Children's Rights in the Digital Age

A download from children around the world

Amanda Third
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Emma Keltie
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YOUNGANDWELL
Cooperative Research Centre

unicef

"We have to concern ourselves with listening to children. We [need to] see [their] perspectives, and those of the practitioner or researcher, as not in competition but standing together in the construction of dialogues, in which there is mutual respect, active participation and the negotiation and co-construction of meaning. Listening to children and encouraging their participation in research, evaluation, decision making and planning is important for many reasons [including] empowering children as learners, enabling them to make choices, express their ideas and opinions and develop a positive sense of self [and] the benefits of their participation to society as a whole and for the development of citizenship."

Pascal & Bertram, 2009: 254

Cover image

Philip Chan,UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador and member of the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre's Youth Brains Trust, at a Youth Brains Trust workshop held in Melbourne, Australia, in February 2014.

***Photo by** Oli Sansom.*

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CRC@25
CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

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The Young and Well CRC
is an Australian–based, international research centre that unites young people with researchers, practitioners, innovators and policy–makers from over 70 partner organisations. Together, we explore the role of technology in young people's lives, and how it can be used to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25. The Young and Well CRC is established under the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centres Program.

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Digitally Connected is a collaborative initiative between UNICEF and the Berkman Center building upon a multi-year partnership for analysing digital and social media growth and trends among children and youth globally. Digitally Connected is a network consisting of 150 academics, practitioners, young people, activists, philanthropists, government officials, and representatives of technology companies from around the world. Together, they are addressing the challenges and opportunities children and youth encounter in the digital environment.

digitallyconnected.org

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UNICEF promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere.

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Voices of Youth is UNICEF's global digital engagement portal for children and young people. Recognizing and building on the opportunities for advancing children's rights in a digital era, Voices of Youth is a space where the voices of children and young people on issues that matter to them can be heard, and where learning, sharing, inspiration and cross-cultural exchange is actively encouraged.

voicesofyouth.org

Foreword

Some two-thirds of the world's almost three billion internet users are from the developing world, with the numbers growing every day. Many of these new users are children and young people; in fact in many countries, internet users under the age of 24 far outnumber the rest.

A growing body of evidence from across the world is also telling us that no matter where they are from, more and more children are relying on digital tools, platforms and services to learn, engage, participate, play, innovate, work or socialise.

There are already countless examples of how – when harnessed appropriately – digital tools can help promote human development, by closing gaps in access to information, speeding up service delivery, supporting educational and health outcomes, and creating new entrepreneurship opportunities.

The power of technology to jump across borders and time zones, to join the once disparate, and to foster social connectedness, has provided the means for the children and young people of today to participate in a global society in ways previously not possible.

Sadly, there are also new or evolving risks – exposure to violence; access to inappropriate content, goods and services; concerns about excessive use; and issues of data protection and privacy.

As it becomes increasingly difficult to draw the line between offline and online, it is necessary for us to examine how this changing environment impacts the wellbeing and development of children and their rights.

Ensuring that all children are safe online requires approaches that promote digital literacy, resilience and cyber savvy. It is only in partnership that we can reach consensus on how to create a safe, open, accessible, affordable and secure digital world. Critically, children and young people's profound insight must help inform, shape and drive this goal – which needs to focus on equity of access, safety for all, digital literacy across generations, identity and privacy, participation and civic engagement.

In April of this year, the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University and UNICEF co-hosted, in collaboration with PEW Internet, EU Kids Online, the Internet Society (ISOC), Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI), and YouthPolicy.org, a first of its kind international 'Digitally Connected' symposium on children, youth, and digital media.

The symposium sought to map and explore the global state of research and practice in this field, and to facilitate sharing, discussion and collaboration among the 150 academics, practitioners, young people, activists, philanthropists, government officials, and representatives of technology companies from around the world.

The Digitally Connected symposium raised a key question that gained special relevance given the focus of the Committee on the Rights of the Child 2014 Day of General Discussion:

How can we give children and young people voice in the debate that explores the impact of digital access and use and their rights?

It is from this question, and a partnership between the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre and partners from the Digitally Connected Network, that this project was born. The multi-media package, of which this report is one component, brings together the perspectives of more than 140 children, aged six to 18, from 16 countries around the globe. Within this package are the rich voices of children and young people that can inform governments, UN agencies, civil society, academic, industry and others on new and innovative ways to bring the rights of children in the digital age to the fore.

Hearing the sentiments of children in eight different languages allows one truth to sound loud and clear: we need to take the necessary steps to ensure that all children can reap the opportunities of digital access, advancing their rights, while also ensuring their safety.

A digitally connected society brings with it challenges, certainly, but ones which children can be empowered to negotiate with aplomb. Any discussion focused on better understanding how the ubiquity of digital tools impacts on children's rights, must be informed by children and young people themselves.

It is our hope that this report will be an excellent and comprehensive starting point for this important Day of General Discussion.

Associate Professor Jane Burns
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Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre

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Harvard University

Gerrit Beger
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UNICEF

Main messages

01

Right of access

Children around the world increasingly think of access to digital media as a fundamental right. For children in the developing world, and for some in the developed world, access is still the biggest issue they face in relation to using digital media to enact their rights.

02

Most common uses

Regardless of the country they live in, the language they speak, or their socio-economic background, if children have regular and reliable access to digital media, they tend to use it for a common set of purposes: social connectedness; access to information; education; self-expression/creativity; and entertainment. Although children are concerned about how their digital media practices might negatively impact upon their rights, children overwhelmingly experience digital media as a positive influence on their lives.

03

Literacy is fundamental

Literacy, the tri-fold literacy of today's very user-driven digital media environment – digital, media and social literacy – is fundamental to children's capacity to use digital media competently and exercise their rights in and with digital media. Literacy provides the technical and higher order evaluative skills required to access, understand, produce and participate in digital media.

04

Risk narrative predominant

While children noted that digital media facilitates their communicative, educational and informational needs, many children found it difficult to articulate the ways that digital media enhanced their lives and their rights in more specific and precise terms. By contrast, children generally found it much more straightforward to enunciate the risks and challenges associated with their digital media practices, quite possibly because their schooling in online practice has been dominated by the risk narrative.

05

No online/offline binary

Children understand their digital rights as closely intertwined with their human rights more broadly. They do not readily distinguish between the online and the offline but regard digital spaces as just another setting in which they carry out their lives.

06

Balancing risk with opportunity

Children's safety in connected media is vital, but it needs to be understood in the context of the spectrum of their digital rights, for example, in balance with children's rights of provision and participation in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Agency is as crucial to positive, effective use of digital media as safety is. Without the agency needed to participate and exercise rights, children can neither take advantage of the opportunities digital media afford nor develop resiliency when facing risks. They must be encouraged to think critically and develop their own language, views, strategies, associations and interests as users of connected digital media.

07

Self-actualisation through media use

Children increasingly see digital media as crucial to their rights to information, education, and participation. By engaging with digital media they learn new skills and develop their talents; they become informed citizens of the world who can contribute meaningfully to their communities; and they foster friendships, family ties, and a sense of community and belonging. These things are important to their resilience and wellbeing.

08

Child-centred definitions

Children worry about how their digital participation might compromise their protection rights, and they take active steps to keep themselves safe. They don't always worry about the same things that concern adults. We need child-centred definitions of risks and opportunities associated with digital media.

09

Seeking acknowledgment

Children say that the rights they enjoy in relation to digital media come with real responsibilities. These include understanding the consequences of their engagements, being personally accountable for the ways their online interactions impact others, and knowing when to exercise self-control. They want adults to understand how and why they use digital media, and they want to be trusted to use it wisely.

10

Ongoing conversation with children

Policy makers and practitioners must engage children in an ongoing conversation about how to use digital media to support children's rights. Children want to be involved in these conversations. They want to take responsibility for making the internet a better place, and they have valuable expertise to share.

“Digital media is a powerful way for children to realise their rights, from accessing information, playing games, to expressing themselves freely and even anonymously. Technology has a crucial role in empowering children by facilitating communication, education and activism. It means children don’t have to rely on adults and can have a voice of their own. Yet not all children have equal access to digital media. Even with access, digital media poses risks for children such as internet safety and cyberbullying. In any new policy or decision-making, it is absolutely important to listen to children’s voices first-hand, rather than assuming what is best for them.”

Philip Chan
UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador
Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre,
Youth Brains Trust

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Executive Summary

In July and August 2014, 148 children from 16 countries, speaking eight different languages, participated in workshops to share their views on their rights in the digital age.

Undertaken with the aim of communicating children's views at the Day of General Discussion on children's rights in the digital age, which took place on 12 September 2014, the project was a joint effort between the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre (CRC), the Institute for Culture and Society at the University of Western Sydney, the Berkman Centre for Internet and Society at Harvard University, and UNICEF, in partnership with the Digitally Connected Network.

The research team worked with members of the Young and Well CRC Youth Brains Trust to develop a content generation methodology. Seventeen partner organisations—recruited through the Digitally Connected Network—held subsequent workshops that involved children aged six to 18, from the following countries:

Argentina | Australia | Brazil | Colombia | Egypt | France | Ghana | Italy | Kenya | Malaysia | Nigeria | Philippines | Thailand | Trinidad and Tobago | Turkey | United States of America

In the workshops, children were asked to reflect upon the extent to which they used digital media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) in their everyday lives – their motivations, their rights, and how these might be enhanced and/or challenged. As part of the workshops, children produced their own 'technology use timeline' in which they outlined their digital media use and related rights. They also responded to a series of vox pop questions on the opportunities and challenges digital media present in enacting their rights, in addition to developing a creative piece, in a medium of their choice, to respond to a particular challenge or opportunity about which they felt strongly. The research team undertook both content and discourse analysis of the technology timelines, vox pop interviews and creative responses.

The research team found that access to digital media is far from evenly distributed across the globe, and certainly if we are to fully enhance children's rights in the digital age, this needs to be addressed. Nonetheless, regardless of the country they live in, the language they speak, or their socio-economic background, if children have regular and reliable access to digital media, they tend to use it for a common set of purposes, including: social connectedness, access to information, education, self-expression and creativity, and entertainment.

Further, when children don't have access to the latest technologies, they develop innovative workarounds and use the available technologies with high degrees of inventiveness and efficacy. This confirms that ultimately, digital media and ICTs are only as powerful as the ideas, ideals and efforts that drive them.

Although children are concerned about how their digital media practices might negatively impact upon their rights, children overwhelmingly experience digital media as a powerful and positive influence in their everyday lives. Children see digital media as crucial to their rights to information, education and participation. By engaging with digital media, they learn new skills and develop their talents; they become informed citizens of the world who can contribute meaningfully to their communities; and they foster friendships, family ties and a sense of community and belonging. These things are important to their resilience and wellbeing.

However, in general, while children noted that digital media facilitate their communicative, educational and informational needs, many children found it difficult to articulate the ways that digital media enhanced their lives and their rights in more specific and precise terms. By contrast, children generally found it much more straightforward to enunciate the risks and challenges associated with their digital media practices. This is quite possibly because their schooling in online practice has been dominated by the risk narrative. If we are to support children's rights, we must find ways of fostering children's right to protection from harm whilst simultaneously empowering them to maximise the benefits of connectivity for their education, health, social connection, economic participation, civic engagement, both as individuals, and as members of their communities.

Digital, media, and social literacies are key to enabling children to leverage the benefits of digital media to enact their rights. Literacy provides children with the technical and higher order evaluative skills required to access, understand, produce and participate in digital media. Because children develop digital literacy via both formal and informal means, they do not always understand their digital competencies as a discrete skill set.

In regards to children's right to education and participation, children reported that being online enabled them to participate meaningfully. They valued the possibility offered by digital media to broaden their horizons, gain awareness of other cultures and be informed global citizens. They regularly used some form of digital technology in relation to schooling, and to satisfy curiosities. Children acknowledged that digital media was sometimes a distraction from studies, but noted that learning how to manage that tension was part of learning how to engage with digital media responsibly.

While children embrace digital media, with many stating that it has improved their lives, they identified a range of risks and challenges associated with their practices. However, the challenges identified by children may not always be the same as those that dominate adult discourses, or those targeted by public policy and regulations. This highlights the need to generate child-centred definitions of children's rights, as well as the opportunities and risks associated with children's digital media use.

In contrast to anecdotal beliefs, children articulated accountability and understanding of the consequences of what they did online, not seeing themselves as vulnerable victims but as sharing the responsibility for making the internet a safe place for themselves and their peers. It is therefore important to support digital literacy initiatives that encourage and empower children to take further responsibility for their online safety.

Overall, this report finds that policy makers and practitioners must engage children in an ongoing conversation about how to use digital media to support children's rights. Children want to be involved in these conversations. They want to take responsibility for making the internet a better place, and they have valuable expertise to share.

The 'digital champion' profiles featured in this report evidence some of the achievements that are possible when the potential of digital media is harnessed in the service of children's rights. These feature pieces showcase young individuals and youth-focused organisations who are maximising the possibilities that digital media offer for children in different parts of the world to live better lives. As a collection, these stories reveal a message that runs through both the developing and the developed world—digital media and ICTs are fostering children's rights by allowing them to be both agents of change, and creators and receivers of innovative approaches to community, health, wellbeing, education, safety, inclusion and civic participation.

Introduction

"States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."

Article 12: *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child codifies children's rights to express their views and to participate in the decision-making processes that will impact their lives, in accordance with their age and maturity.

With digital media[1] becoming an increasingly ubiquitous feature of children's everyday lives around the world, the global community has an unprecedented opportunity to deliver on this promise for children everywhere. Digital media has the potential to open up new possibilities for increasing children's awareness of their rights, and promoting their views and insights on how to improve their lived experience of their rights. Further, under the right circumstances, digital media can be mobilised to support children to enhance the ways they enact their rights in their daily lives.

However, the global community is a long way from acknowledging and realising the potential of digital media to support children's rights. For example, for children in many parts of the world, consistent and quality access remains a challenge. Equally, many other children cannot access online resources in a language they can speak, and where this is possible, children consistently report that they have limited access to age-appropriate and quality information and entertainment (Livingstone and O'Neill, 2014). Many have not been provided the opportunity to reflect upon what their rights are, and how they might be implicated in the rise of digital media.

Whilst we must continue to address the myriad material and structural barriers to leveraging digital media to positively impact children's capacity to enact their rights, we must also learn to understand digital media through children's eyes. This is necessary if we are to develop credible and effective ways for children to harness digital media in the service of their rights.

Although there are increasingly more examples of child-centred initiatives that embed children's insights and experiences at their core, current debates in many parts of the world continue to focus almost exclusively on the risks associated with children's digital media engagements. Such

[1] In this report we use the term 'digital media' as shorthand to refer to both digital media (the digitized content that can be transmitted over the internet or computer networks, and which includes text, audio, video and graphics - Source: Penn State University, "The Fourth Amendment Relating to Technology," https://wikispaces.psu.edu/display/IST432SP-11Team14/Definition+of+Digital+Media) and information and communication technologies (the telecommunications technologies that underpin the networked world, including telephony, cable, satellite and radio, as well as digital technologies such as computers, information networks and software – Source: Center for International Development at Harvard University, Information Technologies Group, http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/readinessguide/glossary.html)

debate results in an overwhelmingly protection-oriented approach to children's use of technology. There are, indeed, very real and potentially serious risks associated with children's use of digital media, particularly for those children who are most marginalised or vulnerable in their communities (Livingstone and Helsper, 2010). However, a narrow focus on risk and safety can negatively impact children's right to participation and undermine their ability to access the benefits of digital media. A growing evidence base shows that risk does not equate with harm and, moreover, that some level of exposure to risk enables children to develop the digital literacy that is necessary to both minimise the potentially negative impacts of their online engagements, as well as unlock more of the benefits (see for example, Third, 2014; Green et al, 2011; Livingstone and Helsper, 2010). Thus, we need approaches that can **foster children's right to protection from harm whilst simultaneously empowering them to maximise the benefits of connectivity** for their education, health, social connection, economic participation, civic engagement, and so on, both as individuals, and as members of their communities.

The task of balancing children's digital participation with their protection is enormously complex. However, it must not be overlooked that children themselves are an enormous resource in rising to this challenge.

In July and August 2014, with the support of organisations affiliated with the Digitally Connected Network, 148 children aged six to 18 from 16 countries around the globe participated in workshops in which they undertook a series of activities to reflect on their rights – as children – in the digital age. The aim of these workshops was to provide children with a space to reflect on the ways their digital media practices intersect with their rights. In particular, the research team wanted to document children's views on the ways digital media might challenge their ability to enact their rights, and also how digital media might provide opportunities to enhance their rights.

It is thus in the spirit of Article 12 of the Convention, that this report synthesises what children have told the research team so far.

Background

Children's rights in the digital age

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted unanimously by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989. It has since become the most rapidly and widely ratified human rights treaty in history, and it guides the work of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The Convention is the result of a 10-year collaborative process during which the rights and the wording of articles were proposed and debated by 80 countries. The result was the Convention comprising 54 articles that collectively delineate the rights of all children.

The Convention encompasses a broader range of rights than any other human rights treaty, from humanitarian to economic, and socio-cultural to civil and political rights. The heavy involvement of non-governmental organisations in both the drafting and the implementation of the Convention sets it apart from other international treaties. It is also unique in that it specifies the obligations of States Parties in implementing children's rights, and provides the Committee on the Rights of the Child with tools to monitor compliance. Articles of the Convention also delineate the responsibilities of parents and carers, the community, the media, and other agencies and organisations in promoting and protecting children's rights.

While the Convention is not the first international treaty to protect children's rights[1], it stands apart from previous declarations in that it enshrines the idea of children as rights-holding individuals. Previous debates and declarations mostly focused on protection and provision rights, addressing children's 'vulnerability' by asserting their developmental needs for health and social care, education, and protection from harm. By contrast, the Convention constructs children as people with the right to express their opinion in matters that concern them, thus adding participation rights to those of protection and provision. Participation rights imply a degree of self-determination, albeit in accordance with the child's age and maturity, which is much closer to the notion of civil and political rights previously reserved for adults. Article 12 – the right to have an opinion and have it respected – is recognised as one of the four guiding principles underpinning the implementation of the Convention.

