

# DIGITAL LEARNING ACROSS BOUNDARIES

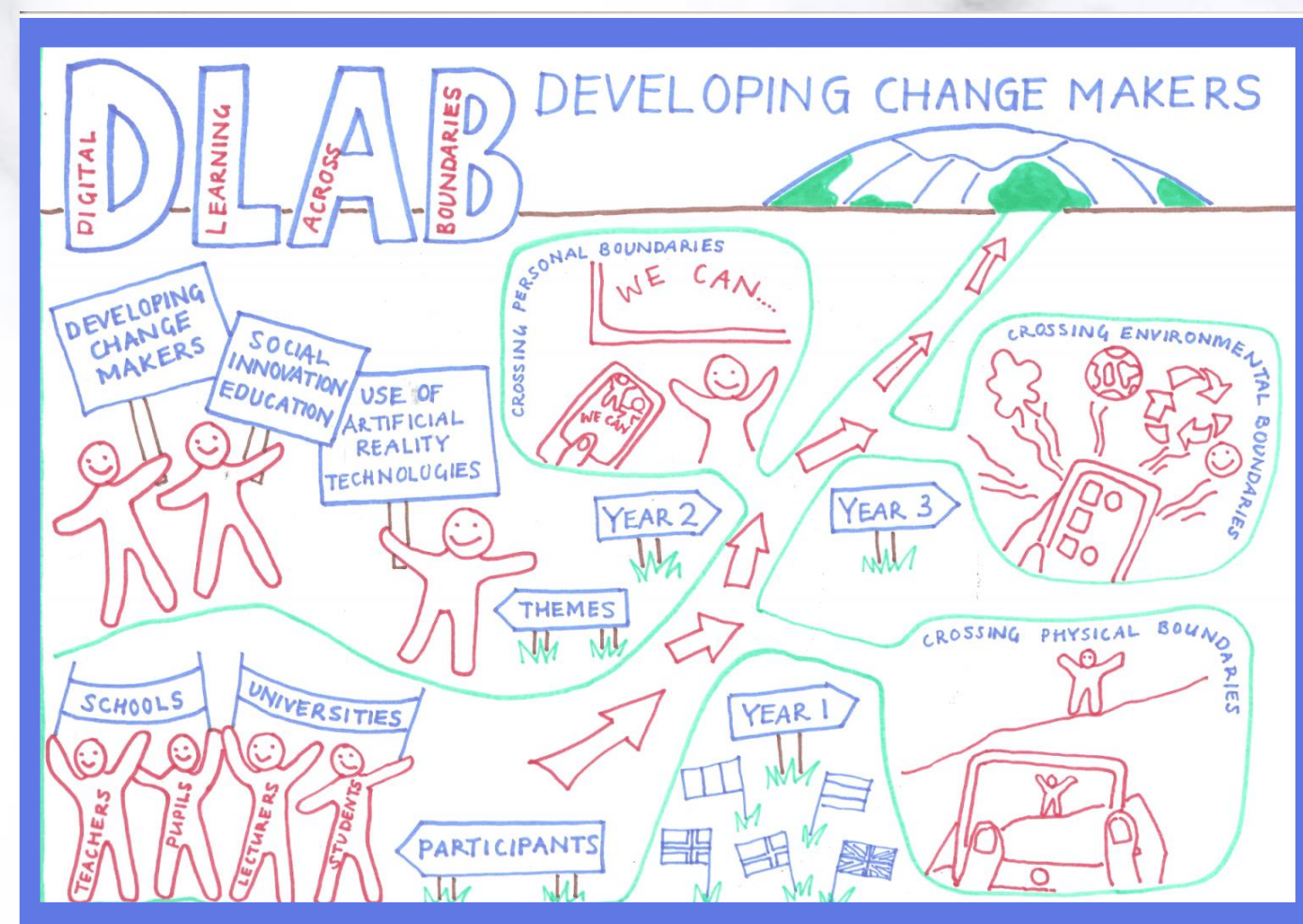
Using digital technologies to innovate international collaborations and develop changemaking in student teachers

## Research background

The DLAB2 project explores how digital technology can support changemaking activities and help individuals to cross various boundaries, including physical, personal and environmental. This year, the project focused on crossing personal boundaries, which was particularly salient given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. DLAB participants identified the social problem of loneliness and isolation - exacerbated by the pandemic - and sought approaches to combat these experiences. The proposed solution was to create a 'Festival', or virtual festival, to bring project participants together and celebrate our achievements over the academic year. The Festival promotes one of DLAB's key themes of international collaboration and enables participants to connect and express themselves via digital technologies. This poster will present reflections from the student teachers who participated and helped to create the Festival.

