

THE EU COMMENIUS

**LABlearning**  
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# Lessons Learned

LESSONS LEARNED PART 2

*To be used as a source for the project's LABlearning platform*

The synthesis of the Lessons Learned material produced by the project partners aims to bring together in clear statements what can be learned from other initiatives. In other words, bring together important guidance elements to be integrated in the LABlearning platform.



## INTRO

The overall aim of the first project phase is to develop a platform for the practical media laboratories in the project's large practice phase.

The Lessons Learned will ensure that the media laboratories benefit from similar initiatives in which important experience have been produced.

The platform will offer guidance and a mutual language and understanding among the practicing partners as to the basic principles in motivating disengaged youth for learning in the media laboratories.

The platform will build on 6 sources:

1. The inspiration paper *Media based learning - lessons learned and open inspiration*
2. The Computer Clubhouse material, especially the Computer Clubhouse hand-outs
3. The project's quality assurance platform
4. A synthesis of Lessons Learned
5. A synthesis of Youth Voice
6. A synthesis of the discussions at the second partner meeting in Denmark May 2012

The synthesis of the Lessons Learned material produced by the project partners aims to bring together in clear statements what can be learned from other initiatives. In other words, bring together important guidance elements to be integrated in the LABlearning platform.

Therefore this paper is not concerned with who delivered the input or from what initiative the lessons learned came from.

The material has been synthesized and re-formulated into the media laboratory language. First we present a text from the partner material; then we present our own text trying to build a bridge to the future LABlearning platform.

The raw material from the partners will in original form be edited and integrated in the project's website.

The clear focus is on bringing together important elements of lessons learned linked to media laboratory learning for disengaged youth - and to feed this guidance into the LABlearning platform.

The confrontation between the platform, including its 6 sources, and the practical laboratory experience will produce the project's final outcomes.



## PARENTS

At school level it is essential to develop a model for working with parents of children in risk of school dropout.

The platform should include principles on linking media laboratories both in formal and non-formal settings to the young people's families and friends. Projects might be developed about the family background of the young people, migrants or natives, and family members might be involved in some of the projects.

Attention should be paid to the fact that some family members might have resources, skills or talents that might be useful to the projects in question. Projects might also be about certain needs in the family that could be addressed through the laboratory activities.

The same could happen in connection friends of the involved young people.

The rationale of this principle is to

- establish dialogues with the young people's families
- allow the young people to feel pride and respect towards their own and others' families

- exploit useful and creative resources in the media projects
- establish a very concrete and important relation to the community
- demonstrate the open learning environment in the laboratories



## TEACHER RESOURCES

It is very important that teachers be given the possibility and are stimulated to work additionally with children in a risk of dropout adapting the study program to and content to their particular needs.

The platform should include principles on initial and ongoing stimulation of teachers and mentors working with disengaged youth in media laboratories.

The teachers and mentors should be allowed to reflect on their experiences and learning with peers both at local and transnational level.

The stimulation and reflection activities should be integrated in the everyday laboratory practices, not organised in traditional course settings.

Social networks in the internet might be taken into account as such reflection forums, but face activities should be given high priority as well.

A major challenge is to what extend media and technology training or stimulation should be a part of such activities - or teachers and mentors should learn together with the young people in the projects.

The platform should make clear and explain that the teachers and mentors working with the young people are the key to successful laboratories. The staff members are challenged with tasks that go far beyond traditional teaching. It should be recommended that the laboratories include adults with long-standing experience with marginalized youth, as social, family and many other issues will be raised in the laboratories.

Once we open up the learning settings, we leave the relatively safe classrooms, thereby invited many personal and social structures to be visible and have an impact on the activities.



## TECHNOLOGICAL EXPECTATIONS

Even those young people who are typically most at risk of disengagement from learning expect ICT to play an integral role within their daily lives.

They also expect it to play an integral role in their learning. Young learners want and expect flexible and engaging learning environments that effectively use ICT.

An environment of this kind is communicative and inclusive. It features a high degree of collaborative learning, interactive content, as well as interactivity among learners and between learners and practitioners. It also connects learners to the world beyond the classroom or conventional learning settings. It pays attention to individual learner needs, values and interests and ensures that the content and mode of learning is relevant to learners' lives. It enables learners to build on their existing skills, reflect on their own learning and become self-regulated and self-directed. This kind of learning environment has been shown to have a direct and positive effect on the engagement and retention of young learners.

In too many instances, however, young learners experience an environment in which technology is used in limited ways. They are unable to rely upon the provision of appropriate technology by their educational organisations. They also

describe a significant gap between their own digital literacy and technological proficiency and that of their teachers and trainers.

