

**RadioActive:**

***Inclusive Informal Learning and Employability through International Internet Radio***

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Addressing how disenfranchised young people can be included and engaged within relevant work-related vocational learning paths is one of the key challenges within the UK and across the globe. Weakening social and economic conditions linked to cut-backs in education is arguably producing a 'lost generation' of young people who are excluded from education and training, particularly within the UK and Europe. The challenge of including, engaging and educating these marginalised young people, in innovative and low-cost ways, so that they can become active and engaged citizens, who contribute to legitimate economies, is a substantive problem linked to research priorities within the UK and EU.

Our RadioActive initiative addresses these challenges directly, through two related Community Action Research projects, one focussed in London and the UK (RadioActive UK, funded by Nominet Trust), and the other focussed on the broader European landscape (RadioActive EU, funded by the EU Lifelong Learning Programme). Collectively, these projects provide a broad international application of internet radio for inclusion, informal learning and employability.

The project is implementing a radical approach to conceptualising, designing and developing internet radio and social media for informal learning within 'lived communities' through 'wrapping around' existing community organisations and networks (including youth organisations, schools, parish outreach organisations and disability groups). It embodies the key pedagogical ideas of Paulo Freire (1970) and his notion of transformational (or emancipatory) learning through lived experience. This is achieved in the UK context through embedding the radio and content production within the existing practices of established youth organisations. The internet radio is used to catalyse, connect and communicate developmental practices within these existing organisations, leading to rich personal and organisational learning, change and development. In particular,

exploring rich and varied personal and community identities, and promoting their articulation, expression and positive transformation, are pivotal to RadioActive. It also embodies a new approach to social media design - that is conceived as an intervention in existing digital, and mixed-reality, cultures. Hence, the application of our approach captures, organises and legitimises the digital practices, content production and critical and creative potential of disenfranchised young people to provide a new and original community voice. This voice combines the intimacy, relevance and 'touchability' of local radio with the crowd sourcing power of social media.

The UK project had an initial setup phase of 6 months, that included: problematisation (or 'understanding in order to change') of the community organisations, their members and their contexts; installing the 'lightweight' radio and music technology; devising a suitable Governance and Editorial Model (GEM) ; and, training in - technology, radio practices and legal and regulatory issues. The training was particularly innovative, in that it was 'backward engineered' from show ideas, which involved weekly modular training linked directly to the production practices that led to shows.

The second phase of the project, that was interlinked with further training activities following the model above, ran for 5 months, and involved learning how to make radio shows 'in action' and led to 5 shows (2 pre-recorded and 3 live). This involved 16 youth workers and academics across two youth organisations facilitating 55 young people to make and perform the radio shows 'themselves'. Early findings that assessed the impact of the internet radio are unusually striking.

At one youth organisation the radio production activity acted like an intervention into their youth work practices between Oct 12 and Feb 13 (5 months), when a newly employed Youth Worker started focusing on radio as one of his main projects. During this time: the number of new young people attending the centre increased from 5-28 (approx. 560% increase); more at-risk young people were retained, increasing from 2 – 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 – 24 (approx. 800% increase). Also the trend of these improvements 'accelerated' during the most recent months as pre-recorded and live shows were broadcast (3 in total).

A more specific intervention can be mapped to the activities of 10 young people from a local Academy on a two week work placement from 28 Jan – 8 Feb, most of whom focussed on RadioActive. These young people: contributed to and participated in a 3 hr live show on 8th Feb 13 (approx. 12.20 to 15.20) ; turned up every day and nobody dropped out, with their teacher remarking "I can't believe they're all turning up"; became interested in radio related activities, such as writing poetry and rap through attending a class called 'WriterZ and ScribeZ' (cf. table tennis and computer games); some came into Youth Centre at weekends to do school work; and, 7 are continuing with RadioActive at the youth organisation after placement (despite potential danger related to post-code 'wars').

Two things are particularly exciting about these findings. Firstly, these are clear early signs of RadioActive leading to concrete positive personal and social change. Secondly, the intervention of the internet radio has significant secondary effects, creating more interest in a youth centre generally and promoting writing activities that were previously unpopular. Clearly, our initial vision of the internet radio acting as both a glue and a catalyst for developing existing youth work activities is being borne out and is clearly illustrated.

This talk will present: our original rationale and pedagogical approach; the new learning design methodology linked to the resulting RadioActive platform; some exemplar broadcasts and content; and, the early findings that give insights into the degree to which RadioActive has led to personal and community learning and development within participating youth organisations.

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