

# Mosca

## A Case Study on Collaborative Work – Combining Dimensions while Learning

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**Abstract.** “*Mosca*” was an art project developed by art students, on a context of formal education, the project was designed in a collaborative learning mode. Throughout the presentation of this project one will reflect, on an empirical basis, as an actor and observer, upon the working platforms and the dimensions which were experienced in a very active and intuitive way: the physical and the virtual dimensions, used in order to create a physical event.

**Keywords:** art education, collaborative learning, virtual dimension, social media, project design.

## 1 Introduction

“MOSCA”, the art project that will be presented in a very brief way was at first developed in a formal education context, with art students.

Together students had to conceive, plan, produce, set and promote their art exhibition, in a physical space, within the local community.

Along the development of the project due to some constraints, such as time, integration and cooperation, virtual platforms and virtual tools came to be suggested and utilized being part and playing an important role in this collaborative learning process.

The use of those platforms was very intuitive by the whole group, one will identify the tools and how the use of these tools contributed to the design of the project and bowed the project into a much more interactive and dynamic learning experience to the group, improving by consequence the outcomes.

As a teacher who adopts collaborative learning as a method, it is a constant to ponder upon practices, learning processes and outcomes. As Walker [1], I can identify the dimension of the teacher within this method as “a facilitator and mentor”: (...) A teacher's role... is to respond quickly to questions, to coach individual groups, to identify common difficulties, and to suggest new approaches.” Consequently one can draw a line of thought according to Dillenbourg [2] and try “(...) to understand the role which (...) variables play in the mediating interaction”. As a teacher, to understand these variables can lead to the improvement of skills in a mediating process, which can reflect on the quality of learning processes.

Now that this project terminated, it seems to be important to reflect on how physical and virtual dimensions intertwine, as variables and can become a plus for art students learning processes in order to integrate these dimensions in a more precise way, concerning collaborative learning future projects in my practice.

As it is a very recent project, one can only bring it in an empirical level, sharing the experience.

In a first moment one will build some considerations on collaborative learning, followed by context, than:

- the group will be characterized
- the project will be presented in a very brief way
- some of the important stages of the project will be mentioned
- there will be the identification of the tools which were used
- how these tools were used by the group
- finally, ponder upon group results and collaborative learning through the use of technology.

## **2 Some Considerations on Collaborative Learning**

Doise [3] states “... it is above all through interacting with others, coordinating his/her approaches to reality with those of others, that the individual masters new approaches”.

Through collaborative learning each individual brings his/her own experience and knowledge to a team, meaning, an individual experience turns into a plural experience, transforming the whole team, causing a certain impact, during this process of interaction and in the end, this learning experience which is acquired evolves to another level of knowledge within each involved participant. According to Dillenbourg [2], “individual development allows participation in certain social interactions which produce new individual states which in turn, make possible more sophisticated social interaction (...)”, in this line of thought one dares to add that through this level of “social interaction” social engagement comes hand in hand, raising a learning experience inter learners and reinforcing acquired knowledge through experience.

As little as the contribution might be it will enforce any kind of outcome, and the whole sphere of involvement: it will affect the producer, the user, the whole learning experience.

Translated in English language, “MOSCA”, the name of the project that was chosen by the students, means, “FLY”.

The fly, was taken as the concept of this gather venture as it was taken as a starting point to conceptualize multiple ways and perspectives, just like the insect’s vision: multiple.

Around the same theme/concept, which was open enough to bring their personal contributions students produced a body of work, resulting in an exhibition that mirrored their own multiple perspectives on contemporary world.

### 3 The Context, the Working Group and the Project

The project was developed in a formal education context, within the duration of a semester.

The learning unit in which the project took place, sets very clear objectives, the student has to:

- Identify different kinds of institutions where artists can operate
- Know the functional structures in the Visual Arts system; acquire a real understanding on how those structures operate in order to be able to relate to them, envisioning an integrated career in arts, along with his/hers inherent creative production.
- To have contact with institutions which can promote a cultural event
- To have an opportunity to experience the real implications of the production of an exhibition
- Experience the impact of his/her art works and experience in a real ground basis the level of involvement with and within a community.

In one's experience, involving students in a collaborative learning platform has its advantages: strengths motivation, promotes autonomy, creates the awareness that working with peers can be an advantage and quite an enriching and creative process. As the level of interaction rises, students also learn about ways to facilitate problem solving individually and collectively.

