

LAB flash

TEACHING AND MENTORING IN MEDIA LABS

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The LABlearning project is funded by the EU Commission's Lifelong Learning Program. It aims to re-motivate disengaged or disadvantaged youth through involving them in project and media based laboratories of learning, thereby offering useful guidance to interested institutions and teachers across Europe.

For contact: see project website

TEACHING IN THE LABS?



Why do we not use the word *teacher* in the media labs? Does it mean that no teaching is taking place? And if so, how are the young people learning?

In fact teaching or instruction might take place in the media labs, but the learning in the labs are not organized by teaching activities in the classroom. What we call teaching might take place in time-outs or in connection with certain needs in the learning process.

The media labs are organized in the form of projects, and the young learners are involved in all the phases of the projects: defining the mission, planning the needed team work, finding the proper resources and collaborators, distributing work tasks among the team members - and carrying out the project in its different phases.

The youth teams will eventually produce the final media outcomes and present it to the end-users or to the clients involved in the project.

Where is the "teacher" in all this"?

MENTORING



The teacher is a mentor. The mentor is not providing knowledge, not trying to make the young learners listen, understand or remember. The mentor is basically supporting the learning process of the youth teams, giving advice, giving a push or an input when needed, using her professional experience to facilitate the many learning activities.

The mentor provides progression and fluency...

Thus the mentor works at the same level as the learners, offering contacts, ideas and networking - and linking the teams to other professionals needed in the different projects. This means that the mentor is not alone. She will also be forming teams in support of the specific needs in the projects. Often she will collaborate with media designers, people from the community, end-users, and professionals from institutions or companies and perhaps with game designers or animators.

The general role of the mentor is to help coordinating these resources and activities and guide the youth teams through their projects - the *specific* role of the mentor is to reflect on the learning processes and to intervene when specific support or guidance is needed.

MEDIA EXPERT?



Most teachers are not familiar with these roles. They are used to be in "control" of the learning processes; they are used to *organize* the learning processes. And most teachers are not comfortable with projects based on extensive use of all sorts of state of the art media.

It is of great importance that teachers involved in media labs are given time and space to train the new roles, to discuss their new roles with colleagues and inspirators - and to have time-outs for reflection during the media projects.

Many teachers are afraid to work in projects with advanced media. They feel unqualified to guide the youth teams.

Of course, the mentors should be interested in media, and they should learn about media tools and potentials along with the youth teams, but the mentors are not expected to be media experts. The key role of the mentors is to support and guide the learning process, not to offer professional media support to the teams. Therefore the media labs must be populated by other professionals, such as media mentors, media designers, game designers, etc, and the mentors should collaborate closely with such resources, whether those resources are contracted, sponsored or volunteers.

WHO'S LEARNING?



So, on one side the former teachers should learn to collaborate with youth teams and media professionals, and on the other side they should learn to involve the community in the projects. Community players might be end-users of the project, private enterprises or cultural institutions - or professionals needed in specific phases of the projects.

So, who's actually learning the media labs?

Everybody! The learning is no longer limited to messages from teacher to student, but is distributed among many different players and situations. The youth teams are at the centre of the learning and of the projects, but many other players might be deeply involved in the learning, including the mentors themselves.

So, in short, the mentor will find herself managing two new major roles: project coordination and team learning guide.

Once the former teacher has become familiar with these new roles, she will no doubt enjoy them... and learn a lot!

Learn more about teaching and mentoring in media labs on www.lablearning.eu