Lab Stories

The Social and Health Science College in Aarhus

LabLearning evaluation

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PART I

LAB description

The lab in Aarhus was managed by SoSuMedia, the media lab of the local University of Social and Heath Sciences, and was attended by their students in Social Studies, Education (Pedagogical Assistants) and Healthcare. These labs were intended as a place for mixing theory and practice, for example by creating movies on internships, stop motion videos about the possible use of a new playground, acting, etc.

SoSuMedia engaged in the lab many colleagues and offered a wide variety of labs to different groups of students, ranging from video-clips production for children songs, to facebook games, to shooting instructional videos about conflict management or physiology.

Young people's voices

Participants in the labs have enjoyed the labs. As they put it, this was finally a learning setting in which they are "active" and "can take responsibilities". Most of all, they appreciated that "you are allowed to do what you are good at" and give a contribution using their best skills.

The rhythm of learning becomes fast in the lab, and is more engaging. You can "learn through playing", and these labs are a way to "learn outside the classroom" in an effective way.

Concerning the use of media, students discovered a new way of communicating and of exploring meaning. They say that "the visual and narrative have great value". However, some noted that time was short, and they discovered they need more time than they thought to complete their projects. Indeed, actual media production skills were lacking for these students, and the support of competent media experts is paramount in this kind of activities.

Interestingly, one group said "get rid of the computers!", but the same group also indicated a high preference for working with movies, sound and images. This indicates that "the computer" is perceived as a boring and office-like tool, while smart-phones and tablet, and tools that allow multimedia production in general, provide new learning affordances.

Participants also enjoyed working in groups, as they think that this is always a good way to learn (this is actually a common practice lot at SoSu). In some cases, they remarked that the group generated difficulties: the best groups are small ones, where nobody remains in the background.

Figure 1 - Teamwork at Aarhus college

So, the labs were a useful experience to rethink teaching and learning. As one student put it "(…) once again it has been inspiring to work with SoSuMedia because they face the educational challenges from a media didactic point, so among other things they help rethink the didactic focus – such as classroom management and the dialogical classroom".

Figure 2 – Student at work at Aarhus college

Mentors' voices

Mentors in Aarhus were teachers at the college. Their overall impression is that students participated in the lab with great engagement, characterized by "joy" and "humour".

The mentors indicated that they observe "more dialogue" during the activities, both between peers and between teachers and learners. In some way, the class "becomes a dialogical class", and the labs break down some barriers and established a new teaching and learning agreement. Students "find and communicate knowledge in new shapes". While this change is welcomed, it also "places new demands on classroom management. The teacher is someone who helps structure knowledge rather than just bringing it to students…".

The big difference of the labs is in the learning process: students "express attitudes, feelings and values", things that apparently find little space in other learning settings. Also, students work with their body and senses, so that the aesthetic dimension becomes central to the learning experience. One mentor states that "it was definitely the visual dimension (…) that appealed to many of the students. They said it was just the right way for them to learn".

Using digital media allows the application and improvement of students' IT skills, which is in itself a value. From the point of view of the mentors, the integration of digital technologies pushed them to a "didactical re-thinking" of their courses. For pedagogical assistants, the labs also offered a model of IT integration for their professional practice.

Group-work as also appreciated, as students learn to work with each other and to take up different roles. Also, the fact that the work done the day before was resumed and finalized in the following days provided a sense of consistency of collaboration.

Concerning the learning actually going on in the class, all mentors are satisfied with the results: projects are of high quality and clear. According to the mentors, useful knowledge "got stuck" and was easier to remember, and also generated a sense of professional ownership..

