# LAB flash

## Games and learning

## ENTERTAINMENT OR HARD FUN?
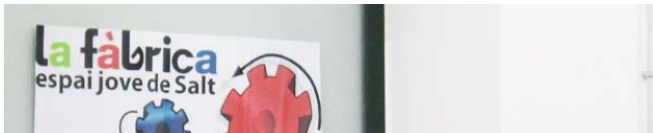


Traditionally games and learning belong to two different worlds: the classic world of academic education and the wild world of entertainment markets.

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 textbooks.

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 when addressing 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 change the plots 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 af 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 like a digital game!

You may think: now, this is too much! Using games are ok, but designing a school like 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!

Learn more about games and learning in media labs on www.lablearning.eu
- and about the new EU initiatives on games for learning and inclusion…