BLUE LEARNING

A SMALL CASE OF MISSION BASED LEARNING

Missions Based Learning is a highly motivating 21st century learning approach offering clear missions and goals, step-by-step capacity building and learning when needed and relevant.

It is by definition cross-subject, team based and often involves a wide range of challenges from very different fields that will need to be brought together to accomplish the mission.

Missions can have various durations – from a few days to several months. They always include working with other resources, open schooling and interacting with the community and the surrounding world; and should work in mixed realities of virtual and physical…

Let's take a look at the small fiction **Blue Learning**. A mission based learning case addressing for example teenage students.

[Of course we are not doing this in school; we must follow the curriculum]

THE MISSION

Your team is given a mission: capture the most fascinating blue and design, produce and sell large posters of this blue online.
Seems simple, this mission, but it is not. It is extremely complicated. A lot of learning on the flight.
For a start understanding the mission, what are the challenges and how to approach the challenges step by step and in proper order: defining a possible progression and defining foreseen tasks and obstacles on the way.
It includes orientation, interpretation, dialogues and planning.

What did you learn?
To seize a mission and its challenges, to create some first progression lines along which the steps can be taken and drawing up quite complicated plans, including some crucial decision-making at important milestones
This is 21st century learning…

BLUE FASCINATION

First great challenge: what is "blue", what does it "mean"?
There are thousands of blue colors and nuances and they mean very different things:

What kind of blue is fascinating and why? We need to know that to design, produce and make people buy our blue design.
Then going deeper: what are the symbolic meanings of "blue"? How is language, colors and feelings intertwined?
What about Ocean Blue, Sky Blue, Music Blue etc.?
The ocean changes its blue many times during the day, so does the sky. So; what "is" blue?
Sadness for sure, as in The Blues or The Blue Notes, but what about Disney's Blue Room? Certainly not sad… Disney's Blue Room is about free creativity.
So, "blue" has many meanings, many connotations. What should be the team blue, so to speak, what do we need to explore?
The key is what kind of feeling we wish to foster among our customers, the future buyers?
We want to fascinate them, seduce them, and spellbind them – with our blue design. We want them to feel: "if I do not have this 200 cm poster on my wall, my life is not complete!"

What did you learn?
To analyse colors and meanings, symbols and metaphors – offering a deep insight into the nature of language, symbolism, emotions and aesthetics…
To create small journeys into various cultural expressions and to understand their "discourses"
To base your choices, design and intentions on what the future customers will appreciate and pay for, and to follow this strategy with consequence
This is 21st century learning…

THE DECISION

Based on those explorations in many directions, the team needs to come up with a clear answer: what kind of feelings, impressions, fascination would you like to create among the future customers to fulfill their desires and create a business?

What kind of blue (ref. Miles Davis *Kind of Blue)* will you pursuit and capture? Why? How will you do it? What will be the theme? What will "carry the blue", so to speak?

3 directions proposed: Ocean Blue, Sky Blue and Flower Blue.

All these blues each have hundreds of variations, fostering a wide range of meanings and emotions.

After studying the many variations, getting totally lost from time to time, and trying to link to how we would like to impact our audience, a team member came up with the solution: we want to promote peace in people's living rooms! We need that, people need that.

We need to call the creations Blue Peace and we need to create a series of for example 10 version of this Blue Peace, each of them slightly different but still within a strict and precise design concept.

This idea and the following decision was a giant step on the way. The mission became concrete and with more precise contours.

However, how to define "blue peace"? Which blue? And carried by which forms, shapes and figures?

At the end: let's work on Flower Blue…

What did you learn?
To work your way from endless options towards a clarified and manageable mission, and clearly based on a vision of what the costumers would appreciate and desire
Complicated decision-making through complicated exploration – and all the time using costumers' desire as key criterion
This is 21st *century learning…*

HORTENSIA BLUE

Then, endless studies of blue flowers…
Which flower blue and which flower might effectively symbolize "peace"?
And also dealing with the fact that colors and forms evoke different emotions and reactions in different people.
How to make sure that the blue selected will evoke similar feelings among a large number of possible costumers?
Finally the team opted for the Hortensia Blue. The Hortensia flower has many different colors, but its blue color is rather special: it evokes such feelings as calmness, lightness, clarity and… peace! The colors are supported by the soft forms and shapes of the flower.
The blue Hortensia thus became the peace flower in the mission.
The crucial point in the discussions were not if this was "true" or not, but if it could be promoted with aesthetic and financial success!
The design and promotion of the Hortensia Blue would make it true…

What did you learn?
To analyse costumer seduction strategies and to meet and co-create their desires
To create a design concept and base the productions on this concept
To progress from all sorts of possibilities towards a clear and well-justified decision
This is 21st *century learning…*

CAPTURING THE BLUE

So, the worst steps are over…
Not at all, now it gets complicated! Now no talking, but doing…
How to capture the Hortensia blue?
Obviously, the blue Hortensia evokes a strong sense of "soft blueness", but the fact is that there are at least 50 different nuances in the blue Hortensia.
How to find out, how to capture the "blueness" we need for the Blue Peace collection?

