THE EU COMMENIUS

LAB*learning*
Project

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Youth Voice Guide

In phase 1 LAB practicing partners should make the first contacts to the groups of young people, who will be involved in the LABlearning activities – or to similar groups of young people.
The aim of Youth Voice is to link closely to the young people themselves *throughout the entire project*.

WHY?

We must practice what we preach.
It is not useful in a project like LABlearning to deduct the laboratory and learning principles from a theoretical framework and then force these principles upon the youth groups.
Therefore the project will link to the needs and interests of disengaged youth in two ways: through the Lessons Learned and through the Youth Voice.
There are several phases of the Youth Voice in the project, and the first one is at the very beginning of the project: in phase 1.

WHAT?

The idea is to set up one or more informal dialogues with individuals or groups. Holding dialogues at group level (small groups, not large!) is recommended, since individual exchanges would be more demanding on partners' time. This is however up to your choice.
It will be nice to address young people who are going to be involved in the LABlearning activities later on, but if this is not possible the dialogues might be carried through with young people from the same target group. Again, the local partner might choose to do both!
A minimum target in terms of participants should be 10 young people in each location of the future LAB experiments. We need such a number in order to present Youth Voice evidence as something more than just a few anecdotic accounts.

What we expect is an open and opening informal dialogue with the young people, not an academic dialogue, not filling in questionnaires, but an open and exploring dialogue on learning.
We need to hear what the young people say – also if they, what can be expected, in the beginning do not really have anything to say about learning. *The dialogue should encourage them to see and imagine learning as something that might be different from the classroom.*
For this reason, we propose a two-steps process. In the first step – face-to-face meetings - the young people will be likely to gradually grasp what we want to know/discuss with them and will be encouraged to share and confront their views and feelings among them and with the LABLearning partner. At the end of the meeting (but this might be announced from the start) they will be invited to take some time for reflecting and documenting "key messages" they want to give us, also in the light of the meeting's discussion (more on this later).

Especially with young people still attending school, it might prove difficult to keep the "content issue" entirely neutral. A quick test performed with students in Reggio Emilia revealed that the questions where "learning" is mentioned (e.g. Guiding Questions 4 and 5 below) are either considered too vague ("what do you mean with 'learning'? Learning what?" we were asked) or are understood as referring to school classes, content, methods (certain curriculum subjects, using books or not etc.).

So, we will need to clarify during the dialogues that we are mostly interested in understanding the HOW of the learning process rather than the WHAT, i.e. its specific content. The purpose of the dialogues is to drive the young participants out of the usual "curriculum-study-school" perspective into a more open, imaginative "personal interests-learning/exploring-in whatever manner" perspective, *and the role ICT and media could play in it*. We hope the participants will enrich this latter perspective with their own ideas and views; examples and wishes.

Guiding Questions

In order for the dialogues to develop along broadly similar lines and to provide support to some partners, teachers or mentors who might need it, we provide the following list of Guiding Questions.

Please be aware that the way you put these questions might vary considerably from the expression forms used in this paper. A question can be put in many different ways and should be very *context sensitive*.

The context must be very informal!

And anonymity should be an option, if so wished by the young people.

Also, we don't believe that you can really go through all the individual questions during a dialogue, as there are just too many. So we group the questions under titles which make explicit the "ultimate aim" of each set of them. It will up to you to select and articulate the specific questions as you feel more appropriate.

Part 1 -Current situation and experience in the "traditional school" perspective

Perceived strength and weaknesses of the (current/recent past) school/education situation

1) *How to you feel being a student here?*
2) *Do you like being a student; do you like what you are doing?*
3) *How do you feel about being in a class and about the teaching?*

What/how do you like to learn things + perceived personal strengths/abilities?

4) *What kind of "learning" do you like; what kind do you not like? Why?*
5) *What kind of activities in the school do you prefer?*
6) *What do you feel you are good at and not so good at?*
7) *Are there things you really like or that you are good at that you cannot work on in the school?*

Current use and desired/potential use/knowledge of digital tools/media

8) *Do you like using computers, mobiles, internet and things like that?*
9) *What are you using these things for?*
10) *Have you tried to work with computers in other ways, like more for learning something, more challenging?*
11) *Would you like to use more technology in school, and for what?*
12) *Would you like to learn more about computer programs, video, animation or things like that? Why?*

Part 2 - Beyond the "traditional school" perspective

Learning elsewhere and learning differently: does it happen, could it happen?

