

Chapter 6

Informal Online Learning through the Mediterranean Youth Technology Club: Think Global, Act Local, Bring Change into a World to Rearrange

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mediterranean Youth Technology Club is a bridge building initiative designed to empower and educate youth, providing them with tools that would enable them to become socially and culturally responsible leaders. Within MYTecC youth simultaneously follow three different but complimentary curricula: English, Social-Virtual, and Technology in an informal educational setting, extensively using Web 2.0 tools. Two MYTecC cycles have been finalized, and a new one is in the process of being initiated. The current study evaluates the effectiveness and impact of MYTecC. It aims to capture the overall MYTecC experience from students' and instructors' perspectives. Additionally, it measures the development of youth's social-cultural and leadership skills, skills and knowledge developed, as well as attitude changes. Finally, it evaluates the role of Web 2.0 tools in achieving the above.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, we have experienced 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 (IT), 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 access to and survival in today’s society.

ICT also removes time and space constraints, it increases flexibility and accessibility to education and knowledge. With the rapid diffusion of the Internet, computers, and telecommunications; new approaches to learning were created including online course delivery (Crosta, 2004). The Internet as a medium to implement online learning provides a pervasive new channel for education, that makes it more accessible (Gao & Lehman, 2003) and appealing to students (Owston, 1997). Given the above, technology removes time and space constraints, it increases flexibility, and provides access to education and knowledge.

The technological advancement in information technology and telecommunications resulted in the development of the Web 2.0. It created the appropriate framework for user participation, providing an array of tools and countless opportunities for altering communication, work, collaboration, socialization, friending, entertainment, etc. Google, MSN, Facebook, Search Engines, Blogs, Wikis! (Hargadon, 2009; Prensky, 2001). We are living in a digital world and the above are part of our daily life activities (Eteokleous & Pavlou, 2010). Elementary and secondary students constitute a great part of this digital world and are characterized as digital natives (Prensky, 2001) and digital learners (Oliver & Carr, 2009; Richardson, 2009). They make extensive use of Web 2.0 tools to play Internet games, visit social networking websites, participate in blogs, and discussion forums, become net-writers through wikis, etc. (Burnett, et al., 2003; Hargadon, 2009).

The young need to develop a combination of skills, including higher order thinking skills, social, cultural, leadership, and management skills, to successfully address the demands of the high-tech, multicultural society in the globalized and interconnected world we live in today. Technology, and particularly this useful and valuable tool called Internet, has the ability to bring together youth from different countries and teach them how to work and collaborate together in an informal educational setting. This chapter underlies the value of combining technology, education, and the development of teenagers’ social and leadership skills. MYTecC (Mediterranean

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