SP.721 (D-Lab) Fall 2004

Session #31 notes

A followup note on this past weekend's latrine building session:

Our cement turned out very weak. Toni Ruttiman (Bridgebuilding, Session 27) related to Amy that one of the first things he learns to say in the local dialect is "not soupy." To make the cement easier to stir and mix, rookies tend to make it too wet. Probably best to work with local masons that know the character of local materials, e.g. sand/aggregate.

ICT4D (Information and Communication Technologies for Development)

Guest speaker: Leo Burd

Background: Graduate student at MIT Media Lab. Worked 4 yrs telecom, software engineering, in Europe. Switched career into education and development projects, returned to Brazil. Worked with a nonprofit that takes donated computers and uses them as basis for community development activities (and in the process, learns about using computer software tools).

CDI-SP (Sao Paolo)

Schools often have 5 or 10 very old computers. CDSIP refurbishes machines and works side by side with the community to develop.

Barn-Raising Parties: once a week kids and adults invited to the organization's warehouse, to work on refurbishing. Big parties, lots of fun. Sometimes the first opportunity for kids to actually touch a computer.

The process is a big boost for self-esteem. Companies and other organizations see media coverage of the parties and contribute.

CDI works with ~800 communities across many different countries.

Computer Clubhouse

Started by Media Lab folks (Mitch Resnick), working in partnership with embedded organizations in the city. The local partner has established relationships and infrastructure – very important! Each clubhouse includes several high-power state of the art machines, capable of multimedia audio/video production.

In addition to the computers, kids have access to other tools i.e. Legos. In New Delhi they built models of their own houses, discussing architecture and lighting; also replicas of adult-world machines like grain grinders.

Example: a kid is concerned about the quality of water. He works with adult mentors to collect water samples, and analyze the water using microscope in the Clubhouse. Decided to start a house to house campaign about safe water, e.g. promoting boiling water.

Young Activists Network (YAN)

http://www.youngactivists.net

Another Media Lab project. Goal is to turn community centers into places that kids will actually use, in the service of social change. The center also helps with recruiting and community acceptance.

In Bangalore, the kids met in the center to discuss problems. They created a badminton court area and planted much needed trees in some areas. Community center provides a comfortable space for kids to meet, and supplies technology (digital cameras, computers…).

In Sao Paulo, a group that was already meeting ~once a week was able to use the center's resources to create flyers and more effectively work into community. Convinced local government to clean up a creek, and mounted a hygiene program.

In Charlestown MA, kids used the Boys & Girls Club facility on programs to reduce community violence. Compiled list of 5 most violent and 5 safest areas, documented these places and then used the documentation to fuel community discussion. Created bumper stickers, and asked the town pizza restaurants to deliver the stickers along with pizzas. In the process, the kids led meetings, wrote notes, operated computers and scanners….

In summer 2004, brought representatives from YAN locations around the globe to Boston. Created a map, youth-oriented, of Harvard Square.

Key elements: local focus lets kids have an impact on things in their community, things of immediate interest.

Lessons and challenges. Hard to make projects that connect broadly enough to the community, going beyond "toy projects."

Q&A

Q: With kids using the computers, how do you keep the computers from getting bogged down with lots of extraneous downloaded garbage?
A: Need a tech literate person to stay on top of it.

Q: How do you select communities to target?
A: They look for places where somebody (e.g. government) is funding technology-based community centers, and there's likely a gap in programs and training.

Q: Who sets the agenda for projects, to navigate the tradeoffs of access and fairness, and promote deep involvement?
A: That's very much the role of the local community partner. They know the kids and the community best.

D-Lab Class activity

Break into project groups, and discuss the uses of technology for your upcoming project.

- If money was unlimited, what computers/software/technology would you bring? Why?
- If you had $500, 5 computers, and were limited to only a shared dialup line, what would you bring? Why?

Specifically, answer these questions:

- What?
- Where?
- Whom?
- Sustainability strategy
- First step

Brazil (Rio)

$200 for 2 GPS

$200 for 3 digital cameras

$100 for printer

Will initially support a mapping project and scavenger hunt.

Concerns: maintenance and supplies. Community partner is a school with a pretty good computer lab already, hoping they have staff expertise for maintenance. Longer term, hope to bring cell phones into the mix.

India

Technology transfer to farming community (generally literate)

Internet fees

Printer and paper

Software: browsers, education software for teachers.

Collaborate with local university students for training and maintenance. Charge nominal fees for large print or production jobs.

Lesotho

They'll be visiting an orphanage. Would setup the computers Internet-café style here. Additional funds applied to buy digital cameras and printer to support health care, teaching kids, and supporting personal connections.