3. RadioActive101: Adapting the 'space' of radio as participatory media to promote inclusion, informal learning and employability

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## Introduction: radio as participatory media

This chapter describes how the 'whole space' of the radio production process has been adapted, following a participatory media approach, to function as a motivating and innovative pedagogy that promotes the informal learning of 21st century skills. This has been achieved with the help of two Community Action Research projects, namely RadioActive UK and RadioActive Europe, that have been funded by the Nominet Trust in the UK and the EC Lifelong Learning Programme, respectively.

The RadioActive model: linking inclusion, informal learning and employability

The RadioActive101 model is an ambitious and relatively wide-ranging approach to participatory media that *combines inclusion, informal learning and employability through creatively articulating the processes, practices and technologies associated with the 'whole space' of radio*. Key to this is that the operations of this space are catalysed through the need to produce a quality broadcast according to a pre-defined timetable. Or, putting this in a more everyday vernacular, the 'buzz' of creating and broadcasting radio shows creates an engaging and motivating framework to develop and marshal the requisite digital media, communicative and organisational skills and practices that are implicit in radio production and broadcasting.

Central to the whole approach is the notion of "learning by doing" that is theoretically informed through a synthesis of emancipatory learning through "lived experience" that was proposed by Paulo Freire (Freire, 1970), Vygotsky's notion of scaffolding and learning within zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), socio-technical design (Ravenscroft *et al*., 2012) and
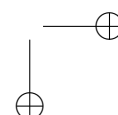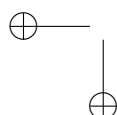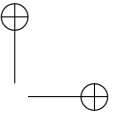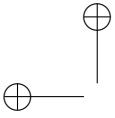
learning through dialogic and dialectic dialogue (Ravenscroft *et al.*, 2007). A simple way to conceive of the way these are articulated is to think of the 'whole space' of radio production and implementation being a nuanced "learning lab", that articulates these theoretical underpinnings in terms of the learning achieved through practically producing radio, and 'accrediting'[1] the processes in terms of the EC key competencies for Lifelong Learning that are recognised through a system of electronic badges. The way in which 'the badges process' in particular aims to motivate learning is given below. These are a relatively recent development within the project that is currently being implemented, but has not yet been fully evaluated. However, their rationale and design are particularly important from a learning and motivation perspective.

RadioActive101 has designed a set of 39 Mozilla Open Badges (see http://radioactive101.eu and Aurwarter *et al.* in this collection) that are being awarded. These cover technical, journalistic and organisational competencies. Each of these badges is linked to several observable real-life activities that must be completed to earn the respective badge. Activities are evaluated by learning facilitators and experienced senior education practitioners at each site. Also, the whole Badge process, from negotiation to awarding, is deliberately open and encourages motivational dialogues between learners, facilitators and senior practitioners. Badges come in Bronze, Silver and Gold to motivate the learner to achieve higher levels. Additionally, the possibility to easily publish Open Badges to Facebook and Twitter has a motivating effect for the many learners who are active in these networks. The modular, specific and profession-oriented character of the RadioActive101 badge system is designed for bottom-up usage in informal learning contexts where the learner decides which badges they are motivated to strive for.

The practical processes that are involved in the RadioActive model which lead to the badge acquisition are: *recruiting and engaging* participants (or *radio-activists* as we call them) who see how RadioActive101 is relevant to their lives; *negotiating the roles* that the radio-activists play, from the range of radio production and broadcast roles; *training and scaffolding* in radio production; '*learning by doing*' of radio production that is facilitated and orches-

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[1] We accept that the notion of "accrediting" informal learning is a contentious issue, but we use the term deliberately loosely here as a description of a procedure in the learning process, and not as reference to formal accreditation procedures.
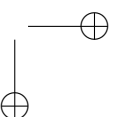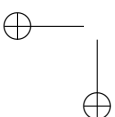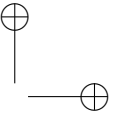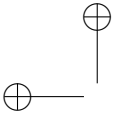
trated through scaffolding; the *planning and creation* of show content and related promotional materials; *broadcasting of live shows* that are then archived; and *reflective and critical debriefs* on shows linked to planning the next show.

Linking RadioActive101 badges to EU Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning or to the ESCO European Skills Competences, Qualifications and Occupations Framework (https://ec.europa.eu/esco/home) points the learner to the broader context and opens up further perspectives for lifelong learning.

All the above is concisely captured by our project slogan, which states:

"RadioActive101: Learning through radio, learning for life!"

