Education and Culture DG
Lifelong Learning Programme

THE EU COMMENIUS

LAB*learning*
project

# LAB*learning*
# I n t e r p r e t a t i o n s

A few things about what the key words in
the LAB*learning* application means in practice…

*The document might be expanded and updated along the project.*

## Laboratory

We use the word *laboratory* in the project to indicate the experimenting nature of the youth settings. The laboratory could be many different things in practice, but it is very different from the classroom. In the laboratory the young people are engaged in defining the problem, defining the mission and also in defining the different ways to carry out the mission. Normally the work in the media laboratory will be carried out in teams of 3-5 young people – addressing a specific need, exploiting community resources and experimenting with different media tools.

The laboratory might include a class, a part of a class, a work period for several classes, or even just a group of young people.

It could be established in formal as well as in all kinds of non-formal settings, in a school, in vocational training, in after-school facilities, in a youth club, etc.

The laboratory project or process might last a few weeks, or it might last several months. It might embrace the full daily work of the young people, or only cover a part of the work day.

The most important thing is, however, how the laboratories are organized:

- the young people are actively defining what they need to learn
- they will find different ways of exploration, based on their digital fluency
- they will elaborate on and organize the material through the use of media tools (media tools they already know, and some they don't know)
- they will present the learning to people who need to know and who can benefit from the results
- they will be encouraged to use all kinds of advanced media tools for production and communication, supported by local media resources
- they will collaborate with useful community resources, whenever they need to

*The primary aim of the laboratories is to allow the project to learn from the young people's actions, decisions and methods, and allow the project to compare this to what we believe we know about media learning.*

## Target groups

The project's primary target group is young people between 12 and 18. Especially young people at risk of dropping out, or simply not fitting well into the traditional classroom – or young people who have already dropped out of school, now attending some kind of non-formal provision. Not-at-risk youth can, of course, participate, but it is important for the laboratory partners to establish groups of young people, for whom the laboratories can really make a difference.

The secondary target groups are teacher and mentors working with the young people, either in formal or non-formal settings, and: the institutions themselves. The teachers and mentors will be involved in inspirational activities to empower them to manage such laboratory settings, and the institutions should benefit from the project by questioning to what extent they are able to provide such media laboratory set-ups in the future, and how to do that without revolutionizing the school in one day.

The project's dissemination and exploitation target groups is a different matter that will be addressed elsewhere.

## Didactics

In LAB*learning* we talk about *media laboratory didactics*. What does that mean? Didactics is not concerned with WHAT should be learned, but HOW this happens. Didactics is about how the learning process in organized, and addresses crucial questions such as: who starts the learning process and why? Who finds the material? Who controls the progression of the learning? Who defines what methods and tools to use? Who defines what kind of people might support the learning? Who makes decisions about what to do with the results?

So, didactics is very much about the roles in the learning process. Are the young people listening, doing multiple choice exercises? Or are they working independently and experimentally? Does the teacher give instructions as to how to manage the line of activities, or will the young people have to find their own way, based on needs, discussions and collaboration?

So, didactics is about the design of the learning process. Didactics is also about motivation. In LAB*learning* there are different kinds of motivators, or drivers, such as creative media work, the free use of social networks, the challenge of finding your own ways, the opportunity to connect to community players... And: taking pride in your results.
So, how is the learning organized? This is didactics.

## Partner roles

It can be difficult for partners in a big European project to identify the roles they have in the project.
Some partners will be establishing media laboratories; other partners will be concerned with discussing lessons learned, evaluation or quality assurance.
Partners should analyze carefully the project's work packages and find out what kind of tasks they have. They might have different tasks in the different work packages and in the different project phases.
All partners should, however, take a great interest in the project's key mission: to describe LAB*learning* models that should be offered as alternatives to the traditional classroom teaching, in particular for young people at risk, non-academic learners, or students simply bored with the school system.
And at the same time, all partners should be concerned with how they can exploit the LAB*learning* project in their community.
No matter if the partner is a laboratory partner it might be very interesting to exploit the project in schools, in after-school settings, perhaps even in adult education... or in kindergartens...?
So, the partner should always combine the general interest in the project with identified specific tasks in the different work packages and phases.
*It is highly recommended that each partner undertake a careful analysis of the application and produces a small guide to how this partner is involved in the project. This work will in itself qualify the partner's participation.*

