# Didactic Experiments Suggest Enhanced Learning Outcomes

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## Abstract

*The article discusses a didactic experiment carried out at an MA programme at The Copenhagen Business School. The experiment aimed at encouraging students to take charge of their learning processes via a course programme design that would motivate students to take an active part in selecting and presenting material in the language studied, just as they were encouraged to systematically use evaluation processes to enhance learning outcomes. Eventually, increased grade point averages suggested that the experiment was successful. The article also mentions subsequent revisions to the original format and points the way for further research.*

**Keywords:** Course design, learning, didactic practices.

## I. Introduction

The Copenhagen Business School (CBS) offers a wide selection of programmes, ranging from degrees in e.g. statistics to subjects in the humanities. This paper discusses a didactic experiment in the MA International Business Communication programme (English). Before 2007, the course Language Specific Market Studies, was delivered in a traditional manner (i.e. teacher controlled), but the new, re-designed course was inspired by current theories of student and teacher empowerment and was conducted using a workshop model. The article describes the theoretical and practical framework behind the re-designed course, presents some of the findings, discusses the evaluations by teachers and students, and reflects on some of the learning points from the experiment.

The experiment arose from a desire to offer students assignments that would challenge them to actively search and select information, process it, possibly discard some of it and finally present it to their peers and me in a setting that would to the widest possible extent resemble the business environment that most of them will be part of after graduation.

## II. Methodology

The article outlines　curriculum changes to the MA program and describes　a new course framework The theoretical considerations behind the course are discussed in regard to learning and divided into three groups: (a) those that relate to student empowerment, (b) to the nature of the learning involved and (c) to the process of learning. These points need to be clarified before moving on to the didactic dimensions, which will support the desired learning processes and outcomes, notably problem-based learning and collaborative learning, The article ends by looking into the experience gained from the experiment, quoting student evaluation comments and showing improvements in grade point averages that point towards some degree of success for the experiment; it should be mentioned that in Danish universities, all student participation in classroom activities is voluntary, and no tests are being carried out during the courses – the only evaluation of student performance is the course exam, and Danish data protection legislation means that only summary information about grades awarded is available. Thus the grade point averages stated unfortunately cannot be substantiated by additional data as these are not accessible to the author.

## III. Background and the 2007 Course Framework

In 2006, the CBS Master of Arts (MA) degree programme underwent a series of changes, which was a good occasion for also reflecting on the didactics to be used in "Language Specific Market Studies", which was offered in English, French, Spanish or German with Danish being the first language (L1) of all participants. The results described here relate to the students who chose English as their second language (L2); 102 students of English presented themselves for exams in the course described, their average age was approx. 25 years. In 2008 the MA curriculum at CBS was changed again, and so this particular course existed for only two years, but the experiences gained from the course have been adapted to other courses.

This means that there is very little data available to support any claims that the experiments resulted in improved student performance. One objective of the course, as stipulated in the study guide, was for students to construct contrastive knowledge about business relations and societal dimensions in Denmark and the countries in which English is spoken. Another objective was for students to acquire knowledge about oral communication and, in practical terms, to optimise their ability to express themselves professionally in English. A third objective was to enable students to search, select and process information for intercultural communication assignments. . The overall framework for the subjects studied would be business organizations and their interaction with the surrounding community.

I chose a course format consisting of four workshops on different topics: labour relations, entrepreneurship, outsourcing and privatization. There were five parallel classes, each of which was asked to investigate the four topics in one of five countries where English is spoken as the L1 by the majority of the population: the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. I introduced the students to the thoughts and ideas behind the workshops in a preliminary lecture in which Biggs' (2003: 27) alignment recommendations were followed, i.e. the students were given an explanation of the ideas behind the curriculum for the course, the teaching methods and the assessment methods. I took great care to make sure that the students understood that what was being tried out in the workshops would match what they would be tested in at the final exam.

*How It Played out in Practice – an Example*
To illustrate the principles in practice, I will outline the workshop that had the overall theme 'Labour relations' as it played out in 'my' two classes, whose geographical/linguistic areas were Canada and New Zealand. The workshop was run in exactly the same way in all classes, and it consisted of two weeks where each class would meet for a three-lesson time slot in each week; between classes, the students were expected to work on the workshop assignments in their groups.  In the course plan, I introduced the labour relations workshop as follows:

**"Workshop theme 1: Labour Relations**
These years, labour relations seem to be changing on a more or less global scale: In some parts of the world – e.g. Denmark – we seem to be faced with a shortage of qualified labour, while in other parts of the world, labour seems to be abundant.
Also, the age patterns in the labour market seem to be undergoing change: The younger generations are fewer in numbers than the generations before them, and also priorities seem to be shifting in favour of other kinds of remuneration than money.

