EDUCAMPS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PEER LEARNING FOR STUDENT TEACHERS IN ICT

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Introduction

Some distance education programs offer campus sessions in their courses. That has been the case at the University of Iceland – School of Education (UISE) for the past decades. The question is how such sessions are best organised. Lectures and seminars have been the hallmark of university teaching for centuries but can now easily be available online in various formats including more interactive styles for example with (recorded) synchronous webinars. Already in 2008 there were indications that distance learners at the UISE who had were exposed to online recordings of lectures were less likely to want to spend face-to-face meetings on lectures (Jakobsdóttir, 2008) than those who were not used to watching lecture recordings online. This was not true regarding online asynchronous discussions. Students tended to appreciate f2f discussions during campus sessions regardless of their exposure to online asynchronous discussions (Jakobsdóttir, 2008; Jakobsdóttir, Jónsdóttir, Valsdóttir, Frímannsdóttir, & Jóhannsdóttir, 2008).

Of course there are many other teaching methods that can be applied when people meet f2f. One method that we have found to be promising among teacher students learning about ICT is a type of workshop that has for example been called educamp or edcamp (Carpenter, 2016; Leal Fonseca, 2011). Similar methods have also been called *unconference* or *over-the-shoulder* learning, playdates, or teachmeets. An educamp as described by Leal Fonseca (2011) is an "unstructured collective learning experience" making tangible "possibilities of social software tools in learning and interaction processes while demonstrating face-to-face organizational forms that reflect social networked learning ideas." Such events have probably mostly been organised for the purpose of professional development and a chance to make connections and learn from peers in an informal way. Due to the fast technological developments it is important to instil in teacher students a mind-set that nobody can be an expert in everything and that it is important to explore together and learn from each other. Teacher students in their second semester of several years of study can expect that the technological landscape will have shifted and changed and new pedagogical emphasis and sets of tools arrived or be on the horizon. The educamp method has been used in Iceland under the translated label (Icelandic) *menntabudir* since fall 2012 with various groups: teachers of ICT, special education, natural science and mathematics, and teachers with groups of pupils in schools for example recently on makerspaces projects at the primary level (Jakobsdóttir, 2015; Jakobsdóttir, Jónsdóttir,

Gudmundsdóttir, & Pétursdóttir, 2014; Jakobsdóttir & Thayer, 2014). In addition, these types of events have been offered in campus sessions with graduate since 2012 and undergraduate students in ICT courses at the UISE since 2014. The method has been adapted with different groups and for different occasions but when it is used as part of the teacher education curriculum it may have a more formal aspect in the way that all participants are required to participate with contributions in dual role as teacher and learner and that such a project is evaluated as part of their grade.

In this paper, educamps organised with undergraduate teacher education students are described as well as the reactions of students from three cohorts in 2014, 2015 and 2016 (additional data may be added in the final version of the paper from a 2018 cohort which is completing a similar project in spring semester 2018).

Method

The study is descriptive involving survey data (numerical and text in open-ended questions) concerning reactions to the teaching method involved.

The Educamp project and data collection

The educamp project was integrated in a 5 ECTS introduction course on ICT in education. Most of the course participants were then in their second semester (spring) in a B.Ed. teacher education program. It counted as 10% of the final grade (involving ca. 12-15 hours of work). The goals were the following:

- Students will understand the value of sharing experience, knowledge and ideas about ICT use in learning and teaching.
- Students will understand the importance of professional development in ICT and opportunities and possibilities to keep up with changes and innovation.
- Students will widen their network among fellow students and teachers regarding the use of technology and pedagogy.
- Students will increase their knowledge about use of ICT and development of teaching methods.

The course was taught online (Moodle-based) but included two campus sessions. The educamp event was scheduled for the second session but students prepared by reading materials and watching recordings about educamps, teacher professional development, social learning and communities of practice. Then they put their name in a course wiki in a time slot to make their introduction by themselves or could also make an introduction with one or two other students. Due to the fairly high number of students in the class (around or more than 100) more than one educamp session was available during the campus session week. Each session had ca. 10-15 min. preparation time in the beginning, four ca. half an hour time slots for introductions, and then some time in the end for whole group discussions and/or follow-up work. Students were expected to be in a teacher role at their station in one of the time slots but could roam around and decide what they wanted to learn from other students during the other time slots. By having

four time slots on average there should have been about 3 students in a learner role at each station/presentation. Figure 1 shows photos from how the project looked in practice.