The platform should include principles on linking media laboratories not only to high-end media technology, but also to the state of the art technology of the young people.

Even though most young people are fluent as to everyday social technology, they cannot be expected to have any experience in more advanced technology such as video and animation technologies. They might be able to record and circulate videos, but not to edit them and present useful content.

In general young people are open and interested in all kinds of media technologies; however they are not familiar with using the technologies for learning and more systematic activities. A major challenge for teachers and mentors is therefore to motivate the young people to take deeper steps into the world of learning with technology.

Young people should be stimulated to take their technology interest beyond what they use in their everyday social life.



### TECHNOLOGY IS NOT ENOUGH

Bridging the "digital divide" is more complex than providing hardware and software to community-based organizations that serve youth. Just providing computers, Internet connections, and technology training will do little to give young people the skills they need to succeed in the new economy. Rather, it is about offering opportunities to use the technology in innovative learning programs and to establish meaningful relationships with other children and adults in the community.

The platform should include principles on the necessary balances between access to technology and learning with technology.

On one hand technology must be available to learn with technology and to be free and creative, but on the other hand the availability of technology will not in itself motivate the young people to learn with technology.

The focus should therefore always be on the collaborative, communicative, community-based and relevance of the laboratory activities, not on the technology itself.



### TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Reliable and quality technical support is critical for all programs. Too often, centers must rely on volunteers or overworked staff to provide technical support to maintain the network, hardware, and software. When the equipment is not functioning effectively, children quickly lose interest and staff loses confidence and become disenchanted with the technology.

The platform should include principles on the availability of technical support. Technical support, both covering the hardware and software fields, should be readily available, however it is an important principle that the young people and the mentors should take an interest in solving technical problems themselves - and learn from the technical support.

This “training” will support the laboratories’ independency and the young people’s independency, as well as encourage the young people to be curious and explore the world of technology beyond using it. This discussion also raises the question: what kind of adults, professionals or resources should be working in the media laboratories? Should a mixed team of mentors, technicians and media professionals inhabit the laboratories? Should we re-think the meaning of “educational staff”?



### POSITIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

One step towards social inclusion is to undergo positive learning experiences and thus (re)engage school dropouts in learning processes. For marginalised young people those experiences have to be outside of the formal education system and have to happen in alternative forms to traditional ways of teaching at school. Thus, one of the demands for a new pedagogical approach is to make use of the fun aspect of young people’s devices, using attractive means of ICT, and extend their interests from pure consumption of content to the creation of content. The platform should include principles on both using media laboratories in formal education for preventing drop-out and using media laboratories in non-formal settings for re-motivation, re-engagement and second-chance activities. The principle of shifting from consumption of content to creation of content is key to all laboratory settings. It represents the very core of the media laboratories: do not play computer games, make them. The most important thing is not to develop advanced technological skills in themselves, but to develop self-confidence and to receive respect from your peers, your mentors and your community. New learning motivation can occur and can be sustainable when self-confidence and respect are linked to the learning activity. The mental and social aspects of laboratory learning should be taken very seriously.



### VARIOUS COMMUNICATION AND EXPRESSION STYLES

All challenge videos were created in order to stimulate participation of the young people but did not have a mandatory character. Neither was the answer video predefined. Participants could create answer videos on their own, collaborate with others, simply speak into the camera, «act» or record something. Participants could also create their own challenges or relate their videos to those by other participants. Ideally, there were answer videos to challenge videos and reply videos by other participants to answer videos. Furthermore, the platform members could use all the features of the platform to relate to others: send text messages, share videos, rate videos, create groups on a specific topic and subscribe to groups that have been created by others. «To make new friends» and to «get to know people from abroad» were the most popular motivators to take part in the community that emerged during the focus groups with the participants. The platform supported various communication styles and skills as the pilot experience shows. It was seamlessly used by people with different mother tongues, by people with literacy problems as well as people with Asperger syndrome or with an antisocial personality disorder. Depending on their skills, they chose visually-based communication or text-based

communication. In the first case, people who relied more on visually-based communication, would rather have accessed videos and commented on the videos of others while in the second case, people with an emphasis on text-based communication, chose to send messages or to post messages in a group. As Mirko has poor literacy skills, shooting videos was the perfect way for him to express himself. Mirko loved presenting himself in front of the camera sharing daily experiences and let others get some insights into his life. For instance, Mirko recorded a wedding in the Roma community; another video showed a person playing a typical Roma instrument. Mirko recorded his neighbourhood, his room, his favourite objects, his personal belongings and introduced family members and friends in the form of videos posted to the online community. Daria used the platform like a diary. Almost every day she recorded a video and uploaded it to the platform. Most of the time, she recorded herself speaking directly into the camera sharing her thoughts on different topics such as first impressions at a new internship placement.