The following areas could be relevant to look into in connection with a closer look at labour relations:
- What is the role and functions of the trade unions in today's workplace?
- What designates a good workplace?
- What does the term "a good working environment" cover in 'your' area?
- In what ways does diversity in the workplace come into play?
- What is the background history of labour relations in your geographical area, and what roles do labour/trade unions play today; is there e.g. a gap between the 'regular' and the 'yellow' trade unions?"

In the first week of the labour relations workshop, the three-hour session began with a brief introduction by me to the Danish 'flexicurity' model in general and to the then ongoing collective wage negotiations. Since the students were supposed to construct contrastive knowledge of societal issues in Denmark and the other country, it made sense to introduce some aspect of the overall theme and its implications for the Danish community. After the introduction and the ensuing Q&A session, the students were given time to work independently in groups of four or five; first they would identify a topic under the labour relations headline that they found particularly interesting and relevant to their geographical area, next they would search and select material e.g. in the CBS Library or via the internet, and then they would have to consider how to present their findings to their fellow students in the following week. During this time, I would be available for consultation.

Since the course had the dual focus of both providing the students with factual, societal knowledge and of professionalizing their oral communicative competence, the students were faced with a given scenario in which to 'play out' their presentations in week two, and they would have to take this into consideration in week one along with the factual information to be presented. For the labour relations workshop, the presentation scenario was a meeting in a working party under the International Labour Organization (ILO), which placed specific requirements on the level of formality (and the linguistic register) to be used.

The topics the students chose to present were quite diverse – by allowing this diversity in topics, the students had the possibility to really take charge of and defend their choices, as I assumed that in their groups the students would negotiate to define their topics and that this process would serve as a motivating factor in their work.  In week two, the student groups presented their findings in class, and those students who were not presenting would function as a critical audience in the debate following each presentation. Ideally, all groups in the class (approx. six groups) would be active in each session, half of them as presenters and the other half as evaluators, however as the course was not obligatory, fewer groups took an active part in the presentations and evaluations. After each presentation/debate, the audience were asked to fill in a form to evaluate the performance of the presenters on topic, structure, language, clarity and professionalism – headlines introduced by me prior to the use of the evaluation form; the peer evaluation forms were handed to me who would then combine them into one form to be given to the presenting group. The presenting group was given another evaluation form encouraging them to reflect individually on the two features of their presentation that they were most pleased with and on the two features that they would like to improve on for next time. Towards the end of the class, I would contribute with those points of evaluation that might not have been covered by the peer evaluators, just as I would comment on how the presentation topics could be developed into exam papers and oral exam presentations.

*Teacher logs.* In the section below on the evolution of the format under 'reflective practices and possible feedforward', the concept of 'learning logs' is introduced; however, in order to monitor events in class on a more learning-related level, I took notes of the events in the workshops. For week one of the labour relations workshop, my teacher log says that after the introduction of the Danish facts, the students discussed whether they would be required to join a union or whether it was voluntary and of the illegality of forcing employees to join a specific union vs. the relevance for a union of being as strongly represented in the individual workplace as possible. This discussion added dimensions to the students' existing knowledge about Danish conditions. Another topic in the discussion was how funds allocated to competence development would best be spent in the workplace.  The teacher log for week two states that although the number of presenting groups was small for both classes, the quality of the presentations made and the subsequent discussions was high; the audience in the Canada class had been reading the outlines posted by the presenting groups and had prepared questions in advance, which contributed to the high quality of the outcome; in the New Zealand class, however, only I asked questions. Still, in the New Zealand class, the students were particularly enthusiastic about the peer evaluation forms, which were a novelty, and they also very much liked the opportunity to learn about a geographical region about which they knew little before the course.

## IV. The Theoretical Considerations behind the Experiments

The below section  discusses  the theoretical considerations behind the workshops focuses i.a. on the various concepts of learning that were considered prior to the start of the experiment; in a following section, I will address whether the different learning dimensions strived for were actually realized in the workshops.