The complex interrelation between the media, children and their rights has regularly been the subject of attention and debate about the Convention in the last two decades. In 1996, the Committee recognised the essential role of the media in the implementation and promotion of the Convention during a Day of General Discussion on 'the child and the media' focusing on child participation, protection against harmful influences, and respect for the integrity of the child. A working group was subsequently set up to further explore the relationship between media and children, with a particular focus on how child participation in the media might contribute to the better implementation of the Convention.

In 1999, 10 years after the adoption of the Convention, children, young people, media professionals and child rights experts gathered in Oslo to discuss the role of media in the development of children's rights throughout the world. From their discussions emerged the Oslo Challenge, which recognised that "the child/media relationship is an entry point into the wide and multifaceted world of children and their rights - to education, freedom of expression, play, identity, health, dignity and self-respect, protection - and that in every aspect of child rights, in every element of the life of a child, the relationship between children and the media plays a role" (UNICEF, n.d.).

In the 25 years since the adoption of the Convention, the world has undergone significant cultural change, of which the rapid development of digital media is one defining aspect. As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Convention, digital media is fast becoming ubiquitous in every aspect of many children's everyday lives. Access to digital media increasingly impacts upon and shapes the whole spectrum of children's rights, as well as the promotion of those rights (Article 42), and the Committee's role in examining the progress made by States Parties (Article 43).

The challenge today is thus to rethink the rights enshrined in the Convention in light of the digital age.

[1] A Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child was adopted by the League of Nations in 1924 and later reviewed and adopted by the United Nations in 1948 and 1959.

Children's participation in research, policy and decision-making processes

At least as far back as the 1970s, there has been scholarly interest in seeking children's views on their rights (Casas et al, 2006). However, the 1989 adoption of the Convention and its enshrinement, in particular, of children's right to be heard, firmly placed the need to listen to children's views on their rights on the agenda.

In the early days of the internet, public policy debates around children were mostly concerned with identifying risks and putting regulations in place to protect children from inappropriate content and online grooming. It is now widely accepted that digital media potentially present tremendous benefits for children and the community. While this does not deter from the fact that protection rights are vital to address potential harms that may be exacerbated by new technologies, a shift of focus towards the beneficial impact of digital media may well contribute to improving the management of the associated risks.

Even so, attempts to listen to children have not always translated into their genuine participation in the policy and decision-making processes that affect them. Fitzgerald and Graham note that "progress in establishing a rationale or case for children's participation has not been matched by evidence of change for children in their everyday lives. As one of the most governed groups... children continue to have little, if any input into the policy, research and practice decisions made about them" (Fitzgerald & Graham, 2008: 65). And despite an acknowledged need and efforts to involve children in discussions relating to internet policy, Davies et al argue that, for the most part, these deliberations have had a narrow focus on online safety, "prejudicing the outcomes of youth engagement. Where young people do speak up, locally and in international fora, on the need for action on online freedoms and access to support to make the most of online opportunities, their voices have been frequently ignored by policy makers" (Davies et al, 2011).

The 25th anniversary of the Convention is an opportune moment to renew the commitment to listening to children and embedding their insights and experiences at the heart of discussions about children's rights. Children's participation in the decision-making processes that affect them is vital. When children are provided with opportunities to participate in policy and decision-making processes, they develop skills, and their contributions grow more meaningful as trust in their competencies grows over time. In turn, these contributions lead to better decisions with more likelihood of impact, because they incorporate the specific knowledge and perspectives that children have on matters pertaining to their lives (Lansdown, 2011). Beyond this, children's participation can foster a robust "community of practice" (Wenger, 2000) which "provides for shared understanding and co-construction of meaning – the meaning that the world holds for [children] and its implications for the policies, programs, and decisions that impact them" (Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, 2011: 15).

Children's participation demands constant vigilance about the extent to which children's voices are being actively listened to and activated in policy making and related areas. One-off consultations are not sufficient to understand children's perspectives; they must be actively integrated into the ongoing conversations that constitute decision-making processes. Children must be heard and reheard. They must be asked what needs to change, and then how effective those changes have been. They must be part of an ongoing, iterative and collaborative dialogue.

Livingstone and Bulger recently outlined a global research agenda for children's digital rights in which they identified four key priorities:

1. Generation of evidence about how to support and promote online opportunities;
2. Identification of the conditions that render particular children vulnerable to risk of harm online
3. A focus on generating an evidence base about children's digital practice and its relationship to their rights in the global South
4. The evaluation of existing policies and programs, and the generation of comparable baseline data (Livingstone & Bulger, 2013: 4).

It is imperative that children's views and insights guide the implementation of this ambitious but necessary research agenda. As Pascal and Bertram state:

"We have to concern ourselves with listening to children. We [need to] see [their] perspectives, and those of the practitioner or researcher, as not in competition but standing together in the construction of dialogues, in which there is mutual respect, active participation and the negotiation and co-construction of meaning. Listening to children and encouraging their participation in research, evaluation, decision making and planning is important for many reasons [including] empowering children as learners, enabling them to make choices, express their ideas and opinions and develop a positive sense of self [and] the benefits of their participation to society as a whole and for the development of citizenship" (Pascal & Bertram, 2009: 254).

Aims and Methodology

This project was undertaken by a team of Young and Well CRC researchers based at the Institute for Culture and Society at the University of Western Sydney, Australia, with the support of the Digitally Connected Network, from May to August 2014.

The project aimed to document and analyse the ways that children themselves, in different locations around the world, conceptualise and enact their rights in relation to their digital media practices. In particular, the project asked children to reflect upon the extent to which they use digital media in their everyday lives and the motivations for their use; what their rights are in a digital age; how their rights might be enhanced by their engagements with digital media; and what kinds of challenges digital media pose to their capacity to claim their rights.

This project was undertaken with the explicit aim of providing a mechanism for children's views to inform the Committee on the Rights of the Child's deliberations when it met to consider the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the context of the digital age in Geneva on 12 September, 2014.

Drawing upon participatory research and design methodologies, this project deployed the methods outlined below to capture, analyse and present children's insights into their rights in a digital age. These methods resulted in three project outputs:

- A short film that documents children's insights into and experiences of their rights in the digital age using footage crowdsourced from children via the project's partner organisations.
- A scholarly report analysing the content generated by children who participated in the project in relation to the existing scholarship on children's rights in the digital age.
- A set of 'digital champion' stories showcasing how children, or organisations working with children, are using technology to enhance the rights of children in different locations around the world.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

01

Methodology design workshop

The research team held an all-day workshop with two Sydney-based members of the Young and Well CRC's Youth Brains Trust to co-design a content generation methodology that could be rolled out by partner organisations in workshops with children aged six to 18 from around the world to capture their insights and experiences of their rights in the digital age. Given the diverse contexts in which the project would be implemented, the methodology needed to be flexible and inclusive.

Prior to the workshop, participants were asked to familiarise themselves with selected sections of the Convention on the Rights of the Child with relevance to the rise of digital media, and to research how technology is used in two countries of their choice. In the workshop, the research team and the Youth Brains Trust members discussed in depth the opportunities and challenges associated with children's rights in the digital age in different parts of the world. Participants then worked with the research team to design and trial activities that could be used to gain children's insights into their digital rights.

02

Recruitment of partner organisations

Partner organisations were recruited through a call for Expressions of Interest (in English, French and Spanish) sent out via the website, email distribution networks, and social media channels of the Digitally Connected Network and the Young and Well CRC. In order to achieve representation from all continents, the call for expressions of interest was followed up with organisations affiliated with the above networks by representatives from the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University and UNICEF. Expressions of interest were collected using surveymonkey.com.

See Figure 1 for a summary of the locations in which participating organisations are based.

A total of 17 organisations in 16 countries ran workshops with 148 children in eight languages (Arabic, English, French, Italian, Malay, Portuguese, Spanish, and Turkish).

03

Development of project resource kit

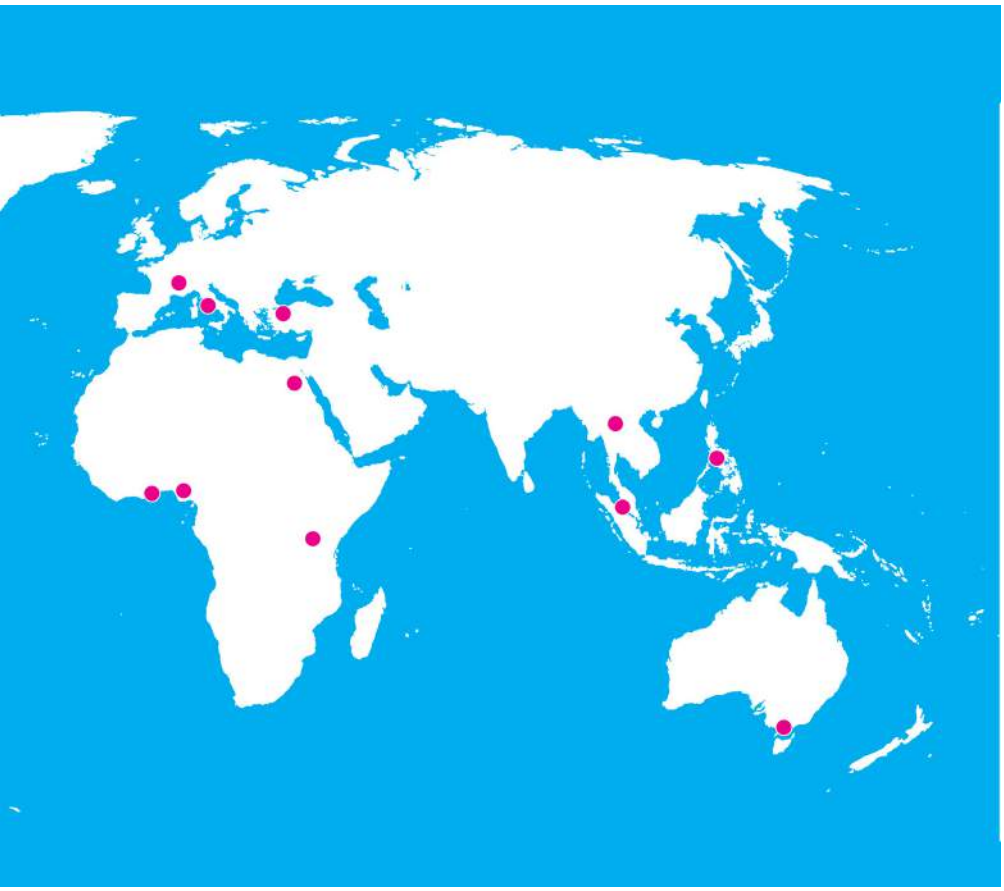


Figure 1: World map showing the locations in which the 17 project partner organisations and 148 child research participants are based.

Accra
Ghana

Barranquilla
Colombia

Benin City
Nigeria

Boston
United States of America

Buenos Aires
Argentina

Eskisehir
Turkey

Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia

Melbourne
Australia

Nairobi
Kenya

Pereira
Colombia

Phayao
Thailand

Port of Spain
Trinidad and Tobago

Rome
Italy

Saint Jean de la Porte
France

Salvador
Brazil

San Jose
Philippines

Saqulta
Egypt

Drawing on the methodology design workshop with the Youth Brains Trust members, the research team produced a project resource kit for partner organisations to use in workshops with children aged six to 18 to generate creative content about their rights. The resource kit provided ethical standards relating to the recruitment for and conduct of the workshops with children. It also contained detailed explanations of the suggested workshop activities and details on how to submit content back to the research team. As long as the ethical standards were maintained, partner organisations conducting workshops with children were given freedom to adapt the guidelines as appropriate to their participants and/or resourcing.

A draft version of the resource kit was circulated to the Youth Brains Trust methodology design workshop participants and the Project Advisory Board for feedback; trialled with a partner organisation; and then finalised and made available to partner organisations in English, French and Spanish.

04

Conduct of workshops with children aged 6-18 by partner organisations

In July and early August 2014, participating organisations each recruited between one and ten children between the ages of six and 18 to participate in a three hour workshop on their premises or at another safe location convenient for the child participants. In the workshops child participants engaged in three activities:

Technology timelines: children plotted their daily, weekly or monthly digital media use and related it to their rights as a child.

Short vox pop interviews: children responded on camera to a series of questions about the opportunities and challenges of digital media in enacting their rights.

Creative responses: children were invited to choose and explore a dimension of their rights in the digital age using one of six mediums (video, audio, photographs, drawing/painting, flip book, or written response).

Each workshop activity was designed to build on the preceding one. Please see below for a detailed description of the workshop activities in which children participated. A total of 17 organisations in 16 countries ran workshops with 148 children in eight languages (Arabic, English, French, Italian, Malay, Portuguese, Spanish, and Turkish). See Figure 1 for a summary of the locations in which participants are based.

05

Data analysis and production of project outputs

Content received in languages other than English was translated and the research team worked from English transcripts. All audiovisual content (vox pops and creative responses) received from partner organisations was then viewed and analysed over a period of five days using visual and discourse analysis methods. The research team simultaneously conducted a content analysis of the children's timelines to identify key themes, commonalities and differences. In conducting these analyses, the research team was very mindful that the project's key aim was to keep children's views at the core of the reporting. The results of this analysis formed the basis of both the short film (*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4-mJgKG9uo*) and this scholarly report.

06

Production of digital champion stories

In a separate process, a professional writer (Urszula Dawkins) was engaged to produce a set of 12 'digital champion' stories to complement the content of the scholarly analysis. These stories aimed to showcase the ways that children, or organisations working with children, are using digital media to enhance the rights of children. A call for nominations for digital champions was sent out via the websites, email distribution networks and social media channels of the Digitally Connected Network and the Young and Well CRC. Project Advisory Board members were also invited to make nominations. The call for nominations was distributed in English, French and Spanish, and the resulting nominations were collected using *surveymonkey.com*. Nominations were assessed and a selection made to ensure that all continents were represented, and that a diverse range of issues, experiences and viewpoints could be foregrounded. Once the list was finalised, the research team provided the professional writer with basic background research on each of the nominees. The professional writer then formulated and conducted email, telephone or Skype interviews with each of the nominees and developed the stories, which are featured in this report. Translation was provided as required.

PROJECT SUPPORT

The research team's work was supported by three entities:

1. Two members of the Young and Well CRC **Youth Brains Trust** participated in the Methodology Design Workshop, and another sat on the Project Advisory Board. All three Youth Brains Trust members provided ongoing, critical feedback across the life of the project.

2. Seventeen individuals and organisations affiliated with the **Digitally Connected Network** kindly agreed to recruit children aged six to 18 to participate in workshops to generate data/content for this project. These individuals and organisations ran the workshops with children and sent the content – electronically or via the post – to the research team for analysis and inclusion in the research outputs.

3. An international **Project Advisory Board** was established to leverage the collective wisdom of the project partners, and to assist in meeting the short timelines associated with this project. The Project Advisory Board provided high-level input on the project design via a short online survey (*surveymonkey.com*). Their responses were used to tighten the methodology and frame the analysis. Members of the Project Advisory Board also played an invaluable role in recruiting partner organisations and digital champions, and feeding back on the project outputs at strategic moments in their development. The Project Advisory Board comprised the following members:

    - **Regina Agyare** (Soronko Solutions/Tech Needs Girls Ghana)
    - **Gerrit Beger** (UNICEF)
    - **Philip Chan** (Young and Well CRC Youth Brains Trust)
    - **Anne Collier** (*connectsafely.org*)
    - **Sandra Cortesi** (Berkman Center for Internet & Society, Harvard University)
    - **Maria Herczog** (Committee on the Rights of the Child)
    - **Bob Hodge** (University of Western Sydney/Young and Well CRC Scientific Leadership Council)
    - **Paul James** (University of Western Sydney/United Nations Circles of Social Life Initiative)
    - **Rey Junco** (Iowa State University)
    - **Sonia Livingstone** (London School of Economics/EU Kids Online)
    - **Tanya Notley** (University of Western Sydney)
    - **Nishant Shah** (Centre for Internet & Society Bangalore)
    - **Amanda Third** (University of Western Sydney/Young and Well CRC)

The Young and Well CRC Youth Brains Trust
(youngandwellcrc.org.au)

The Youth Brains Trust is a group of enthusiastic and committed young people from around Australia, who are passionate about improving their own wellbeing and that of their peers. They play a pivotal role in advising the Young and Well CRC Board and shaping the Young and Well CRC's research agenda.

The Digitally Connected Network
(digitallyconnected.org)

Digitally Connected is a collaborative initiative between UNICEF and the Berkman Center building upon a multi-year partnership for analyzing digital and social media growth and trends among children and youth globally. Digitally Connected has at its core a network consisting of 150 academics, practitioners, young people, activists, philanthropists, government officials, and representatives of technology companies from around the world who, together, are addressing the challenges and opportunities children and youth encounter in the digital environment.

WORKSHOPS WITH CHILDREN: ACTIVITIES IN DETAIL

01

Technology use timelines

Examples of timelines received from Kenya, France and Egypt.

The aim of the first workshop activity was to gain a better understanding of how, when and to what extent children use technology in various parts of the world and how children see this as connected to their rights.

This activity was designed as a practical starting point that would prompt workshop participants to think about the relationship between their digital media practices and their rights, setting the scene for the following activities. Facilitators were encouraged to use this exercise to generate discussion about children's rights in the digital age.

