THE STORY OF A YOUNG 21ST CENTURY LEARNER

This is a small "story" about how children and young people learn in the 21st century; how they create their own learning spaces and directions, and are able to develop incredible capacity through self-directed and spontaneous methods.

IMMERSED LEARNING DRIVEN BY PASSION

Once upon a time there was a boy somewhere in Europe. He was 11 years old and a boy like so many others.
He went to public school like all the others ones, played a little football and joined some break dancing.
He had a small laptop for school work, some gaming, a little Facebook and things like that.

So, he asked with considerable curiosity: how did you do that?
Until then he had only been "editing" pictures in Word and Power Point for school work, such as re-sizing and changing lightness.

The adult told him the name of the program and that is was not easy to use this program; actually it was only for "experts".
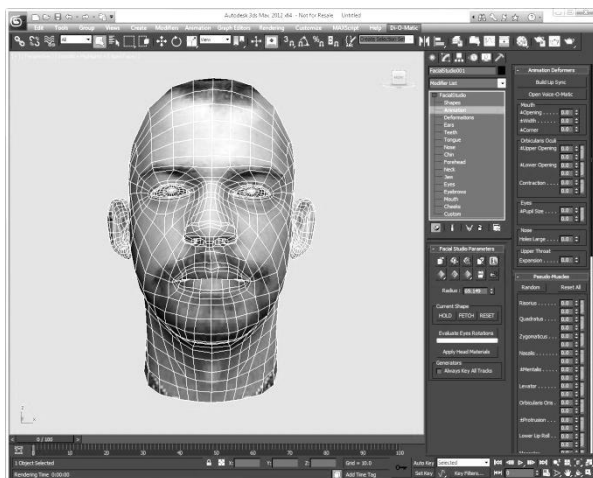
He started his own playing and experimenting with the program, creating small but rather qualified things.

He started talking to some online friends from across the world about how to do this and that.
A lot of virtual dialogues went on…
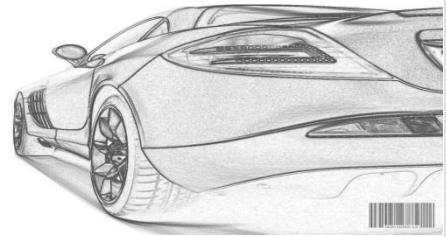
He was doing ok in school, but he was not very interested in most of the school work. Just getting along.

Some day he saw that one of the adults in the family was editing some small graphics in Photoshop for a paper. Nothing special, but still…
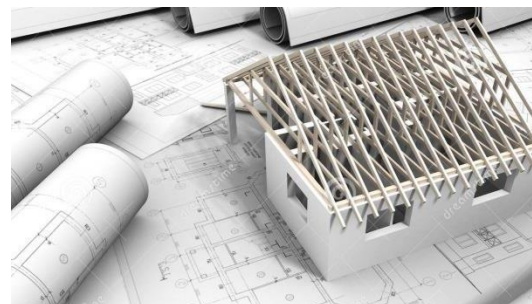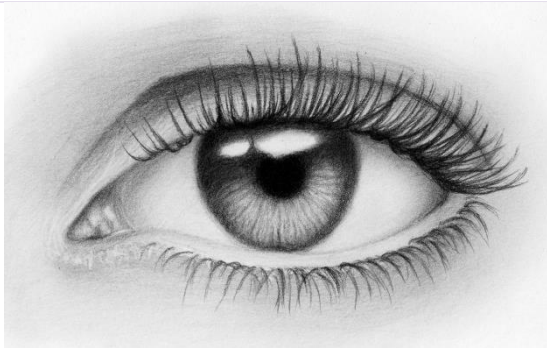

The boy were not impressed with this answer and asked permission to play with the program.

A lot of questions, a lot of guidance…

Then, after some time, the boy managed to find some version of the program and installed it on his own computer.

Then the questions stopped.

Then the boy started to use resources around him, such as friends, family members, friends of family members, and at some point he managed to get some of these people to help him find the programs, or at least different versions of them.