**Concepts of Learning**

I found three sets of learning concepts to be relevant for the workshop experiment: (a) those that relate to student empowerment, (b) those that relate to the nature of the learning involved and (c) those dimensions that relate to the process of learning.

*Empowerment - Knowledge, Skills and Competencies.* Student empowerment is discussed in Nygaard et al. (2008: 36-37), who define the three central concepts of knowledge, skills and competencies as follows.

- <u>Knowledge</u> – *to be able to perceive and make sense of information and/or data and link it to past experiences.* In the workshops, the knowledge dimension was envisaged as a trial-and-error process of searching for quality information, selecting  salient information points, processing the information with the target group's pre-understanding and existing knowledge of the subject area in mind and communicating the group's new-found knowledge
- <u>Skills</u> – *the ability to solve a problem by using a particular technique and/or perform a particular task or activity.* In the workshops, the students were asked to use a number of tools (methodological and communicative) to familiarize themselves with models that could assist them in systematizing the information they were to give to their fellow students.
- <u>Competencies</u> – *the ability to apply one's knowledge and skills in such a way that the task at hand is solved in a way which is recognized as being competent by relevant peers.* In the workshops, the goal was that  the students would find it ever easier to carry out the tasks and thus improve their problem-solving competencies.

*Empowerment – Learning Loops.* In the field of organizational behaviour and organizational learning, the concept of learning loops is used. A distinction is made between single-loop learning (the ability to use feedback to make continuous adjustments and adaptations in order to maintain performance at a predetermined standard) and double-loop learning (the ability to challenge and to redefine the assumptions underlying performance standards and to improve performance) (Huczynski & Buchanan: 128). Triple-loop learning as introduced by Georges et al. (1999) involves "learning how to learn" by reflecting on how we learn. Ideally, courses should be designed along the lines of double-loop and triple-loop learning, which would enrich participants' reflective practices with a view to developing meta competences in students and teachers alike in a reiterative process.

*The Nature of Learning – Motivation and Surface vs. Deep Learning.* Many scholars have worked on the crucial area of motivation linked to teaching and learning. Dörnyei (2003: 614) states that "motivation is responsible for *why* people decide to do something, *how long* they are willing to sustain the activity, and *how hard* they are going to pursue it". Thus in order to select the appropriate didactic tools, it is necessary to look at the students' motives for *why, how long* and *how hard*. Dörnyei (2003: 617) adds that "… motivation to learn in educational settings has another significant aspect, namely the important role played by 'time' in it. During the lengthy process of mastering certain subject matters, motivation does not remain constant, but is associated with dynamically changing and evolving mental process, characterized by constant (re)appraisal and balancing of the various internal and external influences that the individual is exposed to". Dörnyei's point about constant (re)appraisal would appear to correspond well with the philosophy of learning loops (cf. above) and Hermansen's concepts of feedback/feedforward (cf. below).

Dörnyei'*s why* dimension led me to focus on the types of learning that can be seen as instrumental in empowering the students: surface vs. deep learning (Biggs 2003). Biggs (2003: 11 ff.) states that students create knowledge via learning activities and their 'approaches to learning'. The outcome of the latter will depend on whether students aim at 'merely' passing a particular test by being able to reproduce facts – *surface learning* – or whether they go below the surface to interpret and investigate – *deep learning*.

In practice, I took a main starting point in Hopman's didactic triangle (1997) which shows the teacher, the student and the theme at the three corners; but Mathiasen (2008: 112) in a revised triangle proposes that communication is also regarded as an integral part, observing that "the fact that teaching is seen as communication involving participants in the role of teacher and student(s), and that this communication takes place in an operationally closed social system, has the implication that communication may be considered the central pivot around which learning takes place in an exchange of knowledge between the participants about the topic." This way of looking at the didactic triangle more effectively captures the activities that take place in today's student-empowering classroom.