The platform should include principles on re-thinking what communication is about.

In traditional education most learning and activities are based on written texts. In the laboratories all sorts of communication should be encourage and equally respected and celebrated. Sound and pictures, animation and video should be equally important as texts and words.

To many young people these communication forms are more meaningful than long texts, and the laboratories should encourage a variety of non-traditional communication, also between the mentors and the young people.

A very important form of communication should be the combination of different communication forms: combining animation and words, texts and videos, etc. These combinations strongly support traditional as well as media literacy and fluency, and they definitely enhance the young people's creative and critical thinking.

Such principle might very well be linked to encouraging expressing yourself with a variety of art forms, such as drama, drawing, painting, music, etc.

Projects linking to art forms might be established in the laboratories, involving local resources, and the mentors might witness the emergence of hitherto hidden talents or aspirations among the young people.



## IMMERSED LEARNING

The actual shooting of videos requires tactile-kinaesthetic perception and handling of objects and thus it supports different learner types. To have a virtual stage fostering personal creativity and self-expression might have a stimulating effect and provoke positive learning experiences with flow character. According to this notion, in a stage of flow, people are fully immersed in their activities and experience deep enjoyment, creativity and complete involvement with life. When people experience flow their attention is completely focused and the working or learning procedures themselves are sufficient as sources for motivation, no external motivators are required.

The platform should include principles on learning activities leading to immersion and flow. Experiencing immersion and flow is one of the most important elements in learning to enjoy learning. Many young people experience this when playing complicated and demanding computer games, but it is indeed possible to experience such states of mind when creating content and not consuming content.

If the laboratories succeed in establishing activities in which creation and production is linked to immersion and flow, the laboratories are performing at their maximum, and the activities will have a tremendous impact on the young people involved, as well as on the mentors.



## BRIDGE TO THE JOB MARKET

Furthermore, video-based documentation of their everyday life's cultural practices, interests and expertise are seen as a possible bridge to the job market especially for at-risk learners. Learners may select and comment their videos to create portfolios and submit them to potential employers.

The platform should include principles on how to link the laboratory activities indirectly or directly to further formal education and labour market, especially paying attention to possible entrepreneurship opportunities.

Some activities in the laboratories might even develop into small incubators, in which a group of young people develop important skills that could be useful to entrepreneurship or labour market contacts.

One of the advantages of entrepreneurship is that it sometimes can be linked directly to the young people's personal interests and talents.

Although the laboratories should never push the young people towards further education or labour market, it is of great value to use any opportunity to link the laboratory projects to real life, to opportunities in the community and especially to entrepreneurship initiatives (taking into consideration the lack of emerging job opportunities in today's Europe).

Although the laboratories should primarily be considered learning motivation incubators, they in fact support the learning of many basic skills called upon in the ever changing knowledge economy, such as learning to learn, working in shifting teams and projects, exploring the benefits of new technologies - and at the personal level self-reflection and self-regulation.

Developing personal or team based portfolios, perhaps through the social networks, is a very strong way of making the young people visible, to themselves and to the community.



## COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

The phenomenon of learning within social communities on the internet can generally be conceptualised with *communities of practice*. Communities of practice are informal groups of individuals or networks with common goals and interests who communicate with each other over a longer period of time, who exchange experiences, who commonly solve problems, who collaboratively collect and build knowledge and learn from each other:

- Common goals, interests, needs or activities of the members;
- Repeated and active participation of the members;
- Intensive interactions, strong emotional relationships and shared activities among the contributors;
- Access to the shared resources with clearly defined rules of access;
- Reciprocal activities like exchange of information, support and services among members;
- Common rules of activity and common language;
- Voluntary membership.

The platform should include principles on open communication and collaboration. This means that the communication in the laboratories should never be closed and isolated in online forums not visible to the social networks used in everyday life by many young people.

In fact, networking and open communication in the social online networks should be encouraged at all stages in the laboratory projects. This practice will also equip the young people with very useful social networking skills, crucial to all modern learning and labour market environments.

To many institutions this open networking is new and challenging. Both formal and non-formal educational settings must learn to support, explore and benefit from such communities of practice.



## THE BASICS

*Create*: a basic element of a constructivist learning environment is to allow learners to create their own contents. By creating an external representation they make parts of their internal world model explicit.

*Construct*: instead of accumulating unrelated bits of knowledge, students need to construct a deeper structure connecting their own and other students' representations. They should identify parallels, connections, dependencies, and conclusions as well as omissions, contradictions, or errors.

