



# Lab Stories

Designing the school of the future @ Drenthe College in Assen



**LabLearning evaluation**

[www.lablearning.eu](http://www.lablearning.eu)

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**SUPSI**

## PART I

### LAB description

Drenthe College is a large vocational college with about 10,000 students in 3 main locations which are in Emmen, Assen and Meppel. The college offers level 1-4 education for students aged 16 and above. The college is organised in educational clusters: Health and Welfare, Technology, and Business, Horeca (Hotellerie, Restaurant, Café) and Sports.

Apart from these levels, Drenthe College also offers the 'AKA', a level 1 form of vocational education for students that experience difficulties in finding their way in the labour market or to college. This strand is integrated in the Health and Welfare department. AKA students fully belong to LABLearning's reference target group. The lab experience presented in this document involved about 50 AKA students aged 16-21 years in Assen. These students are usually characterized by very low motivation and low self-esteem, and feel challenged by a job market that requires creativity and professional competences.

The idea of this lab was engaging students in designing an online platform, called DC-Extra, that could support them creating a meaningful and consistent portfolio during their professional practice periods or internships. Also, the platform would support interaction with teachers and tutors, to facilitate communication also when students are not present in the college. With this application, staff at Drenthe College intends to experiment in order to experience social media (something familiar to the students), extend learning time during practice periods, and allow teachers to connect to students' perceptions – with the ultimate goal of enhancing students' motivation.

However, as a start, the engagement of student was stimulated through a larger perspective: they were asked to provide insights and ideas about the ideal "school of the future". To facilitate this, instead of a dry survey, the Lego Serious Play methodology was used (LSP; [www.seriousplay.com](http://www.seriousplay.com)), thanks to the support of a qualified trainer and consultant.

### Young people's voices

The challenge of this lab was having students participating in designing the future of their own institution – a democratic approach that is seldom chosen by educational institutions. Can we really expect useful insights from low-performance students?



Figure 1 - Students at work in Assen

The AKA group liked the way of working very much. The LSP method includes a warm-up phase in which participants get familiar with the key activities in the method step by step: building, using metaphors and sharing their stories. After a quiet start, in such warm-up phase, they got more and more into the creative process and were able to come up with new ideas. From a very directional approach (e.g., build a bridge) they were invited – and actually got – to work on less visible or physical themes (e.g., develop your dream app for the college), and to share their insights.

After a few hours, still maintaining the informal and light work atmosphere, the AKA group felt completely free to come up with challenging ideas and new working methods. They delivered some very interesting insights, especially concerning the contact between tutor and students, and about achieving results towards their diploma.

The same approach with LSP was then used with other groups in the departments of Trade, Technology, Education, and Catering. These students are of a higher level than the AKA group, and this became clearly visible during the day. AKA students had difficulties to ‘think outside the box’, while this was not an issue with the other groups, especially educational assistants. Also, the insights generated varied according to the features of the different programs (for example, the balance between classes and practice periods, or the familiarity in the use of ICT).

At the end of the day, a rather clear picture of the “school of the future” emerged from the students’ voices. It is clear that it should be very technological, while not forgetting the good old books. It should help students in being motivated and in planning their activities, and also should strike an effective connection between work and learning. Irony was also part of the game, so that the school of the future was imagined equipped with “an application about how to behave”, a “motivational device”, several “study planners”, and also a digital necklace, equipped with useful learning tools.

More directly applicable indications were drawn from the LSP sessions, such as working more with ICT and mobile internet, having a digital examination program, and finding a digital way of coaching and of attending courses. And of course, this includes preparing teachers to use ICT more effectively.



**Figure 2 - One of the Lego models**

### **Mentors’ voices**

The challenge in Assen was met: students generated useful insights, and they were also engaged in later activities related to the actual design, development and testing of a new online and mobile platform connecting school and workplace. The platform, which is now integrated in the College’s practices, is called DC-Extra.

Providing a space where students can get creative is a good bet: you get more than what you think. Indeed, some teachers got “surprised” by their own students! Also, such a free space never resulted in recrimination of destructive comments: all feedback could be integrated in a constructive way in the project.

Concerning lab management, having both a teacher and a LSP session leader proved to be very successful. While the latter could manage the process, the former could score results and help students.



**Figure 3 - Peeping in the school of the future**

### **The community voice**

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

### **Lessons learnt**

Being creative with digital technologies sometimes goes beyond the resources available in a learning setting, such in the case of the design and development of a large web application. However, engaging young people in the elicitation of requirements and in design (not only in testing!), untaps a huge potential, and generate ownership and participation.

Providing the labs with the appropriate staff is of significance. As they are generally new and experimental activities, it is helpful to have one person managing the actual activity, and one observing and collecting feedback.

## PART II

### Lab overview

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

#### WHO?

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Number of mentors/teachers	11
Number of media experts	2
Number of learners at the beginning	120
Number of learners that completed the lab	120
Age of learners	16-18 years
% of drop-out/unemployed learners	former dropouts: about 35% (about 40)
% of migration background learners	about 40% (between 40 and 50)
Organized in collaboration with	Media company

#### WHAT?

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Was the work organized in groups?	Yes
Size of the groups (if any)	10-12 students
Central topic (if any)	Professional portfolio and media awareness
Lab products	Digital portfolio, communication system, learning environment.
Media devices used (e.g., Camera)	Computer, smartphone, camera, etc.
Software applications used	None. The end product is web based.

#### WHEN?

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Lab started on	April 2012
Lab ended on (month, year)	October 2013
Meeting schedule	Bi-weekly
Total number of lab hours	200

#### WHERE?

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Location	Colleges in Assen, Emmen, Meppel
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Number of rooms available	One classroom in each location
Computers available	12 computers, own devices from students

### WHY?

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Was the lab part of a formal curriculum?	Yes
Was formal evaluation foreseen?	Yes, both in the beginning and in the end.
Were credit awarded?	Yes, following the standards in use in vocational training.

Additional information can be found at

<http://dcextra.nl>

This is the log in site for students. Here they can add there portfolio material and communicate with other students and teachers.

<http://www.dcextra.nl/wm>

This is the log in site for teachers and managers. Here they can approve portfolio material from students and communicate with the students.

### Sources

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

1. Data provided by the organizers about the labs.
2. A slide presentation of the lab concept.
3. Three reports of the LEGO Serious Play sessions.
4. One summary report of the LEGO Serious Play sessions.