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Let's Get To Know and Collaborate with Each Other: Develop Global-Multicultural Citizens in Today's Interconnected World

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ABSTRACT

*The society we live in has been described as the "Information Society" because its infrastructure can be essentially founded on Information Technology; as well as multicultural society since it is composed of more than one ethnic group. The presence of diverse racial, cultural, economic and social groups; and people of different race, characterizes the configuration of our society. Given the above, there is a growing belief in the necessity of combining technology, education, and dialogue in the diminishment of social, economic and cultural gaps inherent within and among societies, and laying the foundations for peaceful coexistence. The Mediterranean Youth Technology Club, **MYTecC**, aims to achieve the above. It is a bridge building initiative amongst youth in Mediterranean Basin, the Middle East and the Arab World. Its goal is to use technology develop a human network with a particular focus: "Let's get to know and collaborate with each other".*

KEYWORDS: *Technology, Youth, Multicultural society*

INTRODUCTION

How technology, knowledge, development, peace culture, multicultural society, and youth could be related? In recent years we have experienced computer technology expansion in our daily life activities. The society we live in has often been described as the "Information Society" because its infrastructure can be essentially founded on Information Technology (I.T.), computers and electronic communication systems. As a result of the invasion of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in society, new forms of work, communication and economic growth have emerged in what is today a global society. ICT is an important aspect of employability, it is related to the economic needs of the 21st century, and it is a requirement to enter the workforce. In other words, it is a necessary life skill for survival and access to society. The education agendas of world organizations include the embedding of new technologies in schools and emphasize the role of Information Technology (IT) in transforming teaching and learning (Hadjithoma, & Eteokleous, 2007). According to many researchers (Goddard, 2002; Haugland, 2000; Honey, 2001; Jonassen, 1999; Polonoli, 2001), such public perception is warranted because the computer represents an excellent curricular tool and a revolutionary teaching approach that can help students

achieve important gains in learning and understanding.

ICT also removes time and space constraints, it increases flexibility and accessibility to education and knowledge. More specifically, Internet's role to knowledge accessibility and dissemination, revealed to be as extremely important. The radio needed 38 years, the television 13 years and the Internet only 4 years to reach 50 million people!! In 1990, 20 countries were connected to the Internet, and in 2004 all countries were connected to the Internet! Knowledge increasingly defines the line between wealth and poverty, between capability and powerlessness and between human fulfillment and frustration. A country able to mobilize and diffuse knowledge can rapidly raise its level of development, help all its citizens to grow and flourish and take its proper place on the 21st century global stage. The knowledge is the mean to promote change and plays a central role for economic growth, cultural enrichment, social development, political empowerment, educational change within and among countries.

ICT provides a realistic, visually compelling, and motivating interactive environment for developing the skills and knowledge needed in today's multicultural environment, another characteristic of the society we live in. A society composed of more than one ethnic group (Smolicz, 1996) can be broadly characterized as multicultural. Often multiculturalism is defined as more than the acceptance of the presence of diverse racial, cultural, economic and social groups; it refers to peoples' philosophy for, and attitude toward, people of different race, ethnicity, geographical origin, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion, economic class and age. In this sense, human differences are recognized, respected, appreciated and celebrated within a multicultural environment (Nikolaou, 2000). Is the above applied in today's interconnected, globalized, wealthy world? Do we recognize, respect, and appreciate differences among human beings? Given the above, there is a growing belief in the necessity of combining technology, education, and dialogue in the diminishment of social, economic and cultural gaps inherent within and among societies, and laying the foundations for peaceful coexistence.

