

Hackathon Diary

The purpose of the Education Hackathon on 3&4 October was to invite educators, innovators, and students to collectively improve the future of education. Having experienced the profession of education, educators can appropriately pinpoint the challenges they face in the current education system. Whereas, students, on the other hand, are the young minds who have a lot of energy and fresh perspectives that can really be leveraged upon in finding the solutions for those problems. This is why the Educational Hackathon was framed as a platform to bring all the different stakeholders at one level to share and solve the challenges with each other.

The students were challenged to take up a problem they feel most driven to, and within 24-hour time, find a solution for it. While working on the challenge, students got peer support and connected with amazing people working on similar challenges from all around Europe. 50+ other hackathons were simultaneously organized since all of them were connected via the so-called DigiEduHack program. At the TU Delft Education Hackathon, 5 student teams had to compete against each other to win €2500. 1250 cash and 1250 consulting hours to work on the idea after the competition. Apart from this, they got a chance to enter the YES!Delft Validation Lab, if there is startup potential. The best international team could also win €5000 in a global award contest of the DigiEduHack program.

The Education Hackathon took place at the Teaching Lab at TU Delft. We kicked off the day with a pitch of the challenge owners, giving an enthusiastic start to the actual competition. There were 5 very practical and complex challenges. The first challenge was about how to quickly create serious games that prove to be excellent tools in education. The second one was, how should one ensure that the students pass all the learning goals during group work. The third challenge was how to enable students to decide what they need on information literacy. And the final challenge posed the question as to how can one track team performance of student teams. After the pitches, the students got a chance to ask anything about the challenge and interviewed the challenge owners.

After a great lunch, the students started designing solutions for the challenges. The hacking process was facilitated by Terry Brochard who has years of experience in facilitating and motivating large groups. His mind is full of great exercises and energizers to motivate the students during the day. The teams dived deep into their corresponding contexts and pushed their boundaries throughout the whole day. Seeing this, the challenge owners who initially didn't really know what to expect were really anticipating some great outcomes. As mentioned by one of the challenge owners; "the students got such a grasp of this problem that they didn't really need any coaching but just some feedback. I am surprised by the outcome." The students got additional support in the form of mentors and experts. They came to their rescue by providing them with some much needed expert advice and guidance. As one of the students mentioned, "I was frustrated when everybody just kept on discussing and could not frame the ideas, and then one of the mentors provided us with simple advice of using post-its to capture our ideas, and this helped us big time." The challenge owners built a very good and informal rapport with their teams wherein

they even kept in constant touch with them through means like WhatsApp. One of the jury members said that “During the Hackathon the atmosphere of this teaching lab flipped right from a very quiet one to a very lively one”.

Amidst all this euphoria and buzz, the students were relishing some good food, snacks, and the much-needed energy drinks. All the teams very well leveraged the different skills each one of their group members had in order to develop and build the solutions well enough to be pitched. Towards the evening of the first day of the hackathon, Pitch Trainer Viki Pavlic provided some great insights into how to pitch not only the solution but also the problem. The students loved his ways, tricks, and tips, as mentioned by one of the students from the winning team, “We actually structured our whole pitch based on the framework he gave us”. After the workshop, the students took the lead and presented the first versions of their pitches. That was the moment that surprised most of the challenge owners as one of the challenge owners mentioned; “I was already satisfied and happy with what they showed in the first pitch and was excited to see what would they add for their final pitch.”

Nevertheless, even after that, the students had the same level of motivation and dedication running in them which was fueled more by the delicious dinner and the continuous stream of snacks. Viki Pavlic and the mentors stayed up till late at night to extend their support to the student teams. And the organisers made sure to keep on some nice background music to keep the mood lively and light. The night came and swept itself but the students kept going. The students were clearly excited to present their pitches the coming morning, as one student's team revealed about one of their members, “He was so much in rush to present the pitch that he would get up during his nap and would start pitching”.

Finally, another fresh morning arrived, and it was time for the jury to come and attend the final pitches to evaluate the performances and announce the final winner. The pitches started and were short and crisp. “The students understood their respective problems really well which also showed in their pitches”, as mentioned by one of the jury members. The jury members were engrossed in the pitches and really engaged with the students especially during the session of questions after the pitches. A series of heart capturing moments came up when the jury went away for evaluations and came back with the decision. The jury specifically mentioned how difficult was it for them to evaluate, as all the teams gave really tough competition to each other. In the end, it was a tie, for which they had to vote amongst themselves in order to decide one winner. And that lucky team was team 4; one of the teams who worked on the challenge ‘How to quickly create serious games that prove to be excellent tools in education’. They designed an online platform to easily create games on the basis of existing successful games. It saves a lot of time since it is not necessary to design & test the games. The hackathon ended with some relaxed moments where everybody enjoyed the last bit of the delicious food, especially the cakes. In the end when one of the students was asked about how she experienced this hackathon; “It was awesome, it pushed me each and every moment. I have attended a hackathon before but that was nothing like it.”

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