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Levinsen, Karin; Ørngreen, Rikke; Andreasen, Lars Birch

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Digital storytelling and social networking– a user test of the Lajost Mixxt website

Karin Levinsen, Rikke Orngreen and Lars Birch Andreasen

Danish School of Education, Aarhus University

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L@jost-LEARN ABOUT FINDING JOBS FROM DIGITAL STORYTELLING project

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Introduction

Workshop 2 with members of the Lajost project’s target group was aimed at using and evaluating the Lajost Mixxt site and digital storytelling as a tool for learning how to find a job. The workshop took place at the Danish School of Education – Aarhus University, on the 5th of October, 2010.

The students at the Master in Designs for ICT, Teaching and Learning (ITDD) participate in a 15 ETC course on ICT and Learning (http://dpu.dk/site.aspx?p=11759). The education is structured round whole days of workshop activities aiming at theory generating practice. The 5th of October was planned as Social constructivism, CSCL and CsdCL, and we chose to combine this theme with a user involvement regarding the Lajost Mixxt site, as the students are potential users of the website.

The students (20 persons) were introduced to the following setup. The previous time, the class was introduced to digital storytelling as a design for learning. In the present workshop we planned that the students explore digital storytelling in an online educational frame. The case was presented as follows:

- As ITDD-students you are invited to contribute to a project, where the project-parties are the trade unions and unemployment benefit offices. Your role is to act as an external consultant group and you are asked to suggest ways of organizing a course that aims to provide the participants with tools for job-seeking and career development, using digital storytelling.
- The course is virtual and based on collaboration and the participants are distributed. The course may be a full day workshop or may take place over a period of time. The partners thinks that the website may be used this way and wants your oppion.
- Our dayplan have three activities.

Day program
10:00
• Introduktion to workshop: online / undervisningsplanlægning
• Workshop - 1. activity – explore Lajost Mixxt site individually
11:00
• Workshop - 2. activity – explore Lajost Mixxt site by participating (distributed group work)
• Plenum discussion - activity 2
13:00
• Break
14.00
• Workshop - 3. aktivity (F2F group work)
The theme of the first activity was to individually explore Lajost and the website and to identify possibilities that the website offers. This part takes ca. 45 minutes and the students are instructed to use the site in ways that they think are following the intentions on the mixxt site. In order to do so, we demanded that the students made a blog contribution about their own job-seeking process, responded on someone else’s blog-contribution, uploaded an image, etc.. The students were instructed to write notes about what they interpreted as the conceptual model and intentions behind the website, and how you think that the website meets the intentions - both positive and negative. You are invited to reflect on the form of interaction, the user interface and the ways of communication. The activity is video-documented (http://latjost.mixxt.com/networks/videos/video.19693).

The second activity was planned as follows: The students were grouped in smaller groups and asked to design a course that aimed to provide the participants with tools for job-seeking and career development, using digital storytelling. The frame was virtual collaborative with distributed students (CSdCL), but the decision as to whether the course participants are planned to work synchronic or asynchronous is a free choice. Consider which criteria have to be fulfilled in order for the website to be used. The students were also asked to consider whether the website needs re-design or re-didactitsation. In order to simulate the conditions regarding being distributed users of the website in a writing-based environment, the students were asked to move away from each other prevent listening and gesturing.

In the third activity the students discussed face to face and produced two presentations, one about the course plan and the other about the experience of using the website and synchronous online dialogue.

The students experiences with the Lojost Mixxt website

The 20 participant students are all experienced everyday users of ICT and social software. They age range from 25 years to 50 and ca. half the group have been or are in jobs while they study.

During the three activities the students produced material on the mixxt website and discussed their user experience from the point of view of 1) the project parties (trade unions and unemployment benefit offices) and 2) the first person perspective of a potential user of the website. Accordingly the workshop produced a series of materials that are used as the empirical
basis of an analysis of the website and its potential uses together with the reflection-papers that the students are assigned to deliver at the course they attend.

The students were able to identify the underlying conceptual idea of the Lajost Mixxt site. In general they agreed that the idea of exploiting social software and digital storytelling as a means to support people in educating themselves to become better job-seekers was indeed appealing to their way of living in an e-permeated environment. All groups managed to propose ways for union- and unemployment benefit-partners of exploiting the website and help jobseekers to become aware of the social software possibilities that such a site may offer. They also saw a need for individuals to improve their job-seeking competencies that a site like this may support.

While they acted as users during the workshop, their experiences with the actual Lajost Mixxt website identifies potentials on the website such as telling digital stories in multimodal media such as video and that the website may offer guides for CV’s and other information material. The different online guides were not accessible at the time of the workshop, but these suggestions support that the guides are considered important for the websites usefulness. They also found the idea that users may share experiences and help each other very useful. In the discussions during the day they maintained the focus, that the idea behind Lajost is both interesting and appealing. However, they also identified aspects that makes the site difficult to use and not really appealing for at least Scandinavian users.

