

4. Reporting European School Projects In A Collaborative Way

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This article deals with the idea of using collaborative writing as a means reporting European school projects. Starting from defining the term collaborative writing and explaining the tool Booktype it describes how this tool was applied for publishing the results of the in-service course in Graz.

Collaborative Writing

The term "collaborative writing" refers to an online social writing process. A number of authors are writing a text or book (almost) simultaneously in the same online environment. One definition of this term is: "Collaborative writing includes all activities involved in the production of a document by more than one author as well as pre-draft discussions and arguments and post-draft analyses and debates which are collaborative components" [1] (Dillon, 1993). Based on this definition collaborative writing includes two aspects, the writing activity and a social component.

Another definition focuses on the social dimension of collaborative writing: "Writing, so far a mostly silent activity of an individual, can take place cooperatively on the computer" (Kochan, 1996). In this definition the computer is mentioned for the first time as a tool for cooperative writing.

A wider definition of collaborative writing is "...any piece of writing, published or unpublished, ascribed or anonymous, to which more than one person has contributed, whether or not they grasped a pen, tapped a keyboard, or shuffled a mouse" (Rimmershaw, 1992). This definition includes almost all kind of writings, because most of the texts refer to other texts or ideas of different people, stressing referring as a main feature of the scientific writing process.

Current definitions include the aspect of online learning. Collaborative writing is seen as a scenario where learners write scientific texts cooperatively with the help of new media. A more substantial cooperative work is possible which points beyond the capabilities of previous applications of cooperative online learning (Hodel, 2005). Text production can be followed on individual monitors by several learners. Ideas and drafts can more easily be saved and text can be revised in accordance with joint discussion (Knüsel, Mitzlaff, Moser, Petko, & Schrackmann, 2009).

Referring to these definitions, collaborative writing can be seen as reflective social online writing process. A team of authors write, edit and publish a text in a collaborative way by using collaborative online writing tools.

Booktype

One of the most well known collaborative writing tools is Mediawiki which is for example used for Wikipedia. Other well-known tools are Etherpad or Google Docs.

Another tool for collaborative online writing is booktype which was used to write this book. Booktype is an open source tool which supports online collaboration in the style of Book Sprints. A Book Sprint is a method to write manuals collaboratively. The term Book Sprint was first mentioned by Tomas Krag and Adam Hyde (Hyde, 2013). Adam Hyde is one of the key persons in the non-profit foundation FLOSS Manuals (FM). This foundation, with their headquarter in Amsterdam in the Netherlands, focuses on the collaborative authoring of high quality books about how to use free software. The first tool they used for collaborative writing was the TWiki software. Later they started to develop the platform Booki which is the base of Booktype developed by the Czech non-profit organisation Sourcefabric (Sourcefabric, 2014).

Booktype nowadays is a web-based open source software which is not installed on the author's computer. It is more or less a web service on a webserver which can be accessed through a web browser. It is Free Software and licensed by GNU Affero GPL. This means that it can be downloaded freely and re-used. Booktype can be installed on a server or Sourcefabric can set up a paid hosting service Booktype Pro account.

Some typical uses of Booktype are (James & Parson, 2013):

- writing books - fiction, manuals, cookbooks etc.
- producing printed books
- producing ebooks
- writing any content as an individual
- collaboratively authoring content
- rapidly developing content in 'book sprints'
- customising existing content to apply to a very specific context
- translating a book into another language

While Booktype can support the traditional book authoring processes, Booktype also supports the rapid book development in 'Book Sprints'.

Book Sprint

"A book sprint is an intensive collaborative event where typically six to ten people can focus on writing a book in three to five days. These collaborators might be in the same room or located around the Internet; in either case, they work together simultaneously to produce a book" (James & Parson, 2013).

The term is based on the programming sprints in software development especially for the Debian Linux System. This way of writing books can be seen as a book writing camp. The participants give lectures or workshops and write an article from their special field. It is important to write this books in high speed - within a week from concept to delivery (Debus-Gregor, 2013).

Some examples for Book Sprints are (Hyde, 2013):

- opening a space for critical reflection on practice
- eliciting knowledge from subject-matter experts, e.g., legacy or new technologies, text books, NGO reports, etc.
- creating responses to fast-changing social and political controversies.
- facilitating new networks and vocabularies between individuals and organizations.

Book Sprints follow a set of key content-development patterns: Concepting, Structuring, Writing, Revising, and Publishing (Hyde, 2013).

Booktype as a tool and Book sprint as a method are great to document European school projects. In the following paragraph

the usage of booktype in the in-service course "VoiceS - Integrated competences for European Teachers. Giving voice(s) to professionalism and citizenship in school networking" is described.

The VoiceS- Graz E-Book

When planning the VoiceS in-service course in Graz in 2014 the organising team of the University College of Teacher Education in Styria Susanne Linhofer, Elfriede Koller and Heiko Vogl searched for an easy way to write and publish the results of the European teacher projects in a collaborative way. Their requirements were:

- Writing should be possible in a collaborative way.
- Writing should be possible in the in-service course in Graz.
- Writing should be possible in every home country of the participants.
- Training should be very short, because of the limited time in the in-service course.
- Reviewing should be very easy.
- Publishing should be very easy.
- The results of the projects should be published in an ebook.
- The -book should be published in the main ebook formats (pdf, epub and mobi).
- If necessary also as a paper book should be published.

Considering these requirements and after the positive experiences of former collaborative writing processes with students of the University College of Teacher Education in Styria and in the collaborative book project "Short Reports from the International Science Meeting" with international teachers, the team decided to write the report in the following way:

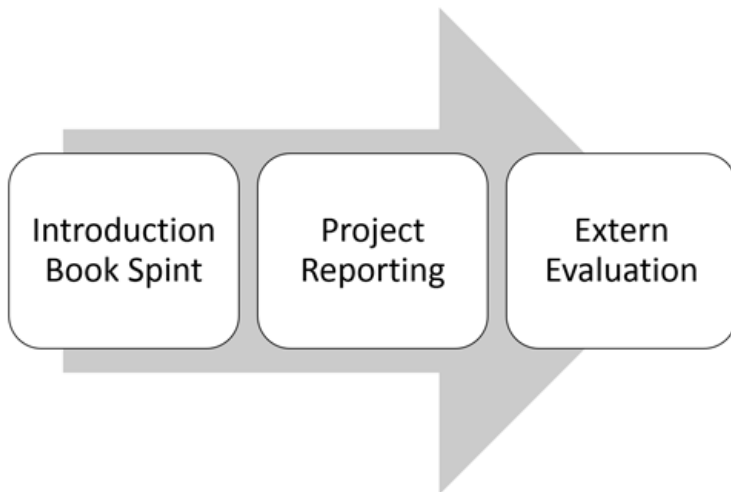


Book sprint Graz (Picture: Oliver Holzer)

The collaborative writing process was divided in three phases: During the first phase all participants got a very short introduction to booktype and started to write the first chapter in the style of a book sprint. This took place during the in-service course in Graz.

During the second phase about two months later the course members started reporting their projects in their home countries. The structure of the content and chapters of the ebook were developed by all members of the school projects. Only the overall framework of the ebook was set by the organisation team in Graz.

In the third phase of the writing process an external evaluation took place which was carried out by a member of the advisory board of the VoiceS network.



Collaborative writing process

Summary

Booktype and book sprints are a fantastic way of reporting European school projects. This tool and this process support an easy and fast way of reporting und publishing the results in different formats and in a collaborative way.

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[1] Translated into English.