MYTecC: Mediterranean Youth Technology Club

The Mediterranean Youth Technology Club, **MYTecC**, is an initiative geared to brining the digital divide; engendering access to information; generate awareness, tolerance, social responsibility and business knowledge amongst youth in the Mediterranean Basin, the Middle East and the Arab World. The objective is to bring hope, knowledge and, ultimately, a culture of peace to a troubled region of our world. The eight project participating countries are: Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Yemen, Morocco, Portugal, Turkey and Cyprus. MYTecC delivers the technology culture which will enable and encourage global citizenship and collaboration in a Web 2.0 environment. It aims at building bridges between the youth of those regions in order that they may enter adulthood with a sense of responsible leadership, business acumen and a propensity to work harmoniously one with the other. To achieve this ambitious goal, a three pronged approach (see below) has been

developed to teach youth skills that enhance their opportunity for employment, nurture a positive mindset, and seed a forum for open, honest and clear communication.

Although education, information, and the internet are probably the most effective equalizers of our time, MYTecC is not solely about that. The initiative aims at developing a virtual community that enables communication and, ultimately, collaboration. Youth will individually and collectively express themselves using Web 2.0 tools. MYTecC aims to develop a human network with a particular focus: *"Let's get to know and collaborate with each other"*. MYTecC aims to exploit the full potential of ICT to transform the way people learn, allowing them to build in their communities a culture of tolerance, solidarity, justice, freedom, mutual understanding and respect, entrepreneurship, leadership, learning, innovation, and creativity. Teenagers will acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function in an ethnically and racially diverse nation and world. MYTecC underlying philosophy lies in the youth empowerment leading to new citizenship with social responsibility. Within this new citizenship, the differences and similarities that characterize individuals and groups will be cherished for their worth and cultivated for the benefit they bring to all people.

Thus, MYTecC is a program that is designed to empower and educate youth with a view of providing them with tools that would enable them to become culturally responsible and competent citizens exercising tolerance care and understanding of themselves and others, that will be able to survive in the cultural diversity society.

The partnership

Clearly an initiative of this magnitude requires a solid partnership that will ensure its continuity and sustainability over time. The partnership currently includes, the Public Benefit Investment (PBI) Department of CISCO (<http://www.cisco.com>),

the ICTDAR (Program Information and Communication Technology for Development in the Arab Region, <http://www.ictdar.org/>) and the Teachers without Borders (<http://www.teacherswithoutborders.org/index.html>).

How MYTecC works?

The program participants are young people aged 15-18 years, mainly from peripheral areas and socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds that limit their chances of progressing and developing a professional future. During this two year program teenagers attend classes twice weekly for a period of four hours after school. The program is delivered through community and youth centers under the auspices of local NGOs, already active with youth empowerment and education programs, with a solid governance model. Both the instructors in the program and the youth participating therein were selected under a rigorously defined approach and set of criteria that contribute significantly to ensuring the success of the program. The 20 Instructors were selected during January – June 2007 in the eight par-

ticipating countries. The two instructors' training sessions took place in July 2007 in Morocco and in November 2007 in Turkey. The last and final training is scheduled to take place in Portugal in April, 2008. The instructors will receive on-going support and help from the project's partners and the management team. The students to participate in MYTecC's first cycle of classes have already been selected during December – February 2008. Everything is set for MYTecC classes to officially start the second week of February to the eight participating countries.

Participating youth simultaneously follow three different but complimentary learning tracks, otherwise MYTecC three pillars, including: 1) Cisco Systems' program - a program borne out of the Cisco Networking Academy Program in which students earn Industry-recognized certifications such as A+ (COMPTIA), Network+ (COMPTIA), Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA) and Cisco Certified Network Professional (CCNP); 2) the social and virtual interaction between the youth within an internet-based framework (<http://www.mytecc.com>, and <http://myteccstudents.ning.com/>), that aims to develop social citizenship skills required for them to become responsible and active contributors to society with a strong social orientation wherein youth are encouraged to get to know themselves, set goals for themselves; learn to communicate and appreciate others; and 3) English Proficiency through off line and online materials (www.mywaves.org). Through MYTecC, the youth will enjoy internationally renowned training in the field of communications network management and gain skills for the technological labor market, graduating with A+ and Network + Certification – a significant asset for entering the labor force.