The small laptop was challenged with Flash, 3D Max and similar advanced programs, normally used at higher education level or by experienced computer professionals.
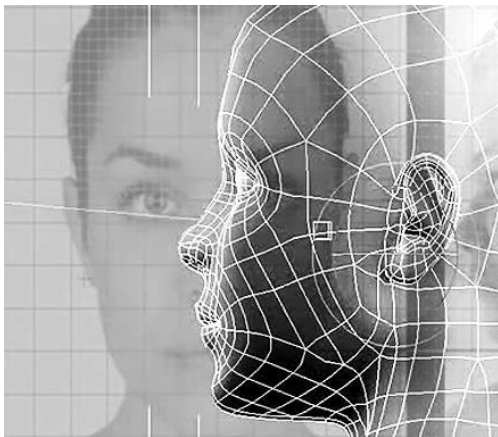
People who know these programs also know that they are not easy to learn and use efficiently. Not at all.
And of course he was blocked every 5 minutes and unable to proceed.
Contrary to discourage him, this actually encouraged him. Because this is precisely what he was always doing in the games: the very core challenge of the games is precisely to overcome obstacles, mostly be finding or mobilizing or creating resources elsewhere in the game to overcome the obstacle and be able to progress in the game.
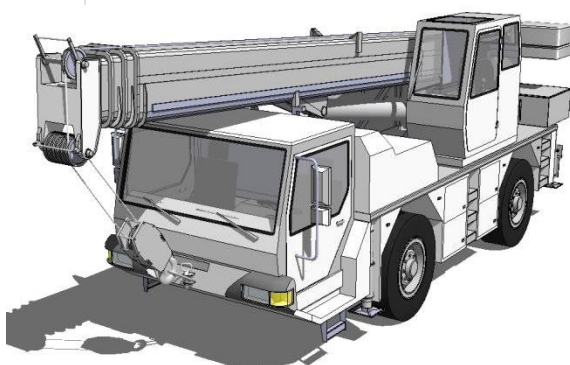
Then one day, new questions.
- I have heard about other programs, like for animation, movie making, 3D designing and things like that. How can I get these programs, 'cause I would like to do that they do in the games…

This time a lot of hesitation from the adults. Actually they didn't know – how to get the programs or how to work with them.

The adults stepped back – they could not help him.

However, that did not matter much, because the 11 years old boy now developed his own self-directed methodology, making him totally independent of support from his local community and family.

He jumped without any form of "respect" or hesitation directly into these advanced programs and started to explore them and create things.

So, no big deal.
After some time the adults around him discovered what he was doing and why he was "disappearing" into his headphones for hours.
Just like in the games he found his tools and resources.
He discovered that YouTube offers thousands of tutorials, giving guidance to all sorts of programs.
So, every time he got stuck – and you do that a lot in programs like 3D Max – he searched and found the tutorials he needed. And on top of that he

started to ask a lot of questions to young experts, and found out that they were more than willing to talk to him and help him.

That was the reason for "disappearing" into the headphones for hours and hours: he was immersed into understanding the tutorials and how they could help him do what he would like to do in the programs.

It was an amazing and totally spontaneous methodology, simple and yet quite advanced for an 11 old boy: you work as far as you can, and when you reach a dead-end, you simple mobilize the learning you need to go on.
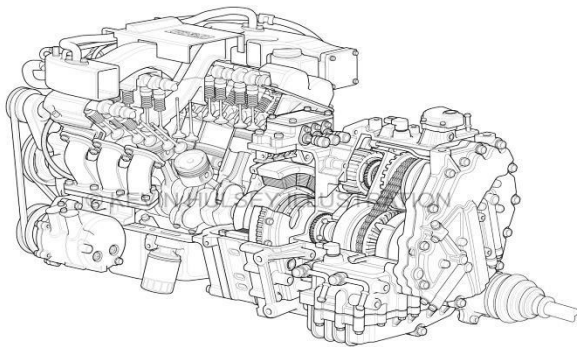
It was definitely not an easy mission for the 11 years old. He often got stuck, frustrated and got angry at the whole world.

He had to deal with geometry, English language (for him a foreign language), mathematics, logic decision-making, complicated planning, computer codes and a lot of other things – at the same time as he made his way into these advanced creative tools.
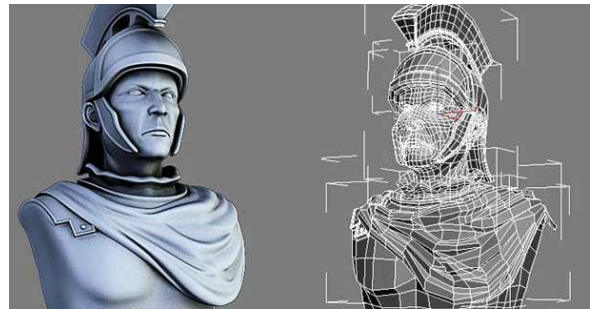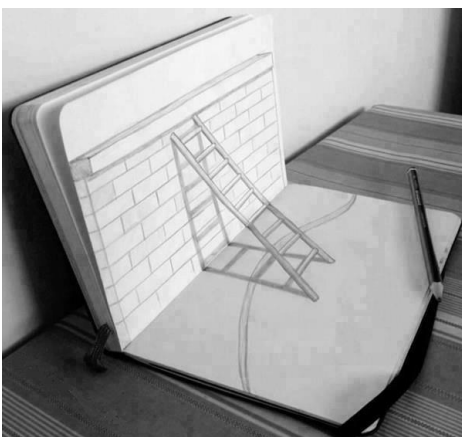
All this took place within a few months, and it became a quite popular dialogue at the dinner table to talk about pixel based and vector based graphics: or rather, it became normal for the boy to teach the adults about what he learned throughout the day.

Not in school, but through his own learning community.

In some of the really big virtual games the players are able to contribute to the gameplay and the game resources to some extent.
So, why not?

If you can produce advanced elements in Photoshop, 3D Max and similar programs, why not contribute considerably to the game universe?
And why not someday create your own games?

