

Education by All for the Well Being of Children
Perspectives on ICT and Media
May 20, 2007

Background

A critical component of Education by All for the Well Being of Children is to explore how each learning environment—school, ICT, media, and health—can nurture the well being of children. In this concept piece, we outline key ideas that form the basis for our thinking and identify several next steps that can move the ICT and Media agenda forward.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and Media are powerful learning environments that impact the well being of children and young people. Research is pointing to the fact that, increasingly, ICT and media are shaping the ways young people think, what they learn, the values they hold, their perspectives on the world and the choices they make along the road to adulthood. Research is beginning to look more rigorously at a wide variety of interesting and provocative questions: For example, Is ICT and Media replacing parents and teachers as the most “believable” sources of information? Are young people learning more outside the formal school environment? Does violence in ICT and Media beget violence in real life? Is intensive use of ICT actually altering the physiological construction of the brain? How can computers mediate language differences when peers communicate around the world? Can computer games prompt positive social action in the real world? What are the most effective vehicles for constructing and sustaining online social networks and collaborative efforts? How can technologies be better used to monitor the health of children with chronic diseases or keep track of where children are 24/7? What technologies successfully alter behavior through biofeedback?

Engagement in ICT and Media

Because a critical success factor of EBAWBC is engaging children and young people in the transformation of their learning experiences, it may be helpful to think about three major types of engagement by young people in ICT and Media. At the lowest level of involvement, we see young people as *passive recipients* of information, services, and entertainment delivered by others through TV, videos, radio and other technologies. The source, purpose and content of the messages can range from highly “educational” programming that offers a window on the world and diverse points of view to focused lessons fostering the acquisition of specific attitudes, values and skills to marketing aimed at promoting social actions or purchase of consumer products. There is a body of research that is dedicated to understanding which messages and formats gain and hold the

attention of the “viewer” as well as drawing out correlations between what young people watch and their subsequent behavior.

A middle level of engagement would include those young people who *use the technology or media as tools for learning and skill acquisition* in and out of classroom settings (academic problem solving, technical exploration, interactive gaming, simulations, social interaction in online spaces, instant messaging, ‘live’ observations and research). The research base in this domain generally examines impact in the mental and cognitive arenas, though there is an increasing sophistication in plotting and analyzing the nature of social collaborations, particularly among peers.

The highest level of engagement focuses on young people who use technologies and media to produce *knowledge*. They are generally comfortable inventing their own computer programs and websites and working alone or with others to create games, videos, or audio productions that can influence or impact leaders, policymakers, practitioners and peers in their school, home, community or work . The latest push for "crowdsourcing" from the media industry is one illustration of an incentive for knowledge creation when it invites competition from the “masses” to propose new software solutions or programming that advance current offerings.

It is important to note that although we distinguish between ICT and Media in the initial phase of this research, we expect the lines to be much “fuzzier” as this evolves, since technologies are offering integrated ways to combine elements of both at the point of delivery. For example, the internet can be accessed at a hard-wired computer or a wireless device at a telecentre, a community technology center, in the home, or through a mobile phone, ipod, or other handheld, and produce “on call” downloads of print, audio and visual expressions from many sources around the globe.

Next Steps: Proposed Scope of Activity to Develop the ICT and Media Strategy

To get a clear reading on how young people gauge the importance and impact of ICT and Media in their lives and tap the “know-how” of children, we propose to carry out three important tasks over the next six months.

Develop a cadre of young participants from each country site who “walk” with the developers throughout the process. (June-August for Palestine; August-September for Wales)

The impact of ICT and Media on physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well being can occur at every level of involvement, but is likely to be the strongest at the highest levels of engagement. (which is also tends to be true in face-to-face, real-time situations). As a general rule, we must involve young people in meaningful ways throughout the EBAWBC journey. One idea is to develop a core team of young people who provide continuity along the way and can share their perspectives not only with us but with their peers around the world. This group, which would grow over time, could magnify the power of EBAWBC by participating in thoughtful discourse with other

stakeholders and translating the results into compelling and attractive ways to welcome others (youth and adults) into the space and get them on board.

We will need to take great care in working with youth to identify the criteria for participation and, with them, craft very explicit ways to build on their fascination with technologies, interests, and desire to experiment and play. At the same time, we will need to develop a system of mentors or coaches who work with young people to take advantage of cross-generational experience and provide opportunities to help both groups become thinking partners for one another. Achieving this will enhance the well being of everyone to learn and contribute to action that nurtures well being.

There are many existing organizations that use innovative strategies to help children and youth become agents of change and we should take full advantage of the “hook” that ICT and Media venues provide to catalyze the energy and fresh wisdom of young people. Youth need to be seen as participatory researchers, designers, implementers, and disseminators of the ideas and products that emerge. In short, they need to be vested stakeholders who co-create with us and share responsibility for the outcomes. As they “graduate from certain roles, they can maintain status as alumnae who continue to contribute. Think of this as a lifetime of connections that are always welcoming new waves of the next generation into the process.

Conduct a literature and human resources search (May and June)

An important step for EBAWBC is to construct the ICT and Media segment of the Voices of Children Survey. To do that, we need to do a scan of existing research, reach out to appropriate partners, and define the new territory that is unique to our initiative.

The purpose of the search will be threefold: (1) Understand what is already known about the correlates of ICT and Media and each element/indicator of well being—physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual—as defined by the UEF Well Being Framework (including the relationship between access or lack of access and each indicator of well being). This will help us identify the hypotheses that frame our investigation; (2) identify any reliable, valid or authentic instruments (surveys, focus group guidelines, interview guidelines, observations or hands-on assessments) that measure impact of ICT or Media on any aspect of well being. We will be especially interested in any instrumentation that allows young people to “play” with the technologies as a means of discovering their preferences and attitudes as well as their familiarity with and skills in accessing and using the technologies to solve problems, conduct searches, be critical reviewers and engage in interactive experiences; and (3) Identify leading researchers and practitioners in the field who are potential partners and contributors to this endeavor. These are likely to include experts from the public and private sector as well as academia—who are dedicated to helping young people become agents of change who contribute to improving the ways they and their fellow travelers on this planet live, learn, and work in a global society.

