



Lab Stories

Media development by Training 2000



LabLearning evaluation

www.lablearning.eu

Team LabLearning

Dipartimento formazione e apprendimento

Scuola universitaria professionale della Svizzera italiana

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SUPSI

PART I

LAB description

The Training 2000 LAB was launched by Training 2000 (LABlearning partner) on November 6th 2012. The final exhibition with the LAB's results took place on May 8th-9th 2013.

The LAB activities took place at the resourceful PoliArte VET College, but addressed young VET students at risk of drop-out or with poor learning results from a network of VET colleges in the community. The idea was to have PoliArte College function as a non-formal after-school LAB provision for the participating VET institutions, and to engage mentors from the VET colleges and media professionals from PolyArte in the youth projects.



Figure 1 - an icebreaker at the LAB

PoliArte is a private, tertiary level, arts and design school which agreed to rent Training 2000 a computer classroom for the LAB and to collaborate to the initiative by making available some of its advanced students as media experts. Initially, 5 PoliArte students joined the 3 professionals that Training 2000 assigned to the LAB as mentors. Quite soon, however, most PoliArte students withdrew from this engagement and only one (Federica Papa, expert in photography) continued to work with the mentors. Even though Training 2000's three mentors all have a good level of digital competence, they had to undertake a significant learning investment in the technical areas eventually tackled in the LAB, in order to provide effective support and guidance to the participants.

The LAB started with a much larger number of young people than forecast, namely, above 30. Besides a group of young people recruited from some other schools and youth centres, the first two sessions in November were attended by about 15 students, all from the same graphic drawing class of Ancona's Istituto Tecnico. They were sent to the LAB by their teacher, who had heard of the new initiative at PoliArte and expected to find a traditional photography course. When they understood that this was not the case, they left the LAB all together. A few other early LAB participants dropped out at different moments for various reasons such as: long transportation time and related costs to reach Ancona (many of them came from smaller towns up to 20-30 km from the city); mismatches with the LAB's timing; family duties (taking care of younger siblings); competing engagements (e.g., mandatory driving licence course); and the intensity and overall long duration of the LAB (twice a week for a total of 4 hours, over 5-6 months). On the other hand, some new participants joined the LAB after its start, having heard of it through voice of mouth and social networks (relatives and friends). Eventually, the number of 'regular' LAB participants has been fluctuating from 12 to 15.

The activities of the LAB went through an initial exploratory process prompted by the interests shown by the young people (creation of animation and comics, websites, stencils, photography, graphic design

and 3D graphics) and the mentors' suggestions, also in reaction to them. Within about one month the activities' focus stabilized around three main areas and three corresponding work groups: photography (attracting the largest number of participants, 5 young people), image editing (3 young people) and digital games (4 young people).

The actual development of activities – especially in the first 2-3 months – occurred through a significant and constant stimulation effort by the mentors towards the young people, with the suggestion of new software and media tools and related activities. As mentioned before, this has been a major challenge for the mentors turned also into media experts. On the one hand, they had to explore and learn many new topics in a short time (e.g., one mentor had to study 10 different software packages in order to pick out the best one to recommend to the Image Editing group). On the other hand, the mentors had to use this knowledge to continuously submit new ideas and suggestions in order to keep the YP's motivation and interest high (as they tended to fall after a relatively short time).

Half-way through the project the two main groups – photography and image editing – had already prepared much material and are mostly engaged in the preparation of the final exhibition. The videogames group was also involved in this process, but its participants were still learning to use 3D Rad for developing their own three-dimensional games. In May 2013, the experience was concluded end with the organization of the exhibition *Vogliamo farci sentire* (“we want to be heard”), the final stage in which young people showcased their works to the community.

LAB participants were awarded an attendance certificate; also, an e-portfolio with the collection of relevant work done was prepared, and for those who were still at school, also some ‘training credits’ (which in Italy can be gained outside of school and are acknowledged to contribute to the formal educational achievement).



