netWorked Youth Research for

Empowerment in the Digital society

WYRED project Insights Summary

Paul Butler

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WYRED Project Insights

Overview of Key Themes

- Private/Personal and Public- technology, society and youth

- Notion of "giving the keys of the car to the kids"

- Optimism versus lack of faith in institutions

- Concerns for democracy and environment

- Mess left behind by the grown ups

- How should we respond as C+YP?

- Positive opportunities v. potential unhappiness, anxiety and lack of control- a core ambivalence

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The WYRED Methodology

1. Consultation phase involving outreach and engagement work and a social dialogue process
2. Leads to a second phase of research definition and the articulation of research questions
3. Action dimension of research project
4. Final phase of analysis and interpretation of the work

At each phase, the children and young people are being empowered to present their own analysis and critique of the online environment with which they are dealing.

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The WYRED Cycles

- Cycle 1 focused on the testing of this methodology with children and young people across the full partnership.
- This cycle led to the engagement of over 500 C+YP in a consultative process, leading in turn to 280 of these participating in almost 100 separate projects. An online platform was developed
- Cycle 2 allowed for further iterations of the methodological steps. Partners have again reached out to over 500 C+YP. A further set of 58 research questions were elaborated, leading to a set of almost 50 projects with the involvement of over 300 children and young people.

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Success of the Approach

- The facilitators, teachers and youth workers used the social dialogue phase of the process to explain and outline the thematic parameters of the project- C+YP motivated and inspired to take active control over the process. Their facilitators became back seat passengers in this moving vehicle.
- Through this process of taking charge of their learning and shaping the questions that they wanted to research, the children and young people became their own agents of change.

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Success of the Approach

- The phases of research definition and implementation took a wide range of shapes and turns. Poetry was written, photography exhibits were put together, models were built, site visits were made to NGOs and others with expertise to offer, questionnaires were developed, interviews were carried out.
- It is clear that from the experience of being active participants within this research process that C+YP were allowed to develop their own voice, ask their own questions and formulate their own responses-empowered to take charge. They could progress an agenda that was set themselves.

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Success of the Approach

- Interest in "big themes" associated with climate change or democracy, racism or homophobia- they were motivated to direct their work and make arguments, conclusions and recommendations that were shared and disseminated across a wide range of forums.
- When their interest was linked more "local or specific themes" regarding social media representations and impacts of influencers, they were equally able to articulate sophisticated research questions that led to important insights that could be shared widely.

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Success of the Approach

- Participants found a range of ways to present their findings. Their peers were involved, their teachers and youth workers were key targets, policy-makers and decision-makers were also engaged. Family members were invited to dissemination activities.
- Young people travelled to events across Europe, in which they were invited to present recommendations or participate in high level committees. Some of these events were attended by European Commission representatives, politicians within the House of Lords, delegates from national policy conferences and networking forums.
- The children and young people were facilitated to see that their action research should have an intended outcome. For many of the WYRED projects, these outcomes were met.

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Role of Platform

- The WYRED platform allows for C+YP to share their projects, their experiences and thoughts. There are specific conversation threads and thematic areas in which conversations can happen. There is also the repository and archive of individual and group projects, their resulting artefacts, outputs and stories. Each separate presentation, spreadsheet, research report, video or podcast has been shared within an international community of children and young people.
- As these WYRED research results are grouped according to digital themes and associated tags, participants new to WYRED can search this archive and get ideas for future work.
- Ongoing conversations are facilitated through the platform. These can be synchronous, with students in different countries coming together for live discussions or asynchronous, where children and young people can watch videos back and share their responses.

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Insights per Theme

WYRED Digital Theme Focus	Proportion of Projects (51)	Proportion of Participants (419)
Self-image and its presentation online	12%	9%
Gender discrimination, and gender differences online, stereotyping	14%	22%
Internet safety and privacy, cyberbullying, online abuse and cyber security	16%	17%
Living on social media, living with stress	16%	22%
Access to reliable information, and fake news, media literacy	12%	9%
Digital participation and activism, digital divide	31%	22%
Total	100%	100%

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1. Self-image and its presentation online

- C+YP were keen to focus on the construction of individual identities, offline and online.
- Key words that emerge are linked to vulnerability, stigma and stereotype.
- Participants were motivated to look at strategies as to how positive self-image can be promoted, at the level of the individual, but also at group or classroom level.
- The process of working together on this theme encouraged some groups to compare their local realities. The sharing of experiences in relation to how these young people manage and consider their "online self" acted as an empowering process.
- Importance of forging resilience not out of toughness and adversity, but through maintaining a relationship with one's self that contains self-belief and accuracy. Through supporting this inner resilience, the group will also benefit.