## Media

We use the word *media* a lot in the application and in the project. In the project media means all sorts of things: computer software, social platforms, computer games, video and sound... Whatever...
The point is that the young people are more or less media fluent and "digital natives" and should learn how to learn with their media tools.
The teachers are not media experts and they do not have to be. They should be concerned with the progression and the quality of the learning, not about what media tools the young people use. *They will never catch up, anyway...*
Many young people are very focused, creative and collaborating when they are in their own media world. Swimming like fish in the water. This is why the LAB*learning* project will take the learning into this world, and give the young learners the free and open space they need to *learn to learn in their media world*. The extensive use of creative media is in particular expected to support the non-academic and so-called poorly adapted young people, as the media didactics is much more activist and action oriented than most classroom teaching. Other talents come into play, when the academic classrooms are left behind...
Media tools might include internet search, editing tools, games and social gaming, visual presentations, animation, video recording and editing, as well as website or social network tools.
One of the challenges for the young people is to use the best tools available for the different work phases in a laboratory project: knowledge search, collaboration, editing of material, visualization, interviewing, and presentation.

## Documentation

This word is used all over the project application. It refers to the fact that the project is not only expected to plan and carry out activities, but indeed expected to document these activities, be they theoretical or practical. The obligation to

document the project runs through the entire project: from a partner meeting to video interviewing a team of young people during or after the laboratory work. Documentation must satisfy the Commission, as it is funding the project. But documentation should also satisfy the project itself, as we would like to produce concrete outcomes of our efforts, and to tell other people about what we learned and how they might benefit from this learning.
And, indeed, documentation is an important part of the laboratory work as well. This is where the teacher or mentor comes in: perhaps the young people are skilled media processers, but they might not be used to document their activities and be obliged to make their work useful to other people, for example other learners.
Documentation is an ongoing meta-activity in a project, and often this is one of the weak points in European projects. In LAB*learning*, this ability to make thoughts and activities visible to other people, and thus transferable and exploitable, should be given high priority from the very first days of the project. *And perhaps the young people involved might teach us how to use media tools in a creative way to document our activities?*

## Progression

We use this word to describe how the project moves forward in a step-by-step and logical way, and how one phase provides the basis for the next.
Progression is crucial to a project, if it wishes to reach its aims.
The first step makes the second possible, etc.
In LAB*learning* we should put a strong focus on progression, as the project is very experimental. This means that we really don't know a lot about what will happen and where we will end up. It will take qualified progression management to lead such a project towards its final goals.
The project has a very clear "theoretical" progression, meaning the 3 big phases described in the application: first, we carry out some research as to knowledge and experience in the field of media based learning, along with establishing dialogues with young people and giving them a voice; this phase leads to a platform for the practical laboratory initiatives in the second phase; in this second and very long phase we experiment, reflect and document; in the last phase we confront the theoretical knowledge and practical experience and produce the final outcomes, as well as tell people in Europe about it.
Teams of young media learners should be involved in all 3 phases, including producing some of the final outcomes and make presentations at the final workshop.
Hopefully the project will be followed by a European funded network, in which we join forced with similar initiatives across Europe, to be identified along the project.