We will also complete a brief review on what emerges as promising, non-traditional projects or initiatives to engage young people as partners in enhancing their own well being and the well being of others.

Map the findings and the instruments to each element and indicator of well-being. (June-July)

Based on the results of the search, we will organize the findings around elements of well-being and levels of youth engagement. We will select instruments (both quantitative and qualitative) that best match the emerging well-being indicators and obtain permissions as appropriate to use any extant sources. If there are significant gaps in measurement instruments for certain elements of well-being, we will develop a small number of items for pre-testing (with expertise from leading researchers who have already expressed an interest in working with this initiative).

Conduct a pilot. (August and September in Palestine)

Since we are committed to the involvement of young people in every phase of the effort, an important first step would be to “try out” several different approaches with small group(s) of young people. It makes sense to do this first in Palestine as a complement to the VOC school survey (and it could also be an important developmental activity in Wales, if resources permit). One aspect of the discovery process will be a survey that includes baseline information (demographics, access to technology, self-reported skills in technology literacy and fluency and a checklist that identifies typical ways that young people encounter and use ICT and Media—alone and with others.)

A subsequent (or prior) focus group with these same students would be designed to capture stories and artifacts that illustrate students’ “habits of mind” and “habits of practice” in their interaction with ICT and media and reveal their broader insights and subjective notions of power, utility, authenticity, influence, trustworthiness and dangers of ICT and Media in their environments. The focus group interactions would also seek information about the efficacy of the survey instrument itself along with ideas about how best to administer the survey and ways they could be involved in the process with their peers.

This would also be an important time to tap into the resources of Media and private sector firms and involve them directly in co-conducting some of the focus groups (using their expertise to help open the floor to discussion and test children’s reactions to various kinds of stimuli and ideas). The idea here would be to capitalize on the sophistication of some of the private sector outreach and “consumer testing” exercises to reveal young people’s subjective experience of self and subjective perceptions of the external environment along with their reactions and ideas to the vision and goals of EBWBC. At the higher end, private sector firms could open up “exploration labs” to the young people and allow them to try out the newest technologies or prototypes and let imaginations of young people run wild to think about the meaning (or not) for various technologies in their lives.

Develop tools for Wales (August-November)

Drawing on the experiences in Palestine (and possible developmental work with Wales and such groups as Funky Dragon), develop a set of tools and guidelines for administration and analyses of the ICT and Media elements of the survey, high level confabs with leaders in ICT and Media, and elevation of promising practices that surface through Elham. It will be especially important to develop technology-based tools to share and communicate the process, host online events to build capacity for implementation, highlight the results on the UEF website, and negotiate with existing media channels of dissemination to keep the discoveries at the forefront of leaders who influenced what happens in those environments through their policies and/or investments.

Find opportunities to discuss the process and/or the results in country or at international venues. (September in Geneva)

The leaders of EBAWBC have identified a number of excellent opportunities to showcase the thought processes, survey results, and “products” of successful ICT and Media programs that impact well being. The Country Well-Being Forums representing the culmination of the Elham process (with Palestine being the first) will offer exceptional opportunities to provide a stage for thoughtful presentations and discourse that elevate a joint agenda that surfaces from the collective work of youth leaders and leaders from the government, public, and private sectors. The upcoming GAID Meeting in Geneva, September 2007 is another opportunity for EBAWBC to shine.

In both instances, the formats for sharing should model the process EBAWBC is using. For example, an *open space* discussion with young people and panelists representing ICT and Media decision makers could stimulate excitement and interest (if orchestrated by someone who has the experience of demonstrating how this process works). Young people could present selected findings from the school survey and/or the ICT/Media pilots and challenge ICT and Media folks to imagine ways that they could contribute to reshaping the learning environments to respond to the needs. The follow-up discussion could also challenge the audience to think about how the approach would work in culturally diverse settings. The whole point would be to break out of the more typical panel presentations and try out one or two bold approaches to “spread the word.”

An alternative would be for young people to conduct their own focus groups with peers (or with the audience) to “test” the ICT and Media Instruments. (For the country forums or a presentation at GAID, it could be an occasion to try out new technologies that capture and post audience responses (in ways that distinguish between the responses of young people, adults, different cultures, and so on). These data can prompt discussion or simply collect information that will be valuable to EBAWBC.

Some Questions that the Initial Investigation Hopes to Answer

- What do the data tell us about the impact of ICT and Media on each element of well being?
- What are the correlates of certain ICT and Media approaches with each element of well being?
- What is the cultural and programmatic context within which the impact was achieved?
- What instruments currently exist to measure youth voice and choice in ICT and Media? What new instruments need to be constructed?
- What are the cutting edge technologies that are being applied to this element of well-being?
- What are potential new areas for investigation and experimentation?
- What kinds of ICT and Media functions or programs lead to what kinds of youth engagement?
- What do youth in Palestine (other countries) identify as the most compelling uses of ICT and Media for their well being? Does this differ by gender, ethnic background, age?
- To what extent is there a relationship between degree and type of engagement in ICT and Media and success in school, in life, in community interactions, with peers, with adults?
- How can existing ICT and Media technologies be transformed or mobilized to nurture the well being of young people?
- How can ICT and Media leaders work effectively with schools, teachers, parents, community and young people to integrate technologies into all aspects of learning and well being?