*Learning Processes – Hermansen's Conceptions.* Another perspective of the learning process is offered by Hermansen (2005), who – like Dörnyei – also sees learning as a lifelong process. During this process, according to Hermansen, learners more or less consciously draw on three conception pairs:

- Feedback and feedforward**.** According to Hermansen (2005: 43) "repeated feedback can be collected in experience. Comparison (unconscious or conscious) of different feedbacks is, however, also the basis for choosing the best, most rewarding or suitable activity". This view suggests that we need to design teaching activities that stimulate comparison of feedbacks, Feedforward, in contrast, is "a pre-understanding or an assumption that something specific will happen with a subsequent examination of whether what we did to realise the idea did actually happen" (Hermansen 2005: 44). Feedforward, then, suggests that students draw on experience to predict the outcome of a particular action, may try it out and then evaluate whether the outcome was successful or requires adjustment. Again there is a close link to learning loops and to Dörnyei's thought.
- Habitus and reflection represent 'opposite poles' of the learning process. 'Habitus' refers to learning formed on the basis of already acquired knowledge by means of processes so familiar to the students that they are used automatically; 'reflection' denotes learning that takes place after selection of the most suitable procedure. Here, the course was designed to enable students to move from a fairly high degree of reflection at the beginning towards a higher degree of habitus once they grew familiar with the procedure.

- Toil and 'exuberance' are present in any learning situation (Hermansen 2005: 60-70). Hermansen refers to i.a. Bateson's theory on learning levels to define the concept of toil. 'Exuberance', the opposite pole of toil, could also be termed 'enthusiasm'. One aim of the experiment was to base the course on a high degree of student autonomy in many of the decisions to be made in the hope that even if toil was involved, the students would see exuberance as the driving force behind the learning that evolved from the course.

*Learning processes – weak vs. strong learning.* In continuation of Hermansen's process-oriented way of thinking in regard to toil and exuberance, it is interesting to look to Bramming (2007), who suggests that students' learning processes may result in two different types of learning: weak and strong learning. However, where Hermansen looks for 'exuberance' or enthusiasm, Bramming (2007: 55) takes a critical look at the environment where learning takes place: "The transformative processes taking place in the students when they are exposed to teaching and that for learning to become strong… this process must be attached to some kind of crisis because the student's world-view must be contested for transformative learning in the strong sense to take place." In other words, students should be exposed to challenges in the learning process in order for learning to become strong.

## V. Didactic Practices

In order to empower students in the learning process, I focussed on the following three elements:

### Problem-Based Learning.

What makes PBL particularly useful is that it differs from lecture-based teaching in that learning is driven by open-ended problems of a context-specific nature with no one "correct" answer; this fits in well with the process dimension of strong learning. PBL supports students in developing their skills as self-directed, active investigators and problem-solvers in collaborative groups where they focus on identifying one or more problems in the case material provided and on negotiating and subsequently presenting a solution to the problem(s) at hand. Meier and Nygaard (2008: 138-142) discuss the changing roles of students and teachers in connection with PBL and similar activities, and they argue that it is important that students "… are prepared to take on themselves the role of partners, rather than customers or pupils"; they elaborate by saying that "students often enter the university with the expectation to 'be taught', that is with a rather passive oriented notion of what it means to learn. When the curriculum is developed on the premise that students learn in relation to their past experiences and their thoughts about their future life and career … it requires a culture, where students engage in their studies and share their experiences, thoughts and ideas with other students, teachers and supervisors." This suggests that PBL could indeed be a didactic practice that would support the development of skills and competences, strong learning and 'exuberance'.

### Collaborative Learning.

Over the past years, one didactic tool that has proved to be successful is collaborative learning, particularly for language and communication-oriented courses. It offers students the possibility of actively training their skills in the foreign language while collaborating to solve a particular assignment in which the communication of the results is a core element.Smith and MacGregor (1992: 1) sum up some of the merits of collaborative learning: Collaborative learning represents a significant shift away from the typical teacher centred or lecture-centred milieu in college classrooms. In collaborative classrooms, the lecturing/ listening/note-taking process may not disappear entirely, but it lives alongside other processes that are based in students' discussion and active work with the course material. Teachers who use collaborative learning approaches tend to think of themselves less as expert transmitters of knowledge to students, and more as expert designers of intellectual experiences for students - as coaches or midwives of a more emergent learning process.

In the workshops, collaborative learning was considered essential for two reasons: it empowers students in respect of their own learning, and it allows the students to cultivate practical skills in e.g. information search and selection rather than offer them teacher-selected materials. Yet, for various reasons some students will always participate less actively than others in group work, and the degree of motivation to be involved actively may vary from person to person in that not everyone has a learning style that matches the collaborative learning idea; this would be a point for consideration in future studies. Experience from the workshops and other classes taught at CBS suggest that working with PBL and collaborative learning requires an ICT platform that will support and facilitate various types of assignments and collaborative functions such as e.g. chat rooms, and wikis, in addition to file upload facilities; the platform should facilitate student co-writing and editing of documents in a synchronous environment.

