

# LABLEARNING

## MEDIA BASED EMPOWERMENT FOR DISENGAGED YOUTH



## THE LABLEARNING GUIDE COLLECTION



### NR 10

## Digital gaming in media labs for disengaged youth

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The LABlearning Guide Collection offers inspiration, tools and principles to establish empowermental media based learning facilities for disengaged youth.

The Guide Collection offers around 20 different guides, including the full collection of guide material.

The media based learning initiatives are contributing to re-thinking learning and to the creation of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning opportunities for young people.

The LABlearning Guide Collection is synthesizing theory and practice from such approaches as media learning, game based learning, project based learning, entrepreneurial and community based learning. The Guide material emerges from extensive literature studies, the Intel Computer Clubhouse Network's 20 years of experience, as well as from LAB practice in Catalonia Spain, Holland, Italy and Denmark.

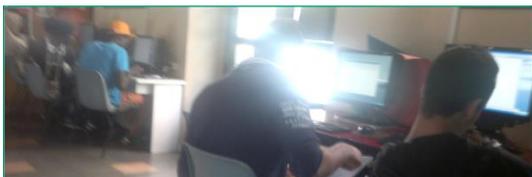


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## Digital gaming in media labs for disengaged youth

Digital games, the development of serious games and the production of serious games in collaboration with professional game designers or game design students can offer a strong didactic framework for all sorts of media based learning - and be integrated in the learning of all sorts of subjects. This guide opens up this field for teachers and mentors...



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. . . **Digital gaming in media labs for disengaged youth**

#### ENTERTAINMENT OR HARD FUN?

Traditionally games and learning belong to two different worlds: the classic world of academic education and the wild world of entertainment markets.

This has dramatically changed. Many serious and social games are developed and education is taking an increasing interest in using games to change traditional classroom teaching and to offer youth more engaging learning experiences.

The best serious and social games fit perfectly into the learning principles of media labs: they offer clear missions, step by step training, immediate response, trial and error, social dialogues, teamwork, strategic thinking and often very qualified simulations of real-life - or, link directly to real-life.

And first of all, they offer exciting visual and interactive narratives, totally different from the old text books.

Good serious and social games are not entertainment. They are *hard fun*. They encourage immersive learning, long-term investment of energy, sustained interest and social dialogues.

*Good serious and social gaming is therefore a great resource to the media labs, especially media labs for disadvantaged or disengaged youth.*

#### USING DIGITAL GAMES

Of course, serious games might be strictly subject-related: you can learn math or language through digital games, individually or in teams.

But the best digital games for the media labs are games offering youth teams to explore different forms of worlds, such as energy, politics, healthcare, etc. - or games offering research and detective challenges linked to complicated topics, often connected to conflicts, change or dilemmas.

The best serious and social games do not invite the young learner to hide behind the computer or the television or the handheld game device, but offer the youth teams social dialogue with community stakeholders or with other young people through the games' online platforms.

Such digital games can be great resources to the media labs and to project and problem based learning, especially for disengaged young people.

And today, more and more serious games invite the youth teams to contribute to the game, to interact with the gameplay and to take the game world further.

#### DESIGNING DIGITAL GAMES

The most interesting way to use digital games in the media labs might, though, be to involve the learners in *designing, constructing and producing* serious games - closely linked to the topics in question and to the learning needs of the youth teams.

Of course, this is impossible. Mission impossible!

*Not necessarily!*

First of all, the media labs are not only inhabited by mentors (the former teachers!), but also by media designers and media professionals.

This means that it is possible to establish projects in which youth teams collaborate, dialogue with and learn from professional game designers, or, perhaps even better, from young game developers in need of training and practice.

Designing digital games takes the young people through all the challenging phases of learning, and it offers young people the opportunity to get deep into the processes, forgetting that learning actually takes place and in more powerful ways than in the old classrooms.

Many disadvantaged, disengaged or drop-out young people have *talents*. These talents might not be recognized in the classroom, but might very well be recognized and unfolded in game design projects.

### BEING A DIGITAL GAME

The most dramatic use of digital games is to design the project, the education or the school as a digital game!