Participants were asked to draw a daily, weekly or monthly timeline (choosing the timeframe most relevant to their circumstances) and map their media and technology use onto this timeline. To make this activity as inclusive as possible, workshop facilitators were asked to use a broad definition of media and technology so that children would be encouraged to also map their mass media engagements (radio, television, newspapers and so on). Participants were then asked to identify the challenges and opportunities associated with their media and technology use and map these onto their timeline. In the final stage of the activity, participants were encouraged to identify how their technology practices intersected, or not, with their rights by cutting out the relevant rights from a template provided by the workshop facilitator and matching them with the challenges and opportunities identified on their timelines. Children were also invited to invent their own rights, where they felt the existing rights did not capture their experience, and stick them on their timelines.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child identifies twelve articles of the Convention as relevant to a consideration of children's rights in relation to the rise of digital media in their 2014 Day of General Discussion (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2014). In addition to these, the research team identified two further articles (Article 16 on the right to privacy and Article 42 on making the Convention widely known) worthy of consideration. To simplify the timeline activity and make it child-friendly, the research team grouped these rights into seven broad themes in plain language. The rights children chose from in the timeline activity were thus:

- Right to have my best interests looked after
- Right to access information
- Right to express myself, have fun, and rest
- Right to be heard and respected
- Right to learn and develop
- Right to be safe and not discriminated against
- Right to participate

02

Vox pops

The second activity aimed to gather audiovisual content in which participants responded to a series of questions about how they see the opportunities for and challenges to their rights associated with digital media.

These vox pops could be filmed on a digital camera, flip-camera, or mobile phone. Where these technologies were not available, or where participants were reluctant to be filmed, children were asked to write short written responses to the questions. The following questions were used as a guide for the vox pops.

- What is your first name, how old are you and what country do you live in?
- What is the single best way digital media enable you and those around you to live well?
- What is the biggest challenge digital media pose to your ability, and the ability of those around you, to live well?
- Has gaining access to and using digital media made your life harder? If so, how?
- If digital media disappeared how would your life change?
- If you could choose to have any digital media at all, what would it be and how would it change your life?

Behind-the-scenes footage from Malaysia and Turkey.

03

Creative responses

The aim of this third activity was to encourage participants to provide a space to creatively reflect upon their rights in the digital age.

Participants could choose to explore and share the ideas or issues they consider most important, using one or more creative mediums (video; flipbook; drawing or painting; written response; audio or photography).

The following questions were suggested as a guide.

- If you could tell the Committee on the Rights of the Child one thing about how digital media give you opportunities to live a good life, what would it be?
- If you could tell the Committee on the Rights of the Child one thing about how digital media challenge your ability to live a good life, what would it be?
- How does digital media enable you to enact change in your life and/or your community?

Using different mediums to creatively respond (in Australia, Brazil, Colombia and Malaysia).

ETHICS APPROVAL

Ethics approval to work with children to design a content production methodology for this research project, and to roll it out via organisations affiliated with the Digitally Connected Network, was obtained from the University of Western Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval numbers H10709 and H10724) in July 2014.

All child participants were required to sign consent forms, and to gain consent from their parent or legal guardian, before participating in the project. Partner organisations were required to adhere to the ethical standards outlined in the Project Resource Kit when recruiting for and delivering the workshops with children.

LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY

Conducted between May and August 2014, this research project has unfolded against an extremely tight timeline. Whilst the research team implemented measures to ensure the rigour of the scholarship (For example, establishing an international Project Advisory Board to review all facets of the project), the short timelines imposed some limitations on the study.

At the Expression of Interest stage, 97 organisations worldwide were sent the project resource kit. However, ultimately only 17 organisations were able to commit to the short timeframes associated with the project, signalling that longer timelines would have broadened the sample considerably. The urgency at nearly every stage of the research process meant that the project's short timeline was also imposed on our partners, with some partners organising and delivering a workshop in a matter of days.

The recruitment of partner organisations via the Digitally Connected Network proved very efficient in the project's timeframe. However, it is likely that using this method, in combination with the short timeline, biased the sample of organisations that joined the project and recruited young participants. It remained a challenge to achieve representation from all continents. The project rolled out at the peak of the summer holiday break in Europe and North America, in part explaining the lower representation from these continents. The research team was also reliant on the partner organisations to gather the data. As a result, there were inconsistencies in the way data were generated.

Varying levels of access to and familiarity with digital media had a direct impact on whether organisations were able to participate and to share the results of the workshops. When they were able to provide the research team with content, the varying levels of production quality made it difficult at times to use the content to its full potential in the short film. Nonetheless, all data have been analysed for this written report.

The calls for expression of interest and the project resource kit were made available in English, French and Spanish. However, the majority of correspondence with partner organisations took place in English. The need for English-speaking intermediaries to communicate with the research team added a layer of complexity to the project but this was managed very capably by our partner organisations. Provision was made for children to participate in workshops in the language of their choice and, where partner organisations were not able to provide translation, translators were engaged to provide English transcripts. Due to budget limitations, some of this translation was undertaken by volunteers.

In light of the above limitations, the research team emphasises that the findings of this report are indicative rather than conclusive. The content children generated has provided the team with a deep understanding of the ways children in different locations are using digital media to learn about and enact their rights. We hope to continue this work into the future by sending out further calls to children globally to contribute to an online content-sharing facility dedicated to their views on their rights in the digital age.

Key findings

When given the opportunity to think about how digital media enhance or impede their rights, children embraced the task enthusiastically. Children repeatedly insisted that digital media was becoming, if not already, a more central part of their everyday lives. When they spoke about digital media in relation to their rights, they did so in a way that signalled that they understood their digital rights as closely intertwined with their human rights more broadly, conceiving their rights in broad terms that acknowledge the integrated part that digital media play in their everyday lives. That is, they tended to regard the online as just another setting in which they conduct their lives, unless they were talking about the risks associated with digital media engagement, in which case they often made sharp delineations between the online and offline worlds. This echoes the growing body of evidence that suggests that, in contexts where children have ready access to and use a variety of digital media, children do not readily distinguish between the online and the offline in the ways that adults do but, rather, move felxibly between onine and offline domains (Ito et al, 2010).

Although children were well-versed in the potential risks associated with engaging online, and were concerned about how their digital media practices might negatively impact upon their rights, children overwhelmingly experienced digital media as a positive influence on their lives: "Digital media made life easier than before" (Philippines, female, 14).

Indeed, some children had high aspirations for a world facilitated by digital media. They lauded the potential for digital media to connect cultures globally. An Argentinian participant stated that, "for me, it unites the world" and an Australian participant noted that "it connects us all on another level." Some saw technology as a potentially uniting force in promoting a spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality and friendship among all peoples. And others noted that digital media had an important role to play in the development of nations: "I think technology is a key element regarding the development of a nation" (Colombia, male).

"[If everyone had equal access to digital media] this would help various people in various parts of the world to learn about different cultures, about the people. This would help with the advancement of people and society."

Trinidad and Tobago, female, 16

All quotations in this section are verbatim. Spelling and grammatical errors have not been changed. The country of origin, the gender and, where the information is available, the age of the participant quoted has been provided for each quotation.

HOW CHILDREN CONCEPTUALISE THEIR RIGHTS

01

Children clearly value the possibility offered by digital media to broaden their horizons and gain an awareness of other cultures and people. They reported that digital media enables them to be informed citizens of the world who are better prepared to participate meaningfully in the lives of their communities, and they talked at length about the positive impact of digital media on their right to education.

In general, children found it much more difficult to articulate the opportunities digital media offers them to enact their rights. Indeed, higher levels of access appear to have implications for children's capacity to both imagine life without digital media, and to enumerate the opportunities this level of access affords them both in the present and in the future. Many children had a perception that the internet made their lives easier and, when asked to imagine what the world would be like without the internet or digital media, stated that their lives would be more difficult: "If digital media disappeared... it would obviously be harder" (Australia, f, 16). However, beyond noting the informational, communicative and educational possibilities of digital media, children generally struggled to conceptualise the benefits of digital media for their rights in any detail.

By contrast, children found it much easier to identify and discuss the risks digital media pose to their ability to realise their rights. As we discuss in further detail below, this raises questions about the kinds of discourses that shape children's understandings of their digital media practices globally.

Nonetheless, children from all parts of the world, when given the opportunity to reflect on the ways digital media both enhances and impedes their rights, grappled admirably with the complexity of the interrelationship between their rights. Children could recognise that their rights sometimes conflicted with one another when it comes to digital media. For example, having improved means of communication is perceived by children as an opportunity to enhance their right to freedom of expression and their right to have fun, which overall is an enhancement of their right to have their best interests looked after. But they perceive 'too much' digital communication, or digital communication at the detriment of other forms of social interaction, as a challenge to those very same rights. Children also often recognised that their rights could clash with the rights of others. Children did not necessarily have ready answers about how to handle these tensions but, as we discuss further below, they did demonstrate a readiness to tackle these questions and a desire to take responsibility for their rights online. And throughout the project, children expressed a strong desire to be trusted, and for adults to value their digital media practices. We unpack these issues in further detail below.

ACCESS TO DIGITAL MEDIA

02

Whilst the uptake of digital media is proceeding at a rapid rate in many parts of the world, access to digital media is far from evenly distributed across the globe. (Nielsen, 2013)

The children in this study reported vastly different levels of access to both hardware and connectivity, evidencing some of the challenges associated with digital media access that have been well-documented elsewhere (see for example, Kleine, 2014; Livingstone and O'Neill, 2014).Nonetheless, strong evidence emerged in this project to suggest that, even in places where children do not have access to the latest technology, children, along with organisations that work to support their rights, are using the available technologies with high degrees of inventiveness and efficacy. The U-Report in Zambia and the initiatives run by Soronko Solutions in Ghana, featured in the Stories of Digital Champions at the end of this report are just two examples of this. While we must be wary of sugarcoating the very real challenges children face in relation to digital media access in the developing world, it is also important to acknowledge when initiatives are working well using technologies that are perceived as dated in the developed world. Indeed, the work of the U-Report is a powerful reminder that, whilst smartphones might be desirable, many of the benefits they offer can also be achieved using analogue technologies. As Bob Hofman of the Global Teenager Project (see Stories of Digital Champions at the end of this report) notes, children are powerful actors in developing innovative workarounds using technologies that adults often perceived as outdated and limited:

"We [adults] tend to think in terms of problems, but students say, let us worry about [how to use the available] technology. We have our cellphones, we have our connections, just guide us in learning and let us solve the technology.... We have students from Liberia, Freetown, where they had to walk – we paid them ten dollars per week to buy airtime in an internet café, and they delivered a higher level of work than a school in [a developed country] who literally tumble over the latest technology." (Bob Hofman, Global Teenager Project)

If we are to harness the potential of digital media in ways that minimise the negative impact of economic, political, socio-structural contexts, we must look to such examples that are already underway and achieving significant success, and engage with them in further refining their impacts.

Developing countries definition: According to the World Bank classification, developing countries are those "countries with low or middle levels of GNP per capita... Several countries with transition economies are sometimes grouped with developing countries based on their low or middle levels of per capita income, and sometimes with developed countries based on their high industrialization. More than 80 percent of the world's population lives in the more than 100 developing countries" (The World Bank Group, 2004).

Access in developing countries

Where children have access to digital media, then the quality of this access is an important factor shaping their capacity to leverage digital media and connectivity to enhance their rights. Children in developing countries highlighted both poor infrastructure and low quality connectivity as major challenges that hinder their rights to access information, to education, participation and freedom of expression online. Children in the Philippines, for example, highlighted "slow internet connection" and "low signal" as key impediments to their digital media access. Similarly, participants from Kenya highlighted that key challenges they face include:

- having limited access to hardware and/or networks: **"I lack access most of the time" (Kenya, male, 14)**
- unstable or weak networks: **"low/meagre connectivity" (Kenya, male, 14)**
- unreliable power sources in their communities: **"there is insufficient power at home" and "power breakdown" (Kenya, male, 14)**

A young boy in Nigeria noted that "there is not enough power so the computer is not working" (Nigeria, male). Video footage submitted by another boy in Nigeria shows him powering up a diesel generator in order to charge his computer and mobile phone, evidencing the kind of infrastructural challenges children face in accessing digital media in the developing world. Children in several countries, such as Egypt and the Philippines, stated that governments have the responsibility to provide better infrastructure in order for the population to have access to digital media.

In the same way, although to a lesser extent, children in the developing world reported that the unavailability of devices and the cost of access to the internet impact their rights to provision. Children in Kenya reported that "insufficient credit for usage", a lack of "modern communication devices such as phones" and "limited use of computer" characterised their experiences. Similarly, a child from Egypt reported that "there is no computer at home", and others from Egypt reported that "there are no computers at school". Again, children perceived a role for governments and other institutions in rectifying these challenges. An Egyptian participant, for example, argued that "the government should provide communication devices at our school" (Egypt, male).

A few children in developing countries proposed that, as a minimum, schools should provide quality access to digital media, in terms of connectivity, supply of devices, and digital literacy education. However, such ambitions must be balanced with the other demands on educational institutions in developing contexts.

The infrastructural challenges narrated by children from developing countries in this study are a stark reminder that the project of resolving issues of access to digital media for certain populations needs to be pursued within a holistic framework that can accommodate cultural specificity and infrastructural, logistical and political factors. This is necessary if the introduction of widespread digital media access is not to exacerbate existing economic, political, and social divides.

Developed countries definition: According to the World Bank classification, developed countries are industrially advanced, "high-income countries, in which most people have a high standard of living. Sometimes also defined as countries with a large stock of physical capital, in which most people undertake highly specialized activities. Depending on who defines them, developed countries may also include middle-income countries with transition economies, because these countries are highly industrialized. Developed countries contain about 15 percent of the world's population. They are also sometimes referred to as 'the North'" (The World Bank Group, 2004).

Access in developed countries

In stark contrast to the above children, those who live in developed countries reported extensive access to digital media. This reflects research findings that, in many parts of the developed world, the rates of children under the age of 18 accessing digital media on a regular basis are reaching saturation point (Burns et al, 2013; Livingstone and Bulger, 2013; Madden et al, 2013). Indeed, when asked to identify what kinds of digital media devices or applications they would like to have if they could choose, many of the participants from developed countries responded by saying that they had adequate access to the necessary technologies, a wide range of platforms, and stable points of connectivity: "I've got a phone, a laptop and a TV so I don't think I really need anything else... I'm happy with what I got, I don't really need anything" (Australia, female, 16).

For participants from all parts of the world with easy access to digital media, it has become so embedded in their everyday lives that it is perceived as a fundamental right. Many find it hard to imagine a world without it. For example, an older child from Malaysia said, "Wow. I don't know what I would do without it because I was born in the internet era... I cannot imagine a life without the internet because I use it every day, for my studies, I use it for all my needs. And... I need it very much" (Malaysia, male, 16). There was a certain level of taken-for-grantedness in the ways children from the developed world talked about their digital media practices. As we discuss below, this has implications for their ability to imagine digital media in relation to their rights.

Access to digital media was frequently described by developed world participants as necessary to the sense of community, belonging and inclusion that increasingly underpins children's capacity to enact their rights to participation in the contemporary era. Where access is already, or is becoming, dominant, forms of participation that are facilitated via online and networked engagements are also becoming the norm; digital media are becoming a primary channel for participation, and a thread that is perceived to bind communities. As a participant from the United States explained, "This is the world we live in." Thus, in a context where the majority has ready access to digital media, not having access is perceived as exclusionary. As another participant said, "You feel like you have to be connected 'cause everyone else is, and if you're not you can feel excluded." (USA, male, 15).

Indeed, it appears that children without regular or reliable access to digital media are more likely to experience a more acute sense of exclusion if the majority of children in their communities do have access. Within developed countries, many children still experience limited access to digital media due to persistent socio-structural inequalities. The idea that digital media can exacerbate inequalities by further excluding those who are most vulnerable and do not or cannot benefit from modern technologies is well established in the literature (Kleine et al, 2014; Livingstone et al, 2013), but usually in a context where access to digital media is particularly difficult or where there is low digital literacy. Here, in a context where more comprehensive levels of access and literacy are both in place, children say that exclusion can result from having no choice but to use digital media as a way to comply with new social norms. As one participant noted, "I do feel like there's a pressure of, like, you have to have some form of it... you have to have a Facebook maybe, and it's, like, kind of frowned upon if you don't have Instagram or Snapchat... or Twitter." (USA, male, 15)

Thus, where there are established levels of access to digital media, some participants reported feeling considerable peer pressure to engage online, particularly using social media, otherwise one becomes at risk of isolation and exclusion. For these children, their use of social media is about adapting to their environment and the terms of the new cultural order. In this context, some participants expressed a desire, alongside their right to participate via digital media, for the right to not participate online, or to disconnect. For some children, this included taking periodic breaks from their technology (for example, during exam periods at school, or during homework time), or blocking out dedicated moments during the day in which to engage online.

HOW CHILDREN ARE USING DIGITAL MEDIA

03

Although there are marked discrepancies in access to digital media around the world, those children who do have regular access reported that they use digital media for a remarkably common set of purposes.

These purposes include:

- Social connectedness
- Access to information
- Education
- Creativity
- Entertainment

Similarly, regardless of the country they live in, the language they speak, and their different socio-economic backgrounds, when children engage with digital media, they tend to participate in remarkably similar activities. The top digital media activities children identified were:

- Participating in social media
- Playing games
- Completing schoolwork
- Emailing
- Watching films and television

Amongst the children in our sample, there were some differences between the ways that younger children (aged seven to 12) and older children (aged 12 to 18) engage with digital media. Younger children tend to use digital media for much shorter periods of time and are less likely to make use of the social dimensions of being online. They reported that their favourite digital media activities were watching television and playing games.

By contrast, older children use digital media primarily to communicate with one another and with their families, taking advantage of the full social functionality of digital media. Social media – in particular, Facebook, followed by WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram and similar platforms – is by far their preferred mode of communicating with friends. Older children also reported that they "send messages", "text my friends", "check my emails". This trend towards using digital media primarily for communicating is consistent with broader trends in digital media use globally, which show that communication is superseding information-seeking as the primary use of online and networked media (Third et al, 2014).

Children also commonly mentioned using digital media to conduct internet searches (with an emphasis on school-related activities); watching television and feature movies; listening to music. These uses occur mostly within a set period of time (usually late afternoon and early evening) whereas communicating typically occurs several times a day; in the early morning, at lunch time, and through the late afternoon and evening until sometimes late at night, if not throughout the entire day.