Figure 1. Pictures from educamps organised in a course on ICT in education in spring 2016.
Photos: Sólveig Jakobsdóttir

After the campus session students were expected to send in: (a) An introduction (online form) about the software, tool, digital learning materials they were presenting, outlining how it worked, whether there were problems in relation to its use and provide ideas and reflections on the potential use in teaching or learning; In addition, students were required to send: (b) information with a different online form about their visits to five other students during the educamp. In the second contribution they were required to reflect on their learning from each visit and provide ideas on how those tools/software/materials presented and discussed with others could be useful in their own teaching and learning. Also, at the end they were invited to evaluate the educamp experience and indicate how much/little they enjoyed it and how much/little they learned from it. It was made clear in that section that students were not required to complete the evaluation questions and whether they did would not have any effect on their grade for the project.

Those who could not attend the campus session due to illness or other reasons, were required to send in two presentations online instead of one (or during one year could make arrangements with the teacher to attend and present at a special table via synchronous online meeting). Early presentations/contributions sent in online were made available in the Moodle course web (wiki) and students could choose five contributions from there to read about and reflect upon if they were unable to attend the campus session in person. Finally, when all introductions had been sent in they were all made available in Moodle. Students indicated whether they permitted that their contributions were made available in an open web after the course and then anonymously or with their name displayed as author. After the project had been graded the course participants received an announcement with reference to the resources produced by the students with all of the presentations, an overview about how the educamp experience had been evaluated by the participants and a request to let the teacher know if they did not want their evaluation of the project to be presented outside the course (e.g. at conferences or in reports or articles about the project). No such notifications came forward in any of the years.

Participants

The participants were in three cohorts taking the course described above, most of them during their second semester in spring 2014, 2015, and 2016. For the first two cohorts taking the course in 2014 or 2015 the course was mandatory but for the 2016 cohort students were able to select

four courses out of six so an estimate of ca 2/3rds of the cohort signed up for the course. The completion rates in the course was 80, 78, and 77% respectively and most of those completed the educamp assignment along with the evaluation questions in the second part of the online contributions. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants in the course and the evaluation survey. As can be seen, majority of the course and survey participants were female all years. The course completion rate was 78%. Most of the those completing the course participated in the survey evaluating the project. The mean ages of the student cohorts were 27 to 30 but the age range was quite broad from 20 to 58. About 10-11% of the students answering the evaluation questions each year had not attended the educamp event in person but just accessed the information about the presentations online.

Table 1: Information about the student cohorts and survey participants (number of participants, gender ratio, mean age, course and survey completion) by year

Participants	Information	Year		
		2014	2015	2016
Course	Number of students	113	109	96
	Female: Male (F:M) ratio	80:20	78:22	77:23
	Mean age (age range)	27 (20-58)	30 (20-57)	27 (20-52)
	Course completion rate	85%	79%	83%
Survey	N (females, males)	88 (77F, 11M)	72 (60F,10M, 2 unidentified gender)	70 (55F,15M)
	Survey completion rates total (females, males)	78% (86%, 48%)	66% (42%, 71%)	73% (74%,68%)

Results

Contributions

The number of contributions during the educamp events ranged from 62 to 73 and covered from 49 to 52 tools/software etc. About half of the group chose to make their contribution individually but others arranged themselves in pairs or small groups (see Table 2).

Table 2: Number of contributions online and in educamp sessions and number of tools, methods or materials sent in by year

Year	2014	2015	2016
Number of contributions sent in online	73 (from 80 students)	72 (from 76 students)	62 (from 57 students)
Number of tools/software etc. covered	52	51	49
Number of tables/workstations in the educamp/campus sessions	45 (24 individuals, 16 pairs, 5 trios)	53 (25 individuals, 26 pairs, 1 trio, and one group of 4)	36 (15 individuals, 13 pairs, 8 trios)

The presentations were about a diverse range of tools, software and/or e-learning materials. Examples from 2015 included digital portals or resources in Icelandic, for example educational games or drill and practice in language learning (storytelling, sound, grammar), mathematics, digital maps in geography, and first aid. Other examples included social media (e.g. various

possibilities in Google, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Pinterest), maps, question games (e.g. Kahoot! Or Quiz Up, flashcards (e.g. Bitsboard), language learning tools (e.g. Duolingo), music (e.g. Guitarbots). In addition, there were introductions about tools for multimedia production or publication (iMovie, Movie Maker, Moovly, Youtube), online communications and learning.