In former years, in the learning unit's context, students were invited to organize their graduation show and two exhibitions took place, mirroring a collaborative work and reflecting the students academic works on the majors of the degree of Visual Arts and Multimedia, evidencing the academic context of the event.

Both exhibitions were characterized by a wide variety of works, involving different mediums such as painting, sculpture, video animation, digital painting, and other mediums.

This year, as I accompanied the students, in other learning units, on the two previous years, one was familiar with the work of each individual, each student's capability and fragilities, and correspondent level of interaction in the group. Relational proximity with the group allowed to take the chance and confer students with even more autonomy, opting to challenge them to create their own works in an autonomous way, either creating individually or collectively, instead of exhibiting academic exercises which would not reveal so much their own personal approaches on art.



**Fig. 1.** The group photo, in the opening night of the exhibition

The class was quite large, composed by 34 students.

In a collaborative learning and working method, students were invited to develop their own exhibition project: conceiving, planning, producing (the works and the exhibition), setting and promoting the event – it was a design project which had to be very well planned as it involved so many stages and was not facilitated with such a large group of participants.

The first stages of the project's design happened on a physical dimension, in the classroom, as a whole team.

In the practice of art education, students learn to act as critical individuals and learn how to be active on their own educational process, similarly to the collaborative learning process; with this project students brought that attitude and learnt as a group. As the group started to be active, every week there would be different topics to reflect upon, practical matters to manage and major decisions to the project.

First, we reflected upon the identity of the group, some brainstorming sessions occurred to achieve this goal and after followed the search for the motto of the exhibition: "MOSCA".

The decision where the exhibition would take place, according to the concept, was also taken in the classroom, as a whole group.

After these stages, it was necessary to take in consideration the timings and actions such as the budget and activities to fundraise the project, a plan had to be built constrained by the length of the semester in order to achieve all the learning objectives, according to the formal academic context.

It was decided that for the fundraising two major events would happen:

- An art market in the city centre, by the Christmas time.
- A dinner ceremony, cooked by the group with all the students of the course, including alumni.

## **4 Combining Dimensions - Combining Communication**

To promote both activities as fundraising and others similar that would follow, such as the communication design of the event, the class had to be split in smaller groups.

Randomly, the students were free to choose the preferred activity and the peers to work with. Though there were split groups for specific tasks, collaborative mode was kept and fundamental, all the members worked as a whole.

In order to achieve all the learning objectives and bring the exhibition as an outcome in “useful” time we opted to work with different dimensions of communication.

A parallel path of communication started to be drawn on a virtual dimension, by using some platforms that were used every time we would have to make a decision but would not be able to be physically present. This form of communication was for internal functionality and later was also used for external communication with the community.

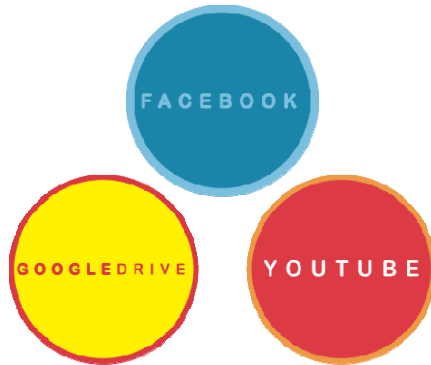


**Fig. 2.** Page of the Art Market, promoted through the *Facebook*

## 5 Facebook Branching

Given the formal education context, as mentioned above, every week we would meet in the classroom/studio, on a physical dimension and in a virtual dimension, it was proposed the regular use of a social network. We created a working group on Facebook it was our main virtual platform to work, though others have come to be used.

During the project: GoogleDrive and YouTube were used, in the end three virtual platforms contributed for this project.