The explosion of mobile access to digital media is beginning to have something of a levelling impact, although it must be noted that children living in remote areas in both developed and developing countries reported that mobile networks in their regions were often limited or non-existent. Both analogue and smartphones are receiving strong uptake in developing countries, while in the developed world, smartphones are increasingly dominant. It appears that factors of cost are the primary driver of the shift to mobile access. In our sample, it appears that factors of cost of mobile and smartphones, as compared to computers, has led to increased usage, both by people who already had access but who are now connected throughout the day, and by people who previously did not have access due to the prohibitive cost of a computer. Most children use a mobile or smartphone and/or a laptop computer. Children in our sample also commonly mentioned using desktop computers, tablets and, to a lesser extent, game consoles.

DIGITAL LITERACY

04

If digital media are becoming increasingly integrated into the everyday lives of children globally, then digital literacy is essential to children's ability to both imagine and enact their rights in the digital age. Digital literacy comprises the technical and higher order evaluative skills required to access, understand, and participate in or create content using digital media. In order for digital literacy to support children's meaningful participation, it must encompass three kinds of literacy:

Technical literacy – being able to successfully navigate technologies with technical skills

Media literacy – understanding the opportunities new technologies can open up; working knowledge of available platforms; capacity to make judgments about the quality and reliability of online sources

Social literacy – an understanding of the social norms that apply in online settings (Collier, 2012)

As Anne Collier writes, "in a media environment that's both digital and social, where media are incoming (consumable), outgoing (producible, spreadable), and often collective or expressive of community (shareable, remixable) – literacy has to include technical, social, and information-handling skills. It's truly a 3-legged stool, not very useful without all three legs" (Collier, 2012).

As might be expected, children in this study demonstrated levels of digital literacy commensurate with their access and exposure to digital media. Some children used the workshops as a platform to demand more digital literacy education.

For example, a group of Argentinian students lamented the fact that digital literacy is not taught enough, nor understood well enough, and that it is a major challenge to inform oneself about the implications of engaging with digital media and to make informed decisions: "One of the biggest problems is the lack of information about the internet in general" (Argentina, female).

By contrast, most children, whilst they sometimes alluded to the skills, competencies and conceptual frameworks that comprise digital literacy when they were talking about their digital media practices, did not necessarily see digital literacy as a distinct skill set. Children acquire digital literacy via a combination of formal and informal learning (Ito et al, 2013). For the majority of children who participated in this study, this process of accumulating digital competencies is naturalised to the extent that they don't often have an objective view on their digital literacy. Even so, children from diverse contexts spoke about their digital media practices in ways that often betrayed a well-rounded and nuanced sense of digital literacy.

For example, many participants talked about the necessity to critically evaluate the content they come across online, which is an essential part of digital literacy. For example, a child in Colombia asserted that: "You shouldn't trust all publications because they might be fraudulent" (Colombia, male, 12). Children noted that, in amidst the volume of information available via digital media, it is sometimes difficult to establish the reliability and credibility of sources. In conversation about her right to education and to access information, a student from Argentina expressed frustration at finding conflicting information on the internet: "It's annoying that there is all sorts of information that can be contradictory" (Argentina, female). Some reported that they had taken specific actions to minimise misinformation. For example, a 16-year-old participant from Turkey stated: "I stopped following accounts that disseminate misinformation" (Turkey, female, 16). Other children reported that, in response to the challenges associated with verifying information, they have developed a general suspicion or cautiousness when using digital media for accessing information.

Similarly, many children demonstrated a deep understanding of the social norms that shape digital media interactions. They talked about how digital media etiquette was important if one's social media interactions were not to impinge on the rights of others: "If you're in a group or something, there'll be one person who is always on their phone while you're talking to them and it's kind of very rude so that's not helping us to live well" (Australia, female, 16). Children also talked about the differences between communicating online and offline. Many children reflected on the fact that they had to be careful how they communicated using digital media due to the fact that mediated communication is missing many of the social cues that occur in face-to-face interactions: "You can communicate but it's a different form of communication, we know what people express with words, but we don't see the facial expression. It's a good thing, but you can't fully communicate" (Argentina, female). For these children, being literate about the differences shaping online communication was connected with their responsibilities to ensure they didn't infringe upon the rights of others to be protected from harm.

Children also demonstrated an ability to think critically about the ways that digital media might be implicated in the transforming social and cultural landscape. For example, children expressed concern that the increasing presence of digital media – and, in particular, the phenomenon of social media and the need to constantly update one's online presence – might be diverting attention away from enjoying life in the present:

"I think a lot of us try to portray something on the internet or in social media... a persona, and it can affect our normal everyday lives... because we're mainly focusing on improving our media personalities rather than actually living our own lives" (Australia, female, 16).

They were also concerned about the ways digital media might be responsible for shifts in the ways people interact with one another. This most often took expression in the idea that digital media were responsible for a decline in face-to-face social interaction:

"The biggest problem... that would be socialising, because if everyone is online these days, no one is interacting face to face" (Philippines, female, 13).

Children were concerned not only about the ways that this was affecting peer-based interactions, but also with how it might be transforming familial ties:

"When my family gets together for dinner there is no communication. We're all on tablets, phones. This is a problem" (Malaysia, male, 17).

These concerns that digital media are potentially antisocial sit at odds with children's claims that they use digital media primarily to extend their interactions with friends from school and other face-to-face social settings. Further, at times, children expressed a level of nostalgia for a time when face-to-face relationships prevailed that is not commensurate with the fact that they have grown up in a digitally mediated society. This suggests that these discourses about the potential for digital media to undermine face-to-face sociality are borrowed from the framings of digital media provided by the adult world.

The profound influence of adult-normative perspectives on children's sense-making about digital media became even clearer in relation to another important aspect of their digital literacy; namely, their capacity to conceptualise the opportunities new technologies can potentially open up for them. An important part of being digitally literate is having a well-developed enough understanding of digital media to know what it can potentially offer by way of supporting one's growth and development. While children frequently noted that digital media facilitates their communicative, educational and informational needs, many children found it difficult to articulate the ways that digital media enhanced their lives and their rights in more specific and precise terms. By contrast, children generally found it much more straightforward to enunciate the risks and challenges associated with their digital media practices.

There appear to be two factors shaping this phenomenon. Firstly, amongst our sample, this tendency was more pronounced for those children with the most regular access to digital media in their daily lives. This suggests that, for those children with ready access, digital media has become such an integral part of their everyday lives – so hegemonic – that they find it difficult to identify the opportunities digital media potentially offer them to live better lives and enact their rights as children, even while they are certain digital media does indeed offer them benefits to which they would not otherwise have access. Secondly, in combination with the taken-for-granted presence of digital media, the other factor that appears to limit children's ability to explicate the opportunities offered by digital media is the lack of an appropriate language for conceptualising and talking about them. That is, the discourses available to children currently focus almost exclusively on risk and protection, and this is potentially undermining their capacity to imagine, and articulate, the benefits digital media offers them in realising their rights.

COMMUNICATION

05

Children consistently rated digital media's capacity to facilitate communication as the single most important way that digital media facilitates their rights. The communicative dimensions of digital media provide children with ways to nourish their friendships, their family ties, and their broader social networks. These things are fundamental to their wellbeing. They also enhance children's participation in their communities.

Children most commonly said that they used online social interactions to sustain their offline friendships. They described the ways they use digital media as a communication tool to facilitate face-to-face interaction; for example, to find out where people are, where they can meet, who is available at a certain time, or to simply organise an event that others are invited to join. Children say that communicating with their network of friends is closely linked to several rights such as the right to be heard and respected (there is a dialogue), the right to express myself (I can contact others), the right to have fun and rest (network of friends, organise leisure activities), and the right to have their best interests looked after (it allows me to maintain friendly relationships, which is essential to my happiness).

While children emphasised that the opportunities offered by digital media allow them to stay in touch with friends and family and thus maintain a close-knit network that already exists offline, some also highlighted that their online social interactions sometimes expand to include a greater network of online contacts. Children say that digital media provide a way to make new friends, or to find other people with similar interests.

The concept of virtual friendship was outlined as an opportunity to find people who might share the same interests and therefore the possibility to create a sense of community, be it around a common interest, cultural background, etc. Children take the idea of online friendship seriously. Many discussed how meeting people online, having never met them face-to-face, has facilitated the deepening of an interest, or led to meaningful social connections. Evidence shows that online friendships can often have particularly positive impacts on children who are otherwise socially margninalised, such as children who live with chronic illness or disability (Third & Richardson, 2010).

"Communicating with people I normally wouldn't."

USA, male, 16

"Using Skype so I can contact my family overseas, in Malta, and be able to talk to them and keep them updated with what's happening in our country and what's going on in theirs."

Australia, female, 15

"For me the biggest [challenge] would be not to be able to skype or facetime with my aunt, she travels a lot for work and we're very close but I don't get to see her much."

Australia, female, 16

INFORMATION

06

Although there is a shift towards using digital media primarily as a communication tool, this is not to say that information-seeking is a dwindling feature of children's use of digital media. Children consistently rated communication as the most important opportunity afforded by digital media. However, the opportunities arising from digital media as a source of information came a close second in children's answers about the positive impact of digital media in their lives.

Children identified a direct correlation between their access to digital media and their right to access information as stipulated in Article 17 of the Convention. Online technology allows quicker and easier access to information than other traditional mediums. For example one child from Trinidad and Tobago mentioned the advantage of not being bound by the local library's limited resources or restricted opening hours.

However, it also brings to users an enormous amount of additional information that they would never have been able to access without digital media. As an Australian participant acknowledged, "sometimes there is too much information available" (Australia, female, 16). Many children said they sometimes experienced "information overload," underlining the importance of digital literacy in enabling children to navigate, sort and utilised large volumes of information.

Children were generally aware that access to information was not equally available to everyone. Some narrated this as a 'rights' issue that needs to be rectified:

"If the internet disappeared, we would not be able to do research on the internet for school projects, we would have to go to the library and that is a problem because some people don't have a library in their village so it is a lot more difficult, especially since there are libraries that do not have a lot of books on specific topics or don't have the money to buy more" (France, female, 10).

The need to access information featured strongly in children's discourse, from being an integral part of recreational activities, to becoming responsible citizens who are able to form their own opinions and participate in their community. Children often explicitly connected the idea that digital media enable their right to information, with their right to participation, and their right to education.

"[Digital media] enables us to live well by allowing us to access more information from the internet and other sources that we would not have directly in our hands."

Australia, female, 16

PARTICIPATION

07

Children talked about digital media's role in their participation in two key senses. They understand digital media as playing a vital role in:

- enabling them to be informed citizens who can participate meaningfully in their communities; and
- enabling them to participate in friendship and broader community networks.

As such, when children talked about participation, they most often connected this with the informational and communicative capacities of digital media.

In terms of information, digital media were often presented as an opportunity to know and learn about the rest of the world and participate as an informed citizen. Many children, including younger ones, expressed how important it is for them to gain an awareness of what happens in other countries, both near and far. Students in Ghana agreed that "researching what's happening in other parts of the world" was one of the main positive uses of the internet. Children cited recent events in Gaza, the Ebola virus or the war in Mali as issues they had learned about via digital media. As an Australian participant said, "[digital media] helps a lot of children know about the news and what is going on, we're more knowledgeable in a way." This idea was echoed by a young boy in Nigeria who said, "I like to listen to news to know more. I want to know what is happening" (Nigeria, m). For those who have no or less frequent access to digital media, the inability to access information and current affairs was seen as a major disadvantage. Some participants also raised the issue of censorship of digital media restricting their right to access information. This highlights the fact that, while digital media open up a range of opportunities for some, in other parts of the world, children are not afforded the same rights.

Several children noted that the opportunities that digital media provide to stay in touch with world affairs can also have their downsides. Many participants noted that it is very easy to come across age-inappropriate content online: 'Kids these days have easy access and there's a lot of inappropriate things out there that they should not be seeing' (Australia, female, 16). However, interestingly, these children were not necessarily referring to the kinds of inappropriate content that is commonly targeted by cybersafety education; namely, sexual imagery, gaming violence, and so on. As a boy from the United States attested, there have been times when his right to protection from violence and harm has been inadvertently compromised simply by watching breaking news online. "You're going to learn about more gruesome things and the harsh realities of the world younger... I've had to learn about things I wouldn't have wanted to know by going on BBC and CNN" (USA, male, 15). This highlights the importance of working with children to develop child-centred concepts of protection.

Another boy from the United States captured the complexity of the decision making processes children navigate online – sometimes on a moment to moment basis – when he talked about inappropriate content as a challenge to his right to freedom from violence: "Videos people post on YouTube and Facebook about very graphic content: The struggle is wanting to know what it is... There might be a video of two kids fighting. You might have the urge to want to see the actions but you know the actions aren't very positive" (USA, male, 18). This boy articulates very clearly the tension between wanting to know (and being able to know because it is there on your screen) and taking responsibility for one's wellbeing. For this kind of moment-to-moment decision-making, children rely on having developed digital literacy, underlining the importance of children acquiring digital literacy to enable them to protect their right to freedom from violence and other inappropriate material.

For a minority of participants, participating in digital media networks enabled them to engage in broader processes of social and cultural change. For example, a participant from Trinidad and Tobago noted that, by engaging with digital media, "you have access to politicians who can play a significant role in the community" (Trinidad and Tobago, female, 16). An Australian participant noted that her digital media practices meant that "it's a lot easier to get involved in projects and... things" (Australia, female, 16). There are clear opportunities for decision-making entities to more actively engage children in their processes using digital media. The Blockanomics initiative in the United Kingdom is one good example of the ways that children might be encouraged to participate meaningfully and more consistently in the lives of their communities, whether that be at a local, national, regional or global level.

RISKS, HARM AND SAFETY

08

As many commentators, such as Sonia Livingstone and collaborators, have recently pointed out, the relationship between risk, harm and safety for children in online settings is enormously complex. In amidst the online safety literature, there are three key insights that are beginning to impact policy and practice, creating something of a shift in the ways online safety is addressed.

These are:

1. Exposure to risk does not equate to harm, and most children benefit from experiencing some degree of risk because it enables them to develop the resilience to deal with risks online (Livingstone and O'Neill, 2014)

2. Some children are more vulnerable to experiencing harm as a consequence of exposure to online risks than others, and online safety efforts need to focus more precisely on supporting these children (Livingstone and O'Neill, 2014)

3. Attempts to protect children can impede on the possibilities available to children to realise their right to participation, or as De Haan and Livingstone express it, "safety initiatives to reduce risk tend also reduce opportunities" (De Haan & Livingstone, 2009).

The internet does indeed present a range of new potential risks and harms, which require measured responses from policy makers and practitioners. As Davies et al note, "In exploring how to respond to the online lives of children and young people, safety must sit alongside, and be integrated with, a broader range of considerations, including promoting positive uptake of online opportunities, promoting skills relevant to a digital economy, and encouraging the development of accessible, democratic online spaces in which rights to both play and participation, amongst others, can be realised" (Davies et al, 2011).

There have been recent calls for policy and practice responses to seek to develop online safety approaches that can foster children's right to protection from harm whilst simultaneously empowering them to maximise the benefits of connectivity. Evidence gathered from children around the globe as part of this project only underscores the importance of pursuing more balanced approaches to cybersafety as a matter of urgent priority.

Indeed, our evidence shows that children in many parts of the world today have inherited a popular discourse that is characterized primarily by fear – if not moral panic – and that this potentially inhibits their capacity to imagine and articulate the opportunities digital media affords them in realizing their rights. In general, while children struggled to narrate in detail the ways that digital media potentially supports them to exercise their rights, they found it much easier to talk at length, and often in significant detail, about the risks and challenges to their rights that they face online. This suggests that, while cybersafety has achieved success in raising children's awareness of the potential risks, it has not achieved the equivalent in relation to the opportunities digital media provides.

Children who participated in this project talked knowledgeably about the range of risks they might potentially encounter online. For example, many children reported "seeing things they did not want to see" or learning about things that they would rather have not known about until later on in life. The risk of seeing inappropriate content was often expressed in relation to violent content or disturbing footage from real-life situations such as scenes of war, school yard fighting, poverty and starvation. For example, a participant from Thailand reported that "a challenge is violent content" (Thailand, male, 14). Other children also expressed concern at seeing adult content, and more specifically nudity and pornography. There was a strong recognition from children that some content is more or less appropriate depending on age or maturity. Children generally recognised that, when it came to their right to protection, this could be at odds with their rights to access information.

Similarly, children spoke at length about the need to keep one's information safe online, and the potential problems associated with one's 'digital footprint'; namely, the permanence, searchability, and traceability of one's information online. Children – and particularly girls – also talked about the risks associated with sexting, and a small minority talked about the possibility of sexual grooming. Children addressed the risk of cyberbullying through a couple of powerful creative responses, talking about it as a challenge to their right to be safe and not discriminated against. For example, a Malaysian boy created a short video to raise awareness of cyberbullying with succinct information on the proportion of the population affected by cyberbullying and the fact that it can affect anyone irrespective of race. Children's direct references to cyberbullying nevertheless remained few and far between, which suggests that cyberbullying does not preoccupy children to the same extent that it often features in public and policy debates. This is not to suggest that cyberbullying is not a serious issue that needs to be addressed by policy and practice. Rather, it underlines the necessity for research that can better identify which children are more at risk of experiencing particular harms, so that resources "can be used to more precisely target those who experience harm" (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010: 1).

Notably, children frequently spoke about risks in the very same terms that characterise cybersafety campaigns. The risks they identified were not necessarily ones of which they had either direct or indirect experience (e.g. through a friend). Children often talked about the risks and potential harms in hypothetical terms, as risks that other people encounter. For example, one female participant noted that "there are girls that upload nude pictures of themselves, so other people can take those photos and make trouble". And a male participant noted, for example, that "people don't know that they shouldn't put their personal information up online". Children, and particularly young children, also frequently resorted to superlative illustrations of the potential risks they face online. For example, one 10-year-old noted that "some people have committed suicide because of insults posted on the internet", and several other older children recounted that people had been abducted or been the victims of violence because they failed to protect their personal information online.