13) *Do you think you are learning anything outside the school?*
14) *(in case of negative answer) Do you think you could learn something if you were not in a classroom?*
15) *Can you think of other ways of learning things?*

Could this different perspective be brought into the school, and how? Ideas, suggestions, desires…

16) *If you could choose, how would you like to work in the school?*

17) *How would that be good for you, why would it make you interested?*
18) *Would you like to be involved in such projects, like working more with computers, multimedia, etc.? Why?*
19) *Would you like to work more with computers, video, animation, etc. after school? What kind of things? Where?*
20) *If there were no "teachers", how would you learn something in school?*
21) *Would you like to try to organize the things in school without a "teacher"?*
22) *What would make you like "learning"?*

Leading to post-meeting documentation
23) *Do you want to talk more about all this later? How can we do that?*
24) *Would you like to describe what you have said with some kind of media? Like what? How would you like to do that?*

WHEN?

The dialogues should take place and be documented no later than mid April. The dialogues should be fully available to the partners well before the second partner meeting.
NB. Remember to ask the young people permission to publish the documentation on the project website.

HOW?

One or two adults engaged in the project invite the young people to talk about school, being a student, the classroom, the teachers, and what they think about all this, and especially how it might be different? The Guiding Questions above should help in this.
If the young people have nothing to say, it might be because you are not asking them the proper questions – or perhaps you are doing it like a teacher!!

Adults' presence and role in the meetings
Adults working with the young people (teachers, mentors, whatever…) can be present in the dialogue (they are highly likely to request this), but they should not be left alone to run the meeting. At least one LABlearning partner should participate and actually "guide" the discussion. We need someone that has a deep understanding of the purpose of the Youth Voice "operation" and that can guide the interaction towards its intended aims.

About recording the exchanges during the meeting and afterwards
Some adults involved might prefer not taking notes during the dialogues, whereas others would rather do it. We recommend talking about this with the young people at the beginning and agree with them about whether and how to record anything DURING the dialogue with photos, video or by taking notes.

For sure, the young people should be invited to express what they have said with whatever media they prefer also AFTER the meeting. A clear DEADLINE should be given for this - one week might be enough.
Such post-meeting activity would be extremely useful for documentation purposes and because even in small groups some people might refrain from speaking or from thoroughly expressing their views, so having a "second chance" to do this on their own might produce more interesting and authentic narratives. Of course, we cannot oblige anyone to do it, but we should strongly encourage participants in the dialogues to produce such follow-up contributions.

For this, after raising the issue with guiding questions 23 and 24, the message should be "We would very much appreciate if you could provide us with some additional and/or more precise views, ideas, comments etc. about the things that you feel are most important among those that we discussed today".
Remember to ask the young people permission to publish any documentation from the dialogues on the project website.

RESULTS
- organising the dialogues' output

Since the dialogues will most likely produce disparate materials, we propose the following structuring and processing of the dialogues' outputs so as to make it easier to analyse and consolidate them.

<u>Dialogue Report</u>

The adults participating in the dialogues are expected to write a short report in English, based on their notes and/or memories and on any documentation produced by the young people.
The report should have three parts.

1. Info about the meeting
1) Location, date and duration
2) Number of participants and general demographics (male/female; age; migration background?)
3) Any general feature characterizing/qualifying the group (all from same school class; new/old members of a youth centre etc.)
4) Especially in the case of a school setting, key figures (or qualitative comments) about school attendance by meeting participants (how many regularly go to class or skip them; how many are low performers, are "repeating" a year etc.)
5) Who/how many adults attended the meeting
A short description + some evaluation comments could also be added about how the dialogue developed: overall climate and attitudes of participants; any conflict/difficult moment; etc. etc. This would be useful for interpreting and contextualising the dialogue's results.

2. Adults' accounts of key dialogue's outcomes
The main content of the report should be what the adults perceived as the most interesting/relevant things said by the young people during the meeting.
We are NOT envisaging that "answers" are given to each individual question, but rather they should be given to the broader questions/topics that have been articulated and addressed during the dialogue.
In order to enhance the structure of this report/account and to make the dialogues' results more comparable across sites, we suggest that the report's

writer could follow the titles/topics of the guiding questions, by trying to reply to some closed options for each of them (high level answers) and then adding some qualitative/informative comments:

Q. 1 1-3: Perceived strength and weaknesses of the (current/recent past) school/education situation

Please summarize what is the prevailing student/young peoples' opinion about their school and their student experience.

First select one of the following options and then provide a more qualitative description.

⮞ The opinions of most participants are negative
⮞ The opinions of most participants are positive
⮞ Some participants have a prevailing positive opinion and others a negative one
⮞ Participants mostly have a mixed/balances opinion; they see both negative and positive aspects

Qualitative observations:
Free text ⇒

Q. 4-7: What/how do you like to learn things + perceived personal strengths/abilities

Please summarize what is the prevailing student/young peoples' opinion about their day-by-day learning experience at school.

First select one/more of the following options and then provide a more qualitative description.

⮞ Most participants enjoy the activities they do at school
⮞ Most participants do not enjoy the activities they do at school
⮞ Participants are divided on this aspect (some are positive, some negative)
⮞ Participants mostly have a mixed/balances opinion; they see both negative and positive aspects
⮞ Most participants feel that they cannot do at school the things they like best or are good at
⮞ Most participants feel that they can do at school the things they like best or are good at

Qualitative observations:
Free text ⇒

Q. 8-12: Current use and desired/potential use/knowledge of digital tools/media

Please summarize what is the prevailing student/young peoples' situation with regards to current and desired/potential use of digital tools/media.