## Networking

A part of the project's networking is about European dissemination. We must disseminate the project and the project results. In our project this is actually very important, as we should build up the post-project network along the entire project.
But networking means much more. From the very beginning of the project the local partners should discuss how to exploit the project in their communities: *how can they use the project as an opportunity and a justification to take new initiatives in the community?* How can new cooperation infrastructures in the community be established as a spin-off product of the LAB*learning* project? If a project opportunity is exploited in a smart way, it can often give rise to many interesting activities for different groups of citizens, and give rise to new cooperation opportunities for example with the local government and with private enterprises.
Especially in connection with partner meetings or other project events in the community, the local partner should exploit the situation and organize a number of community activities before and after the partner meeting.
But, once again, networking is also a part of the laboratory work: the young teams should open the doors to the community and establish valuable

collaboration with relevant stakeholders and resources that might support their learning and their media project.
This is one of the great opportunities in laboratory learning, as it offers the young people access to the world of business and labour market. Smartly managed, these networking activities might even lead to more education and job motivation among the young learners.

## ICCN

ICCN is short for the *Intel Computer Clubhouse Network*, the project's third country partner from Boston US.
The partner is a global network of more than 100 Computer Clubhouses in more than 20 different countries across the world and with almost 20 years of experience working with media projects for at-risk youth.
At the same time, the ICCN and its key resources have produced valuable contributions to the understanding of new media based learning didactics for youth at risk. Well-known people are Seymour Papert and Mitch Resnick.
The ICCN will offer lots of valuable, short and precise inspiration material about media didactics for youth-at-risk and at the same time give access to professional impact studies of the clubhouses.
It is the first time the ICCN is involved in a European lifelong learning project, and we are, of course, very excited about this new and unexpected collaboration opportunity.
In one of the project's "laboratory communities" (Salt Catalonia) it has been discussed to establish a genuine clubhouse in the community; and the Danish partner has been working with the establishment of computer clubhouses for almost 10 years.
In conclusion, the project should expect a lot of inspiration and synergy from this computer clubhouse "cluster" in the consortium.
www.computerclubhouse.org
www.sosuaarhus-international.com/LABlearning.htm

## Lessons learned

This term refers to the research activities in the first phase. The project will collect and discuss available knowledge and experience on media laboratories and similar settings for young people, with a special focus on disadvantaged youth as this is a priority in the project and in the lifelong learning program.
We will identify a number of knowledge and experience "clusters" to investigate and learn from, such as the Computer Clubhouse approach, the game based learning approach and similar groups of media approaches for young people.
In parallel, the project will engage in dialogues with young people expected to be involved in the project's laboratory experiments to allow the project to learn from and reflect on the young people's views and ideas about what media based learning might be, and what's not working in the classroom.
These lessons learned will result in a *media laboratory platform* for the 10 months long experimental phase in the project; but the results of the lessons learned will also be documented and presented as valuable contributions in itself from the project.

## Young people's voice

The project must practice what it preaches, and putting the young learners at the centre of the laboratory learning processes should include linking directly to them i the different project phases. Their voices must be heard all along the project and the more involved the teams of young people are the better results can be expected from the project.
Teams of youth-at-risk should be involved in all the key processes in the project: developing visions, discussing media learning, producing material, playing with media and social networks, presenting the results of the project to interested people and playing a key role in the final phases of the project.
LAB*learning* is not only establishing media laboratories, but *is* in itself a media laboratory and must act accordingly. Perhaps the youth teams can learn a lot

from the project, but we are quite sure that the project also can learn a lot from the youth teams.

## Community

The word community can mean many things in the project; a city, a part of a city, a region, a network of institutions, etc.
The important thing is that the project as well as the youth teams should link the activities to resources in the community and in this way create new collaboration infrastructures along the project. The project should create an interest for media laboratory learning among many stakeholders in the community: educations, cultural institutions, private enterprises who acknowledge the value of qualified employees, etc.
Media projects are known to be very good at opening the doors to the community, as many community resources can be put into play in support of the young teams' projects. Sometimes these cross-sector break-troughs lead to lasting and innovative collaborations, highly enriching the community.
The teachers and mentors working with the young people must be capable of guiding the young people towards the community in their projects. This is a challenge for most teachers and mentors, as such activities are not normally included in the classroom activities.
A special and ongoing European project, the Transversal Xploit project, is focusing on such community initiatives in the perspective of developing learning communities.
Key partners in LAB*learning* are also partners in this Xploit project and will make sure that the LAB*learning* activities will benefit to the max from the Xploit project.