In fact, subsequent work at a.o. CBS shows that in a synchronous platform, students are much more likely to interact within their groups and to enter into a dialog with their teacher between classes, so this could be a possible solution to the challenge of students engaged in 'social loafing'; in addition, with this type of interaction it is also suddenly easy to document learning processes based on evidence in learning logs, wikis etc. (Mondahl & Svendsen, 2011).

## VI. The Experience Gained from the Workshops

Below is a summary of the stock-taking after the first round.
*What Did the Students Say?*
At the end of the workshop sequence, the standard CBS evaluation form (for quantitative data) was supplemented with two focus group interviews with student volunteers held by an external consultant to obtain additional qualitative data. All evaluation data were supplied anonymously, and the students were informed that quotations might be used for research purposes; there were no objections to this.

*Quantitative data.* The evaluation forms were distributed electronically to all 150 students; 29 handed in their evaluation, which gives a response rate of just below 20 %, which is unfortunately average for CBS where all courses are evaluated upon completion, so a certain degree of 'evaluation fatigue' is common in students; it is reasonable to question the validity of such evaluations, and so it is questionable whether any hard and fast conclusions may be drawn from such 'thin' feedback, but it is the only qualitative data available. In addition to the two standard questions about what was good and what might be improved in the course, I was allowed to ask two supplementary questions:

- Describe how the workshops have been different from other subjects and courses.
- Give examples of the types of benefits (learning) you have gained from the workshops.

Responses to these two questions show that in general the students had taken positively to the course; a number of students offered positive comments in their evaluations of the course: "More free and flexible than traditional classes", "Information search and selection followed by a presentation is not exactly a new feature, but to supplement your presentation with a small text is", "The subjects were interesting and took us through many different issues", "I also learned a lot from watching my fellow students make their presentations", "We actually got to SPEAK English, not just listen". Still, it should be remembered that only 20% of the students participating in the workshops actually submitted their evaluation, and the comments could indicate that the respondents were the most positive students.

*Qualitative data.* With a view to providing qualitative data, an independent consultant carried out two focus group interviews with a small number of volunteer students, who had participated in the workshops. The two main themes in the interviews were:
- Students' attitudes to the possibilities opened up by the workshops, and
- Students' attitudes to more experimental teaching methods in general

The first question related to the level of activity. The positive conclusion was that in general the students welcomed the idea of independent work and presenting cases they had chosen for themselves The less positive conclusion was that the workshop sequence in 2007 was under pressure time-wise and that my level of ambition had been unrealistically high.

In terms of reversing the teacher-student roles the students liked this 'new' relationship with me better than the more traditional relationship. It was indeed one of the original ideas behind the workshop sequence to inspire the students to take a higher degree of responsibility for their own learning, and it would appear that this ambition was realized.

The second question on knowledge sharing resulted in very few comments. This would be a point for a more targeted effort in future, and it supports the points made above in regard to the ICT platform.

The students also stated that they tend to give priority to obligatory assignments rather than to non-obligatory assignments rather than look at the learning outcome of a particular activity, so a greater effort must be made in terms of motivation and attitude forming. Again it should be remembered that the volunteers could well be the students who were most positive towards the innovations; still their responses do offer useful insights into what seemed to work and what would require improvement on the part of the planning and actual implementation.

*What Did the Grades Say?*

The first workshops replaced a much more teacher-controlled type of classroom interaction; yet, the subject areas studied in the workshops and the 'old' 2006 course, , had a number of aspects in common: the dual focus on business and market related subjects and the students' ability to communicate orally this knowledge in their L2; also the exam procedures were identical , viz. an oral examination based on an individual, written synopsis, so it would be possible to compare the exam results obtained in the two courses. In both courses, the students were given two grades: one for the content and one for their oral communicative competence. The grade point average for content in the 2006 course was 8.77, whereas the corresponding grade point average for the 2007 workshop course was 8.99 on a grade scale consisting of non-pass grades 00, 03, 5, and pass grades 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 13. The number of students participating in the 2006 course was 95 against 102 in the 2007 course.

