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The Educational Battle

Report about development, evaluation and dissemination of a teaching intervention

20 September 2016

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The Educational Battle
Report about development, evaluation and dissemination of a teaching intervention
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1.1 Background

This project is based on an initiative by the Faculty of Social Sciences at Aalborg University, to investigate inspiring and innovative teaching approaches in the PBL context. The author of the report was initially approached to support the ideas put forward by Associate Professor Henrik Find Fladkjær. Henrik's proposal was based on his teaching experiences and suggested a new approach to conduct what is known as the mid semester 'status seminar'. The new approach was called; 'The Educational Battle' since two groups of students had to critically examine each other's work. This revised and innovative approach involved that senior students were trained as peer advisors, facilitators and critical friends, to first year students. The groups and the senior student (they were also termed the 'catalysator' students) had to examine a research proposal put forward by a second group, to review and revise what was put forward and to then assist those students, to critically review their documents. Then followed an activity where the two groups had to work one-on-one, each from the opposing team had to give feedback and then jointly prepare a solution. Those solutions and the feedback were then carried back into each other's main group to review and refine one's own project plan. Pairing the first year student with senior peers was also identified as identity strengthening (for the senior students) and identity building (for the first year students).

The joint plan was to conduct an observation of an Educational Battle to examine the interactions, and interview the students, including the catalysator students. The planned outcome was to develop podcasts for both teachers and students about the teaching approach, and develop resources to support critical project planning of student projects.

1.2 Methodology

The project utilised a video ethnographic approach to examine teaching and learning interactions (see for example Heath, Hindmarsh & Luff 2010). This means that the focus was on the collection of naturally occurring data using video cameras. Methodologically, this approach was fundamental to the description of the structures of interaction order, the social and behavioural mechanisms the students used to coordinate and organise their activities with each other.

The observational set up included several stationary video cameras, as well as external blue-tooth microphones. The teaching session was filmed and afterwards students were interviewed in focus groups, including the catalysator students.

Following the recording the videos were organized and analyzed using Adobe Premiere Pro to review and organize the materials, to then be produced into podcasts.

All students involved received a letter of informed consent, detailing the aim and purpose of the activity, their involvement, rights and risks. All visual material used for dissemination has the participants' permission to be shown as specified.

1.3 Key Findings

- ***Students found the experience rewarding and meaningful:*** All students reported that they enjoyed the activity and that they preferred it over the traditional status seminar format.
- ***Catalysator students reflected on their own professionalism:*** Being involved as teachers to their own peers was experienced as a positive, because it made students



reflect on their own identity within the field, as well as critically examine important skills and competencies that would be needed by the first year students.

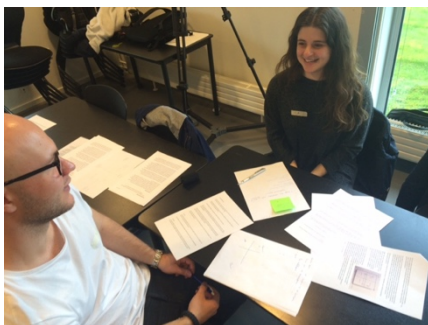
A catalysator student working with 'his' group.

- ***A serious job as a catalysator student:*** The students interviewed as catalysator students took this task very serious, this was reflected in their preparation and then also in working with the students. They could be observed as listeners and as guides, while liaising with the main teacher at hand.

- **Teachers as facilitators:** The observations showed that the teacher's role was that of the facilitator, providing key instructions at critical points in time but then stepping back to support from the periphery, leaving the critical joint thinking and problem solving to students.



- **Empowering learning:** Since the activities were structured with the task not only to critically review but also to jointly work on solutions with a member of another group. This means that all students were actively thinking and working on problem solutions, while being supported by their peers.



The setting provided for a safe yet highly productive thinking activity, where every student could come up with ideas and innovative solutions that were negotiated in pairs and then the group.

1.4 Key Outputs

- Two sets of podcasts were produced in the VILA research lab (www.vila.aau.dk), both are accessible through the Learning Lab YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/dashboard?o=U>
- :
- (1) Gode Tips Til Projektet: <https://youtu.be/shf1Z6JnVtE>

Selected episodes that showcase and explain to bachelor business studies students how to critically review their own projects and that of others.



- (2) Hvad er Educational Battle: <https://youtu.be/Lf-q5FkwNVQ>

A step-by-step guide on how to conduct the pedagogical intervention coined ‘the Educational Battle’ – to be used as an inspiration for all University teachers.



- In addition, the pedagogical ideas behind the Educational Battle were shared at the AAU 2016 Annual Teaching day. The workshop was conducted by Associate Professor Henrik Find Fladkjær, together with one of the ‘catalysator’ students.

Materials from the day were shared on Learning Lab's website:

<http://www.learninglab.aau.dk/Undervisnings+Dag+-+University+Teaching+Day/Slides+from+University+Teaching+Day+2016/>

- The author and Associate Professor Henrik Find Fladkjær were also invited to contribute a chapter to a book on co-construction, to be published through Sense in 2017.

1.5 Recommendations

- The materials that have been produced are very specific podcasts. They have a potential to enhance learning both for teachers and for students, however they need to be 'couched' in specific teaching strategies to be useful.
- At the moment the YouTube links for the two resources are hidden so they cannot be found in a general search on the Internet. This could be changed if needed to make them fully public. They can also be made more visible by making public reference to the link.
- The material for students should ideally be used in combination with teaching instructions and follow up activities.
- The material produced for University teachers will be ideally used to supplement workshops where teachers could first watch the podcast then have a discussion what this could mean in their own teaching.
- The material produced for students could also be introduced to the teachers who learn about the Educational Battle to then see how to prompt their students what it means to examine project ideas and reports critically.
- Both materials could be shared at the Annual Teaching Day or other faculty specific

1.6 References and further reading

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