You may think: hey, this is too much! Using games is ok, but designing a school as a game...?

In fact they do this in New York City: The *Quest2Learn School* is one of the first schools to explore how digital games can be used to design curricula, learning projects, missions, entire school environments, etc.

*Take a look yourself on <http://q2l.org/>*

For most people turning your school into a digital game might be too much! Perhaps a strategic perspective...

But what about exploiting the great learning principles in digital games to design a project?

*How would you design a four week project for a youth team based on the principles of digital gaming?*

If you do that, please let us know! Games go didactic!



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### . . . Designing games in the LABs?

In this context we are talking about serious games, not all sorts of commercial games.

The use of serious games and the development of serious games is becoming a big thing in Europe these days - in very many and very different contexts, including education and empowerment...

LABlearning has been involved in preparing new Commission policies and support programs for serious games for empowerment and inclusion, and it is highly recommended to take this very seriously in the LABs and in future projects and youth initiatives.

Media lab initiatives should follow these movements closely and be prepared to work with these new funding opportunities.

Of course, using serious games in the LABs is interesting in many different ways, especially if the use of the games is linked to creative youth projects.

Even more challenging is obviously the development, design or even production of serious games in the LABs.

Basically, the LABs are not expected to produce serious games, as this is a rather complicated process including many different professional competences.

On the other hand, why not?

Developing serious games offer extremely powerful learning processes, including subject-related learning.

Developing games is really what we call Hard Fun! It takes a lot of time, reflection, planning, knowledge and collaboration; not to mention technical skills.

The background to all this is that game development can mean many different things, so let us briefly mention the many different options.

We hope this is useful to media labs, at least as a first orientation in the landscape.

So, imagine one of our LABs. A group of young people wish to work with the design and production of a serious game.

The mentors say: ok, you need to take a 2 year programming course and then come back. Or: no, we can only offer a very small and primitive piece of game design software, but you are welcome to play with it.

The reaction should be more open and flexible, and offer more options.

How, then, could young people work with game design and even game production in the LABs - taking into account that this is actually not possible?

Let us take a look at some of the options:



#### . FINDING GAME SOFTWARE...

If the young people need game software, why not let them find it themselves? They can go to internet forums, use networks, contact game educators and all sorts of things. It can be a project in itself - and let them produce some material about game software at the end. That would be useful for many young people and for other LABs, not always pleased with software like Scratch or GameMaker.



#### . COLLABORATING WITH YOUNG GAME DESIGNERS...

In all countries and regions and bigger cities there are many young game developers trying to find out how they can use their game skills. Find them and integrate them in the LABs and let them work with the young people - perhaps even inspire or train some of the young people to take steps into the game design world.



#### . COLLABORATING WITH GAME INCUBATORS...

In more and more cities and regions game incubators are established. Game incubators are facilities in which young game developers or small game companies can get support, networks and contacts - and learn more about how to make their talents useful, also economically.

Many game incubators would welcome invitations from EU projects, LABs or educations, by the way.

Such collaborations will also help the young game developers learn more about the potentials of serious games.



#### . WHAT IS A SERIOUS GAME, ACTUALLY...?

Another thing: what is a serious game? A digital game, yes. But many new serious games are not simply console games or computer games. Serious games and gaming can be distributed across a wide range of activities: computer, internet, social networking, interactions between digital and physical spaces, etc.

This means that serious games do not necessarily need hard-core programming or advanced animation: if you can tell an interesting story and gamify it, then you can use a mix of digital and real-world measures to create your game, your quest, or whatever it ends up looking like...

A website, some strange videos, a little text, some sounds... And you might have a good serious game, about politics, energy, health, sports or whatever.

It is very important to understand what a game is and can be!!



#### . PARTNERING WITH GAME EDUCATIONS...

Most big or mid-sized cities have game educations now; different kinds of game educations, but still game educations.

Why not partner up with such game educations and see what it might bring along: perhaps some of the students would like some interesting assignments, perhaps the education would like to help out the young people in the labs, and perhaps the education has an interest in developing European projects on serious games...?