The Hortensia is a very delicate flower; it changes colors and shapes according to temperature, season, humidity, water supply, location, etc.
So, a biological time-out needed: the team engaged in a study of the Hortensia biologics and botany. In which conditions should we capture the Hortensia Blue? For some team members it was the first time that they took a genuine interest in such subjects. Now they became unstoppable…
After studying the life of the blue Hortensia in real life and through desktop explorations, the team managed to define the "blueness" they were looking for; the blueness that was going to seduce the costumers…

What did you learn?
To analyse and study the life forms of plants and flowers and to work in a cross-subject field of biology, botany, aesthetics, design and commercial strategy
To acknowledge that the final financial success is depending on the quality of detailed studies and the relevance of the results of the studies
This is 21st century learning…

ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY

Now the team knew what to capture, but not how.
How would they photographically "capture" the "blueness"?
The mission was not to draw or to paint, but to photograph.
In fact we don't really know how to do this; we need to experiment and find out what works and what doesn't.
One idea was to shoot pictures at various distances, such as super-close-up, medium distance, etc.
But to do that one needs qualified equipment, and the team did not have that.
However, one of the team members proposed to contact a local company doing professional photography and ask them to provide a professional camera – or perhaps to collaborate on the shooting and production of the graphical raw material.
The company was quite open to this, as they liked the commercial part of the mission as well. They agreed to provide a really good camera – on the condition that the future web promotion would mention the company on the website.
Hortensia Blue Art powered by…!
Problem solved. Not at all, as none of the team members knew how to operate such an advanced camera.
As the company contact did not have the time for instruction, the team started to engage in finding online manuals and instructions and to… learn by doing.
This was much more complicated than expected, and a lot of time was spent learning to use this advanced piece of equipment efficiently: light, distance, zoom, background, angle, focus and much more.
In fact, the team members became small experts in advanced photography through these exercises.

What did you learn?
To make unavailable resources available through community collaboration and through working with others
To immersive deeply into the learning of advanced technology
To appreciate working with details in design
This is 21st century learning…

PHOTOGRAPHIC TECHNIQUE

Being able to handle advanced equipment did not solve the problem.
You still need to know the important things: how to use the equipment to accomplish the aesthetic mission: how to shoot the pictures of the blue Hortensia in such a way that it supported the idea of Blue Peace, and in such a way that a series of for example 10 slightly different version would result?

Hundreds of examples were produced: in various light conditions, from different angles and distances, etc., etc.

The results were carefully studied on the laptops, but it was an extremely complicated task to choose and select and decide. There were almost endless options and many of them met the "costumers' desire" criteria.

Finally, three important decisions were made by the team: 1) the selected photos should support the creation of a 200 cm long split-in-3 popular art design, and 2) the idea of creating 10 versions as a collection could not be based on a large number of different photos (leading to a messy collection design), but should be based on the selection of only 3 photos to be presented in slightly different versions (color saturation, graphic processing, light, etc.), and last, 3) the 3 photos selected should be super-close-up, close-up and medium-distance.

Equipped with these decisions, the team was able to select the 3 most promising and aesthetically satisfactory Blue Peace photos.

A giant step had been taken…

What did you learn?
To use advanced technology based on a clear idea and vision and purpose
To create a strong but difficult link between producing raw materials and the final design
To focus constantly on "design for the costumer" and "what would make a difference"
This is 21st century learning…

ADVANCED PHOTO EDITING

Now, a new chock.

Trying to edit the selected photos in Word or freeware turned out to be catastrophic.

The high-quality photos in super resolution (each photo around 120 Mb) were completely destroyed.

More learning, more resource creation.

Quality products are not only depending on advanced hardware, but also and perhaps even more so on advanced software!

The team did not have much knowledge about advanced photo editing software. Advanced gaming, yes, but not advanced photo editing software.

They needed help and finally it was decided to talk to the multimedia education in a city close by, training young people at vocational level.

Of course, they could not simply enroll in some ongoing courses, but the contact person suggested that some of the older students could work with them. In fact these students were supposed to use their newly acquired multimedia skills in practical projects along the next months, and why not allow two of the students to work with the Blue Peace team?

The two older students were well-trained: no, we are not going to do it FOR YOU, but we are going to show you how YOU can do it!