Summarising, the RadioActive Model links attested notions of learning and informal learning to real-life situations covered by RadioActive101 programming. These are articulated through the development and application of digital media literacies and 21C skills, that are in turn accredited in ways that are relevant to gaining employment or further education.

Radioactive101: Its implementation and evaluation

The European Partners are actively developing, implementing and running the national RadioActive "stations" (or hubs). We use the word "station" circumspectly to describe our national internet radio initiatives, as the traditional concept of a radio station is deliberately questioned by RadioActive's radical approach to educational intervention. Its low-cost, extensibility and sustainability are key factors in the success of the project. It is realised through the application of state-of-the-art thinking in Community Action Research, Socio-technical design (*e.g.* Ravenscroft *et al.*, 2012) and Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL), and is described in detail in Ravenscroft *et al*. (2014).

The implementation thus far is realised through five national hubs (websites) and one international hub (website) that provides access to the national ones (see http://radioactive101.eu). Over five hundred radio-activists have participated thus far, with many of these being constantly involved since their first broadcasts (almost two years in some cases). Five excluded and disenfranchised groups have been participating so far – young people linked to youth organisations, older people (typically over 50 years old), schoolchildren from schools with high drop-out rates, higher education students linked
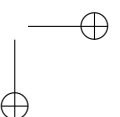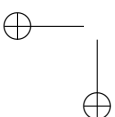
to church outreach organisations, and learning disabled young people. These radio-activists to-date have engaged in over 2,000 hours of preparation and broadcasting which has led to 60,142 page views and 28,687 unique web-hits/listeners.

The following section briefly presents the key evaluation findings so far, that are later reflected upon from a motivational perspective.

An early evaluation of RadioActive101 (Ravenscroft *et al.*, 2013) showed its impact during a pilot phase in the UK, that was a four-month intervention within a youth organisation, that was striking. During this time: the number of new young people attending the centre increased from 5 to 28 (approx. 560% increase[2]); more at-risk young people were retained, increasing from 2 to 10 (approx. 500% increase); and, perhaps most striking was that the number of young people moving from NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) to EET (in Education, Employment and Training), increased from 3 to 24 (approx. 800% increase). The trend of these improvements also "accelerated" during the later months as pre-recorded and live shows were broadcast. Although these numbers are relatively small, they are show an important pattern within a challenging youth work context, and clearly demonstrate the positive social impact of RadioActive101 at one site. Of course, these figures do not represent the outcomes of a well-defined empirical study, that was not possible at this early stage of the project, but both the Director of the youth organisation and the youth worker who was centrally involved stated that these improvements were due to 'the radio project' and not other activities within the youth centre. These early findings inspired the ongoing work in the UK (funded by the Nominet Trust) that led to the European version of the project (funded by the EC LLP). The later evaluation of RadioActive Europe is described below, with a focus on young people in the UK and Portugal.

A second evaluation of RadioActive101, working with young people in two countries, the UK and Portugal, has shown strikingly positive and complementary findings. A study in the UK (Edmonds *et al.*, 2013) was conducted first, as a "prototype" evaluation for the other international partners. It had a representative sample (n=48) of learners and showed the delivery of additional impact and value beyond the informal learning of technical and employability

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[2] We are aware that the numbers given are relatively small, so the percentages given are considered strongly. indicative rather than exact measures.
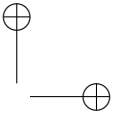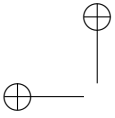
skills. Additionally they found improvements in confidence, self-esteem and general well-being of individuals, groups and organisations involved with the project. Indeed the necessity of, and model for, developing a "platform" of improved "well-being" prior to and alongside the informal learning of digital literacy and employability skills was a key preliminary finding of the project. It appears that once our excluded groups developed the confidence and competence to perform activities they previously thought were beyond them, such as the production and broadcasting of live radio content, they seem then empowered to learn many other things and to develop a number of key competencies[3]. In the UK evaluation, confidence levels were assessed by questionnaires, which identified that, on average (across different groups), over 50% of respondents felt they were more confident after being involved with RadioActive over a period of time. The data across a range of mixed evaluation methods using both recorded interviews and questionnaires highlighted the significant impact the project had on the skills and social outcomes for these young people as well as on their well-being. For example, the scores on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale identified that all respondents scored in the normal or above normal range except two. The evaluation also highlighted the skills acquisition that participating in the project had brought about.

The evaluation conducted by partners in Porto (Portugal) was a pilot that used the same methodology as the UK as they were working with the same demographic, although their sample size was smaller (n=12). For the purposes of this paper we will present a synthesis of findings from both studies and then consider the implications.