Figure 2 - One participant learning to use a digital camera

Young people's voices

The LAB advancements were followed by an intense social media activity on Facebook. That discussion, reveals that the activities in labs (photography, image editing, video games) increased autonomy in the learning process: “I enjoyed being able to decide what to do...”. Young people look very involved in what they are doing, they claim that it's very interesting, fun and useful. Students indicate a high degree of satisfaction and motivation. The LAB is much preferred to “classical” lessons.

The majority of participants have appreciated what they have learned in the LAB: they appreciated learning a new software and using it for managing images and improving use of a digital camera or a ICT device in general (from photography to the creation of video games, from video editing to the use of technical HDR software). Students appreciated this work especially because they perceived the quality of the final outcome and the importance of each one's contribution and ideas.

The preparation and realization of the exhibition also proved to be an important learning experience for participants: they had to address also organisational and funding issues, and other aspects for making a “real” communication event for the public.



Figure 3 - Preparing for the exhibition



Figure 4 - Certificates were awarded during the exhibition *Vogliamo farci sentire*

Mentors' voices

Mentors were very positive and motivated throughout. During the LAB, learning to use media and ICT tools started to become a pleasure and an effective professional method for them. They say they are convinced that these experiences are valid, effective and functional for learning but they need more communication and collaboration with other mentors and teachers of traditional schools. The change in mentality needs time and mainly further “efforts”. Moreover, returning to the usual teaching and learning methods increases the risk that mentality does not change definitively, and that the LAB experience only generates surface changes.

As in all labs, the selection and preparation of mentors appeared crucial – and the difference between mentors explains the differences in outcomes in the groups. The mentors needed direct dialogue between each other. The possibility to explain ideas, share knowledge and understand others point of view is functional to overcome obstacles.

Media based work processes

The possibility to learn using social network as Facebook and YouTube, open source software for the videogames development, or useful applications like Adobe PhotoShop and digital-photo devices is

something interesting and motivating for young people, because are tools that participants can use – every single day. New media are on their own strong communication means. Their strength is in giving an almost and immediate answer to questions (e.g., with Google or YouTube), and young people understand their true potential.

Obstacles

However engaging, the difficulty remains in motivating participants in the long term, day after day, after the “Las Vegas Effect” fades away. This requires the identification of the true requests of the young people, who are often unable to express them clearly.

Also, mentors should be prepared to support participants during the Labs. A professional limit is the little knowledge regarding software or sites that would have answered to the participants requests but “luckily the collaboration with other mentors supported and helped (...) since they had more knowledge (...) in this field”.

Especially when starting to use a new software, the mentor should have specific competencies in order to help learners. If the approach is completely bottom-up, as it was in Ancona, learners can explore a great number of software application, and this requires a really big effort on the mentors’ side.

Labs and the school

The traditional school system is not focused on a media-based or even media-rich environment . Also, the fact that labs are driven by young people’s personal interests and based on authentic problems is something different from the traditional school system. While this is an advantage for labs (they are “new”), this can also raise conflicts. Mentors can try to establish an active dialogue with the schools in order to promote this new way of learning, or to make it integrated with school practices.

The education system mainly prevented the development of a new mentality of participants. Staying with the mentors in the afternoon for four hours a week with this new methodology and then 35 hours in the morning with the traditional method, somehow slowed down the changing process. Some school teachers were very happy with this project and they noticed its actual impact. It is a dialogue that requires time to develop also at institutional level, in order to achieve sustainability.

The community voice

The community got in touch with the Lab at PoliArte substantially, in particular during the final exhibition. Feedback was collected from interviews with school collaborators, with the head of *Casa delle Culture* Association, and with a teacher.

The people interviewed could all appreciate changes in the young people that took part in the lab: a growth of interest in lab activities, acquiring skills in the specific application of photography, with the preparation of the exhibition and in the graphic arts, greater motivation in general, large satisfaction with the products manufactured and a more constructive attitude. The students became the agents of their own learning, without necessarily seeking a teacher intervention, in complete autonomy.