Children also talked about the risks associated with digital media in more abstract terms; for example, digital media participation as a risk to their physical health and wellbeing. Again, these renderings tended to be dominated by adult-normative discourses. In particular, the use of digital media was described as an activity that 'makes us lazy', with children noting that it is unhealthy to look at a screen for long periods of time, and that digital media produces the tendency to stay indoors. Some children admitted that if digital media disappeared one of the good things would be that they would go and play outside more, echoing the discourses that are prevalent in the developed world about the health issues associated with sedentary lifestyles and obesity. Children noted, that while digital

RESPONSIBILITY

09

media potentially stop them from taking part in other activities, the more embedded digital media become in their everyday lives, the less likely children are to contemplate participating in activities that do not involve digital media. These narratives signal that there is scope for organisations invested in promoting children's wellbeing to shift children's thinking around how digital media might support and promote physical wellbeing.

Our evidence shows that risk and safety tends to dominate children's sense-making about their digital media practices. As much recent research has shown, awareness of the risks, and an ability to articulate them, does not necessarily translate into behaviour change that enables children to navigate risks safely (Third et al, 2014).

Further, the dominance of risk and safety discourses in children's thinking about their digital practice raises the question of whether or not children are being given adequate opportunity to develop the alternative ways of thinking about digital media that are necessary for children to be able to conceptualise their rights not only in terms of protection, but also in terms of participation. Children must be allowed to formulate and express their own (collective) framings of technology and its impacts on both their everyday lives and the social world more broadly. They must be able to conceptualise themselves as having agency in their digital engagements.

As the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare has asserted, "a rights-based approach to participation requires that children are assisted in not only expressing their views but also in forming them." (Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Inc., 2011: 20). Children's right to form their own opinions must guide our approaches to developing online safety initiatives that can balance harm minimisation with the promotion of children's right to participation.

In the context of their discussions about rights, a surprising number of children – especially older children – talked about the interrelationship between rights and responsibilities.

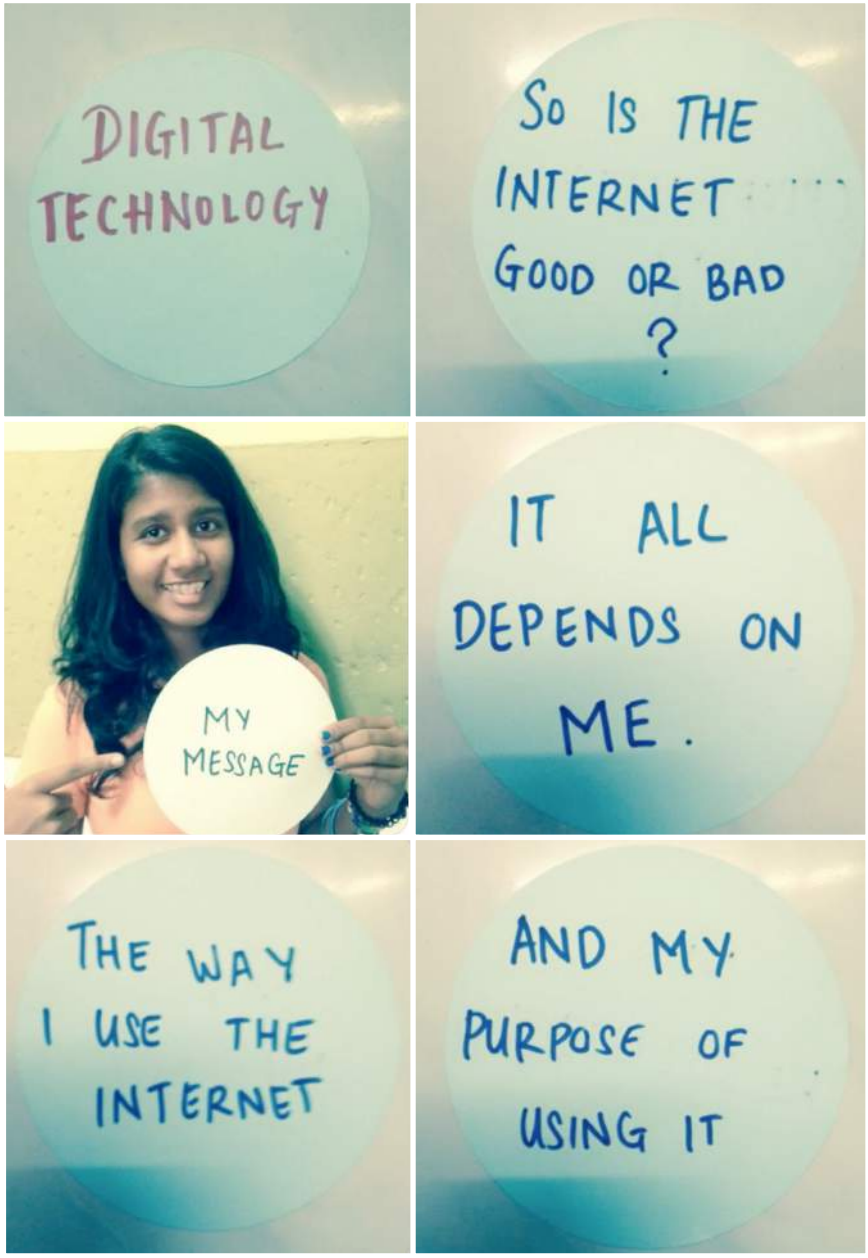
Many children underscored that the rights they enjoy in relation to digital media also come with real responsibilities, which include "understand[ing] the consequences" of their engagements (Argentina, Malaysia), being personally accountable for the ways their online engagements impact others, and knowing when to exercise self-control:

"The most important thing is... knowing your limits" (Malaysia, female, 14)

The kind of reasoning these children articulated around personal responsibility runs counter to arguments that sometimes circulate in the popular domain that suggest that technology enables, or even encourages, children to abandon responsibility for their actions. As an Argentinian participant stated:

"Technology is not simply good or bad. It is how you use it. That is the point that we should reflect on" (Argentina).

This sentiment was also captured succinctly in a creative piece generated by a child in Malaysia (female, 14), as shown at right.



Stills from a creative piece to camera by a 14-year-old Malaysian participant.

Importantly, some participants suggested that they found the idea of taking responsibility enabling, in that it allowed them the opportunity to shape the internet, digital practices, and their life worlds more broadly. For some participants, their individual sense of responsibility had, over time, grown into a sense of social responsibility. For example, a 14-year-old Malaysian girl reported that learning more about taking responsibility for her own actions online had led her to become involved in an informal peer support initiative to educate younger children about digital literacy: "In my neighbourhood, I am educating younger children, aged eight to 12. They also have internet access, so we can also create awareness in them too" (Malaysia, female, 14).

This serves as a powerful reminder that, by empowering children to take responsibility, more opportunities potentially open up for children to support one another's digital practices.

There is an opportunity here for advocates for children's rights in the digital age to work with children to foster their sense of responsibility for their rights as they play out in digitally mediated settings. Promoting this sense of responsibility amongst both individual children and children collectively potentially enables them to take a more active and empowered role in mitigating the risks of online engagement, and leveraging the benefits.

Children from all over the globe told the research team that they want to be trusted by the adults in their lives,

FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

10

and to have adults understand how and why they use digital media. As a Malaysian participant said, "the biggest challenge is that adults don't trust us" (Malaysia, m, 16). In her ethnographic study of the digital practices of young people living in the United States, danah boyd found that young people see digital media as a key part of their lives, and that they want their parents and other significant adults to understand why they place value on online interactions. It appears that children around the world share this sentiment.

A couple of our participants noted that the adult-child relations shaping children's digital practices are aggravated by the perception of a generation gap: "A generation gap prevents teenagers to communicate effectively with parents and grandparents" (Trinidad and Tobago). This generational prejudice cuts both ways. That is, although children frequently took issue with the fact that parents think children are often unaware of the consequences of their actions online, children articulated what is potentially an equally limited conception of adult's understanding of, and capacities to use, digital media.

Research from around the world is only just beginning to emerge on the differences between children's and parents' perceptions of children's digital practices (Hart Research Associates, 2012; Green et al, 2011; Third et al, 2011). However, this emerging evidence base suggests that we need to invest in educating parents about how children use digital media, and why, if we are to enable parents to adequately support their children to leverage the benefits of their digital media practices for their rights.

Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention underpin the right to education and participants clearly expressed how digital media allow them to better claim those rights. Children reported that the internet has made it easier for them to undertake schoolwork and to engage in the education process. They consistently made strong statements about how closely interrelated their rights to information and education are:

"I think that digital media contributes to education too. Imagine all that is there in front of you on the net, to research, to learn" (Brazil, female).

With regards to formal education, it was apparent from the technology timeline activity that the majority of participating children regularly use some form of digital technology in relation to their schooling.

"When I use the computer at school, I do something that older kids do because those at preschool could not do it. I go every Thursday [to the computer class] so I can learn" (Italy, male, 7).

The use of computers in the classroom is fast becoming the norm in developed countries, either as a complementary resource to more traditional teaching and learning tools, or when computers and other digital technologies are integrated in the curriculum.

Children described at length how they use the internet to research information and increase their knowledge of topics raised at school, as part of their homework. A participant from Colombia stated "I am already used to doing my homework on the internet. It helps me a lot" (Colombia, m, 14), and an Australian participant stated that "to find out information made [home]work a lot easier, it's right there" (Australia, female, 16).

While the ability to research information is not a new feature of the school curriculum, some children consider that not being able to access the internet would directly hinder their capacity to complete schoolwork: they would no longer be able to research projects or create slides to present to their peers, and would struggle to meet the required milestones to successfully progress through their education. As a 13-year-old girl from the Philippines explains, without the internet "everything would be harder, schoolwork, projects, assignments, I use digital media to get information so, without it, it would become harder for me" (Philippines, female, 13). This highlights the fact that digital media is to some extent becoming an integral part of education and that, as access to digital media increases, so too does the expectation that digital media can and should be used to some extent within the formal education process. However, this in turn raises questions about maintaining equitable rights to education for those children who do not have ready access to digital media at home or at school. It also underlines the idea that digital literacy education must be a priority for

children everywhere, because digital literacy is essential to leveraging the benefits of digital technology as an educational tool.

Digital technology is used as a means to receive instructions and send homework back to the teacher, to extend beyond the 'standard' level of homework for those who can go a step further or on the contrary, for those who may need some additional support, to explore themes or practice skills through games, etc. New technologies also allow for an extension of the teacher/student relationship outside the classroom, with many children reporting that they contact their teacher outside school hours to answer questions or to discuss topics raised in class.

Similarly, digital media can provide solutions in the event of 'traditional' schooling being interrupted due to travel or sickness. As a participant from Trinidad and Tobago suggested:

"If you're sick, you can get homework... So you don't really miss a day at school, because of technology you can just ask a friend or even a teacher" (Trinidad and Tobago, female, 16).

There are clear benefits here for the educational rights of children living with chronic illness or disability that prevents them from attending school regularly.

Children also noted that digital media provide an invaluable opportunity to expand their learning beyond the school curriculum: "It helps me to learn new things" (Colombia, male, 12). The internet allows children to research, discover and pursue topics they are interested in, or curious about.

"I have learnt how to bake, various baking techniques" (Trinidad and Tobago, female, 16).

"I learnt to make these clay dolls on YouTube" (Colombia, male, 8).

For children with regular access to digital media, it allows them to take the learning experience into every moment of everyday life. Children demonstrate new skills they had learned through the internet, such as craft activities or cooking skills, or to explain how they increased their knowledge of a specific subject of personal interest such as film making. In this instance, children articulate the opportunity to learn with their right to engage in recreational activities and participate in cultural life and the arts (Article 31).

"It keeps me moving forward in all the things I enjoy doing" (USA, male, 16).

For some, the in-depth and self-directed learning that becomes possible on the internet has led them to develop skills that position them for careers. Several participants from Malaysia had learned to write code and create apps using digital media, and are in the process of exploring opportunities to convert these skills into a career in the technology industry:

"I like creating apps, what I like is that we can create new things" (Malaysia, male, 16).

Children report that there is a tension between the right to learn and the right to rest and play:

"Has digital media made my life harder? Yes somewhat because my attention could be easily distracted. I would be working on an assignment and the next second I would be watching animes" (Philippines, female, 13).

The fact that social media sites can be blocked in a school setting was often highlighted as a challenge that hinders their right to access information. However, a couple of children also recognised that it was an opportunity to enhance their right to have their best interests looked after because it removed the distraction of social media and helped them to focus on their studies.

ENTERTAINMENT, LEISURE, FUN AND RELAXATION

11

Children consistently reported that digital media allowed them to exercise their right to fun, play and rest. As a 14-year-old girl from the Philippines states:

"[Digital media] made life easier than before, it helps a lot with assignments, homework, research, [but] it can also be a medium for having fun, relaxation and much more" (Philippines, female, 14).

The timelines children completed demonstrated their use of digital media for a wide range of leisure activities: from listening to music or watching television and movies, to playing games with others and participating in social media. For many children in places with regular and reliable access to digital media, engaging in online entertainment was a routine activity.

"The best thing about digital media is entertainment. When we get bored we can connect to the internet" (Turkey, male, 15).

In line with trends of user-generated content, children reported engaging in creative content production in their leisure time. By providing an avenue for children to create content and share with others, digital media may be seen to be fostering their right to expression. Beyond this, as previously mentioned, children also use digital media to learn new skills as part of their leisure time activities. Children submitted audiovisual footage in which they demonstrated the interests they had developed and the skills they had learned on the internet. For example, a nine-year-old girl from Colombia had learned to make paper windmills and other paper constructions online, and an eight-year-old boy showed the figurines he had learned to make using online tutorials. Children generally reported that the content available online had enabled them to pursue leisure time activities they would otherwise not have exposure to in their communities.

Some children noted that digital media's role in enabling them to enact their right to fun, play and rest sometimes conflicted with other rights, such as the right to education. For example, some children spoke about the 'lure' of digital media as a distraction away from time that could be better spent studying.

"It's very distracting, you can go on there for hours and not even realise" (Australia, female, 15).

However, they also noted that they had become better at managing the tension between the need to study and the desire to 'play' online as they grew older, and that this was part of developing responsibility in the context of digital media.

PRIVACY

12

Whilst they did not necessarily talk about privacy directly, the children who participated in this study were generally well-informed about the need to ensure that their privacy was protected, particularly as relates to ensuring the security of their personal information.

Children from countries where children's access to digital media is the norm talked easily about the steps one can take to ensure one's information is secure. For example, a Malaysian participant related:

"Privacy settings are important. When it comes to social networking, you should set your privacy settings in a way that you don't search for trouble. If you set your privacy settings to 'public', post too much information on yourself, that's searching for trouble. My mum has played a big role in creating this awareness in me" (Malaysia, female, 14).

Similarly, children also demonstrated a good understanding of the permanence of their digital footprint. As a French participant noted:

"You can post a photo on the internet but then everybody can see it and it is difficult to remove it. It can go anywhere in the world and this can be an issue for some people... There is the issue of photos or documents that cannot be deleted" (France, female, 10).

In short, many children in the study expressed reasonable levels of awareness about issues relating to privacy and were aware of ways they could protect their right to privacy.

However, alongside the definitions of privacy that frequently underpin cybersafety education, a different concept of privacy emerged from children in this study. For example, when children in Kenya were asked to identify challenges to their capacity to realise their rights in the digital age, they singled out "nosy parents", "overprotective parents", and "parents who spy", signalling that they have a strong desire for privacy, but that privacy often means having a space of their own beyond the adult gaze. This confirms the findings of a recent study commissioned by UNICEF and conducted in Kenya (Intermedia, 2013). This sentiment was echoed by children from numerous other countries in the study, highlighting that stakeholders with an investment in protecting children's rights need to work with children to develop child-centred definitions of those rights if the resulting initiatives are to respond to children's stated needs.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING

13

Responses received from children in this project indicate that children in most parts of the world do not yet readily think about digital media as a phenomenon that might support their right to both physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Indeed, digital media were more likely to be seen as an impediment to their physical health. For example, a couple of older children speculated in passing that, if digital media disappeared, they "would be healthier because I would get outside more often" (Australia, female, 16).

There is an emerging evidence base that suggests that, under certain circumstances, digital media can foster positive approaches to eating, exercise, sleep, and a range of other physical and mental health practices (see, for example, Cummings, 2013). Further, researchers are evaluating a range of apps and biometric devices for their benefits for both physical and mental health (Hides et al, 2014). Once the evidence is in, it will be important to engage children in developing initiatives to encourage children globally to exercise their right to a healthy life (Article 24).

Whilst participants in this project did not talk explicitly about the potential benefits of their digital media practices for their mental health and wellbeing, they made frequent references to the fact that digital media and, in particular, social media helped them connect with friends, family and community networks in ways that they find enjoyable and rewarding, and which help them engage as informed citizens, all of which have proven benefits for children's mental health and wellbeing (Collin et al, 2011).

Some children also spoke about how digital media provided more introverted or socially challenged children the opportunity to participate in peer relations and social life on their own terms and exercise their rights to be heard and respected, express oneself, and have fun:

"I am more comfortable with electronic communications. I can express myself better in electronic chat" (Turkey, female, 16).

This gestures toward the potential for the mental health and wellbeing of more children globally to be fostered using digital media (For further information, see the work of the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, *youngandwellcrc.org.au*).

Such approaches to supporting children's physical and mental health provide a good example of the ways that we might leverage children's digital media practices in a holistic way to enable them to enact their rights. This is potentially as important in the developed world as it is in the developing world, and especially where communities have experienced severe levels of trauma (Lala, 2014).

However, digital media initiatives that work with the world's most vulnerable children must be underpinned by investment in the generation of an evidence base (Livingstone & Bulger, 2013) of rigorous interdisciplinary research that can account for medico-scientific, as well as economic, political, social and cultural factors, to ensure that children's vulnerability is not exacerbated.

LEGAL PROTECTIONS

14

Whilst this study did not directly seek children's views on the legal protections relating to their rights, where participants did mention them, they expressed much confusion about how regulatory frameworks operate to protect them. Research has consistently shown that children are confused about the legal protections available to them in relation to digital media (see for example, Katz et al, 2014).

Children from Argentina who commented on this issue, generally understood that there is a tension between national and international legislation, and the global scale and reach of the internet. However, at least one child was under the impression that the internet is outside the safeguard of legislation:

"The worst is that, despite being the technology that we use the most, the law does not apply to [digital media]" (Argentina, female).

