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Promoting Engagement Through Technology

New Web Project about Ukraine Boosts Student Engagement

15 January 2015—The [UkraineAlive](#) project was started in October 2011 in response to a request for help on [ProTeacher](#), a professional on-line community for Canadian school teachers in grades preK–8. The team which created [UkraineAlive](#) was headed by Dr. Natalie Kononenko, Professor in the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies, University of Alberta, and consisted of graduate students and system analysts Mark McKellar, Kamal Ranaweera and Melania Ru'Aini from the Arts Resource Center and a volunteer, Peter Holloway. They began constructing a website focusing on the Ukraine component of Grade 3 Alberta Social Studies Curriculum which mandates studying Ukraine, Tunisia, India, and Peru.

Anecdotal reports suggested that the Social Studies curriculum required more resources for grade 3 students. The UkraineAlive website was aimed at providing resources that (1) meet the requirements of the Alberta Education mandate; (2) coordinate with existing social studies print and multimedia resources; (3) are easy to update and keep current; and (4) engage students through interactive learning. A prestigious SSHRC grant enabled the [UkraineAlive](#) team to generate a website template and populate it with material over the next few months.

Dr. Kononenko points out that “building a resource site for grade 3 education is a complicated process. The biggest challenge was presenting accurate information about Ukraine in a manner that is accessible and relevant to students.”

In order to understand what really appeals to students, Olena Sivachenko, a graduate student from the same department, visited 10 schools in Edmonton and surrounding areas during the 2013–14 academic year. She made 17 presentations on Ukraine, using the website. “By presenting our website to grade 3 students, I got a clear idea of what materials sparked students’ interest and what else they wanted to know about Ukraine. Teacher feedback was also very helpful. It inspired the development of materials for our website,” says Sivachenko.

Before Easter 2014, McKellar generated an interactive Ukrainian Easter Egg (pysanka) program so that anyone could colour a 3D egg with a digital brush. When Dr. Kononenko gave one of her annual “[Pysanka Workshops](#),” children who were too young to make a real pysanka played with the program for 3 hours. With 594 page views to date, the success of this interactive unit prompted the team to design a prototype for an online game—an “Interactive Ukrainian Village.” This game will be developed through the collaborative efforts of researchers from the Faculties of Arts, Science, and Education, should grant applications be successful.

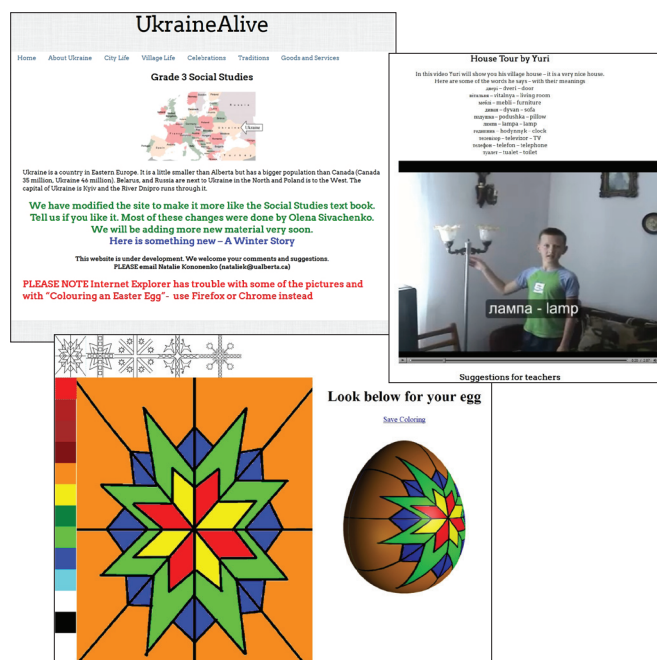
Dr. Kononenko notes that “while the **UkraineAlive** project focuses on the Ukraine component of Grade 3 Alberta Social Studies Curriculum, we have been receiving requests from teachers to expand the project and cover the other three mandated areas, namely Tunisia, Peru and India. We realize that this could be a very ambitious task. Nevertheless, our team is certain that the **UkraineAlive** project has laid a solid foundation for international collaboration, and we feel prepared to take on this challenge.”

The **UkraineAlive** team showcased the first version of the Interactive Ukrainian Village at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences in St. Catharines in May 2014.

Photos:



The team of the UkraineAlive project (l-r): Melania Ru'Aini, Mark McKellar, Natalie Kononenko, Olena Sivachenko, and Peter Holloway



Screenshots from the project.

The Ukrainian Language Education Centre promotes and develops Ukrainian language education in Canada and abroad by: supporting bilingual programs and professional development of Ukrainian-language teachers and instructors; creating learning and teaching resources at both the secondary and post-secondary levels; conducting research on topics related to Ukrainian-language education and related fields; and fostering international links and community engagement. If you would like more information on the Centre, please visit our [website](#), [Facebook](#) page or contact by [e-mail](#).

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