So, the hard way. Some heavy days. Photoshop and similar tools are not easily learned…

After some useful instruction and inspiration, all of which were cleverly linked to the Blue Peace mission, the team was allowed to use the software on two of the institution's computers along the production. The deal was that the team was obliged to spend a day at the institution after summer explaining new students about the mission and how they used digital tools.

However, the team motivation was very strong: they were becoming eager to see the outcomes of all their efforts.

What did you learn?
To create the resources you need to pursue your mission and through open collaboration with resources around you
To learn to use advanced technology tools when you need it (situated and on the flight learning) and when you are motivated

To perform high-level digital editing that can be transferred to an endless number of other situations
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DESIGN

Before starting to edit the selected photos, the team now made studies in similar fields of popular art work.
The study included how the material had been re-worked, what effects were obtained and how the split-in-3 posters were organised differently (= how the "split" was exploited, so to speak).
As they were about to create the final first examples (for test print!), the editing processes were, of course, extremely important.
As it was decided earlier to use the same basic 3 photos for all the collection and variations, the question was: what kind of editing would make the versions in the collection different and how would that support the Blue Peace mission?
Another crucial design question was: how to exploit the split-in-3 design to the max and in support of the aesthetic vision?
It was made clear that the team wanted a simplistic design of the collection and that this included not focusing too much on the split-in-3 technique, but to focus the variation on qualified and meaningful graphic editing, resulting in 10 slightly different versions, primarily diverging as to discrete color nuances and graphic art processing.

What did you learn?
To make detailed and complicated design decisions
To focus design work, not on your own dreams, but on seducing the future costumers
To avoid using advanced editing for excessive effecting, but to make advanced editing serve the aesthetic and commercial visions
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DIGITAL PROCESSING

The editing of the series in Photoshop was an exercise of abstinence!
The young team first overcrowded the 3 original photos with all sorts of effects, and one version came out worse that the other.
It took some time to learn the discipline: focus on your mission, your criteria and what your customers need and desire!
Often the most simple and discrete editing turns out to be the aesthetically most satisfactory.
It's the brilliant design idea that counts, not the multiple effecting…
Photoshop and similar professional tools offer a wide range of artistic graphical editing: you can make your photo look like a drawing, a painting, a poster and hundreds of other design options.
For each of these "styles" you can play with several variables and settings. In short the design opportunities are endless – but not always useful.
The team worked hard to identify the most relevant artistic processing and they based this work on the two key Master criteria:
1. What would express Blue Peace in the eyes of the costumers?
2. What would look good behind the sofa in the customers' homes?
Finally, after hard work, the team managed to identify the color variation scheme in the collection and the 10 most relevant and useful artistic styles.

What did you learn?
To be the subject of advanced technology, not the object of its endless "opportunities"
To focus your final design decisions on the user situations, not on abstract and contextless criteria

To make crucial aesthetic choices that might greatly impact the success of you mission, including the economic success
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☀ FROM DIGITAL BACK TO PHYSICAL

It looks good on the computer screen, and it even looks good when printing on a professional printer – in A4 format!
But how does it look in the planned 200 cm x 70 cm poster version – or on canvas or similar background material?
The truth is that we cannot know. Not even if we use super resolution and super technology.
This was a milestone for the team.
Who can print in this format and who will pay for it?
A big crisis and a big and critical time-out…
Finally, after many dialogues with people in the community, they were advised to go directly to the local bank and present their mission and their future business ideas: get a small loan to produce the test version and to cover the production of a small number of final posters.
The local bank said no. They did not get the point at all.
But the local bank advised the team to contact another bank – in a city nearby – that was known to have a program to support new artists and their entrepreneurial activities.
So they did – and after some negotiations the bank agreed to a limited loan, and on the condition that large-scale production would only take place if supported by substantial initial online sale.
In other words: do not print more than you can sell!
Based on this agreement with the bank, the team managed to get a good and flexible deal with the printing company.

What did you learn?
To test your products in real-life: back to the physical world
To negotiate financial resources when you need it
To create a sound, limited and manageable economy for the first step sale
To team up with resources willing to support such enterprise as yours
To make sure that your production alliances are in place
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☀ PROMOTON AND SALE

The last stop in the mission was to promote and… sell.
One of the team members already knew about online sales basics from earlier engagements and she shared her skills and knowledge with the team.
But the problem was really not the online sales mechanics, as they are quite simple, once you get to know them. Most of the processes are automated.
The problem was another one, and once again an aesthetic one: how to present posters at the size of 200 cm x 70 cm online?
The team was keen to manage the website themselves, but they had to go back to the multimedia students for help: how to we present such posters in an attractive and credible way, without asking people to open 50 Mb files?
And how can we present the ideas of the split-in-3 format online?
How can we allow the users to play with the 10 different versions?
And, by the way: how can we make sure that we look credible online?
The problem was complicated to solve: how do you present beautiful 2 meter long high resolution posters in the 20 cm low resolution format of a web photo – and with no opportunity to place the poster in a realistic "home situation"?
Surely, against all odds, as all the strong elements in the Blue Peace collection might disappear in the online promotion!!
The students that were helping the team actually gave up and asked some of the expert teachers to give support.