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2. Gender discrimination, gender differences online, stereotyping

- The development of research questions and projects that focused on the theme of was carried out by over 20% of WYRED participants.
- The manner in which offline gender stereotypes can be reinforced within online activities and platforms was studied by young people-looking to understand differences across countries and cultures. "Creative contributions of women are less encouraged and recognized than are those of men in many areas such as the arts and sciences."
- Returned to the manner in which individual identities are constructed and the fact that it depends on a large number of external and internal factors.
- Within the construction of online identities, the pressures to conform to idealised notions represents a shared challenge for young women, evidenced in different countries, age groups and settings.

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3. Internet safety and privacy, cyberbullying, online abuse

- The impacts of cyberbullying key research topics for C+YP
- They felt that they were used now to receiving regular guidance and tips about how and why to stay safe online, in terms of possible threats as well as to Internet security issues. They felt that there should also be greater awareness-raising for parents, teachers and youth workers.
- Including the voice of C+YP in examining how best to address a situation of cyberbullying- research found a range of different parental, school or institutional responses, leading to confusion.
- Many of the younger cohorts within this research theme were increasingly aware about potential pitfalls in the management of personal data. Having this information at a younger age was regarded as important as these children begin to access mobile phones and the range of popular platforms.

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4. Living on social media, living with stress

- "Never before have we had more Mental Health Awareness, Yet never before have we been more unhappy."
- Over 20% of WYRED participants elaborated projects in this area.
- How C+YP deal with the performative aspect of their online lives represents an important focus here. They point to a range of pressures and how they need to respond. This creates and sustains stress.
- Young people understand that they can lead to more stress within a social media vacuum that requires constant perfection.
- Importance of developing coping mechanisms and understanding resilience from a younger age. Such lifeskills can then allow the child or young person develop their online identity in a positive manner.
- Understanding this performative aspect of a social media identity is important for the other stakeholders in the life of child or young person.

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5. Access to reliable information, and fake news, media literacy

- Fake news represented a key area of interest for C+YP
- The youngest cohorts of WYRED participants carried out research into this area, quizzing their peers with regard to how they might understand what is real and what it false with regard to media representations of events- analysis highlighted the importance of trusting information sources. Within an online environment, this is increasingly challenging.
- Children and young people are clearly also able to recognise positive opportunities presented by their social media presence.
- They can readily share information and thoughts.
- Their relationships within their social group can be mediated in a positive manner, allowing for new dynamics to emerge.
- Many of the young people highlighted that they wanted to always be "critical consumers of technology, not just sheep".

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6. Digital participation and activism, digital divide

- The largest set of projects undertaken- almost one third of all projects were associated with better understanding digital divides, across countries and classes.
- Many young people were interested in how future developments would impact on these divides. Within education and employment, they point to uncertainty and vulnerability. The digital world can be potentially seen to further entrench a range of disadvantages.
- Many young people focused on how best to use new media to energise and develop new responses to these structural factors. The development of local community level or school-based campaigns has been made easier through access to digital tools.
- These discussions led to new relationships being formed with other young people in their community and the development of podcasts and shared projects.

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6. Digital participation and activism, digital divide

- Creative approaches to promoting community learning can be supported by such online approaches. Key within this type of communicative response is the recognition that digital exclusion represents a real fear for children and young people, thus mirroring and reinforcing social and economic exclusion.

- Children and young people were mostly engaged in digital activism in order to promote awareness-raising in terms of a positive environmental message.

- Using positive online platforms and opportunities can work to break down social divides and change people's attitudes. C+YP have articulated many common points in their value systems that involve a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of their online world "in a culture of offence and distraction we need to instil balance, calm and space."