Firstly, as mentioned earlier in the context of the UK groups, both groups noted the importance of developing greater "confidence" and "well-being" within their radio-activists, and that this was a platform for further engagement and skills development. In other words, RadioActive seems not just to be an educational intervention, but there are signs that it is also a positive psychological intervention (in terms of confidence, well-being, dialogue and digital discourse). Secondly, the groups noted wider positive impact than was initially envisaged. Whilst improvements in the informal learning of 21st century skills leading to potentially greater employability was expected, the

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[3] Note, this is not apparently selection bias amongst those participating in RadioActive, as youth workers have noted that deciding to participate in other activities does not lead to the same level of improvements in well-being.
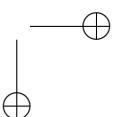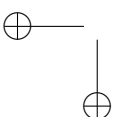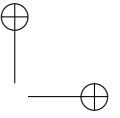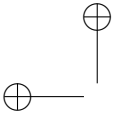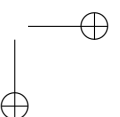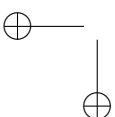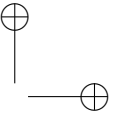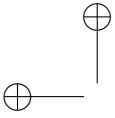
deeper psychological improvements within individuals and groups alongside broader organisational and social improvements and developments were not initially envisaged to the degree to which they occurred. These two national groups reported developments in improved communication and literacy skills linked to a greater confidence and propensity to use their voices, with this in turn leading to more competent, confident and coherent group and organisational thinking and communication. Then, building on these improved communicative, digital and media literacy competencies, the youth organisations in particular seemed to, as a "unit", become better organised and drew greater attention to their activities. Thirdly, the groups noted that RadioActive was also a social and/or cultural, intervention, in the sense that it produces positive changes and impact at broader social and cultural levels beyond the organisations in which it is used, *e.g.* putting organisations on the cultural map, attracting attention and involvement from external agencies, and increasing very pragmatic dimensions – such as the capacity to attract further funding (that has happened in the UK and Portugal). Fourthly, in achieving and realising the above, the radio-activist groups felt a clear sense of 'ownership' of their shows, and that they are the central part of, and not "performing for" RadioActive101.

A difference noted between these groups was that the Portuguese young people underlined the benefits of exploiting family structure more, and related to this, engaging an audience that is perceived as a sort of 'outer circle' of potential radio-activists.

Taking these two evaluations of learning, well-being and general experience collectively, we also noted another particularly interesting and positive finding that overarched more specific findings. The radio-activist groups seemed inspired to have ambitious and "high-minded" thoughts through being a part of the medium of RadioActive radio. It seems that, potentially, the RadioActive model can inspire "dreams, curiosity and imagination" in a powerful and yet practical way (through devising and performing the shows). These ambitious ideas can then motivate the acquisition of conceptual and communication skills, related to collaborative and critical or creative discourses and voices, that are in turn expressed through acquiring concrete employability and technical skills, such as things like team-working, sound recording and editing. In other words, RadioActive seems to have the ca-

pacity to inspire expressing 'dreams and ambitions' in ways that can then be realised as concrete and quality radio and media content.

Concluding comments: RadioActive101, motivation and 21st century learning

The evaluation of RadioActive101 shows it to be accepted and successful as an ongoing educational intervention promoting the informal learning of disenfranchised groups, in a number of European countries. The motivational and affective factors that are in play during the RadioActive processes are clearly central to this and intertwined with virtually all of the learning activities. These motivational factors, however, do not easily breakdown into notions like intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and the like. Instead, the motivational landscape of RadioActive101 demonstrates complex relationships between learners' conceptions of themselves, their actual or perceived social and cultural positioning, and what is possible and desirable in a world that requires increasingly, what we call 21st century skills. RadioActive101 in particular shows that learning activities are motivating because they are both attractive (or cool) and directly relevant to learners' lives, and also when they provide a clear and tangible path to personal and community improvement. In a sense, this is simple, if learning has the perceived and tangible capacity to change our lives for the better – then it will have a good chance of being motivating. Conversely, if the learner doesn't understand why they are learning, and whether it will matter, they are unlikely to be motivated by it. And although this seems amazingly self-evident, the latter occurs far too frequently in traditional educational settings.

Acknowledgements
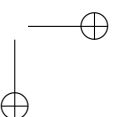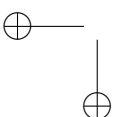
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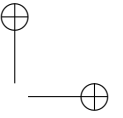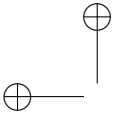
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