Student reactions

The students tended to rate the experience as very interesting/fun. A large majority all of the years agreed with that statement, 73% 2014, 81% 2015 and 84% 2016, whereas 27% 2014, 18% 2015 and 16% 2016 thought it was considerably interesting/fun and none answered not interesting/fun. See Figure 2.
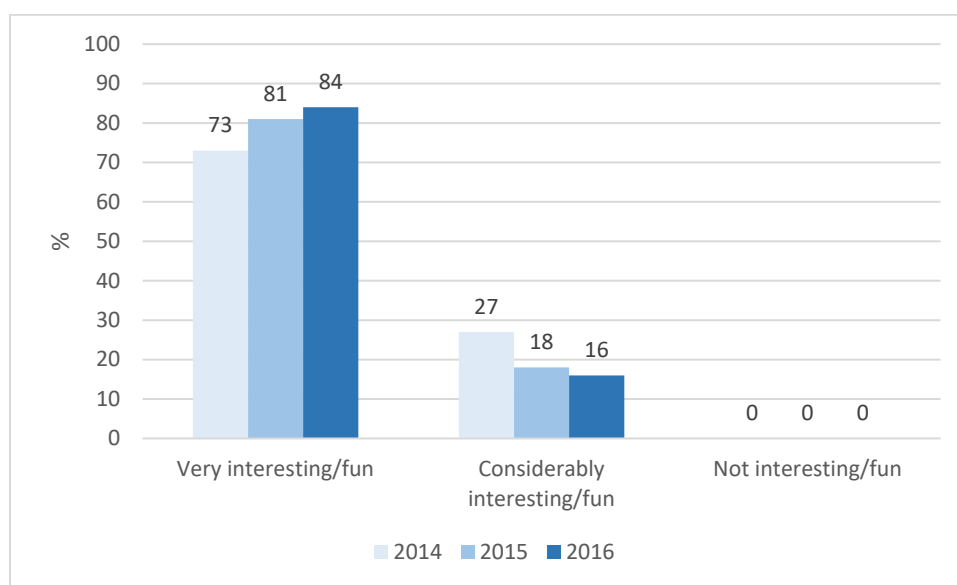

Figure 2. Students' interest
Answers to the question: "What did you think about participating in the educamp? How much/little interesting/fun?"

In spite of the short time devoted to the educamp event and the project, a large majority though they had learned very much (29%, 36%, 43% 2014 to 2016) or much (50% 46%, 46% the years involved) from the project while some answered considerable amount (21%, 14%, 10%) and hardly any students said little or very little/nothing. See Figure 3.
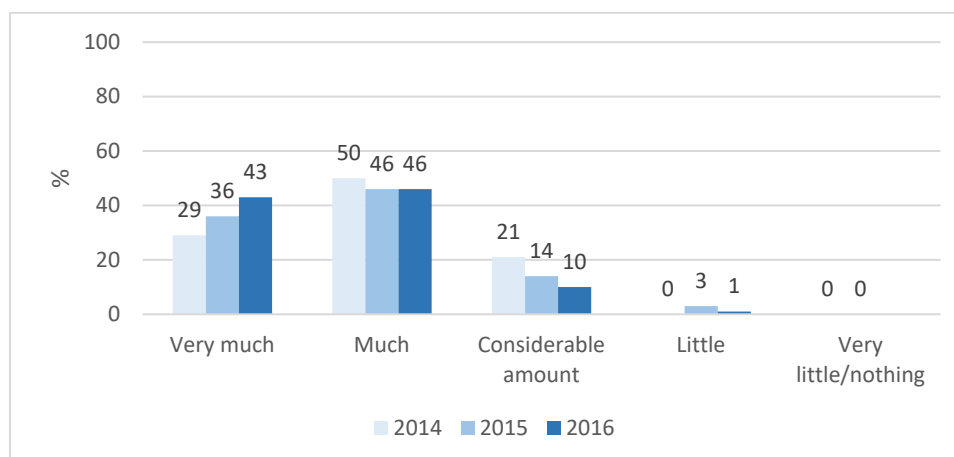
Figure 3. Students' learning.
Answers to the question: "What did you think about participating in the educamp? How much/little did you learn?"

There was a tendency for students to rate the experience higher (learning and interest) with year which might have been an indication that the project was better introduced and/or organised in the latter years by the teachers (learning. R = .180, n = 222, p = .007; interest: r = .165, n = 221, p = .014). However, in 2016 students more interested in ICT in education may have selected to take the course than those less interested which could be a factor in higher rating that year whereas in 2014 and 2015 the course was mandatory for everyone. However, interestingly correlation between attending the event on campus or not with amount learned or interest was not significant (in the final version of the paper data from open-ended questions will also be presented).

Conclusions

Teacher students appear to enjoy and learn from the educamp method to reflect and think about using ICT in education. There is a need to work with ICT competences in teacher education perhaps with a focus on self-efficacy (Gudmundsdottir & Hatlevik, 2018). In a world that can be quite intimating, regarding its huge flora of tools and methods that are being promoted in teaching and learning, new ways need to be tried and tested where learning and professional communities can explore technologies and discuss with peers and experts why and how they could be of use in praxis.

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