## Changemakers

The concept of changemaking is discussed in a range of literature; Thorogood *et al.* (2018), suggest changemaking involves processes of developing and evaluating innovative solutions to social problems. A changemaker, therefore, is a group or individual who seeks to identify an issue and take positive action (Whewell *et al.*, 2021). Changemaking activities are said to develop attributes such as empathy, critical thinking, creativity and teamwork skills (Whewell *et al.*, 2021). Changemaking is an integral theme in DLAB, as illustrated by one member of the project.



## Personal Boundaries

Breaking and crossing barriers is one of the overarching themes of the DLAB2 project. According to Dziejewicz *et al.* (2014), collaboration between people from different countries and cultures breaks down barriers and helps to develop the attributes which are associated with changemakers.

## Aims

This year, the project's research investigates the experiences of student teachers and their development as changemakers. The research aims are as follows:

- 1 Explore how digital technologies have supported changemaking in student teachers.
- 2 Analyse the reflections of student teachers, relating to how they have crossed personal boundaries.

## Methodology

The research employs an ethnographic methodology, which explores the lived experiences of the student teachers (Cohen *et al.*, 2018, p.292). It also adheres to a participatory action research framework whereby members of the project contribute as participants in the research and seek to elicit positive social change through their contributions (MacDonald, 2012, p.36).

The sample consists of 20 student teachers from Belgium, Denmark, England, Norway and Spain.



Data was gathered from reflective vlogs created by the student teachers; these were transcribed using Otter.ai.

## Data analysis

The data was analysed by two members of the research team who conducted independent coding before reviewing the data together. An inductive approach to coding was employed as thematic codes were decided during the coding process (Cohen *et al.*, 2018, p.669).

- Two key themes were identified from the data analysis:
- Technology-supported changemaking
  - Crossing personal boundaries

## Findings

Below are some key quotes from our student teachers:

We've been changemakers in how we've adapted our initial plan and our practice so the project could continue in a COVID world.

I crossed a lot of personal boundaries in many ways, particularly as the subject of the three days are very out of my comfort zone.

I used some digital tools that I thought I would never use in my life, or in life as a teacher.

Technology played a big role in enabling us to collaborate and join together, despite being physically apart.

## The Festival

The DLAB2 participants from all five countries collaborated to create the Festival, which consisted of a number of virtual festival tents - each with their own theme. The tents contain lesson plans and CPD activities created by the lectures, teachers and student teachers, as well as resources produced by the children who participated in the project. The student teachers also produced 'DLAB Talks' videos, addressing some of the key themes and content of the project.

The Festival was an entirely collaborative venture which required not only acted as the catalyst for changemaking, but also crossing personal boundaries. The Festival includes tents on facing fears and the technologies that the student teachers explored during their activities. The concept of the Festival, itself, reflects DLAB2's response to the personal boundaries created by COVID-19.



## Discussion

In discussing their changemaking activities, it was evident the student teachers' perceptions of changemaking focused on changes made in their everyday lives, particularly as a result of the pandemic. They indicated that changemakers are those who seek solutions to social problems, which adheres to definitions presented by Whewell *et al.* (2021, p.2). In their reflections, the student teachers reported that their use of digital technologies, such as Teams, Padlet and Cospaces, enabled them to connect with others and address the social issue of loneliness and isolation by producing the Festival, thus supporting their changemaking activities.

A key project theme this year was crossing personal boundaries; the student teachers described how they had crossed boundaries through: addressing their fears, engaging in activities outside of their comfort zones, and communicating with students in other countries who, in some cases, spoke languages different to their own. The student teachers expressed that their involvement in creating the Festival promoted international collaboration and allowed them to connect with peers in a period where many countries were experiencing lockdowns.

## Conclusion

Through their participation in the DLAB project this year, the student teachers have been able to use digital technologies to support their development as changemakers. In particular, the creation of the Festival has allowed and encouraged them to cross personal boundaries and connect with others in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## References

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