Shared experiences through online photo diaries

Bitte Rydeman & Per-Olof Hedvall

In the described project, a platform for online photo diaries for children and adults with developmental disabilities was developed and tried through an iterative, collaborative process (Gulliksen & Göransson, 2002). The project took its departure in the knowledge that individuals who use AAC often find it difficult to tell cohesive stories about their experiences (Reiter et al., 2009), a problem they share with many speaking children with developmental disabilities. Another point of departure was the digital divide between people with and without intellectual disabilities when it comes to cellphone and internet use (Stock et al., 2008), a divide that to some extent may be overcome (Davies, Stock & Wehmeyer, 2001). In particular, rich and multiple media, such as photo, video and sound, can help strengthen the links between images and meanings, past and present, and school and home (Bunning, Heath & Minnion, 2008). Storing digital photos from everyday activities have been shown to enhance our memory, help with time management, the sharing of experiences with others and be used for personal reflection (Czerwinski, Gage, Gemmel et al., 2006). Sharing photos online has become an important way of communicating and interacting with others for many people (Khalid & Dix, 2010).

Aim: The aim of the three year long project was to create new opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities to participate in the modern, digital world and in the storytelling and sharing of experiences from their own lives.

Method: The study took its departure in the practices around low-tech schedules and daily picture diaries in schools for children with developmental disabilities. Ten children and five adults with developmental disabilities, together with their close social networks, took part in the study. The groups were very heterogeneous – some participants used aided and/or unaided AAC while others had fluent speech, but all had difficulties with narration. In the project, photos from their daily lives were regularly uploaded to the participants' online diaries that were accessed from mobile phones, tablets and/or computers. Semi-structured interviews and diary use was documented with photo, video, audio and data registration.

Results: Photos from activities the participants had been involved in enhanced their memory and their ability to communicate and share experiences with others. They got empowered by having their own camera, and sometimes the camera itself was used for communication. The online diaries were also used for direct communication, but one of their most important roles was to enable distance interaction. Family members and friends from the participants' close networks, could log in to see what the participants had been doing during the day. This could then result in a written comment from the relative, or maybe a photo from the relative's day as a greeting.

From the relatives perspective, having looked in their child's diary could help parents to understand what their child was trying to tell them when he or she came home from school, preventing communication breakdowns. The relatives of the adult participants appreciated the opportunities to take part in their lives in this new way. The participants whose relatives and/or close friends interacted with them through their photo diaries, tended to be very encouraged by that and to specifically upload photos to their diary for others to see.

The staff at the work center found that helping the clients with their diaries gave them new opportunities to interact and get a moment of sharing with each individual. When they put diary sharing with the whole group on the schedule, this soon became very popular and made the participants more interested in each other and each other's experiences.

There were more differences between the individual participants than between the different age groups, but the adults tended to take more photos themselves, while the children many times were happy with pictures of them taken by others. In both groups, the personal photos were important sources of inspiration and motivation for writing and for reading what was written about the photos. Despite their varying abilities, most participants got some inspiration for their literacy learning through the diaries. The way the diaries were structured, with, day, week and month views, also facilitated their understanding of time.

Conclusion: An online photo diary that can be shared with others, on and off line, is a valuable complement to other forms of communicative support for individuals with developmental disabilities and their social networks. Being able to snap a photo on the go and upload it to the diary platform opened up for new ways of interacting with the participants' next of kin and significant others.

Video examples of diary use will be shown during the presentation and the results of the study will be discussed.

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Declaration of Interest Statement
The authors disclose they have no fianncial or other interest in objects or entities mentioned in this paper.

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Certec – thoughts, technology and design for what the individual wants to do

Design
- Future oriented – more interested in what might become than in what exists
- Works in the contexts and practices
  - Where the action is
  - Where the technology is
  - Where people are
- Looks for and builds on
 - Potentials, openings and abilities, rather than
  - deficiencies, problems and inabilities

The DIKO project

- Development of an online photo diary for children and young adults with developmental disabilities.