In the following, the students experiences and comments are presented with examples from the produced data from the workshop.

**Digital storytelling**

In the discussions several students mentions how multimodal presentations may be a good way of producing digital stories.

T.A.: Maybe the employers would like to see a video, images and text from the jobseeker. Maybe that could substitute some of the things they look for in a jobinterview? (group discussion – activity 2).

Erik originally produced a personal presentation-video **Who is ERIK** at the beginning of the semester. In the video Erik presents himself through speak and movements and tells about his interests and competences. He found that the video would work as a digital story and uploaded it to Mixxt. With this short video, Erik demonstrates how an imaginative use of webcam, music and
performance may introduce a person in a complex and multi-facetted way and work as a dynamic, multimodal self presentation (http://latjost.mixxt.com/networks/videos/video.19697).

Screen dumps from the video Who is ERIK

Other students produced written stories that may invite others to respond.

Critical issues

The students agreed that the site appears messy and does not invite to intuitive interaction. Consequently, they find it tedious to find material of interest on the website. The students suggest that if the website had different and more intuitive interaction design and information architecture, they would expect to gain more benefits from using the website and thus also become future users.

In the continued discussion, the students found that cultural differences across Europe may explain their specific user experience of the Lajost website. E.g. they react strongly on the looks and claim that the visual design may confuse a potential user:

Lajost looks as if it intends to be a social network, which may also be used for “not so serious” categories as nightlife, music, sports. These categories are not related to job-seeking based employers needs, unless the job-seeker wants to work in a bar, arrange concerts or be a tennis instructor. As I see it, there is a mismatch between the visual design and Lajost’s intentions (group discussion – activity 2).

The students link the experienced mismatch between the looks and the intentions behind the site as a factor when they discuss why, they find it difficult to navigate the website.

I noticed that many of us compare Lajost with Facebook and hold Facebook as the ideal interaction design for asocial network. Therefore we tend to look at Lajost as an unfinished attempt to be as Facebook. I think that maybe our intense use of
Facebook steer our expectations and makes us expect similar functionalities and navigation on other social networks. Maybe that is why we find it so difficult and tedious to navigate Lajost (group discussion – activity 2).

One student made this screen dump to illustrate his experience of what he calls visual noise.

The student’s comment to the screen dump is: “Too much information for my taste and I feel that I spend too much time to search for what I may need” (student ePortfolio)

When it comes to specific functionalities, they missed a fluid and easy communication between participants – e.g. a chat function. They also found that it might be difficult to find others to share information and knowledge with and suggested that
if it just was one group you could join from the beginning – otherwise, you may never find others that share your interests. (group discussion – activity 2).

The students tried to make groups, blogs and wikis and found it not easy to do so. In the wiki on the website they wrote this comment:

```
ITDD konsulenter (ITDD consultants)
You can make a wiki here – that is great, I think!! I can even write in Lars’ wiki – but can you see who of us wrote what?
It would be nice if the wiki-contributions had a discussion-possibility, but – no – it doesn’t look like its possible!
Who are you?????
Ah ... use history, but then you have to use the name.
That is really difficult – but now at least I can write
```

In the chat from activity 2, one group begins to discuss whether they can bypass the website and use additional tools that servers their need for synchronous collaborative tools.

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ER
11.28
Its really annoying that we cannot work simultanious!
ME
11.29
Does anybody know "help-sites" on the web that we can link to?
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Consequently, some students did not really take the invitation to produce digital stories serious, as this story from the website demonstrates:
However, another example demonstrates that if the website works for the users, useful contributions as the following from a blog on Lajost Mixxt site may help other job-seekers.

**My latest job seeking**

**Description**

In 2006 I visited a public playground with my niece and noticed that there was a cosy looking little house for the employees. At that time I was unemployed, and as I am a pedagogue I thought that maybe it would be fun to work in a place like that. I asked uninvited if they needed someone and what the job was about. She told me that on another playground in Copenhagen they needed a female creative pedagogue for 32 hours a week and Friday off.

Great, I thought, and I called as fast as possible to make an appointment and to visit the playground in order to get an impression of the place and vice versa. I was invited and I thought this is just the job for me and hurried home to write an application. Soon there was a job interview and I was so lucky to get the job. I have worked here for 4 years now and is responsible for the creative workshop and practical tasks.

Do you want to know more about this workplace? Then use the following links:

http://www.aok.dk/byen-rundt/blegdamsremisen-legeplads

Generelt om *De bemandede legepladser* I København:

http://www.kk.dk/Borger/ByOgTrafik/GroenneOmraader/Legepladser/BemandedeLegepladser.aspx