The platform should include principles explaining the most basic principles of media based laboratory learning: the activity of exploring, constructing and creating is at the heart of the laboratories, not the transfer of "dead knowledge".

Creating and constructing covers all fields of learning: constructing knowledge, creating physical and digital artefacts, constructing things or services, creating new partnerships and links to the community.

The key is reversing traditional education: production instead of consumption, constructing instead of receiving.



## UBIQUITY – RE-LINKING TO SPACES

Context-sensitive and location-aware mobile technologies create a need to raise the question of the relevance of spatial location for learning anew. We state that mobile video has the potential to be much more useful than desktop video for learning because it can be accessed right at the learning place. Video learning resources need to be available in practice to be useful. Mobile video unites the learner from the desktop into the action, e.g. under the engine bonnet to repair a car engine.

Mobile and location-aware Internet technology provide a basis for *ubiquitous learning infrastructures*. Such infrastructures support on-site learning-by-problem-solving approaches by providing pervasive access to learning communities and re-attaching persons and knowledge to *real places*.

(a) *Location-based search and documentation of learning resources*:

- Search for learning resources at a place.
- Documentation of learning resources at a place.

(b) *Location-based notification and monitoring*

- Notification of nearby learning opportunities, resources and activities.
- Monitoring learning opportunities, resources and activities at certain places of interest.

(c) *Location-based networking and summoning*

- Finding nearby co-learners.
- Summoning learning advisors or experts for a place.

The platform should include principles on taking the media into life instead of taking life into the media.

This means that the laboratories should not close themselves around digital computer production, but link to the surrounding realities. The realities include the community, the family, nature, the different physical spaces in the city, etc. This principle is extremely interesting and calls for a lot of reflection: the laboratories replace the classrooms by expanding the actions in both directions - deeply immersed learning with media tools and opening up to and connecting to the realities around the learning setting.

Accordingly, the laboratories should take an interest in using and exploring media tools that can facilitate both immersive learning and can connect to physical spaces and activities in the community realities.



## COMPUTER CLUBHOUSE LEARNING PRINCIPLES

Activities at the Computer Clubhouse are guided by the current educational research that shows that adolescents learn most effectively when they are engaged in designing and creating projects, rather than memorizing facts or learning isolated skills out of context. The Clubhouse fosters a learner-centred, informal educational approach that encourages participants to discover their interests and apply their own ideas. Given the support and freedom to pursue their own ideas, young people get beyond their disinterest and apathy about learning, and develop the internal motivation to learn and grow.

The Computer Clubhouse gives participants the opportunity to become *designers* and *creators* of technology. The Clubhouse provides high-end resources, materials, and tools for young people to develop projects based on their own interests. Rather than playing games with computers, young people learn how to use professional software for design, exploration, and experimentation. In the Clubhouse, young people can learn what it is like to be an architect, engineer, composer, artist, journalist, scientific researcher, computer programmer, and a wide array of other professions in the modern workplace.

The Clubhouse educational approach is based on research that shows the importance of interpersonal relationships and community in the learning process, particularly for adolescents. Young people are influenced a great deal outside of school by the people around them, peers as well as adults. In the Clubhouse, young people interact with other youth and adults who are enthusiastic about learning and are interested and invested in their work. Clubhouse members become part of a community that values and respects hard work and the pursuit and sharing of ideas and knowledge.

This structure is led by the youth themselves, but guided by staff, adult mentors, and youth peer leaders who serve as coaches and catalysts, providing members with inspiration, mentoring, and organizational support.

### *Learn by Design*

Put technology directly into the hands of the youth, to lead as designers, inventors, and creators.

### *Follow Your Interests*

Provide opportunities for choice, where youth care about what they are working on, are willing to work longer and harder, and learn more in the process.

### *Build Community*

Create a community with a culture of peer learning and equal opportunity, where young people work together with one another with support and inspiration from adult mentors.

### *Respect & Trust*

Create a stable environment in which participants feel safe to experiment, explore, and innovate and are given time and space to play out their own ideas.

The expected youth impact from our learning model includes the ability to:

- express oneself with technology
- collaborate, communicate, work in teams
- solve complex problems
- develop, plan, and execute complex projects
- express self-esteem and self-confidence

The platform should link directly to, explain and explore the Computer Clubhouse learning and social principles, as they represent 20 years of designing creative learning laboratories for disadvantaged or disengaged youth.

The platform should explain how these principles are relevant and useful also to formal youth education.

The platform must present these principles in a very simple and clear way, inspired by the simple and straightforward texts in the Computer Clubhouse hand-outs.