This suggests that much more could be done to engage children in a conversation about what kinds of legal protections would enable them to best realise their rights, and to use participatory research and design methods to design initiatives that will raise their awareness about the legal protections available to them.

DISABILITY

15

This study was not able to engage children living with a chronic illness or disability due to the short timelines. This remains one of the outstanding limitations of this study.

Research evidences that digital media can play a particularly powerful role in connecting such children with their peers, minimising their social isolation, enabling them to develop the necessary social and technical skills to engage with the social world (Third & Richardson, 2010), and to foster their economic participation in ways that give substance to the fuller expression of their rights (Article 23). This is supported by the stories of children like Kartik Sawhney and the practice-based knowledge generated by partners of this project, such as Soronko Solutions in Ghana and *Livewire.org.au* in Australia (see Stories of Digital Champions at the end of this report), suggesting that organisations working in the disability and chronic illness support sectors should be encouraged to work with such children to further explore how to implement digital media initiatives that enhance their rights.

"Being able to see their own ideas come to life is a proud moment, and one that many kids don't get to have. This game gives many children who wouldn't normally be heard a chance to be, and I think this alone will make them far more eager to contribute."

Game developers foresee that local government and school-aged children will connect through Blockanomics' virtual city.

Digital Champions

Blockanomics – Democracy Minecraft

United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom's Carlisle region, game developers are working to connect local government and school-aged children using a version of the popular online game, *Minecraft*. In *Blockanomics* – named for the 'building blocks' that players use to create objects and environments – solutions to local problems will be proposed and explored through a bespoke 'virtual city'. Up to 1,000 young people at a time will learn about local democratic processes, contributing ideas in a format that is both familiar and fun.

Children's input to the development of *Blockanomics* is as important as that of council and the other 'adult' bodies contributing ideas in areas including housing, education, health and, of course, youth issues. According to game developer David Kinsella, around 100 school students, youth councillors and gaming club members have already been consulted, on both local issues and the structure of the game.

Youth mental health is a concern both for the council and for Katie McConville, a gamer and Carlisle Youth Councillor. Secondary school children are under major pressure, Katie says, and are not taught how to manage stress: *Blockanomics* could include a game scenario that teaches these skills.

In Katie's view, many young people feel that adults are not interested in them. But she believes the way *Blockanomics* involves them will help shift young people's negative perceptions. She also sees the opportunity for children to learn about politics and democracy.

"I'm 15, almost old enough to vote, but in elections I wouldn't otherwise understand. I think just the basic understanding of where [my] vote goes, and what powers local councils all the way up to the government have, would be very useful knowledge."

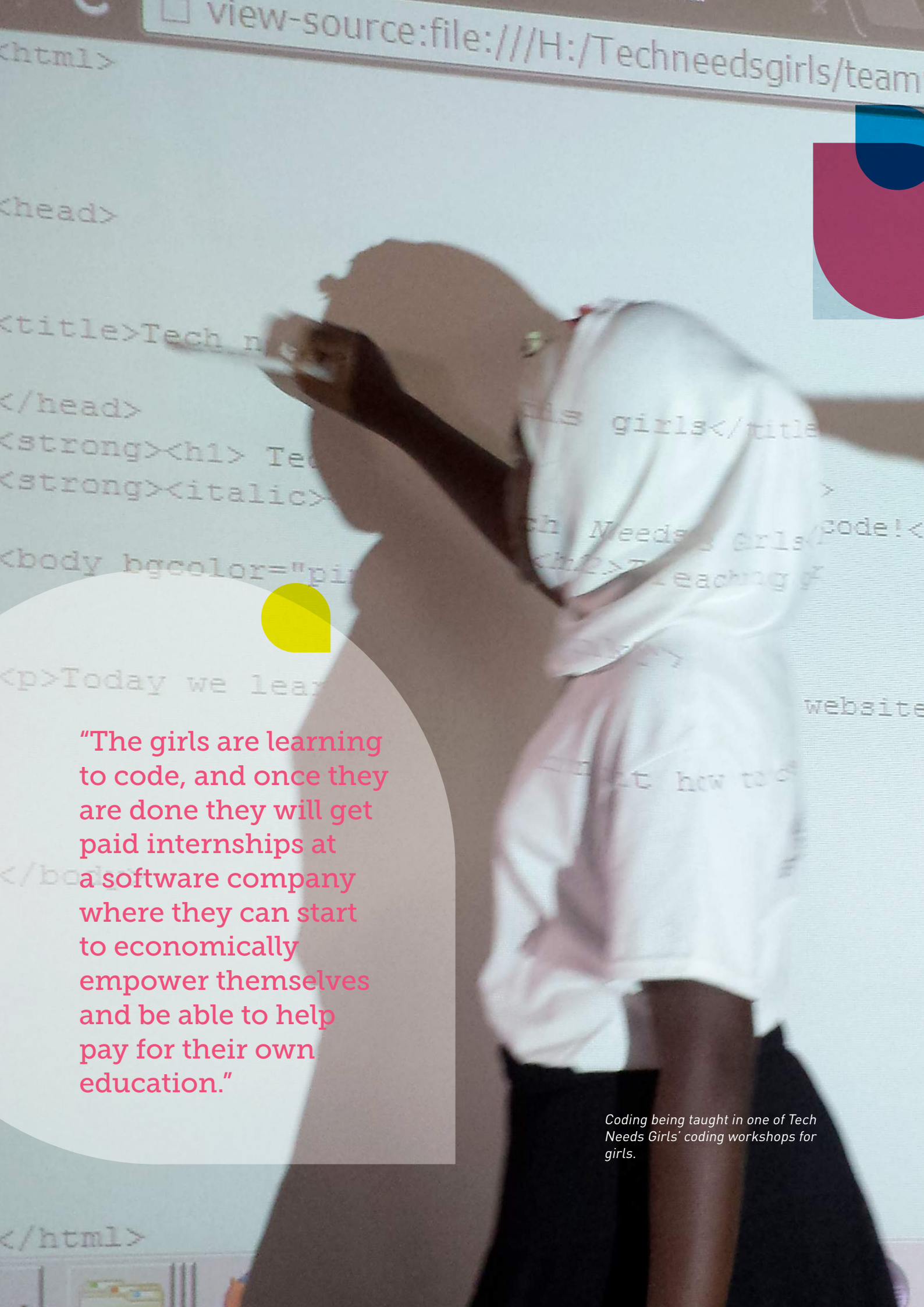
Blockanomics continues to involve young people heavily in the development process; as players, testers, and, in some areas, as programmers. After next February's launch, says David Kinsella, children playing in school settings or at home will be able to vote on different issues each week within the game, with the results communicated to the council. Councillors will be taught to play *Blockanomics*, so that they can communicate with young people through the game, and even potentially simulate proposals so that players can see how different ideas might work in practice.

Katie McConville is confident that *Blockanomics* will enable children to put forward real ideas, rather than "just being used for a statistic, then forgotten". She believes children have a right to contribute to the world they will inhabit as adults.

"Children are the next people who will be in charge," Katie says. "If their voices aren't heard, they'll inherit a society that isn't how they want. I think children can think in ways adults can't, and a problem that a group of adults can't fix might be easily sorted by a free-thinking child who isn't constricted by the same rules."

Certainly, the use of gaming platforms to invite and encourage young people's input could be applied across a range of settings, issues and themes.

"Being able to see their own ideas come to life is a proud moment," says Katie, "and one that many kids don't get to have. This game gives many children who wouldn't normally be heard a chance to be, and I think this alone will make them far more eager to contribute."



"The girls are learning to code, and once they are done they will get paid internships at a software company where they can start to economically empower themselves and be able to help pay for their own education."

Coding being taught in one of Tech Needs Girls' coding workshops for girls.

Digital Champions

Soronko Solutions/ Soronko Foundation

Ghana

The social enterprise model has rapidly gained traction internationally as a high-potential, business-focused force for positive social change. In Ghana, Soronko Solutions and the Soronko Foundation, founded by young IT entrepreneur Regina Agyare, exemplify a social enterprise aimed squarely at children's digital empowerment.

The companies combine a tech solutions business with IT-based education programs that equip disadvantaged children with skills that can lead them, and their communities, to improved lives.

When she left a high-level IT job in the banking sector to start her business, Regina Agyare was keenly aware of the importance of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills in today's world. In creating her company, Regina says, "I also wanted children to use technology to solve problems, and to get more girls to take advantage of the many opportunities in this digital age, as creators of technology and not just consumers."

In previous interviews, Regina has pointed out that women in Ghana are generally expected to complete their education and then get married, rather than pursuing careers. As in many countries, it is rare for a young woman in Ghana to be encouraged to run a tech business, she says, but because her father runs an Internet Service Provider, her path has been easier than most. Perhaps in consequence, Regina's key Soronko projects, Tech Needs Girls and Growing STEMS, focus on cohorts often overlooked: girls from impoverished backgrounds, and children living in rural areas. The foundation is also developing an app for deaf children, that will convert text to Ghanaian sign language, aimed at helping ensure "that no one is left behind".

Tech Needs Girls takes a narrow focus – teaching young girls to code HTML – to achieve broader social gains. Of over 200 girls currently enrolled, Regina says, "our biggest group is girls from the slum, where in that community girls are forced into early marriage".

"The girls are learning to code, and once they are done they will get paid internships at a software company where they can start to economically empower themselves and be able to help pay for their own education. We have also engaged with the community such that the parents see the value in educating their girl child."

Growing STEMS teaches digital skills more broadly, through a supplementary education curriculum for children in rural schools. Interacting with web-based and mobile learning platforms, students conduct real experiments aimed at addressing problems their communities face every day, and compete for an annual innovation prize. The next phase of this program, says Regina, is "to set up an apprenticeship program so that the children convert the STEM skills into products and services, that benefit their community and other rural communities".

Children want to contribute to solving problems, Regina says. And in Ghana, she adds, there are more mobile phones than people: "That means they could reach masses – starting with their communities – with the solutions they will develop."

Regina sees digital technology today as being crucial "in every sector".

"Children everywhere should have, as a basic right, the right to access, use, create and publish digital media or to access and use computers, other electronic devices, or communications networks."

For this generation, she says, "access to technology, and its use, will be as important as being able to read and write."

Frisco and fellow U-Reporters accessing and sharing information through the U-Report.

Digital Champions

Zambia U-Report

Zambia

In Zambia, less than half of all young people aged 15–24 have comprehensive knowledge about HIV. To address HIV education and prevention for children and young people in a relevant and friendly way, UNICEF Zambia has implemented a free SMS counselling and polling service that delivers confidential information via members' mobile phones, and gathers data that can help government to improve HIV services.

Priscilla Chomba-Kinywa of UNICEF Zambia, says that of U-Report's more than 47,000 members aged 10–24, approximately 42 per cent are 19 or under. U-Report is a direct response to calls from youth to approach the AIDS pandemic differently, Priscilla says. It directly addresses prevention priority targets for HIV testing, male circumcision, condom use, and uptake of anti-retroviral therapies.

Frisco Henry Nshimba joined U-Report at 17, and is now 18. He became a U-Reporter, he says, in order to get information about HIV and sex-related topics, to educate both himself and his friends.

"With U-Report, youths can get answers to questions that some of the parents wouldn't talk about at home," Frisco says.

Although increasing numbers of youth in Zambia have mobile phones, Frisco comments that rurally-based children are less likely to be able to join U-Report, however. Donations of phones via non-government organisations, he suggests, would help some of Zambia's most vulnerable children to gain vital sexual health information.

In Zambian tradition, says Frisco, it is taboo for children to speak openly about sex with their parents. While these issues are sometimes talked about at church or school, "the information was not good enough, because the pupils in schools teach each other and learn from their peers," he says.

U-Reporters can SMS their sexual health questions to U-Report, 24 x 7, and receive tailored responses to their queries in real time.

"The introduction of U-Report has brought a huge and great change, because the service has well-trained counsellors who have the information that we all require."

Frisco says he and his friends are excited to be able to access information on these usually 'hidden' topics.

"When someone starts explaining it to us the way U-Report has done, it's fun. Mostly every youth has that curiosity of wanting to know more about these issues... When we talk about sex you are given that awesome information and knowledge of when to do it and who to do it with...and it's just so amazing. I'm loving the service, it's amazing."

U-Report also conducts regular polls, to find out why young people do not adopt prevention measures, as well as asking adolescents what would encourage them to do so. According to Priscilla, the engagement and input of adolescents in recruiting their peers, providing feedback, and helping to tailor youth-friendly messages, are key to U-Report's success to date.

U-Report's polls have garnered information that is now being shared with Zambia's National AIDS Council and other partners, says Priscilla, to help with decision-making and the design of future interventions.

"We believe that all young people are inherently important and deserve to be safe, respected and valued. As humanity evolves further into the digital age, as our values, beliefs, goals and dreams spill online, let's build a world that is worthy of us."

Rosie and Lucy Thomas, founders of PROJECT ROCKIT.

Digital Champions

PROJECT ROCKIT

Australia

In 2006, when Melbourne sisters Rosie and Lucy Thomas were "relatively fresh out of school", they co-founded PROJECT ROCKIT: a series of offline and online, school-based anti-bullying education programs that has reached more than 100,000 Australian students.

It was an opportunity to build "resilience, empathy and citizenship" among fellow young people, they say. In terms of children's rights, Rosie and Lucy were "motivated by our common belief that all young people deserve access to acceptance, self-expression, respect and leadership regardless of their gender, sexuality, background or social label."

Cyberbullying might appear relatively trivial to some adults – as just a part of 'growing up'. But for Rosie and Lucy – who spoke as one in this interview – bullying sits at the heart of youth culture. Potentially devastating, it is also a locus for developing social skills and empathy.

"We saw bullying smother development, extinguish potential, and in some cases destroy lives," they say. "We decided not to focus on the one in three young people who are bullied online each week [but] on the bystander, what we call the audience...the people who can make the greatest impact, those who can create a real cultural shift."

PROJECT ROCKIT acknowledges and leverages the interdependence of 21st-century Australian children's offline and online worlds. As 'digital natives', Rosie and Lucy love technology, but see in phenomena like 'sexting' and 'trolling' the "timeless" issues of adolescence playing out: those of "belonging, sexuality and identity". Their answer is to encourage children's 'digital citizenship'.

"We refer to digital citizenship as your 'digital brand'...it might sound tasteless to compare people to mass brands [but] for us, it's about reframing the idea in a way that is actually accessible to young people.

"We present the idea that everything you put out there online constitutes your brand. If your brand is negative, it will negatively impact your offline world. But we also focus on the exciting opportunities that your brand can create for you. The young people we work with are pretty surprised and excited to hear that they can craft an online identity that reflects the person that they are proud of."

PROJECT ROCKIT's young facilitators present a range of in-school modules, tailored for age groups across both primary and secondary school and delivered as all-day workshops or in multiple sessions over several weeks. There is also an online, four-session curriculum, P-ROCK Online, designed "by young people for young people". Being web-based makes it especially useful for remote schools, and gives teachers a unique view of their students' online world.

"P-ROCK Online allows students to log on, turn the music up and become completely immersed... [It] also provides teachers with valuable insights on attitudinal change, learning and student culture, which is something that we've never been able to achieve in our face-to-face workshops."

For Rosie and Lucy, translating 'offline' rights into online spaces means attending to issues like privacy, abuse, and sometimes, protecting young people from peers who aren't adequately educated. The sisters see tackling bullying very much in 'big picture' terms.

"We started PROJECT ROCKIT because we believe that all young people are inherently important and deserve to be safe, respected and valued. As humanity evolves further into the digital age, as our values, beliefs, goals and dreams spill online, let's build a world that is worthy of us."

"I think all children should have access to the internet and, through social networks and blogs, be able to fight for their rights, demanding solutions and improvements from the authorities... They should have access to technology, to understand that the world is huge and the opportunities immense."

Portrait of Rene by Margaret Day.

Rene Silva

Brazil

At age 11, Rene Silva started a community newspaper in the impoverished neighbourhoods of Complexo do Alemão, in Rio de Janeiro. He printed it on the school's copier until advertising earned enough to fund the paper and take it online.

Six years later, when the Complexo was targeted by drug raids involving thousands of armed police, heavy violence kept journalists out and locals were caught in the crossfire. Rene reported on the siege live via Twitter, becoming a key source for media around the world. Today, *Voz das Comunidades (Voice of the Community)* boasts a massive digital audience both at home and abroad; and serves as both a 'voice' for Rene's neighbourhood and a catalyst for change.

According to the 2010 census, Rene's hometown has 69,143 residents, making it one of the largest shantytown complexes in Latin America. "It is also well known for the great power of its drug trafficking," Rene says, and "the quality of the available public education is poor". To achieve good enough grades for a public university, students need extra help, which they can't afford. Those free university places, he says, go to rich, well-educated students instead.

Rene started *Voz das Comunidades* "because I noticed the major media did not show everything that happened in the shantytown where I live."

"I started it with no intention of growth, but to help solve the social problems within the community... I learnt how to produce a newspaper, so the community could have their say and express what we wanted!"

When the 2010 police raids placed 17-year-old Rene at the centre of the action, he "could not imagine" how far his communications would reach.