The grade point average for oral communicative competence in 2006 was 8.64, and the corresponding grade point average for the 2007 workshops was 8.95. The numbers suggest that the transition from a fairly traditional, teacher-controlled course to the more student-centred workshop format did indeed have some measurable effect on the exam results . If we disregard the students that failed, the grade point average for content rose from 8.92 to 9.03, while the oral communicative competence grade point average went up from 8.84 to 8.95. While the improvements in grade point averages are moderate, they would still suggest that didactic experiments using e.g. workshops would be justified and could prove successful, but it also raises the question of whether such experiments can be extended to other courses and programmes

How Did the Theory Match with the Workshops as They Unfolded?
This section will sum up how events in the workshop match with the learning theories outlined above. In terms of *empowerment*, it could be argued that with the repetitive pattern of events in the workshops, students would become increasingly familiar with how to select a topic under a given framework, with selecting, processing and presenting material thus enhancing their problem-solving abilities; although the students were not asked directly about how they experienced this, the higher grade point averages indicate that the students' problem-solving competence did indeed improve.

The other aspect of the empowerment dimension is that of learning loops; a few student comments suggest that development did indeed take place: "It helped you reflect more on things ahead of the final exam ", and "I have become better at quickly finding an angle to a topic and narrowing it down to a brief text". Particularly this last comment where the student reflects on having become better at suggests that some loop effect has taken place. The empowerment dimension is also addressed in this quote from one of the focus groups: "The teacher is more on an equal footing with us; they become more of a sparring partner, which is positive". Still, we can assume that a more systematic use of learning logs by the students would probably lead to a deeper insight in student learning processes, e.g. how learning loops are shaped; however, the SiteScape platform did not facilitate active student use of learning logs, and so the study does not reveal with sufficient clarity whether learning loops were indeed present, although a few scattered student comments from the qualitative data would suggest that some learning loop-like activity was indeed taking place.

Looking at workshops in terms of the *nature of learning*, a very central aspect was that of motivation. Here it was found that in both the quantitative and the qualitative data, the students commented on their increased level of motivation in the workshops compared to more formal courses; a high degree of motivation is usually closely linked to the aspects of surface vs. deep learning where motivation promotes deep learning, which is desirable, since deep learning represents the type of learning that can be reproduced in other settings (Biggs 2003: 16-18). A sense of motivation and deep learning would also link to the student's desire to develop competencies for use in other situations. To quote one student: "I have become much more confident about making presentations, just as my general business knowledge has improved; I'm sure I'll need that later on." Looking at the workshops in terms of *learning processes*, Hermansen's (2005) conception pairs illustrate the processes where the student draws on previous experience of how to solve a given new task as well as the amount and nature of work that goes into the process; as one student puts it: "it was really nice to be able to select your own topic and select the relevant information and then present it; this is always a challenge in itself"; another student comments that "the students have been far more dedicated in this course than in others" – both comments would suggest the drawing on previous experience to anticipate future outcomes; also, "it was really nice" suggests that the student in question was not put off by the toil dimension but seemed to lean towards the 'exuberance' end of the scale.

Whether strong learning was actually achieved is questionable; there are no student responses in the data that address this aspect; however, in future courses it would be possible to build in challenges that could be perceived as crises by the students, e.g. by giving different information to different student groups in the process.

The Evolution of the Workshop Format

The results of the first workshop run were so encouraging that it was decided to continue the project. Prior to the beginning of the second run, a few changes were made based on the responses in the questionnaires and the focus group interviews. Another vital source of inspiration for changes was provided by student comments in a Dialogue Café, which invited MA students and teachers to meet and discuss teaching and learning in the 21st century in order to develop best practices to promote the notion of life-long learning. Three themes were discussed at the café tables: What makes a good learning experience? What motivates you as a student/teacher? How may we stimulate students to think 'out of the box' in terms of developing skills and competencies? The changes to the original format are outlined in the following.

*ICT.* The ICT environment used in the workshops turned out to be not nearly as interactive and supportive of the learning processes as we should have liked it to be. Few students actually uploaded documents to the platform, just as few students set up team workspaces for document sharing and collaboration. One reason could be that SiteScape is asynchronous and rigid – it takes a large number of clicks to find a specific file or reference – and does not facilitate seamless collaboration. A more intuitive ICT platform that offers the possibility for synchronous work and real collaboration, e.g. in the form of wikis and learning (b)logs, would support the learning processes better (Mondahl & Svendsen, 2011).

