

Making memories

Designing a tangible product for the students of WALHALLAb

Loes van der Werf,
Industrial Design,
University of Twente, the Netherlands

The past few years, the number of school dropouts and students that are not present at school, has been increasing in the Netherlands (Rijksoverheid, n.d.) WALHALLAb is an organization that tries to help those students by providing them a space to work on their own creative projects and giving mental support. Their goal is to get students back on track and reintegrate into normal education. In practice, this does however not always happen. This study aimed to design something that aids students from WALHALLAb when reintegrating into regular education.

A pre-analysis of the problem led to a design challenge that involved two aims: *'to design something for students at WALHALLAb that both works as a reminder of their experiences for themselves, and can be used as an explanation of their experiences for people at school'*. To determine requirements that contribute to this challenge, an analysis was done based on a literature review, a survey, interviews, and observation. The literature mainly focused on the attachment between a person and a product, and how this can be stimulated. The survey and interviews were done with people working in education to discover the relationship between student and teacher and where a product might fit into. Observation was done at WALHALLAb to gain more insights in the ways of working at WALHALLAb.

From the analysis, a few main insights were the starting points. Firstly, the importance of the inclusion of memories, and therefore the inclusion of users in the making process. A second insight was that the communication between the student and teacher is experienced the best when it is done via talking; therefore, one of the goals of the design became to stimulate a conversation. These, and other requirements were considered when starting the ideation process in which multiple ideas were created. A final concept was chosen by doing an evaluation of the requirements and discussing with people from WALHALLAb. This concept was worked out further into a final design called the WALhanger. This is a product consisting of a tangible object that can be personalized by students in a workshop guided by their supervisors. The tangible product is a keychain that contains multiple extendable 'frames' in which memories in the form of pictures or other visualizations can be placed (figure 1, 3). The other part is a small box, in which give-aways can be placed. These give-aways are for example cards that can be given to a teacher as a provocative for a conversation (figure 2).

The product was evaluated using different methods. A test was done in which the workshop was tested by letting a student personalize a prototype. Also, expert reviews were done by interviews at WALHALLAb and a survey. Results from these tests were used to answer the main question.

In this research, multiple implications were found that can contribute to the design challenge: *'to design something for students at WALHALLab that both works as a reminder of their experiences for themselves, and can be used as an explanation of their experiences for people at school.* A product can contribute to reaching this challenge by including a set of design implications. The design must include memory cues that are chosen and created by the user. This self-creation must be assisted by a supervisor to get the best result. The product does not have to have a function but needs to be easy to take. The user can best explain their experiences themselves, which means a conversation about these experiences need to be provoked by small gifts that will raise curiosity. The WALhanger was a design response that includes these aspects and can therefore be an aid for students from WALHALLab that have to reintegrate into normal education.

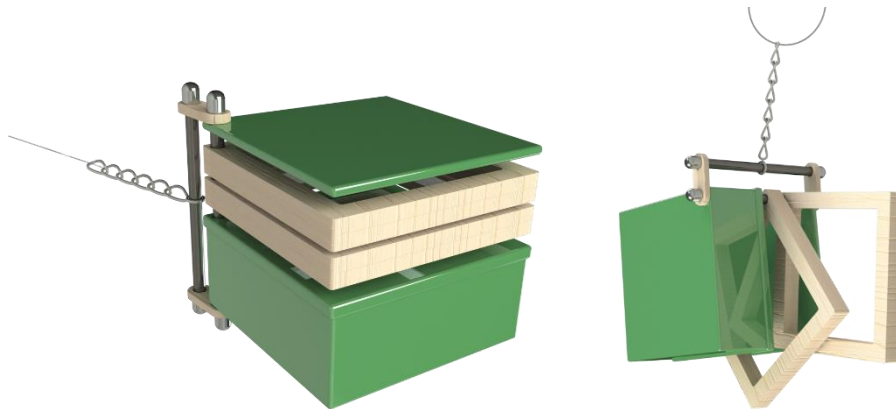


FIGURE 2: THE TANGIBLE PRODUCT



FIGURE 2: THE PRODUCT WITH GIVE-AWAYS



FIGURE 3: THE PRODUCT IN CONTEXT

Reference

Rijksoverheid. (n.d.). *Maximaal 20.000 voortijdig schoolverlaters in 2021*. Retrieved from <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/vsv/maximaal-20.000-voortijdig-schoolverlaters-in-2021>