## Entrepreneurship

As is widely recognized, there will be fewer public jobs and low-skilled jobs available in Europe in the future. This means that entrepreneurship and user-driven innovation is a very high priority in the Commission's funding programs and in the European policies in general.
Change and "instability" will be a rule and not an exception for most people. Most routine work will end up in the Far East, in America Latina or in Africa. Europe will be under great pressure: *what are we good at in old Europe?*
Entrepreneurship is one of the answers. People, and especially young people, must learn from the first days in kindergarten and school to invent their own job, create new needs and markets and be interested in the risk-taking and adventuring connected to such initiatives.
A great part of the new entrepreneurial initiatives will be linked to media and communication technology.
LAB*learning* and laboratory didactics in general are perfect settings for developing entrepreneurial skills and interests among the young people, and it can be foreseen that especially the non-academic and "un-disciplined" young people will take an interest in such activities.
This means that the entrepreneurial spirit should be highly valued and encouraged in the project's laboratories.

## Mentoring

One of the most complicated aspects of media laboratory didactics is the changing role of teachers and mentors and other "adults" in the learning environments.
The teacher must step back and learn to work as a mentor, a guide, watching and supporting the young teams whenever needed, and paying attention to the learning quality of the activities.
The basic principle is: every action from the teacher or mentor should not solve the problem, but motivate the young learners to solve the problem themselves.
Another basic principle is that the teacher or mentor should not control or organize the laboratory activities, but leave the scene to the young people themselves, again: watching and guiding.

So, one of the challenges to the teachers is to de-construct their traditional role as educators.
On the other hand, new challenges will emerge: contact to experts, contacts to media resources, networking in the community, just to mention a few.
The mentor must learn along with the youth teams, engage herself in experiments and exploration, in media play and in game learning, as well as in the study topics in question.
The teacher is then simply an experienced learner, working side by side with other learners. Sometimes one of the young people demonstrates strong mentoring abilities towards her fellow learners, and in this case this young person should be engaged by the senior mentor or teacher to function as a junior mentor for one or more of the youth teams.
It is important to make clear that these teachers and mentors are NOT expected to be media experts. Not at all. Their primary concern should be the quality and progression of the learning, not the media tools involved in the learning. But, on the other hand, the mentor should take a *great interest* in exploring the learning potentials of media, social gaming and collaborative platforms.
This is one of the reasons for the importance of community networking: the mentor must be able to involve media experts from the community, if needed, but is not expected to carry out the media coaching herself.
The project will provide inspiration and guidance to the laboratory partners in the first phase of the project to prepare them for the laboratory challenges to come.

## Outcomes

Projects like LAB*learning* often end up flowing around in their own circles. Laboratory experiments can go on forever, and perhaps they should, but not in a European project.
This means that the final outcomes, or *products*, are very important in the project. They are important at all levels of the project.
Educators are often not very fond of *products*, as they prefer to be engaged in pedagogical *processes*.
But this is one of the innovations in laboratory didactics: the idea that working towards producing results that other people need and can use will increase the quality of the learning processes.
Therefore the project as well as the laboratories should be highly product-oriented. The project is obliged to produce outcomes, as this is a part of the contract with the EACEA and the Commission, but also because it is our mission to contribute to the development of new learning settings for young people in Europe. This can only happen through the production of concrete and valuable outcomes.
The young teams should in the same way be guided towards the importance of producing outcomes. The media laboratory is experimenting, explorative and creative, but none of these things makes much sense if they do not lead to concrete products to show to other people, to be made available to other people, to demonstrate your own capacity and talent – and in general to visualize your learning process and what it can be used for.
Therefore we need to promote a strong product-oriented spirit in LAB*learning* in support of the young people's learning and in support of the project itself and its mission.

*To be continued along the project…*