#### . OFFERING INTEGRATED TRAINING...

If some of the young people are serious about the game development, why not consider offering them professional game design training as an integrated part of the LABs? Or even continue the game design training in non-formal contexts in the afternoon or in the weekend?



. **DESIGNING, NOT PRODUCING...**

It is also important to be aware that game design of serious games can be extremely exciting and offer powerful learning processes - without actually producing the game.

The design of a serious game is in itself a big challenge for both young people and mentors, and it produces a lot of learning and a lot of transversal skills.

Then, perhaps it is possible to contact young game developers or companies and discuss with them, if it would make sense to actually produce the game.



. **EMPLOYING OR CONTRACTING A PROFESSIONAL...**

We must get used to the fact that other professionals than teachers should inhabit our educations, whether formal or non-formal.

We need media people and game designers working closely with teachers, mentors and students, and it is an extremely interesting idea to employ or contract a professional young or more experienced game developer.

Such professionals will end up financing themselves, as the drop-out rate decreases...



. **OFFERING MENTORS SERIOUS GAME TRAINING...**

Why not consider including game design and game production in the future competence profiles of mentors working with youth in media settings, LABs or even in more formal settings...

It would offer unseen opportunities for the education, and the institution might even make a business case out of this, offering other institutions game pedagogical development services!



. **USE PROBLEM BASED LEARNING!**

A radical but most powerful solution would be: if the young people need game software or to produce games, then let them solve the problem by designing a project: how will you search for software, how will you test the software, how will you evaluate the software - and what have you learned about game software in the end? And: how will you use this new knowledge?



### . THE GAME OF THE GAME... GAMIFICATION

If the LABs are very creative, they might say: the search for game software is in itself a game! Or rather, it could be turned into a game!

The first game is therefore about game software...

How would you design the *Quest for Design Software*? How will you make it interesting and exciting? What can you gain from playing this game?

*Remember, games are not opposed to learning, they are simply a special form of learning, and often a much underestimated one: the kids must stop playing when they leave the kindergarten and enter the school...!*



### . . . How can educators establish collaboration with game designers?

The idea is to include one or more game designers in the media based learning teams, working side by side with teachers, mentors and young learners.

Not necessarily every day, of course, but perhaps one day a week or organized in certain clusters along the LABlearning activities.

*Such collaboration might offer tremendous and powerful learning opportunities for everybody, including the game designers!*

The problem is, of course, that it is not easy to establish this kind of ongoing collaboration: in fact, we are talking about developing a *new culture of learning*! The teachers don't know how to do it, neither do the game designers.

They need to learn to work together, to create a common language, common missions.

It should be noted that such activities are very close to the promotion of entrepreneurial mentality, thus targeting yet another high priority for education in Europe. Why? Because perhaps game design leads to social innovation or the development of resources for different people in the community...

And, because learning through game design develops strong entrepreneurial competences among the young learners.

Let's roll out some options:

The game design activities should be integrated in the everyday learning activities and be about the education's key topics.

The game design activities should include teams of teachers, students and game designers.

The game design activities should be based on a joint mission, for example to help solve a problem in the community, or to produce innovative material for other learners (primary school, elderly, patients, whatever...).

The game design activities should involve game developers with a clear interest in new types of jobs or creating new markets for their professional competences, first of all in the field of serious games.

The media lab might wish to approach one or more of the following local or regional game design environments:

- Game design or multimedia educations (⇒ the students need real-life cases and practice during the education)
- Game design incubators (⇒ the young game designers need start-up projects, practice and networks)
- Small game companies (⇒ looking for new markets, new customers and new opportunities)
- Universities with game or multimedia research departments (⇒ interested in real-life projects and in linking their research to social reality and users)
- Well-established game companies might also be addresses (⇒ due to an interest in new markets, new opportunities)
- Informal communities of young people interested in or with a talent for game design (⇒ they would love being involved in real-life projects)

It is very important that the collaboration with such resources can run smoothly, meaning that the geographical distance and time available must be realistic.

It is of the utmost importance that the game designers can see the perspective and can benefit from the collaboration, as to future employment, European engagement or being included in new networks (for example educational networks) with further market perspectives.