Finally, all mentors made plans to continue the labs' practices also beyond the project's lifetime.
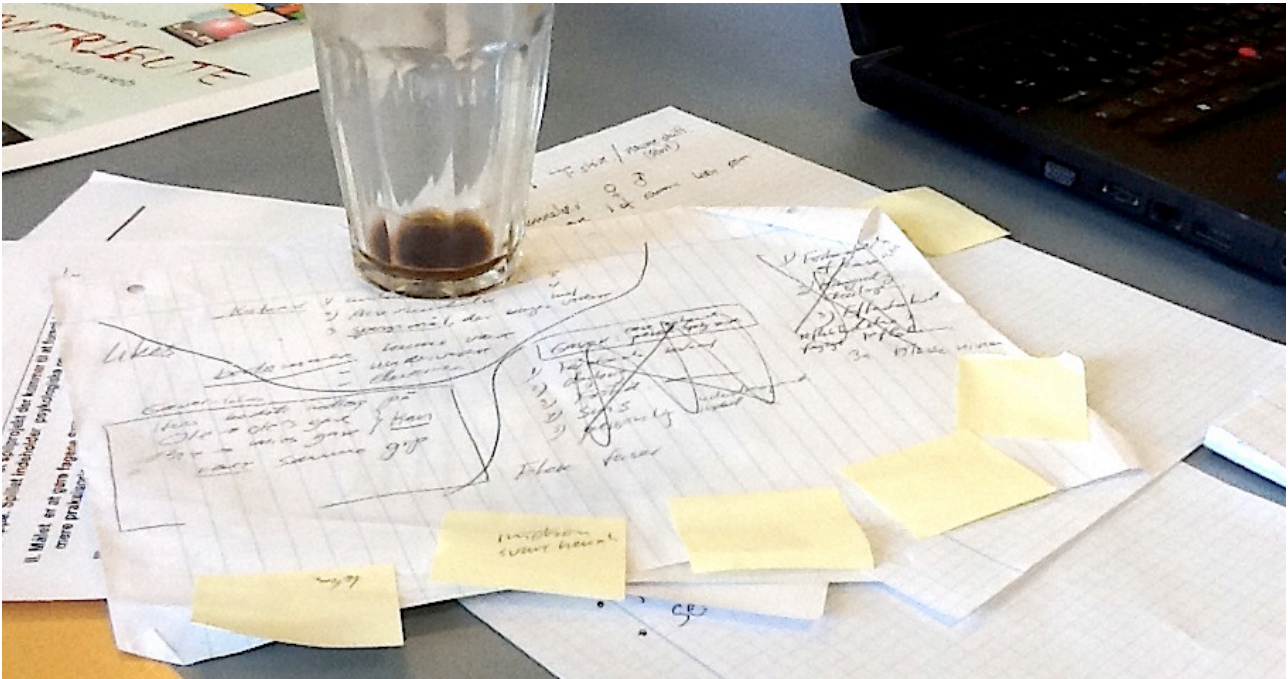
Figure 3 - Media design during the labs

The community voice

These labs were conducted within the university setting, so that no feedback was collected from the community.

Lessons learned

Within a vocational higher education setting, the labs generated high motivation and engagement: students appreciated their being different, and the visual side of media production. Also, they gave value to students' IT skills.

The labs' approach generated a new dialogic balance between students and teachers, and among peers. In terms of learning, the labs proved to be effective.

Time should be carefully measured, and production has different rhythm and requirements than lecturing.

PART II

Lab overview

The following table presents a summary of the overall lab experience in Aarhus.

WHO?

Number of mentors/teachers	5
Number of media experts	4
Number of learners at the beginning	200
Number of learners that completed the lab	200
Age of learners	17-42
% of drop-out/unemployed learners	
% of migration background learners	approx 25%
Organized in collaboration with	Another European project, KASK, on learning games

WHAT?

Was the work organized in groups?	Yes
Size of the groups (if any)	2 to 5 members per group
Central topic (if any)	Different topics
Lab products	Different media productions
Media devices used (e.g., Camera)	Mostly iPads
Software applications used	Many different apps such as iMovie, iMotion, Puppet Pals, etc.

WHEN?

Lab started on (month, year)	1.5.2012
Lab ended on (month, year)	Still going on as part of the regular academic activity
Meeting schedule	Variable
Total number of lab hours	5 teachers set up ongoing "lab activities"

WHERE?

Location	In the school's physics lab and in classrooms
Number of rooms available	2 or 3, depending on the day
Computers available	Some classes enjoyed iPads, one for each student. Other classes borrow by the day

WHY?

Was the lab part of a formal curriculum?	Yes
Was formal evaluation foreseen?	No
Were credit awarded?	No

The different labs included:

- The development of videos about conflict management
- Geo Coaching
- Using the Age Yourself app
- Song of the day - a brain break
- A lab activity about Mindfullnes
- Documenting a Cultural week with iMovie
- The development of conflict management clips with Puppet Pals
- Media based goodbye speech from all the teachers
- Evaluating practice training (video) and interviewing yourself (puppet pals)
- Practice training with assignments on Communication: student/teacher, student/student
- Handicraft workshop and documentation: sharing, finding images, inspiration, tutorials/instructions online
- Using Facebook for assignments and communication
- Using Puppet pals to create music videos for children songs
- Using Stop motion to create music videos for children songs
- Using Stop Motion to create a playground using LEGO
- A facebook game / theatre / roleplay
- "The Municipality" - a live game: music / iMovie / video
- The photoGame
- Log book - in Book Creator. During the school period: activities and periods; during the practical training period: activities and reflections

Sources

This report was developed based on the following sources of information:

1. Data provided by the organizers about the labs.
2. The planning documents and end products of 8 labs experiences.

3. Two transcripts of group interviews, each with 4 students.
4. A video presentation of the Labs idea by three mentors.
5. Two written reports by two mentors.