After some work and dialogues and trying out a satisfactory solution was found –
but it was complicated and not cheap – and the team had to re-negotiate the
loan in the bank!
The teams accepted the solution and the practical sales work began.
However, the supporting teacher gave them two new and incredibly interesting
challenges for increasing the online business:
- think about having a program developed that allows the costumers to select
their own blue nuances (within a range of predefined blue-peace-palette) and
order the poster accordingly
- think about having a program developed through which the costumers can
insert the different variations in a number of living room contexts to allow them
to imagine the effect of different color and graphic art version
So, as always, the completion of one good mission leads to the next!

What did you learn?
To design and manage online promotion, taking into account the limited
technical conditions
To design an inviting and attractive online environment for possible customers,
allowing them as much co-creation as possible
To take one step at a time and make this step work, but at the same time create
visions of taking the mission further and, if needed, in collaboration with
potentially interested resources
This is 21st century learning…
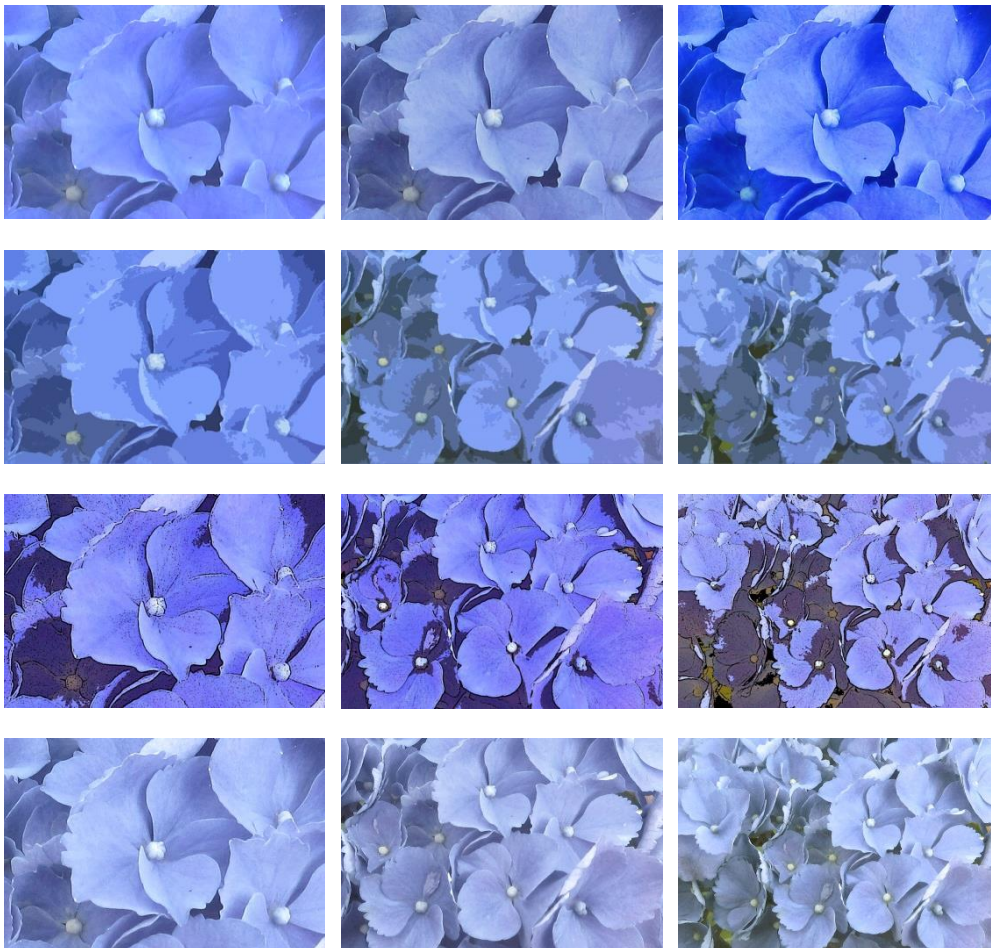
EXAMPLES FROM THE BLUE PEACE COLLECTION
www.bluepeace.com
[200 cm x 70 cm split-in-3 on canvas]