- Collaboration between families, teachers and researchers, 2010 – 2013 (June)

- Funded by the Swedish Inheritance Fund

Based on existing practice
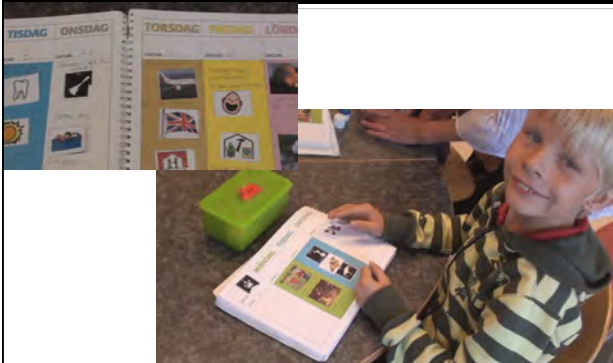
The DIKO diary: photo + text
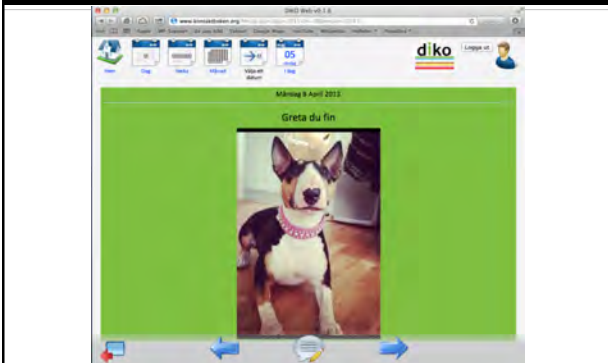
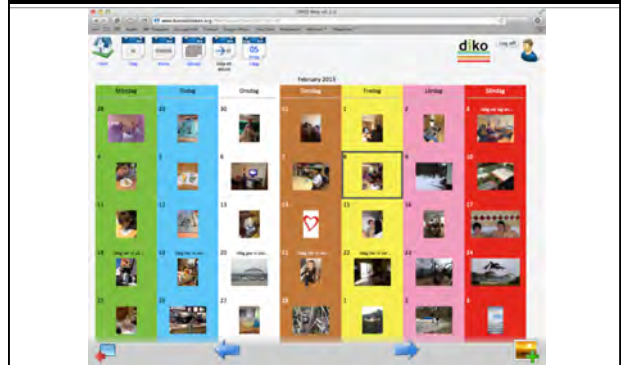## Day
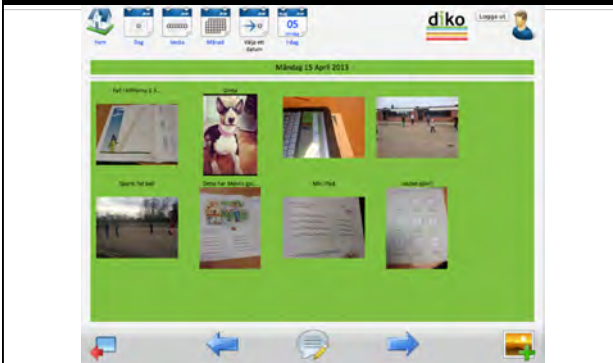
Week
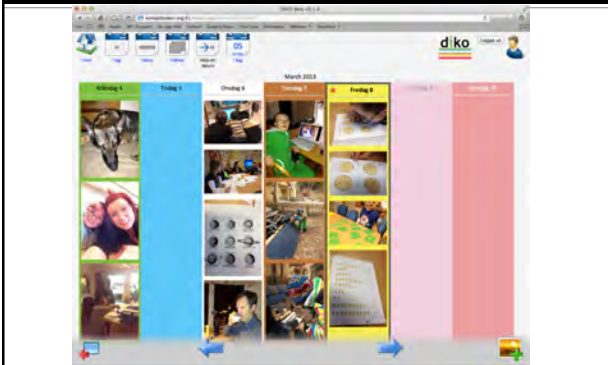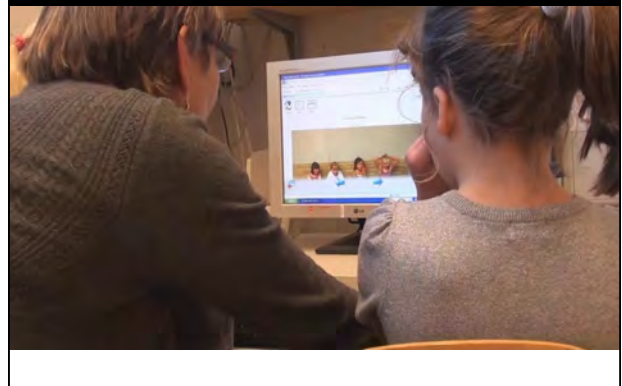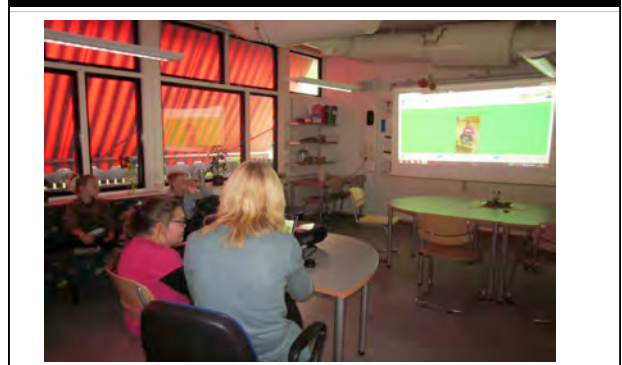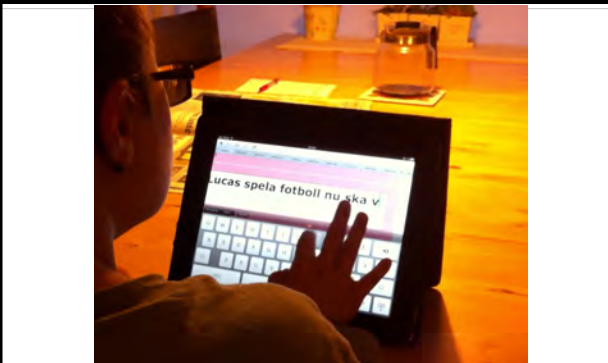
Month
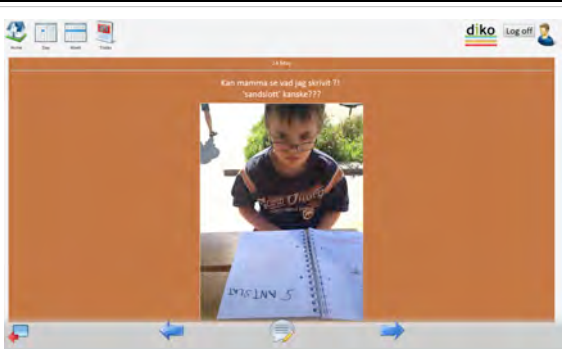
Shared experiences

