic content. Only 31 % of NSTU students were already familiar with the concept of electronic narrative before the classes, yet despite this, almost all of them (more than 80%) understood its essential nature. Over 75% showed interest in the topic, wanting to learn more about Alice's story and read all of its episodes.



Pic. 4: NSTU Inanimate Alice's seminar

A new phase of the project got under way this year. It relates not only to the study of *Inanimate Alice* (Episode 3: Russia) as an electronic literature resource for learning a foreign language and the structure of electronic texts, but also with the production of students' digital texts using multimedia in order to practice storytelling skills. First, I decided to enrich my seminars with some creative activities such as the video-invitation "Alice, welcome to my school". Since many of the 'graduates' of the 2017-2018 project noticed that Alice felt scared while entering the Russian school despite liking it (thirty-seven per cent of respondents



Pic. 5: Video-invitation "[Alice, welcome to my school](#)" by Sofia Orlova

mentioned the school scenes in the questionnaire), I asked them to suggest their own interpretation of the school topic. They went to the schools that they recently graduated from and shot short videos describing their school, showing the main school locations (gym, canteen, classrooms) and inviting Alice to come there. It was a multipurpose task that was aimed at building both speaking skills and skills in creating a multimodal narrative.

And then, I decided to implement Twine digital story software in our seminars. Among many web resources, Twine was selected as it is convenient to use having an online version that does not require installation. In this case, the user does not have to be an expert programmer to create their own digital story, it is enough to know the general rules of markup language, a topic discussed during the first lesson of the project. Moreover, Twine allows users to create their own hypertext narrative using multimedia resources. Sounds and pictures are easily integrated into this app. As a result, my students create their own digital multimedia narratives in a fairly short period without spending much time on programming. This allows them to focus more towards developing their multiliteracy and storytelling skills. Since the project participants often asked about the continuation of Alice's story, now they have a enjoyable opportunity to write it on their own!

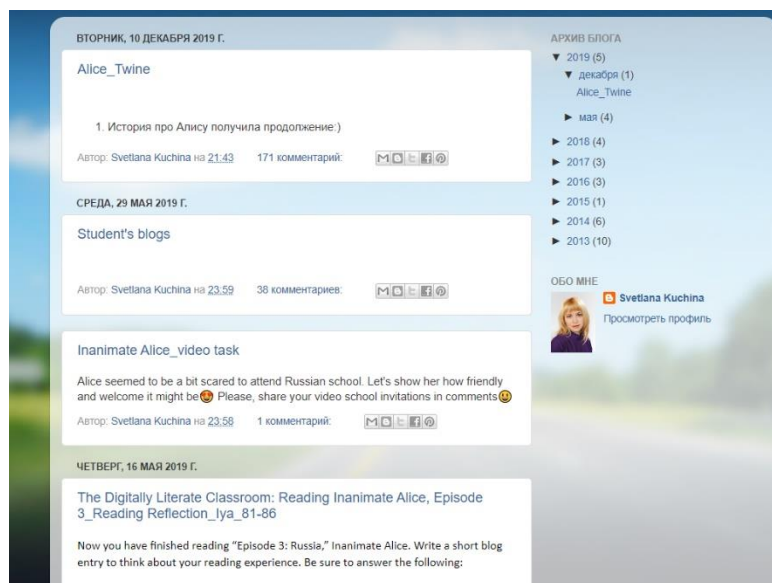
[My teacher's blog](#) contains project assignments, students' creative works, teacher's remarks, as well as survey results and students' reading reflection.

During the project we have held twelve seminars with about one hundred and thirty student participants all told. Going forward, I have decided to focus on further integration of Twine into *Inanimate Alice* modules as the essential structure of both courses (English as a second language and literature courses). This type of assignment design will allow me to achieve several

educational goals simultaneously. I am also going to re-position the vocabulary training tasks and pre-reading exercises, which are currently available in the NSTU online training system, into a more universal format (for example, by creating interactive modules with exercises on [Learning Apps](#). Without doubt, this will expand the target audience of the project. By the end of the spring term 2020 we will promote the project results through seminars and a trial lessons for teachers and students in Novosibirsk State Pedagogical Lyceum. These seminars will help us to identify whether there are any specific features concerning the perception of electronic literature that need changing due to the age of students, and if so, what kind of course methodology reconstruction would they seek.

The results of the project stages were reflected in two articles in Russian pedagogy journals and also in my presentation at "Dialogue-2018" (conference on computer linguistics and technology, Russian State University for The Humanities, Moscow), Electronic literature conference – ELO-2019 (University College Cork, Ireland, 15-17, July, 2019) and TDLIC – Teaching Digital literature conference (University of Coimbra, Portugal, 25 – 26, July, 2019).

Being a member of the Electronic Literature Organization, I look forward to participating in future ELO conferences where I will present further progress on our project.



Pic 6: Teacher's Blog

References:

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