This seemed to be his ambition…

This boy never showed that kind of interest in the school work, no matter the subject, no matter the theme or activity. Never.

Why, then, did he immerse and disappear from the earth for hours and days, with nobody telling him what to do?

Because this form of learning was driven by passion!

Passion, endless curiosity, a great need to create his own "things", ambition.

The most remarkable thing in this never ending process is not all the subjects he needed to address and learning, such as geometry and English, but the methodological competences he constantly developed, created and refined.

In fact (returning now to the more discursive form) what he learned are precisely the general competences so highly promoted by for example the European Commission, such as:
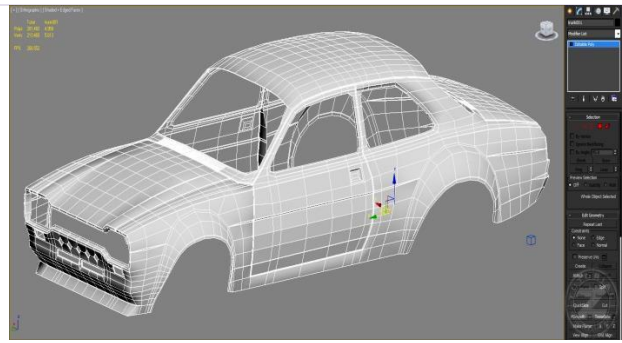
So, for the first time in his life this European boy discovered what immersed learning is.

What it means to desire learning, to push forward and not accept any kind of ultimate obstacle.

It did not happen in his school and it probably will not.

But his future performance in the education system will definitely be impacted from those experiences, deeply impacted.

School is not creating passion, people are.

▸ Learning by creating things
▸ Learning when you need to learn
▸ Entrepreneurial mindset: what you don't have, create it and mobilize resources accordingly
▸ Learning through inner motivation, through passion
▸ Using the most useful and recent technologies
▸ Developing strong methodological skills
▸ Teaming up and source crowding
▸ Ability to organize your own learning
▸ Learning about different subjects as they are relevant to your mission, for example language learning
▸ Developing competences and skills that are useful to all sorts of learning
▸ Creating learning pathways that are relevant to 21st century jobs and work forms
▸ Do not simply consume what others made; create your own
▸ Etc., etc!

In total, this small story is about an amazing learning process.
It is also about the incredible learning resources openly available in the 21st century.
It is also about questioning the so-called "superficial" new generations…

Unfortunately it is also about the total deficit of formal education. The gap between the industrial education system, now covered up by modern pedagogy, and what learning is for the young people in the 21st century (and for the labour markets, by the way), is still increasing, and the education system will never catch up.
This is why I recently have been talking about the need for *deconstruction of education*.
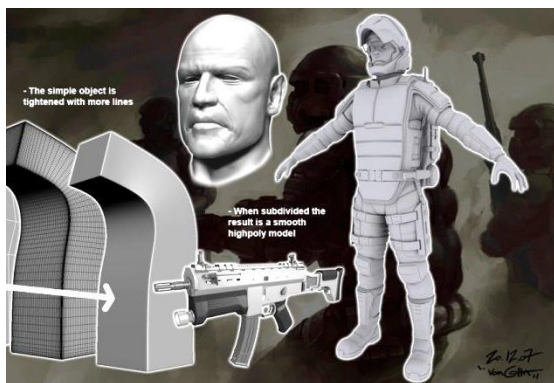
So, either you limit yourself to what happens in the classrooms, or you are on your own.
If you have a football talent, you will join the football club.
If you have 3D animation or robotics talents, where will you go?

This is why we are in the process of creating such opportunities to talented technological youth in the communities, beyond the education system and in collaboration with a variety of community players.
We will try to do that through the available European funding mechanisms.

Some things are, however, missing in the described scenario.
What is missing first of all is this boy's opportunity to link his interest and passion to places in the community, through which they can be taken further and through which they might be linked to real-life missions.
Very few communities across Europe offer such kids the opportunity to engage in more advanced learning and to link their talents to real-life projects and initiatives in collaboration with companies, cultural institutions or whatever it might be.
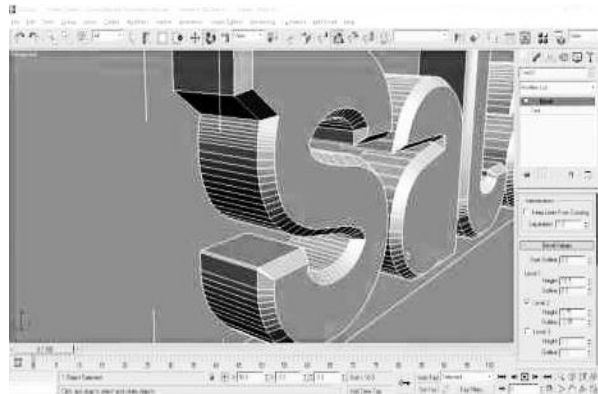
So, basically we are well-off.
We will develop projects and initiatives offering talented youth time and space and resources.

However, the kid is not so well off.
He will have to wait – and to go back to school, trying to survive and subdue his passion until proper resources are available.