The use of ICT is very important; young people had an opportunity of being active. However, interviewees remarked that it is necessary to conduct ICT-based activities with a critical spirit, and help young people to develop not only technical skills, but also actual digital citizenship. This is imperative, as ICT is experiencing a remarkable growth that is affecting all aspects of society.

Finally, interviewees suggested that this approach is further developed to complement schools activities through the training of teachers and better communication between the world of work and school.

Lessons learned

The experience of the Lab in Ancona clearly revealed the importance of establishing contact with the local community – as they did through the exhibition – both as part of the learning experience of the young people, and as a pathway to sustainability and deeper impact through the dialogue with the formal education system.

Also, this experience calls for a sound preparation – both educational and technological – of mentors, and for the establishment of a mentors' network that supports them throughout.

Finally, this lab again proved that ICT create engagement, and are the catalyst for generating an open and effective learning environment – in which young people rapidly outgrow their mentors in technical skills, generating a fluid and peer-like teaching and learning relationship.

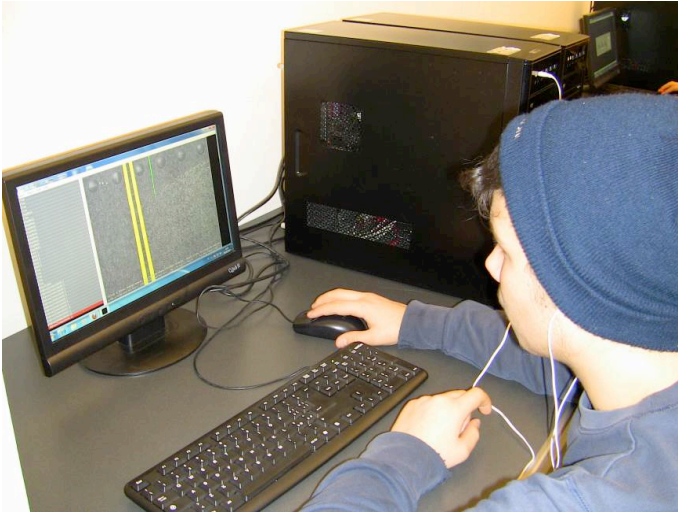


Figure 5 - Developing a videogame

PART II

Lab overview

The following table presents a summary of the overall lab experience in Ancona.

WHO?

Number of mentors/teachers	5
Number of media experts	1
Number of learners at the beginning	30
Number of learners that completed the lab	12
Age of learners	15-22
% of drop-out/unemployed learners	40%
% of migration background learners	60%
Organized in collaboration with	Centro Sperimentale di Design Poliarte - Ancona

WHAT?

Was the work organized in groups?	Yes
Size of the groups (if any)	2-6
Central topic (if any)	Image editing,digital photography, videogame development
Lab products	Digital photos, video clips, videogames, final exhibition
Media devices used (e.g., Camera)	Camera, computer
Software applications used	Scratch, Gamesmechanic, 3D RAD, Adobe PhotoShop, Adobe Illustrator, Easy HDR, Sketch-up

WHEN?

Lab started on (month, year)	November 2012
Lab ended on (month, year)	May 2013
Meeting schedule	4h/week, wednesdays and thursdays 3.00 PM – 5.00 PM
Total number of lab hours	74

WHERE?

Location	Centro Sperimentale di Design Poliarte, Via Valle Miano, 41 60125 Ancona
Number of rooms available	1 computer room, 1 photography set, 1 room
Computers available	18

WHY?

Was the lab part of a formal curriculum?	No
Was formal evaluation foreseen?	No
Were credit awarded?	Yes, through an agreement with the local school

Additional links

Facebook group Lablearning Italia

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/432893870092301/>

Facebook group – Photography

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/MakeAShot/514291498589635?fref=ts>

Facebook group – videogames

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/435594209829822/>

Sources

This report was developed based on the following sources of information:

1. Data provided by the organizers about the labs and observations by QA team
2. The planning documents and end products of labs experiences
3. Young people voice (discussions on Facebook groups)
4. Mentor voices (LABlearningReflectionsRound)
5. Community voice
6. Pictures and video by the organizers about the labs