THE EU COMMENIUS

LAB*learning*
Project

COORDINATOR TEAM
BRIEF SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED
MAY 2012

In spring 2012 partners and the coordinator team engaged in searching for interesting examples and lessons learned in the field of project and media based learning.
The expectations were not high, and this was clearly justified.
In Europe, as in most continents, there is a tremendous imbalance between theory and practice: oceans of books, papers and conferences describe and analyze topics like media based learning, game based learning and learning with social media; but there are very few good practices to learn from. 95% theory and 5% practice.
This makes it very difficult for institutions and teachers to be inspired in a productive way: reading all the theoretical materials dramatically increases the expectations, but the practical examples are too weak to link these expectations to reality. This might very well produce a lot of *frustration* among teachers and mentors.
The most significant result of the Lessons Learned was: the Intel Computer Clubhouse Network is still the most powerful source of practical inspiration.
Therefore the project is, of course, pleased with the ICCN being an active partner in the project!
The ICCN is now talking new initiatives, opening up the clubhouse experience to the educational world in general, meaning also formal education.
The project expects a very productive convergence emerging from these two lines of activity: LABlearning being inspired by the ICCN, and the ICCN taking stronger interests in inspiring formal education.

The ICCN material from the partner meeting, along with other ICCN materials, are available on the project website and communication platform, as will the videos recorded during the ICCN activities at the meeting.
The full Lessons Learned material is available on the project's communication platform.

The Lessons Learned activity resulted in a variety of material. The material can be divided into 3 categories:
1. Materials on policy and programs or upcoming projects
2. Materials on the integration of ICT in general in education
3. Material more directly targeting the LABlearning thematics, offering practical experience on laboratory and media based learning for young people
The two first categories offer interesting material, but not material, though, that can help teachers and mentors create media based laboratories.

The third category, however, offered very interesting material, the most significant materials linked to these two initiatives:

www.youthlearn.org

www.reactproject.eu

The YouthLearn initiative offers a long-standing experience and a variety of materials from many projects and experiments in the US, in which schools try to use media in creative ways.
The ReAct project is a European project aiming to offer a variety of media based examples on creative integration of ICT and media in schools.

How to briefly evaluate these two resources?
PLUS
→ The initiatives offer a great variety of inspiration materials that cannot be summarized in a few words; the materials need to be studied and explored, and it is recommended to do so
→ The initiatives offer many practical examples on media based projects for young people that might inspire lab teachers and mentors
→ The initiatives are clearly addressing the key objective of the LABlearning project: changing the traditional classroom didactics into open and project based media labs
→ The initiatives have made a great part of their work openly available on their websites

MINUS
→ The initiatives are not offering clear guidance as to the new didactics, based on clear and tested learning approaches
→ The initiatives are not addressing disadvantaged or disengaged young learners, but young people in general
→ From time to time the materials from the initiatives seem to be more focused on integrating ICT in education than developing new learning approaches

Nevertheless, the coordinator would like to recommend to our teachers and mentors to take some time to study the YouthLearn website, as it offers a great variety of interesting material, examples and approaches to media based learning.
We definitely believe that the YouthLearn material can be inspiring for our teachers and mentors.

As can be seen from this brief Lessons Learned summary, very few alternatives to the Computer Clubhouse were presented!
Therefore it is not surprising that the LABlearning project puts a lot of focus on this experience and this approach.

However, the Lessons Learned activity in LABlearning is not finished: we will be looking for practical media based learning examples all along the project and feed our website (menu: *Be inspired*) with relevant materials from other initiatives.
It is, though, important to bear in mind the specific objectives of the LABlearning project, not for example being general integration of ICT in education.

Let us, then, briefly summarize <u>some</u> of the things we have learned throughout the initial phase of the LABlearning project:

1. Integration of ICT and media in the classrooms will not in itself change traditional education, but merely lead to "modernization" of old classroom didactics
2. New ways of learning for disengaged youth cannot be drawn from technology itself, only from creative and well-reflected learning approaches
3. Teachers and mentors will have to learn and explore side by side with the young people; they are not experts on these fields
4. Teachers and mentors should be focused on creating motivating learning activities for the young people, not on trying to be technology experts
5. The learning activities should link strongly to the young people's interests, talents and aspiration, no matter the content of the activities
6. The new lab settings should include the social media used by the young people, and should not "control" these environments
7. The labs should include working on the young people's "traditional educational mentality" and guide them to imagine and explore new ways of learning and new ways of using state of the art technology
8. The LABlearning project is specifically targeting disadvantaged and disengaged youth and therefore the labs must be concerned with social, psychological and cultural issues as integrated dimensions in the learning activities
9. Appropriate technology, physical surrounding and media support and inspiration should be readily available to the young teams, not to produce destructive frustration (in learners as well as in mentors)
10. The key words in the lab activities should not be curricula and tests, but creativity, self-expression and exploration

This Lessons Learned summary might very well be linked to the project's expectation and change based evaluation approach.