University of BRISTOL

Graduate School of Education

Research Briefing No. 21

Enabling Creative Collaboration through Supportive Technologies

Key findings and implications for Policy Makers

CoCreat - Enabling Creative Collaboration through Supportive Technologies - was a three year project funded by the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme that finished at the end of 2013. The aim of the project was to design, implement and evaluate new pedagogical concepts and learning practices that lead to better collaboration and problem-solving skills. It followed the rationale that the aim of education is not to develop only professionals with certain knowledge and skills, but also to support collaboration and creative problem solving between students.

The eight partner universities designed and implemented five different Collaborative Spaces, where creative collaboration and collaborative learning was supported with different pedagogical models and technologies. One of the main aims for the project was to support collaboration and problem-solving skills across the life course, so the five Collaborative Spaces range from elementary schools to universities across Europe to spaces for elderly people.

The project's main outcomes are

1) models of how creative collaboration can be structured using notions of collaborative learning;

2) promotion of creative collaboration with development of collaborative spaces using mobile technology and social media and

3) practical and methodological guidelines to support the design and evaluation of creative collaboration.

The research

Research took place at sites or collaborative spaces whose settings ranged from purely virtual to purely face-to-face, where the creative activities include storytelling, 3D modelling and creative writing. The five Collaborative Spaces were:

- Collaborative Space 1: Digital story creation by school students
- Collaborative Space 2: University students working together to create courses in Second Life
- Collaborative Space 3: University students creating an e-handbook
- Collaborative Space 4: Using digital technologies collaboratively to meet the needs of elderly people
- Collaborative Space 5: School students collaborating with mature learners to create a poetry blog

In these spaces, the data collection was guided by the following questions:

- How can we conceptualise creative collaboration?
- How can this creative collaboration process be operationalized?
- How can this creative collaboration be orchestrated?

	Age group	Activity	Technologies used
CS1	Elementary School Pupils	Create a digital story about local history	Apple iPod Touch / iPad
	Upper Elementary School Pupils		StoryRobe, StoryKit, iMovie
CS2	University Students	Study course about "Designing Technology-enhanced learning"	Second Life
			Moodle
CS3	University Students	Write book chapter collaboratively about current challenges in the field of educational technology	Wiki
			Mobile devices
CS4	Aged People	Get acquainted with modern social tools and web services	Apple iPad
			Commonly used applications and web services
CS5	Upper Secondary School Students	Study, create and peer comment different types of text	Apple iPad
	Adult learners		Blog, inspirational tools

The collaborative spaces

Research design

This study followed a mixed methods approach comprising both quantitative data collection aiming to assess the levels of creative collaboration in each collaborative space through participant survey and a qualitative data collection aiming to illustrate a richer picture giving more details of these collaborations through observation and interview.

The quantitative data assessing participating students' perceptions of the set tasks were collected via an online survey, selected as the most convenient way of measuring participants' perception for internet connected computers on which to complete the survey were readily available to participants. Not all groups could be surveyed though.

Qualitative data was collected via open ended questions in interviews and from focus groups (depending on the needs of the collaborative space) and was also informed through participant observation in some of the collaborative spaces where the research teams acted as tutors or to support the tutors involved.

Further information

Successes in stimulating creative collaboration stemmed, in all collaborative spaces, from effective preparation of the groups for their shared, creative tasks. Lessons were learned from collaborative spaces where participants were asked to collaborate at a distance when participants could not easily share initial ideas through difficulties with establishing a common ground for their discussions. The role of the digital tools chosen to support the collaborative task was central to managing creative collaboration. Particular successes were having mobile devices that enabled creative activities at authentic locations or at those that had particular meaning (such as virtual support groups, and places that triggered poetry) for the participants.

The eight partner universities in the CoCreat project represented Norway, Sweden, Romania, Estonia, Spain and Finland as well as England. It was led by the University of Oulu.

Website

http://www.cocreat.eu

Contact

Dr Jocelyn Wishart, Dr Sarah Eagle and the international project team.
Email: j.m.wishart@bristol.ac.uk **Phone:** 0117 3314497.