Local or regional youth (un)employment provisions might be interested in supporting such meetings between game designers and educations.

Pro-active educations might wish to include game developers or multimedia designers in their staff: instead of 50 teachers, 48 teachers + a game designer + a multimedia designer.

Pro-active educations might wish to train a team of teachers in developing serious games as a part of their further professional training, or to spot talented students wishing to be trained in game design in parallel to their vocational studies...

- As you see, there are many opportunities and some of them could be combined. They all call for *new ways of thinking, pro-active mentality, strong local and regional networking* (linking educational activities to game designers and community missions), but: this is exactly what the European Commission calls for!



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. . . **How can it be funded?**

Most of us would reply: yes, we see the opportunities, but who will pay for these activities?

So, funding.

Creativity is needed, but in fact there are many opportunities, especially for those institutions and media labs wishing to engage in learning through game design in a strategic perspective, meaning: focus on this field for many years ahead.

Let's list some of the opportunities, as we progress from the simplest to the most complex funding:

- ~ Game designer students in education, in practice or in labour market incubators are often free of charge, or might receive a limited payment, as it is a part of their education and training
- ~ Unemployed game designers might wish to engage on short-term or step-by-step conditions
- ~ Young game companies or teams or individuals might accept a limited payment in the first experimental phases of the collaboration, especially if promised better conditions if the collaboration proves successful to all parties
- ~ The education itself might wish to invest in part-time contracts with game designers (1 or 2 days a week, for example), or to plan more mixed staff (not only teachers should be working in education)
- ~ The local or regional authorities might be interested in supporting activities fighting youth unemployment and opening new markets and employment opportunities (sometimes specific and open funding is available)
- ~ The education's labour market stakeholders might be interested in supporting such innovation, and even in using the outcomes of such activities
- ~ Community stakeholders, to which the education is linked, might also be interested in providing financial support
- ~ Local or regional companies, such as banks and insurance companies, often have social responsibility programs for young people, and the game design activities are perfect for such programs, as they include entrepreneurship
- ~ Local or regional educational and youth authorities might have an interest in supporting such innovative approaches and benefit from them
- ~ In a further perspective, it will indeed be possible to fund such innovation through the European programs (at regional as well as European level) in all or most educational sectors, which means continued development of high quality and forefront European projects is still of high value

Such steps might be combined with different forms of community initiatives: if there are no incubators available, or there are no labour market measures installed for youth in the community, maybe the education or the media lab could kick-start such processes, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders in the community.

But, it also true that we are at the doorstep of exploring all these new ideas in Europe.

Perhaps other ways are more efficient or relevant or useful. Europe will be looking for such examples for many years ahead. Digital games for learning, inclusion and empowerment is one of the most important emerging fields in Europe and at global level - now and will continue to be so for many years.

It is important that pioneer work and innovative practice is linked to all kinds of educations, not simply imprisoned at the universities...!



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Much more on [www.LABlearning.eu](http://www.LABlearning.eu)

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The LABlearning consortium offers

**Counselling** on media laboratories for disengaged youth for national and European educational policy-makers

**Collaboration** on the establishment of media laboratories in formal and non-formal contexts for institutions and communities

**Training** in managing media laboratories for disengaged youth for teachers, mentors and youth workers

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The LABlearning consortium offers its services on non-profit basis and always links the media laboratories to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

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If you are interested in knowing more about games and learning, games and media labs and serious games in general, you are welcome to contact the LABlearning experts in this field.

# 21<sup>st</sup> century learning in action

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## LABLEARNING



MEDIA BASED EMPOWERMENT  
FOR DISENGAGED YOUTH



Penja un video ▾



Experience the direct voices of the young people on



With English subtitles

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The 37 minutes video **Joves i Futur** is created, designed and produced by young people in Salt-Girona Catalonia participating in the EU LABlearning project. Their work is much appreciated, as are their open statements in the video.

The project wishes to thank both the youth teams and the mentors working with them!

The video, other videos and 20 different LABlearning Guides are openly available on

[www.LABlearning.eu](http://www.LABlearning.eu)