METHODOLOGY

In order to capture an accurate picture of the quality of the initiative on the ground, and to assess the effectiveness of instruction and measure the impact on participating youth; a research-based evaluation has been designed with rigorous methodological approaches. More specifically, a mixed methodology approach (Creswell, 2003; Krathwohl, 1997) will be employed in an attempt to evaluate MYTecC application to the eight countries. This research work makes use of both qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative component will be addressed through surveys, and secondary data analysis (i.e. student school and MYTecC Grades) and the qualitative component will be addressed through interviews with various stakeholders (students, instructors, project partners, parents, school teachers and principals, local authorities, community leaders, etc), visits, and classroom observations at the Centres/ NGOs, field notes, diaries, and reports from the instructors, students, school teachers, etc. For the quantitative analysis, the targeted sample will be students and instructors population in the eight countries. Additionally, random sampling will be used to collect quantitative data from the parents, school teachers, local authorities, etc. For the qualitative part purposive sampling will be used to draw the subjects (Kvale, 1996; Rist, 1982; Moustakas, 1994).

For some cases in order to better 'use' the data gathered the study aims to apply a sequential explanatory strategy where first the quantitative data are collected and analyzed followed by a qualitative data collection and analysis. The two methods will be integrated during the interpretation phase of the study. The purpose of this mixed method is to use "qualitative results to assist in explaining, interpreting and further examining the findings of the quantitative study" (Creswell, 2003, p. 215). The qualitative data collection methods, aimed at providing a deeper level of data that will be used to evaluate, confirm, complement and/or better understand the survey findings (Kvale, 1996; Rist, 1982).

The ultimate goal is the instant collection and posting of quantitative data on the data management website (<http://mytecc.enpraxis.net/>) to allow for the possibility of rapid statistical analysis that could flag potential problem areas as well as provide the gratification of speedy recognition of success. The qualitative information will provide deeper insight into the impact that MYTecC will have on the participating youth. Similarly, Meta-evaluation/ analysis and longitudinal studies will be conducted as students graduate as well as two or three years thereafter in order to examine how MYTecC influenced students' lives, goals, career orientation, and employment prospects. MYTecC's impact will be measured by, inter alia, instructor retention, student recruitment, community acceptance (whether parental, familiar or communal) change of self perception of students, tolerance, and achievements of students. More specifically, MYTecC research-based evaluation approach focuses on four levels: organizational, instructional, students and community. For each level, a number of Parameters/ Key Performance Indicators is developed:

1) Organizational/ Management Level: The Partnership (resources provided, commitment, collaboration, personnel, project management); The Business model; The Management Structure (project manager, evaluator, instructors, committees); MYTecC Presentation and Promotion Process at the participating countries; MYTecC Operation (Centers/NGOs that classes will take place, infrastructure, selection, location, equipment, environment, classes offered, hours of operation); Logistics; Revenue Model; Legal Structure.

2) Instructional Level: Demographics; Instructor Selection and Recruitment Process; Instructor Training; Professional aspect (understanding of job description and requirements, if instruction is consisted/ aligned with the overall MYTecC goals); Class management (preparation, curriculum covered, class attendance, discipline issues); Teaching methods (lesson structure, usage of various teaching methods, usage of various teaching tools, interesting and attractive lesson, addressing student needs, student involvement, behaviour, relationship towards students and interactions with students).

3) Student Level: Demographics; Grades (School and MYTecC Grades); Student selection process; Development impact on the students (Impact on student life, goals and aspirations – enhancing future prospects; Impact on student job career – successful integration of the young people into the labour market; Impact on stu-

dent school performance; Impact on student self perception); Leadership skills development; Perception of other cultures/ tolerance, diversity, dialogue; Social skills development; Values of citizenship; Participation and contribution to the community; Addressing youth needs (human rights, social education). Students' level is one of the most important levels and the one to reveal MYTecC success. Students will be measured on their improvement in school, their contribution to the MYTecC class, and their contribution to the community all compared with their involvement prior to joining the program. They will also, of course, be measured on attendance as well as on the time effectively spent communicating on the website. There will be pre and post test evaluations for the material taught and learnt.