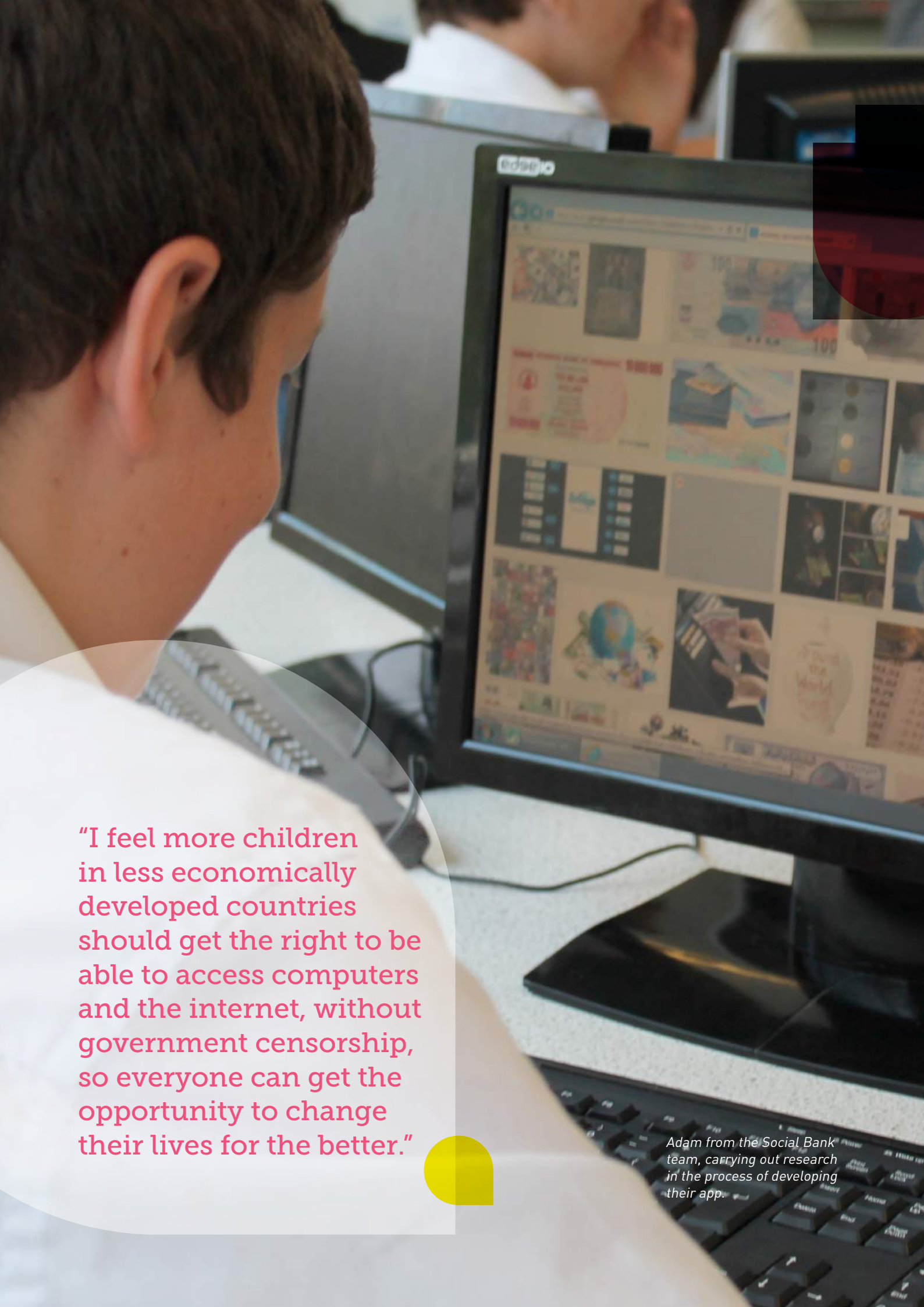
"I started communicating what was happening in my street, when my uncle could not come back home because the buses had stopped running on the main road; and my friends started providing me with information from various spots within the community. I gained credibility...because we were giving first-hand information. When I started writing, I only had 180 [Twitter] followers, and in less than 24 hours more than 30,000 people, from all around the world, were following me."

Voz das Comunidades now posts stories to more than 150,000 Twitter followers and more than 30,000 on Facebook. As well as reporting local news and events, Rene's project focuses on community needs, drawing attention to issues such as health care and sanitation; mobilising volunteers to collect and deliver food donations; and using its reputation to garner opportunities for locals.

"We have achieved jobs, free course opportunities, and access to shows that would be hard to pay for. When [Cirque du Soleil] came to Brazil, I sent an email...and they released 1,000 tickets to be distributed within Complexo do Alemão and other shantytowns."

As a young man keenly aware of the challenges for children where he lives, Rene's views on the importance of digital connectivity are clear.

"I think all children should have access to the internet and, through social networks and blogs, be able to fight for their rights, demanding solutions and improvements from the authorities... They should have access to technology, to understand that the world is huge and the opportunities immense."



"I feel more children in less economically developed countries should get the right to be able to access computers and the internet, without government censorship, so everyone can get the opportunity to change their lives for the better."

Adam from the Social Bank team, carrying out research in the process of developing their app.

Digital Champions

Apps for Good

United Kingdom

As the United Kingdom school year began this September, more than 20,000 students aged 10–18 embarked on the daunting process of developing a mobile, social or web app as part of the non-profit Apps for Good program. Over several months, each small group will take their project from idea to technical build, and potentially, to market; learning both coding and team skills, and guided by teachers and industry experts.

Two Septembers ago, Adam Lee was 13. He and three friends at his Hertfordshire school were just starting the Apps for Good course. The biggest challenge, Adam says, came at the beginning: choosing the right idea. The resulting app, called Social Bank, won the national Apps for Good People's Choice Award in June 2013, raised "£10,000 of crowd-sourced funding in three minutes", and is now available in the Google Play store. Social Bank allows users to set savings targets, track their progress, and compete with friends via social networking.

Adam's team knew that it was hard to save money, but saw it as an important skill to have later in life. So they set about solving the problem and making saving fun.

"We feel allowing young people to help each other save has more effect," says Adam, "because if an adult was telling them to save they might feel it is a chore and may not find it as exciting as if their friends were doing it."

Apps for Good was conceived by technology consultant, Rodrigo Baggio, as a way to revolutionise tech education in schools and harness the talents of young people. Its 2010 pilot program included just nine London students, one educator, three experts, three apps, and support from computer company, Dell. Managing Director, Debbie Forster, notes that the program gives urban and remote schools equal access to international experts via online meet-ups; and is close to eliminating the tech 'gender gap', with 48 per cent female enrolments this year. But most importantly, Apps for Good empowers children to solve problems themselves, she says – from how to manage farm cattle to offering support for young same-sex-attracted and gender-diverse people.

Apps for Good has inspired Adam Lee to become a tech entrepreneur, he says: he believes "young people can change the world" by applying themselves to ideas they feel strongly about. He is concerned, though, that not all children can exercise their right to shape their future lives.

"I feel more children in less economically developed countries should get the right to be able to access computers and the internet, without government censorship, so everyone can get the opportunity to change their lives for the better."

Debbie Forster sees the ability to digitally 'create' as a rights issue for 21st-century children.

"As a society we agree that it is a fundamental right for young people to have a decent standard of literacy and numeracy skills upon leaving education. However we now cannot ignore the need for them to have a level of digital skills...in order to be become active and responsible citizens.

"The key to developing 'digital literacy' and even fluency – i.e. not just to consume but to create – will be not to teach the skills in isolation, but in context...to help [children] see the purpose and the exciting opportunities to access and to shape the world that such skills offer."

"In Canada, the internet has become a great way to communicate with each other, and there is a feeling of being less remote. First Nations here are very active on the internet. It is as if, with all the land claims that are still unsolved in Canada, they are gaining territories in the digital space."

Oshim in a digital still from 'Correcting the Chalkboard', a film he helped conceive and create.

Digital Champions

Wapikoni Mobile

Canada

For minority communities such as Quebec's Atikamekw people, online culture can have a 'downside'. While digital access enables young Atikamekws to connect and communicate, for First Nations (indigenous) communities in Canada and elsewhere, the internet's dominance can also threaten local culture, further marginalising some groups already experiencing exclusion or disadvantage.

Wapikoni Mobile, a mobile digital film unit working with young First Nations people, helps youth to create cultural product within their communities, and distributes the results online. Wapikoni also aims to counter youth suicide, addiction, dropout and crime – both through the strengthening of networks that occurs when entire communities become involved in productions; and where needed, through confidential social support from professionals who travel with the film production team.

Oshim Ottawa is 17. He lives in Manawan, Quebec, and worked with Wapikoni on *Correcting the Chalkboard,* a film devised and created in 2012 by children from his secondary school, in collaboration with anti-discrimination foundation, Ensemble for the respect of diversity. In the film, a group of Atikamekw children literally 'chalk up' the racial insults they have been subjected to. Their voices repeat each of the slurs, before, one by one, each is erased from the board and replaced with a statement of pride.

"[*Correcting the Chalkboard*] gave me an opportunity to be creative and have some leadership," says Oshim. "The film talked about racism and stereotypes towards Indigenous people. The first time we showed the video, everyone was speechless. At the end, there was a very long applause. Everyone was proud of us because we had made a video that showed our pride of being Indigenous."

In over 700 short films made to date, says Wapikoni's Virginie Michel, young people have engaged their communities in discussing serious topics such as alcoholism or the historical separation of children from families; documented traditional knowledge; reclaimed their languages; and told their own stories to the wider world. First Nations children are not immune to negative impacts of the digital age, she says: "However, if they appropriate digital technologies...then it becomes beneficial".

"For example, on Facebook, young people have long discussions in their traditional language – in Atikamekw, Anishnabe, Innu... Those who film their traditions are in direct contact with Elders and receive their teachings. With video projects, youth who were not necessarily in contact with their tradition may also gain access to it."

For young people whose communities have been historically disconnected from traditional lands, 'cyberspace' offers an interesting proposition, Virginie suggests:

"In Canada, the internet has become a great way [for them] to communicate with each other, and there is a feeling of being less remote. First Nations here are very active on the internet. It is as if, with all the land claims that are still unsolved in Canada, they are gaining territories in the digital space."

Oshim agrees that the internet is a powerful connecting force – with a caveat:

"All [our] communities have access to technology. The 21st century is the 'digital era'. We are aware of what goes on. We have electronic devices just like any non-Indigenous young people living in a city. This is the evolution of Indigenous people! However, our culture should be preserved."

"[Children] think that having access to the internet is a basic right – food, water, health care and connectivity... And whether it's students from Ghana or from Canada, they express [this] very clearly..."

Students from the Netherlands working on a presentation titled 'Learning Circle Water and Wetlands' in Canada.

Digital Champions

Global Teenager Project

Five continents

In the wiki-based 'learning circles' of the Global Teenager Project (GTP), more than 20,000 students from schools in 42 countries share virtual classrooms, work creatively together, and gain insight into one another's lives, exploring world problems from diverse perspectives.

GTP offers more than simply a cross-cultural educational opportunity; it also champions the development of collaborative critical thinking in a child-focused environment, strongly nurturing children's 'right to be heard' within an increasingly digitally based global community.

Founded in 1998, GTP brings together several schools in each 10-week 'learning circle', which schools sign up for online by contacting the GTP coordinator in their home country. Class groups formulate questions for the learning circle, based on a theme – it might be water security, HIV, poverty or child labour, for example – and over ensuing weeks, each class researches and responds to each question.

Based in the Netherlands, GTP runs learning circles in Dutch as well as English, French, Spanish, German, Papiamento, Slovenian and Arabic, with many circles running concurrently. Participants are mostly aged 12–18, but the program recently extended to include some students as young as six. They live in countries as diverse as South Africa, Bolivia, Canada, Egypt, Lebanon, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania, Liberia, Slovenia, Suriname, Uganda, the Philippines, Taiwan, the UK and Yemen – to name just a few.

For GTP's Bob Hofman, today's children have a basic right, not simply to be in school, but to be engaged with "their global fellow learners"; gaining knowledge, 21st-century skills and perspectives that are genuinely globally informed. Students' ownership of and investment in learning circles is evidenced, he says, by the fact that some 60% of learning circle contributions are made by students outside of official classroom time.

Children's feedback on the learning circles has noted the value of the different perspectives gained, with 2014 participant, Ali (Canada) commenting: "When learning about a subject with people from various countries the idea will be viewed from many different perspectives, as people in other countries have different lives and experiences". A Ghanaian high school student, Seke, said: "Being part of the Global Teenager Project makes me feel unique and part of a big network at the same time".

Seke's comment indicates an issue of increasing importance in the digitised world: that of children's rights, wherever they live, to belong to the global community that the developed world takes for granted. This sentiment is underscored by participant, Mark, 12 (Lebanon), who, as part of a learning circle on children's rights, wrote:

"There are many children around the world who want to be heard. These children want the adults just to stop and listen to what they have to say. Children are just like adults. So why can't children be heard, and why are they looked at as if they don't understand anything? We are all equal no matter what!"

Without digital access, children may be denied not only educational opportunities, but also the opportunity to become contributors to the global community. GTP's Bob says:

"[Children] think that having access to the internet is a basic right – food, water, health care and connectivity... And whether it's students from Ghana or from Canada, they express [this] very clearly... We had students from Soweto who said, 'For us, we are there, we belong, we have been seen. When someone talks to us, we are there'."

"... I would like to urge that [adults] 'trust the children' and evolve mechanisms of dealing with the digital world in partnership. Let children learn 'concern and watchfulness' from adults and let adults learn fearlessness from us."

Shruti working with one of the local children during the making of 'Maina: The Little Bride.'

Digital Champions

Shruti Rai/CHINH Early Education Web Channel

India

Shruti Rai has been exploring the art of digital storytelling since she was seven, when she made her first film, *Children of Nomads*. In the film, she and a group of India's nomad children interview one another on camera about their different life experiences.

Now 15, Shruti has made films on topics from the environment to digital bullying to teenage peer pressure. Her collaborative animation about child marriage – *Maina: The Little Bride* – has won awards including the International Jury Award at the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations' PLURAL+ Youth Video Festival 2013.

Shruti travels regularly within India, with children's media organisation CHINH, teaching other children to express themselves using digital media. In addition to running film workshops and media clubs, and distributing films online, CHINH produces an annual children's film festival in New Delhi, with a festival jury of children aged 4–15.

Maina: The Little Bride was produced in a village near the Indo-Nepal border, where Shruti was teaching local children to do hand-drawn animations, which were digitised to make the film. Talking with the children, Shruti was surprised to discover that most, although around her own age, were already married. One girl nearing her wedding day, Dilkash, felt it was not right, Shruti says. "When we discussed the issue, many of them felt the same, and they all wanted to share their stories. This is how *Maina: The Little Bride* came up."

Shruti and her collaborators met with parents and tried to understand their views, Shruti says. "We accommodated their perspective through dialogues. I preferred to get the story evolved in the local language and regional singing style, using regional instruments to ensure that the film reaches the target audience...the elders of the village." The resulting film shows the trials of the fictional Maina, forced to keep house for her new family while other children go to school or play.

Digital media offer very effective ways to portray one's views, says Shruti.

"When you speak there are chances people might not hear, but when you show them they are compelled to take note. It's hard to ignore the true voices."

The story of Maina changed things in the village, Shruti says.

"The film did what a media tool is meant for. It made the community think. [Dilkash] made it clear to her husband that she would never agree to child marriage if she has a daughter – that is the belief and conviction that the film gave her. Many of the boys...strongly registered their opinion against child marriage while making the film. I am very sure that the children who participated...would never marry their children very young. Adults would have to think twice in the community where this film was made to take such decisions again."

Shruti sees child-created media content as "a rich research repository for adults – it is an ideal way to know what constitutes the global child in the digital age."

"This is a unique time...where adults are at a loss whether to let children go off to the digital age or block their way into this unknown and unfathomable space. I would like to urge that [adults] 'trust the children' and evolve mechanisms of dealing with the digital world in partnership. Let children learn 'concern and watchfulness' from adults and let adults learn fearlessness from us."

"Fortunately, the WIPO [World Intellectual Property Organization] has already taken action through the Marrakesh Treaty enacted in June 2013, which considers the conversion of books into accessible formats as 'fair use' under the copyright rules."

Kartik sharing his experiences at the Activate Talks at the UNICEF headquarters in New York, highlighting that people with disabilities can be not only consumers of technology, but also innovators.

Digital Champions

Kartik Sawhney

India/United States of America

As a blind student in his home country India, Kartik Sawhney had to fight for permission to pursue sciences in Grades 11 and 12, and had to develop his own audio description software in order to read graphs. He is now studying computer science at Stanford University in the United States of America, one of very few Stanford students on full scholarship.

His systematic quest for access to educational resources and opportunities, and his subsequent achievements, highlight issues around digital rights for children in developing countries – and, in particular, for those with vision impairment.

Born in New Delhi and blind since birth, Kartik was well supported by family, school and teachers, and participated in all activities at his mainstream school. But with an interest in science and technology, Kartik realised that even with access to screen readers, he could not read charts and graphs, which is essential for higher-level studies.

Unable to import equipment that would enable graph reading, he successfully designed a revolutionary 'audio graph describer': a software application that converts graph coordinates into sound, with changes in frequency representing graph contours such as parabolas, ellipses, hyperbolas, and so on. Despite this remarkable achievement, it took nine months and over 30 appeals to India's educational board in order for Kartik to be allowed to study science.

Kartik sees his experience as typical within India, citing a mostly "charity-based" approach to disability, "as opposed to the rights-based approach in developed countries". And while those around him have been instrumental in enabling his success, he believes that "technology has been my biggest supporter". Without his screen reader, he says, "I wouldn't have been able to do anything".

The issues for vision-impaired children in developing countries are not limited to those who want to pursue sciences, Kartik says; nor are they simply issues of access to technology. More broadly, he describes what has been termed a 'book famine' – a lack of books in accessible format due to copyright restrictions – and this, he says, impacts especially harshly on children.

"Fortunately, the WIPO [World Intellectual Property Organization] has already taken action through the Marrakesh Treaty enacted in June 2013, which considers the conversion of books into accessible formats as 'fair use' under the copyright rules," says Kartik.

"Unfortunately, very few countries have ratified this treaty. If all countries were to ratify it, and implement it in its true spirit, then the problem of 'accessible book famine' that we face today can be mitigated. The UN can now help to encourage the member states ratify the treaty, and ensure its compliance."

Asked for his thoughts on the digital rights of children in India, Kartik cites internet connection as crucial, enabling access to "the wealth of information that is available virtually". Disabled children, in particular, experience frequent, unnecessary exclusion, he says, even when web access is available.

"Thanks to non-compliance with the WCAG 2.0 [World Wide Web Consortium Content and Accessibility Guidelines 2.0], I come across inaccessible websites every day. It's high time all web developers take cognisance of this important issue, and do something to remedy the current situation. The UN member states can also play an important role by requiring all public organisations to abide by WCAG 2.0."