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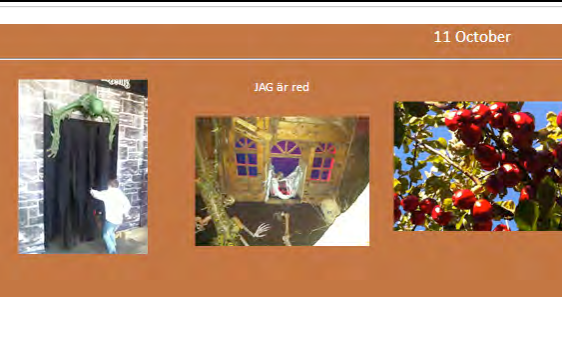

Shared experiences

Shared experiences

Shared experiences

Shared experiences

CRPD is about how we want to live together

People with disabilities "should have full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms"

(from the preamble of CRPD)

To *tell and share* is fundamental
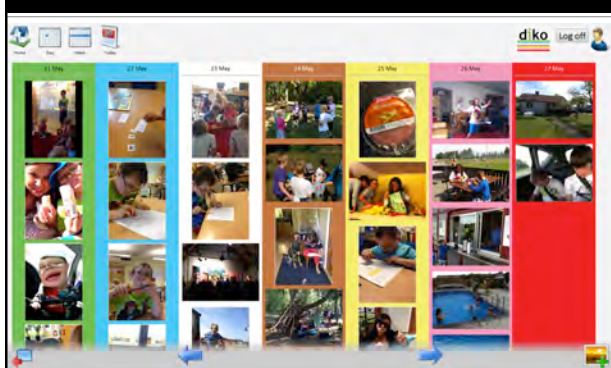

Participation
– to be a "me" within a we"

ME
WE

Being a photographer

DIKO use

	2011	2012	2013	2014	No. of months	No, of pictures	Pictures / month
	sept okt nov dec	jan feb mars april maj jun jul aug sept okt nov dec	jan feb mars april maj jun jul aug sept okt nov dec	jan feb mars	12	300	25
					22	280	13
					26	282	11
					31	663	21
					31	1944	63
Children 10 girls, 3 boys					31	443	14
					31	820	26
					31	847	27
					31	3513	113
					31	796	26
					31	2635	85
					6	210	35
					6	182	30
					16	734	46
					15	1753	117
Adults, 4 men, 1 woman					17	686	40
					17	3077	181
					16	768	48

A week of documented activities

Future steps

- The platform
  - Open source
  - Available in Swedish and English, and easy to translate
  - Own or shared server
  - iOS, Android and in Chrome browsers on Mac, Windows
- Spin-off projects
  - Following more photographers with intellectual disabilities
- Develop into article

Thank you!

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