

LABLEARNING

MEDIA BASED EMPOWERMENT FOR DISENGAGED YOUTH



THE LABLEARNING GUIDE COLLECTION



NR 18

The social ethics of media based laboratories for disengaged youth

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 21st 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.

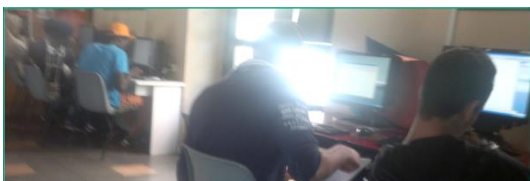


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The social ethics of media based laboratories for disengaged youth

The LABlearning project and similar initiatives are, partly inspired by the Intel Computer Clubhouse Network's 20 years of experience, trying to create open media laboratories for what is often called "disengaged" youth. Often such formal or non-formal settings are not geared to allow the young people the time, space and personal development they need.



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. . . The social ethics of media based laboratories for disengaged youth

Who are they, the famous “disengaged” young people? Who are they?

They are a highly mixed and non-homogeneous group. One size fits all does not apply to this group. No single profiling possible...

What we do know, however, is that more and more young people belong to this group of “disengaged youth”.

There seem to be two explanations to this:

- the new generations and their lifestyles, including how to learn and work do not fit well with the traditional education system
- groups of non-academic young learners are increasingly excluded from the more and more theoretical education system (the academification of learning)

The last group is the primary concern of LABlearning. These young people face a double exclusion threat: the general lifestyle and education mismatch, which they share with most young people, and a special threat caused by specific “disengagements”.

Even if disengaged youth is the primary concern of LABlearning, it is important to make clear that the new generations in general are in urgent need of dramatically different learning environments than what is offered by the traditional education system. They need open and explorative media laboratories, they need 21st century learning.

Traditional education is not bringing out the best in our new generations.



Besides the general lifestyle and education mismatch the disengaged groups of young people are disengaged for many reasons:

- they are not able to manage the formal classroom situation
- they are not confident working with theory, books and exams
- they might come from disadvantaged social and economic communities and families
- they might be migrants with language difficulties and difficulties in “adapting” to the Western education culture
- they might have a record of early school leaving and drop-out
- they might be NEET youth, neither in education nor in the labor market
- they might not be able to learn in the academic ways required in our education system
- they simple might have troubled lives with aggression, hatred or violence
- and they might simply have a very low self-esteem, which is likely to get worse along the broken educational pathways

So, our young LAB people might be “disengaged” for many different reasons.



But, are they really “disengaged”? Why are we calling them “disengaged”?
Because they ARE disengaged - from the point of view of the classroom and traditional education system...

They don't fit in. They cannot sit still for hours, they are not listening, they are disturbing, they are restless, they don't care about their homework, they cause conflicts in the class, they prefer to play with their technological toys, they cannot even read a novel and explain the meaning, they cannot...

And many of them demonstrate a most hostile attitude: I don't give a shit!

The strange thing is, though, that outside the classroom, and once something raise their interest, they are deeply engaged, deeply immersed into problems, situations, challenges.

The “problem” is not, then, that they cannot engage. The “problem” is that they cannot engage in traditional academic education and sometimes not in traditional jobs either.

There is considerable evidence that media laboratories of learning can re-engage or engage almost all these young people.

However, explorative media LABs are not only about technology, computers, digital gaming or project based learning.

A very important dimension in such open explorative learning environments is what we call *social ethics*. It's about the young people's mentality, behavior, feelings, social situation, etc.



Let us be direct.

If your baggage is full of

Bad experience from different schools

Lack of self-confidence as soon as you enter a school building

Feelings of being a loser

Experience of a lack of respect

Troubled family relations

Lack of economic and social resources

And burdened by always covering all this up...

Then you are not likely to fit well into our classrooms and formal educational environments. You are not likely to behave well.

And if we add to all this that the general lifestyle of the new generations is moving further and further away from what was once considered normal industrial mentality, then we must admit that we are facing a dramatic double mismatch between these young people and the educational establishment.

Our educational establishment reacts with theoretical understanding: we write books and organize conferences on this mismatch, but educational practice seems to change the turtle-like way.



Some young people simply join the media LABs and eat it! No problem, they work full speed from day one.

But there are many other scenarios.

And this is where *social ethics* comes in.

Many young people entering open and project based and explorative media LABs seem not to appreciate these new provisions. Some are reluctant, some are not interested, some don't want to engage, and others simply behave in strange ways and disturb the work processes.

Some teachers may get angry: why are they not grateful?

The thing is that it might take a long time for some of our young people to engage, to enjoy, to relate, to immerse, - or simply to find out that the media LABs are not yet another classroom.

And, remember: the baggage that some of these young people carry with them are still there! A troubled life or lack of self-confidence does not disappear just because you enter a media LAB!

What does all this mean? Where does it lead?

It leads to the *social ethics* of media based laboratories.

To be successful the media LABs must offer a special atmosphere, very different from traditional classrooms.

The adult mentors and the work processes must be extremely flexible and tolerant. The individual young person should be allowed the time and practice needed to accept and enjoy the new opportunities. Even though also media LABs should be governed by basic social rules, many forms of behaviors must be accepted and tolerated, such as:

- temporary dropping out
- lack of interest
- discussions and quarreling on behavior and peer relations
- outbreak of anger or sadness
- lack of trust in mentors and peers
- disruptive behavior
- periods of doubts, relapses and disengagement

Even though the environment must be governed by social rules and agreements, the individual young person must be allowed time to change, time to find his or her way and without constantly being judged or rejected.



The social ethics in question are not about pleasing the young people, mothering them or showing endless tolerance towards whatever behavior.

Nice pedagogies do not work with these young people.

The mentors must be open, direct, transparent, clear and frank. But at the same time they must show respect and allow each and every young person to find his or her way of re-engagement and re-motivation.



This is where many experimenting media provisions for young people fail. Often they employ too many “teachers” and too few “youth workers”, too many “educators” and too few “non-pedagogical professionals” from the different companies or institutions involved.

Some provisions offer rich technology, but are not able to manage the mentality of the young people.

Some provisions are not allowed the flexibility to help some of the young people to change, to grow, to feel differently.

This failing happens in formal media LABs as well as in non-formal after-school media provisions.

But it is very clear that formal educational frameworks show great difficulties in offering the needed flexible and tolerant learning environments. Formal education is precisely a *system*, and the system is not geared to allow flexibility in time, space and personal development.

And one thing is sure: the increasing demand for short-term efficiency in the education system will not make things better.

This means that there is an urgent and increasing need to establish non-formal open media LABs of 21st century learning for all sorts of “disengaged” young people. Unfortunately this does not seem to happen, even though we know that this is one of the only long-term efficient ways to re-engage and include millions of young people in Europe.

Turtle Europe.



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Much more on 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 21st century learning.

21st 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