4) Community level: Development Impact on the community; Job creation; Number of students experienced MYTecC; Student school drop out rates; Contribution to community (volunteerism); Collaboration with community members (parents, school, teachers, local authorities, municipalities, local universities)

Research-based evaluation: Current Status

The data collection process regarding a number of parameters/ key performance indicators mentioned above has already began. For example, student and instructors' demographics are collected, questionnaires were completed by the instructors regarding: 1) the two training sessions held, 2) MYTecC presentation and promotion process in the 8 participating countries, and 3) student recruitment and selection process. Additionally, interviews with the instructors took place in order to capture MYTecC experience as of now. Some representative comments from the instructors regarding MYTecC experience can be found below. One of them commented on the greatest contribution that MYTecC has brought to his life: "...I knew that it is too much of a dream which meant a lot to me and I hope it will come true. And it is definitely what MYTecC has brought to my life; it's hope to make it happen". Another instructor reported that MYTecC "...is likely to change other people's mind frames and make them believe, again, that when there is a will there is *certainly* a way". Addressing the question of how has MYTecC changed your life, instructors commented on the fact that MYTecC has stimulated their minds to think about some human-related concerns. More specifically, one said: "In a nutshell, it has reminded me that in default of an answer to the existential question: "what's your purpose in life vis-à-vis humanity concerns?". In other words, it's better off improving people's lives by providing them with a toolbox of competencies, values and opportunities, and by extension making the world a lovely place to be, than leading a meaningless life". Finally, instructors were asked to comment on their initial experiences with the first-selected MYTecC students. An instructor from Morocco, mentioned with great enthusiasm that "...the whole experience has been very impressive; but what stood out for me the most in the students' selection is the kids' incredible motivation and thirst for technology, especially among girls, which made me realize that technology is the heavenly key to

make the world a better place for better people". Overall, the instructors reported that students are very excited to be part of MYTecC. They consider it a project quite compatible with their hobbies, so to speak, since they are all fascinated by new technologies, particularly Internet. They further see it as an opportunity to become distinguished and better persons. An instructor from Portugal said: "I am very happy with the kids that I selected! They are all very different, with very special features and complement each other very well. Different ages, different backgrounds, different cultures (2 boys are African and 1 girl is Brazilian). They are very excited (just for you to see, none of them have had any extra-school activity before!). During the break, I was watching them and they decided to play the "Human Football" Game because they said they were bored!! They came to class 5 minutes before time!

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The instructors and youth selected are the pioneers of this exciting initiative. They have been recruited as trainers of trainers for their countries since the project aims to continue over the next couple of years. Although the program is currently limited to the 8 countries, expansion into other countries is a very important objective. The Mediterranean Basin countries as well as selected countries from the Arab world would be strong candidates for inclusion in MYTecC. Nobody has a crystal ball that effectively predicts that future, some clear basic assumptions have been made that allow simple projections to be made. MYTecC starts with twenty trainers. Should each of these train 10 instructors each year, and should there emerge one and only one trainer from these ten instructors then by the fifth year, in 2012, there would be nearly 120 thousand participating youth being trained by more than 4,000 instructors working out of 2,230 centres. A total exceeding 180,000 youth will have benefited to one degree or another from MYTecC training over the five year period. These projections do not reflect the complete picture. They do not, for example, take attrition into account. The loss of instructors as time goes by has not been considered. Nor has the absorptive capacity of each of the countries been taken into consideration. What they do tell is that there is a need for a governance model and structure that can accommodate possibly phenomenal growth when the program embeds itself in these communities, new communities and attracts more and more youth. This is an excellent and valuable opportunity for people (instructors and youth), and institutions to participate in an attempt to enhance the quality of education provided to our children. They will have the chance to meet other people and network, tremendously benefited from their interactions, provide and gain valuable knowledge and skills. In this ever-changing Hi-Tech, globalized world it is responsibility of all of us to develop culturally responsible and competent citizens that will be able to survive in the cultural diversity. It is a great challenge to develop citizens that can be characterized as multicultural and be in a position to promote peace culture in today's interconnected world.

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