*Tutorials.* Key words such as dialogue and closer collaboration came out in the Café in connection with discussions about learning experiences and motivation; one student formulated a wish for tutorials where students could meet in groups with their teacher for an informal, in-process discussion of results achieved so far and of how to progress. We implemented this thought in the second workshop sequence in spring 2008, and subsequent evaluations show that the students consider tutorials a good learning tool; therefore the tutorial idea has been carried forward into other courses after the Language Specific Market Studies course was discontinued after two runs.

*Changed Time Format.* One of the suggestions for improvement that stood out in the data was that the students wished to have more time to dig deeper into each workshop topic. This was changed in 2008 by reducing the number of workshops to three workshops of three weeks each. This change made it possible to offer tutorial sessions in mid-process and received positive comments in the subsequent course evaluations.

*Real-Time Cases.* In the discussions about motivation in the Café, commitment, involvement and creativity were some of the keywords used by the students. In 2009, the workshop idea was carried forward in a new MA course, Oral Interaction, and here the UN COP15 in Copenhagen in December 2009 was used as a real-time case; this was welcomed by the students, since background knowledge and knowledge of the communicative challenges facing delegates and aides at the conference were seen to optimize the students' chances of getting a job in connection with COP15. Over the workshop sequence, a number of students expressed the opinion that the relevance of the workshop topic was a motivational factor.

*Reflective Practices and Possible Feedforward.* A small experiment involving the use of learning logs was made in the autumn of 2009 in connection with yet another course, where students had to write a learning log before they could upload their case solutions to the ICT platform used; the underlying thought was to encourage students to reflect on their learning processes on a regular basis, and similar initiatives will be taken with other courses. Systematic use of learning logs could be said to resemble a self-directed documentary film of each individual student's learning progress over a given course or degree programme. It may be useful to supplement the film with 'still photos' of learning experiences, and here evaluation forms such as self-evaluation and peer-evaluation could provide such 'still photos' and be a valuable contribution to the learning process.

It would be reasonable to assume that with a well-functioning ICT platform, reflective practices such as self and peer evaluation forms will provide the students with a useful feed-forward tool, where they can use the 'film' and the 'still photos' as the experience basis to predict the outcome of a given action and assess whether the outcome was successful or would perhaps require adjustment. This would be a significant step in the students' taking charge of their individual learning processes and perhaps also contribute to the avoidance of 'social loafing' by students.

## VII. Results so Far and Perspectives for the Future

At this point in time (2011), workshops have been carried out in a number of course with modifications to the original workshop format in topics, methods, report types and requirements; most of the changes have come about via dialogue between teacher(s) and student(s), and other modifications have been introduced via study board decisions. The results from the first, original workshop run show that the thoughts and ideas behind the workshop did indeed make sense. The grade point averages for both 'legs' of the course content rose in comparison with the more traditional setup, and the students were appreciative of the course format, which allowed them to take greater responsibility for their own learning and to apply the experiences made in the course to other learning situations; in addition, the students were positive towards the shift in the teacher role towards more of a sparring partner function. Seen from a teacher perspective, this is highly encouraging; yet, it also suggests that a more focused effort on student learning processes and the tools required to support these processes (e.g. a well-functioning ICT platform) could lead to even better results.

As teachers and active participants in the teaching and learning processes at our respective institutions, we play an active part as sparring partners in our students' efforts to develop knowledge, skills and competences that will empower students and allow them to take ownership of their own learning processes, and to develop those meta skills that they will be drawing on in their life-long learning process. The reflections on the various pedagogical principles and the experiences from the workshop sequences described above are small, yet important, steps on the way towards that goal.

Another logical step in the development process would be to involve the students more actively in the planning of the activities in the course. However, for this to be successful students need to have an insight into learning processes and learner styles. One way to facilitate student learning processes would be to offer students a theoretical introduction to learning processes and learning/teaching methods and perhaps to link this to thinking and learning styles (e.g. Sternberg, Kolb), allowing them to put together individual 'learning process packages' that will help them attain their academic goals; here the systematic use of learning logs and synchronous ICT facilities could be invaluable tools.

Also, new evaluation methods are required that would allow for both the traditional feedback on student (and teacher) performance and for feed-forward where students and teachers cooperate on formulating goals for the next steps in the students' and teachers' learning processes alike and for the implications that these steps will have on other course modules and on the students' meta learning. Another interesting dimension would be to work consciously on developing 'strong learning' in the students by deliberately building in 'crises' in the course format, as this would no doubt also enhance students' general problem-solving competencies and trigger the unconscious development in learning loops.

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