

## **Futurelab publication launch**

### **Designing educational technologies for social justice handbook**

*2 April 2008*

#### **Notes on a speech made by Lyndsay Grant, Learning Researcher**

The handbook that we are launching today was developed as we were thinking about the ways in which digital technologies can be used to support greater educational equality and social justice.

I'd like to thank Estelle for bringing to the forefront the issue of conversation, which is something that I hope pervades the work in this book. Because really what we're trying to say is that designing educational technologies for social justice involves a conversation between the learners and the teachers. And that needs to be a genuine dialogue, it's not a superficial conversation. It involves really listening, and acting on what you hear, on both sides of the conversation. Really listening is a hard thing to do. It's quite easy to 'consult', but really hearing what people are saying, and understanding what they mean and their motivations for saying that is very difficult.

In our initial research, we found many examples of innovative and effective projects that use digital technologies to construct new approaches to learning, and widen access to learning for groups and individuals who historically have not been served well by mainstream education.

Too often, however, the lessons learned in such projects are not necessarily recorded, or shared – so that others find it hard to learn from previous successes. What we found was that perhaps we are 'letting a thousand flowers bloom' – many different projects starting up and working it out alone, without learning from previous successes and what had worked in other contexts.

Many of these successful projects work well because they were deeply embedded in the specific needs and local context of the learners they were trying to serve. When we're thinking about social justice, we need to think about how education can meet the needs of very diverse groups of people. We often hear that our current education system is based on a 'factory' model where we provide the same experience to everyone. What we're saying now is that not everyone fits into the same system, people have different and diverse needs. The problem then, is how do you transfer that information from one context to another? And so what we've tried to do with this book is look at the underlying principles of designing projects for social justice. We know that we necessarily and easily simply take one project from one place and 'scale it up and roll it out' to everybody else. We wanted to look at the underlying principles about how to *design* projects, that we could take from these successful examples, and apply across the board.

One of the best ways of making sure that a project meets the needs of its users is to involve them in the process of designing it. The co-design approach that we've taken sees learners as the experts in their own lives – they are the ones who know best their own context, needs and aspirations. This is not to take away from what I was saying earlier about conversation – it's not simply asking people what they want and going away and doing it. It's about dialogue, and involving them in a more equal power relationship to discuss their learning needs and where they want to go. It links in, therefore, with the personalisation agenda, both in the formal and non-formal sectors.

In order to develop this handbook, we wanted to build on the experience and expertise of existing practitioners and projects. We then also held an intensive two-day workshop

with experts in the fields of technology, user-centred design, education and social justice. We had some intensive, in-depth conversations, that started to uncover some of these underlying principles for how to go about designing projects such that they really would meet the needs of the users they were trying to engage with.

In the spirit of user-centred design, we also carried out consultation with the potential users of the handbook – discovering what they wanted from such a resource and how they would use such a text. The text was also informed by an Opening Education report that reviewed the theory, literature and project evidence around social justice, user-centred design and education. This will be published in the coming months.

This research process led to the generation of 13 considerations presented in the handbook. These considerations were agreed as essential to any project. They are not prescriptions for what to do and when to do it, but they are issues that are essential to any project in any context, no matter what its aims. Each design group, including participants, learners and users, would need to decide how they were going to respond to these issues within the context of their own aims. These considerations are the core of a design process that would lead to projects using digital technologies to support greater educational equality.

This is supported by a section on practical methods that provides information and guidance on how to involve a diverse range of users in the process of design. This conversation is difficult to have and there are many creative and innovative ways to have it. We were very lucky to have Greg Villalobos and Martin Orton from Bold Creative contributing to that section.

There are also several case studies illustrating both how technologies can play a role in projects promoting educational equality, and demonstrating innovative and creative techniques in which users can be involved in the process of design.

We hope that this handbook will be a valuable resource to people involved in designing their own projects to support education equality using digital technologies. Teachers, practitioners in informal learning, and technology developers should all find useful guidance here.

Organisations involved in funding and commissioning new projects will also be able to use this handbook to ensure methods are used that increase the chance of success for new projects.

Thank you.