First select one/or more of the following options and then provide a more qualitative description.

⮞ Most participants use computers, mobiles, internet etc. regularly
⮞ Most participants do not use computers, mobiles, internet etc. regularly
⮞ Participants are polarized between intensive and low ICT users
⮞ Most participants usually use computers etc. only for recreational reasons with no specific purpose
⮞ Most participants use computers etc. not only for general entertainment, but also with a specific purpose: media creation (blog, video…) , art creation (music, graphic, …) , computer programming …
⮞ Most participants are aware about the potential of computers, media and internet
⮞ Most participants are not aware about the potential of computers, media and internet
⮞ Participants are divided between high and low awareness of ICT potential
⮞ Most participants would like to use and learn more about computer programs, video etc.
⮞ Most participants would not like to use and learn more about computer programs, video etc.

- Participants are divided about more ICT use/learning (some very keen, others not interested)

Qualitative observations:
Free text ⇒

Q. 13-15: Learning elsewhere and learning differently: does it happen, could it happen?
Please summarize what is the prevailing student/young peoples' opinion with regards to traditional class-based education and alternative approaches.
First select one/or more of the following options and then provide a more qualitative description.
- Most participants think that they learn almost nothing outside the school
- Most participants think that they learn something outside the school
- Most participants think that they learn a lot outside the school
- Participants are divided about learning outside the school
- Participants have no idea about other ways of learning things
- Participants have a lot of ideas about other ways of learning things

Qualitative observations:
Free text ⇒

Q. 16-22: Could this different perspective be brought into the school and how? Ideas, suggestions, desires…
Please summarize what is the prevailing student/young peoples' opinion with regards to non-traditional learning approaches, and the potential use of media.
Answers in this section are particularly difficult to summarize, except for the following three aspects. Please select one/or more of the following options and then provide a more qualitative description.
- Most participants are willing/interested to work more with computer, media etc.
- Most participants do not want to work more with computers, media etc.
- Participants are divided about working more with computers, media, etc.
- Most participants would like to use computers etc. also after school time
- Most participants would not like to use computers etc. also after school time
- Participants are divided about working more with computers etc. after school time
- Most participants would like to experiment learning without a teacher in school
- Most participants would not like to experiment learning without a teacher in school
- Participants are divided about experimenting learning without a teacher in school

Qualitative observations:
Free text ⇒

Q. 23-24: Leading to post-meeting documentation
- Most participants do not want to use media to express their point of views
- Most participants want also to use media to express their point of views
- Some participants express their point of views better with media than in a group dialog.

Qualitative observations:
Free text ⇒

SYNTHESIS
- in English of young people's produced documentation

The report should also include a brief written synthesis/presentation of any documentation produced by the young people. Since this material (text, video etc.) will be in the native language of each country, without such processing the other partners will not be able to understand it. This can be done in two ways:

〉 Assuming that not too many young people will provide such input, partners could prepare a short synthesis of each documentation item. Not a full translation of whatever is written or expressed (too much work), but a summary of the key messages expressed by the young people, as they are subjectively perceived by the reporting staff. Again, such key messages should be related to the titles-broader questions/topics of the guiding questions list. Along with content information, for each documentation item it would help to have a short profile of the author (skipping names, we need age, sex, and whatever additional information is deemed useful). The issue of full anonymity is tricky here, because those who will collect the young people's documentation likely already know each person; besides, any recorded video or voice will likely reveal the author, at least to other members of the local group. On the other hand, we could guarantee the full removal of names and any other "critical" information when the documentation is published (if the authors agree with the publishing)

〉 In case many/all young people decide to provide some documentation of their views after the meeting, it might be too lengthy to prepare a synthesis of each item and we would suggest that just a selection of key messages is extracted and put into the report

POST SCRIPTUM

Please allow a few general comments to the Youth Voice and to the Guide:

Some people like very structured approaches, some prefer more free and open approaches. Please feel free to use the Guide in ways that you feel serve the purpose of the activity best.

Please regard the Youth Voice activities not as isolated project tasks, but as one of more ways to establish a community of reflection with groups of disengaged young people that should be carried on throughout the entire project duration, and should deliver important input to the project and its experiments and final outcomes.
You might, then, regard the ongoing Youth Voice activities as a kind of reflection dimension in the project.

You are very welcome to identify interesting challenges during the youth dialogues that you believe the project should pay attention to and work with. We should be open to surprising and unexpected contributions from the young people and from the dialogues.

In general the Youth Voice is one of more ways to link all project activities closely to the young people themselves, thus avoiding the traditional: *we speak ABOUT them…* approach.