"I believe it is very important to recognise that each of the child's rights has an online dimension, and in a world with 24x7 connectivity these dimensions become more and more important for the wellbeing of children."

Youth panelist participating in a session at the Safer Internet Forum 2013.

Digital Champions

Pan-EU Safer Internet Forum, and Safer Internet Centres

Bulgarian focus

Collaboration between children and decision-makers is key for the European Commission's Safer Internet Programme (Insafe).

Across 31 countries, from Iceland to Russia, Insafe enables children to help create a safer internet – teaching in local peer-to-peer education programs, presenting in forums alongside adults through national Safer Internet Centres (SICs); or representing their country at the annual Pan-EU Safer Internet Forum.

Bulgaria's SIC Youth Participation Coordinator, Luiza Shahbazyan, describes the Pan-EU Forum as a place for debate, where young delegates "express their hopes and fears in front of parents, experts and decision-makers." Bulgarian delegates "present the view of [Bulgaria's] youth panel, but also share back home what they have learnt and experienced." Across Europe, children's contributions feed into Insafe's wider network of information gathering and exchange. The organisation's average figures indicate that every day, Insafe works with eight government, industry or NGO decision-makers and 125 youth participants, engages 6,000 young people and adults through events or helplines, and reaches a further 90,000 through media and targeted resources.

Pan-EU Forum delegates are nominated by national SICs, which focus on children and young people's internet safety and provide education, advice, and an avenue for reporting illegal internet content. In Bulgaria, where many adults do not use the internet, Luiza says, children's views are especially important. As well, "listening to the views of the young people from other European countries enriches our understanding of digital culture and informs us of emerging trends."

Involving children directly in policy-making can be challenging for adults, Luiza says.

"We try to encourage young people to take a stand and defend their position even if it is different from that of the experts. [But] a lot of adults do not feel comfortable stepping back and letting young people have a stand."

Children, too, face some challenges. Conflicts can arise regarding how to educate – and as Luiza points out, children themselves can be surprisingly conservative.

"It is very common for young people to feel that exaggerating the harmful effects of certain behaviour is helpful. As it is common for adults as well... [We] try to help them view the benefit of using positive messages and positive reinforcement."

Siana Stratieva, aged 15, is a member of the city of Varna's Prevention Club, a growing network that supports more than 100 peer educators and collaborates with Bulgaria's SIC to deliver peer-to-peer internet safety advice. Siana believes that as a young person, she can explain things in a way that is "more understandable and acceptable".

"I personally like to ask this: 'What is the most successful antivirus?'," Siana says. "And then the students automatically start to enumerate names of programs. I say: 'All of the things were right, but the best antivirus is called YOU!"

Bulgaria's SIC is a valued member of the Pan-EU network, and provides an important service nationally. Nevertheless, Luiza expresses concerns for its future.

"The public interest towards online safety issues is growing each year. However...we have received negligible financial support from our government, which is a major threat, as the European Commission is pushing towards more national co-financing for the SICs."

"I believe it is very important to recognise that each of the child's rights has an online dimension, and in a world with 24x7 connectivity these dimensions become more and more important for the wellbeing of children."

"Social media has a lot of power over a young person's day... [It] has the power to make a day amazing or ruined... Livewire makes my worst days better."

The Livewire online community allows teenagers living with chronic illness or disability an opportunity to just be teenagers.

Digital Champions

Livewire online community

Australia

For children living with chronic illness or disability, isolation from peers with similar experiences and limited access to 'offline' social connection can have significant negative impacts. The Livewire online community (livewire.org.au) has reduced these impacts, providing a secure and supportive social media platform for seriously ill and disabled members aged 10 to 20, in both metropolitan and remote Australia.

Livewire is a program of the Starlight Children's Foundation, which provides seriously ill children with 'normal' childhood experiences that others take for granted. Livewire's primary objective is peer support, enabled through online chat rooms and private messaging, common interest groups, blogs, competitions and opportunities for creative expression. National Program Manager, Kylie Johnson, explains that members – who must register and be individually approved – can discuss topics of everyday interest to teenagers, as well as issues related to their condition.

This opportunity to just 'be teenagers' is often not available in other aspects of Livewire members' everyday lives. With an average 3,000 logins per month, Livewire enables a large cohort of members to listen, to be heard, and to develop social skills that other adolescents develop, unhindered by prejudice.

"Blogs, in particular, play an important role in members being able to express themselves," Kylie says. Common topics include "concerns about upcoming operations or treatment, their frustrations about their inability to live life like their peers, and bullying they experience as a result of limitations on their ability to 'fit in'".

A feature of Livewire is its young adult 'chat hosts', assigned to chat rooms with the task of maintaining them as fun, safe and supportive spaces. "They expertly balance the tensions between supporting individuals and fostering community cohesion," says Kylie; "between supporting members to engage and developing their independence, [and between] exercising leadership and being a 'friend' to members." University of Western Sydney research found that this chat room 'moderation' has played a key role in Livewire's success.[1]

Livewire member Hannah Larrescy is 17. She has Chronic Obstructive Airways Disease, often has difficulty breathing, and is limited in her day-to-day life. She is a prolific user of online communication platforms, but sees Livewire as "much more loving than regular social media".

"The concern of judgement, unkindness or misbehaviour is non-existent on Livewire," Hannah says. "The adult moderators play a big role in maintaining the peace."

"Social media has a lot of power over a young person's day... [It] has the power to make a day amazing or ruined... Livewire makes my worst days better."

Kylie Johnson cites research undertaken with Livewire members, which identified benefits including feeling more supported, connected and understood; distraction from pain or stress; developing new skills; increased wellbeing; and, not least, improved health management.[2] For Hannah Larrescy, Livewire is also an especially accessible platform within a broader social media environment "that has become instrumental for positive change".

"[There's] limitless communication – [with social media] a person can talk to anyone about anything," Hannah says. "Social media is also a fantastic place for young people to exercise freedom of speech. It is resulting in world-conscious, mature teens that are not afraid to speak their mind on matters that concern them."

[1] Amanda Third, Damien Spry and Elizabeth Kelly-Dalgety, *Real Livewires: Understanding the Role of Chat Hosts in Moderated Online Communities*. Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, Melbourne, March 2013.

[2] SVA Consulting, *Social Return on Investment Baseline Analysis*. Social Ventures Australia, March 2014.

Conclusion

In this project, children were asked to reflect on their rights in a digital age, and to identify the various opportunities and challenges that shape their capacity to use digital media to understand and enact their rights. From the responses children generated to the tasks set for them by the workshop facilitators, a very diverse and complex picture of children's digital media practices around the globe emerged; or, as danah boyd might say, "it's complicated" (2014).

Evidence generated by this project overwhelmingly showed that children's greater levels of access to digital media does not imply a greater awareness of their rights in the digital age. Rather, if we are to support children to better realise their rights using digital media, then this will require a concerted effort. To date, it appears that children are not necessarily being given the opportunities to consider how digital media might positively impact their rights, although it is clear that most children have a clearer conception of how digital media might infringe on their rights in the digital age.

This suggests that it is worthwhile for organisations with an investment in promoting children's rights – however broadly they may be defined – to revisit existing digital literacy, digital citizenship, digital resilience and related initiatives, in partnership with children, in order to find ways to foster children's awareness of and capacity to enact their rights in the digital age. We must actively work with children to instigate conversations in which they evaluate the ways that their digital media practices intersect with their rights, and operationalize strategies to leverage digital media to better support their wellbeing.

These efforts must be complemented by more research on the role of digital media in children's lives globally, so that initiatives on the ground can be evaluated and sustained in light of a strong evidence base. This research must, as Livingstone and Bulger (2013) assert, address the need for baseline data on children's digital practices; evaluate existing policies and programs; and generate much-needed evidence about digital practices in the global South. However, we must also understand better the factors that render certain children more vulnerable to harm online, as well as how to harness the potential opportunities of digital media for enhancing children's rights. This kind of work will enable the field to move well beyond a focus on risk and safety, and to develop policies and programs that genuinely respond to the complex role digital media increasingly play in children's lives.

We began this project with a commitment to listening to what children have to say about their rights in the digital age. Our hope is that, from here on, the conversation with children can become broader and ongoing, and that children's voices can be activated ever more powerfully in relevant policy and practice settings, and used to develop new responses and approaches to children's rights, or to refocus existing ones.

The 150 academics, practitioners, young people, activists, philanthropists, government officials, and representatives of technology companies from around the world that make up the Digitally Connected network, along with the growing network of children they work with, stand poised to play a key role in continuing this conversation into the future. United, with a commitment to participatory methods, and with an unfaltering belief that children should be the authors of their futures, we can seize the opportunities, and mitigate the risks, that digital media offer children to conceptualise and enact their rights – both individually and collectively – into the future.

It would obviously become harder to learn new things. **USA 16**

I'd spend more time doing things outside, not watching TV or my phone or anything, I'd find more productive things to do.
Australia, 16

If digital media disappeared? ...Wow! What would life be without digital media? **Trinidad and Tobago, 16**

If there is no internet life would be hard because you don't have much access to whatever you need.
Malaysia, 14

It would not do any harm. In the end we are not hard wired to digital media. We are not controlled by digital media. **Turkey, 15**

It would make other people more confident to be able to talk to other people face to face, not over the internet, actually be able to have conversations with them.
Australia, 15

Stoneage, writing on the walls, hunting animals. **Malaysia, 14**

I really would not like this to happen because digital media are very important for all of us.
Colombia

If I don't have any digital media then I would read story books.
Thailand, 14

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF DIGITAL MEDIA DISAPPEARED?

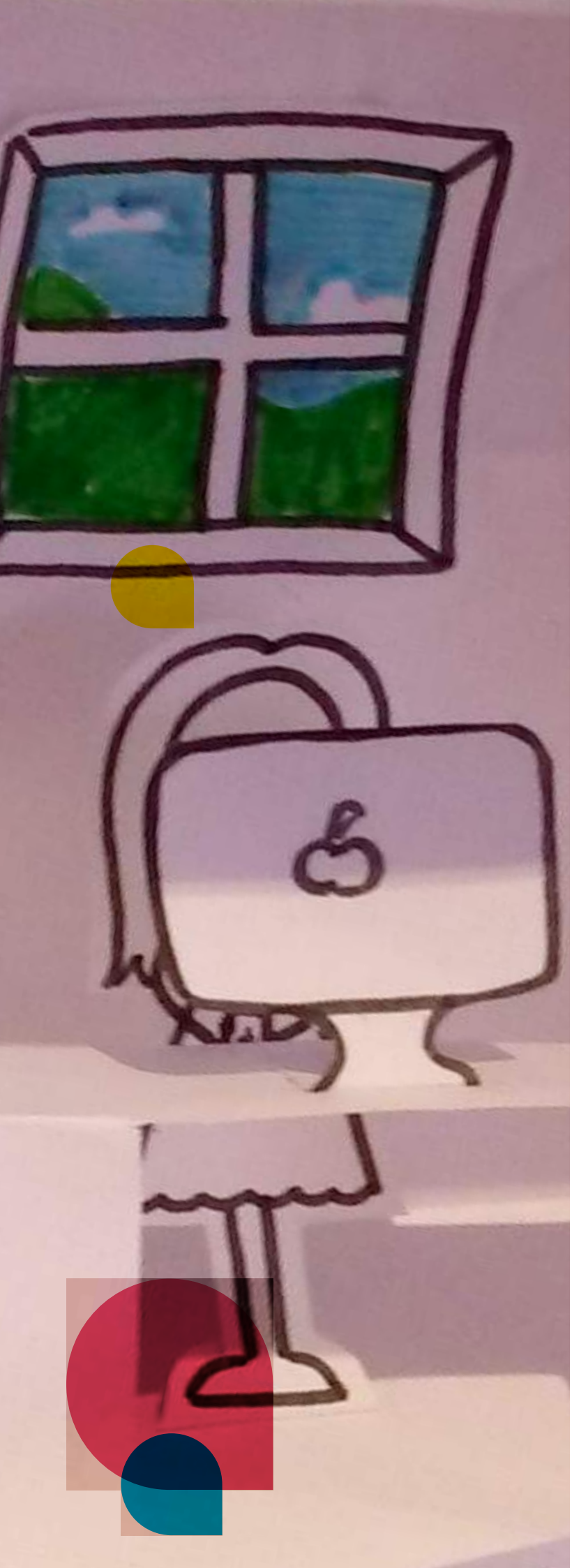
If the internet disappeared, we would not be able to do research on the internet for school projects. We would have to go to the library and that is a problem because some people don't have a library in their village so it is a lot more difficult.
France, 10

It would be very boring. **Turkey, 10**

I'd lose contact with friends, I'd feel a bit isolated, but it would also be a good thing because I probably would have to get outside, and be healthier. **Australia, 16**

I think that would affect us a lot because technology has become part of our everyday life. It's like saying to a footballer that he cannot play anymore because he is injured. That would be very frustrating.
Colombia

It wouldn't be that difficult... certainly not the end of the world, but...it would just be a little harder.
Brazil, 9



[Without digital media] my life would change drastically. Everything would be harder, schoolwork, projects, assignments, I use digital media to get information so without it it would become harder for me. **Philippines, 13**

In terms of research for school purposes, it would be so much harder. Instead of googling we would have to go back to the libraries, go to the old fashion method of the books. In terms of communication, we might have to start back using the drums. **Trinidad and Tobago, 16**

It would be harder and different. But I believe it would facilitate interpersonal communication. **Turkey, 11**

At first it would be very hard just to get used to it, but since everyone would not have it, everyone would get over it. It'd be better as well 'cause everyone would be able to talk more, to work harder for friendship. **Australia, 15**

People would learn to live with other things, using other ways. **Brazil**

I couldn't be instantly informed as much. I wouldn't be able to search for what I like. I wouldn't be able to interact as before. **Colombia**

Key considerations

Acknowledging that, for growing numbers of children around the world, digital media are fast becoming a condition of everyday life, and recognizing that children's digital rights cannot be easily separated from their rights more broadly, this report recommends the following:

01

Actively engage children in an ongoing conversation about how to best leverage digital media to support children's rights in different parts of the world and embed the insights of this process in policy and practice.

02

Develop child-centred definitions of children's rights in relation to digital media in close partnership with children, and work with governments to implement them.

03

Work in close collaboration with children and other stakeholders to improve children's access to digital media in ways that are responsive to the cultural, political, economic and social contexts that shape their everyday lives, and which are user-led but supported by appropriate governance and regulatory frameworks.

04

Promote balanced public debate, policy making and education that acknowledges the benefits of digital media and connectivity for children's rights, and avoids overstating the risks.

05

Actively support children to develop resilience by promoting and supporting digital literacy initiatives for children that foster their technical, media and social competencies.

06

Foster opportunities for children to identify how digital media might support them in enacting their rights, to develop ways of talking about their digital media practices that reflect their own experiences, and to imagine ways of using digital media to help solve problems in their communities.

07

Empower children to take responsibility for their online safety and their digital practices, and to participate online as global citizens by teaching them to know their rights and to respect the rights of others.

08

Where the appropriate social, cultural, economic and infrastructural conditions are in place, develop strategies to engage and skill children as creators of digital media so that children's technological engagement may open up new opportunities for themselves and their communities.

09

Generate high quality, child-centred, participatory research into children's digital practices globally, with a focus on contexts where evidence is lacking and the policy development imperative is most urgent.

10

Support parents and professionals to learn about and use digital media to ensure children can be supported to maximise their technological engagements to enact their rights.

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Urszula Dawkins

Urszula Dawkins is a journalist, editor and creative writer. She was co-writer of Melbourne's successful UNESCO City of Literature bid, and has produced feature articles for Melbourne Festival, the Barbican (United Kingdom), Murdoch University, Arts Centre Melbourne, Art Monthly Australia, Canberra Times, Arts House and Dance Massive, among others. She writes regularly for RealTime magazine, and is regularly commissioned to write catalogue essays and narrative documentary pieces. Urszula has edited books and theses in disciplines including cultural studies, philosophy, sociology, psychology and health sciences. Her creative writing appears in anthologies in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, and she has performed her work widely. Recent projects include the limited-edition artists' book What She Wants, created with artist Peter Lyssiotis and acquired by institutions in Australia and the United States; and Solitude, a spoken-word performance with electric violin, co-created with Melbourne Symphony violinist Sarah Curro.

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Emma Keltie is a Research Assistant at the University of Western Sydney's Institute for Culture and Society working on the 'Engaging Creativity' project as part of the Young and Well CRC. Emma has recently completed and submitted a PhD for examination at the University of Canberra. Her thesis explores participatory culture and digital media practices within the broader structural framework of industry and government regulation of the Australian media sector. Emma's research interests include participatory culture, digital storytelling, and media convergence. Prior to joining UWS, Emma worked as a lecturer at the Qantm SAE Creative Media Institute in Sydney and as a tutor at University of Canberra. Not only has Emma a passion for study and academia but she is also an independent film director who has presented her work and spoken at film festivals around the world.

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Kari Pihl is a Research Assistant in the Institute for Culture and Society at the University of Western Sydney. Kari has a background in public awareness campaigns with a social inclusion agenda, as well as the organisation of large-scale public celebrations and events. Prior to joining the Institute in March 2014, her most recent position was with the NSW Department of Family and Community Services, managing the NSW Seniors Week and Don't DIS my ABILITY ambassador programs. She provides research support on a part-time basis to the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre's project 'Transforming Institutions and Community Perceptions', while also undertaking studies in Psychology.

“Digital media has brought about a greater understanding of my rights, and vastly increased community awareness of when rights are breached. However digital media has also facilitated the violation of rights, namely through the violation of individuals’ privacy, harassment and safety. Ultimately digital media is a force that will inevitably play a huge role in shaping a modern understanding of our rights, and it is therefore important that this potential is harnessed and directed into positive channels.”

Theodora von Arnim
Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre,
Youth Brains Trust

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"A rights-based approach to participation requires that children are assisted in not only expressing their views but also in forming them."

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Inc., 2011: 20

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