**Fig. 3.** The three virtual platforms that were used in the project



**Fig. 4.** Facebook was the main platform used by the group, the other platforms were worked in a integrated mode



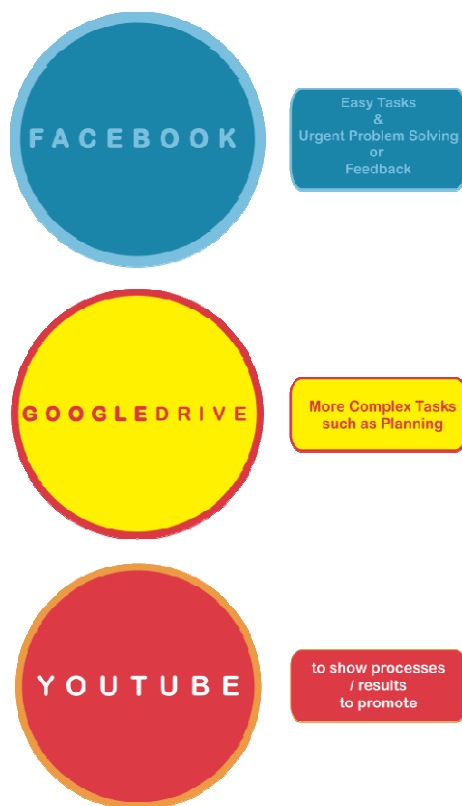
**Fig. 5.** One of the urgent moments the group had to deal via *Facebook*

Facebook was the main virtual platform in use but along the project the other two: GoogleDrive and Youtube were used in an integrated mode, meaning Facebook came to be the main frame of work on virtual ground though branched and complemented with the other two platforms.

Googledrive was used specifically to create files that would concern careful planning, as the platform allows constant access and editing tools, to all members.

Youtube was used to share videos that would touch the subject matter of the project and would be shared on the Facebook's group and was also used to promote the activities of the group and document the processes involved on the project.

The group made an adequate use of the virtual platforms, we have worked according to the grade of complexity of each particular task or purpose.



**Fig. 6.** The three platforms were used for different purposes

The use of email was less as the group would report activity on *Googledrive* through *Facebook*, articulating platforms.

One can only think about the advantages on combining a physical and virtual dimension, as they resulted to be quite complementary but also playing different roles.

## 6 The Results

### 1. In a physical dimension: the classroom

In the classroom, meetings came to be a place to conceptualize, orientate and manage practical matters but also were managed interpersonal problems that came not to be so evident in the virtual dimension that was in use. Apparently, the group was much more emotive when physically present as critics came to happen much more in this kind of dimension. Critical thought was more marked.

In the classroom, our meetings would also be used to share results and make a brief of the previous week activities and the activities that would have be developed on the week that would come.

### 2. At distance, on the virtual dimension, groups:

- Have met to organize, produce and promote the event
- Have made contacts concerning the production of the event
- Have reported results and managed production details
- Worked together on the creative process of communication materials
- Interacted in the production of communication materials

It seems that in this dimension there was a higher level of efficiency on problem solving, positive feedback was regular between peers and suggestions were well embraced with active and autonomous response of the group.

Shared information was constant in the working group as several students took the initiative to share the information about the work of other artists.

### 3. After combined dimensions, some results

In a moment such as a setting of an exhibition, a sense of pressure is quite normal and the need to have the ability to deal with last minute resolutions is necessary. In the case of a collective exhibition interpersonal matters normally add, due to pressure. By the moment of the setting of the exhibition the group revealed a different and better quality level concerning problem solving and it seemed to have acquired better communication skills. One can associate that working in the two different dimensions of communication might have contributed.

The promotion of the event, which was worked on the virtual dimension, produced on Facebook and on Youtube, seems also to have had impact on the local community and in the media.

By means of physical and virtual communication products, the group managed to gather around two hundred people in the gallery, in the opening evening, and frequent visitors during the rest of period.

The local media were also very supportive about the project.

## 7 To Conclude

Within a complex project, which involved several work fronts, the large number of involved people became an advantage. One's opinion is that the design process and the use of social media played a essential role. Combining dimensions of communication was and can be an advantageous working and learning method, not only to produce but also to develop qualities of interaction.

The "MOSCA" project was possible on a very short term due to high levels of engagement of active individuals but also by means of combining physical and virtual working platforms, the two platforms were a common ground to each individual of the group, this can mean that collaborative work can be quite empowered by the interaction of individuals on a physical dimension but on a virtual dimension as well, depending on the levels of digital literacy of each work group.

Individuals analyze and solve problems in a different way depending on dimensions, physical or virtual.

There are also procedural problems that come from the physical or virtual dimension.

The combination between the two dimensions can allow the reduction of physical and virtual blanks, this might be considered regarding the quality of interaction or concerning problem solving at a more practical level.

## 8 To Visualize

To watch the video of the set up of the exhibition  
 The event that was create on Facebook  
 The page of the project on Facebook  
 The event that was created on Facebook for the Art Market  
 To watch how the Art Market happened

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