YEAR 1 RECAP

THE EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY DEBATE

A Discussion of Low-Cost ICT Devices for Educational Systems in Developing Countries

Date:	June 30, 2010
Version:	1.a
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Overview

In May 2009, infoDev at the World Bank launched the Educational Technology Debate (ETD) in conjunction with Unesco with its first topical discussion, "Are ICTs the Best Educational Investment?" between Tim Kelly of infoDev and Wayan Vota, consultant to infoDev.

The long-term goal for ETD was for it to become a focal point and catalyst for an informed discussion and debate around practical implementations of ICT solutions in education globally, bringing innovative technology and best practices to the overall ICT for development (ICT4D) effort.

From this humble beginning, ETD has grown to achieve its goal - its become a central conversation in the ongoing global discussion around ICTs and learning. Through its 90+ posts by subject matter experts and 730+ comments by technologists and educators, ETD is blossoming into a real community of practice.

In fact, leaders in the ICT for education field (ICT4E) say:

> *"ETD is invaluable. I used an excerpt of Atanu Dey's Live Debate presentation in my efforts to educate the Ministry of Education on ICT4E best practices. I footnote and link to ETD throughout my reports."* Edmond Gaible, PhD, CEO of Natoma Group

Original Goals

The ETD was designed to utilize a whole spectrum of best practice activities to achieve three overarching goals:

1. Stimulate a public, holistic, and documented discussion on appropriate low-cost ICT solutions for educational systems in developing countries.
2. Become a primary knowledge repository and knowledge transfer mechanism to support implementations of low-cost ICT devices in education.
3. Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of low-cost ICT device implementations in educational environments of the developing world.

These activities can be categorized into four mutually supportive and inter-related focus areas, each building on the other to create a true industry- and continent-spanning community of practice.

Sharing Information: The main focus of the ETD will be to facilitate sharing of knowledge and perspectives, and to point people to additional knowledge resources. Sharing will happen between educational and technology practitioners, to increase the knowledge base of each practitioner, and the overall network of technology and education practitioners in all six major groups. Information sharing can happen through almost any medium, but an importance will be placed on documenting the knowledge and its source.

Sharing Experience: Each practitioner brings to the ETD different experiences with technology and educational settings, and through the community, each can share his or her experiences to enhance the network's collective ICT in education expertise. The ETD will incorporate opportunities to share practitioners' experiences at every turn, documenting and promoting experiences across the community.

Discussing New Innovations: The community will serve as a platform to exchange ideas and opinions on appropriate technology and education solutions for the developing world - a conversation currently lacking a central point of communication between practitioners. This discussion will be open to external stakeholders from the beginning and also serve to promote thought leaders in appropriate technology for education.

Solving Problems: The community will be a resource to quickly resolve outstanding ICT in education implementation issues through peer support - education and technology implementers will look to each other's varying skills and knowledge to expedite solutions.

Brief Description

The ETD is centered on an online communication platform that integrates industry best practices in online conversations and knowledge sharing. The main focus of the community is monthly discussions of topics central to low-cost ICT solutions for education in the developing world.

Original Design

Originally, topics were to be discussed through a process loosely based on the classic debate framework, in which a moderator introduces a topic, experts discuss two different viewpoints through an opening statement and follow-up perspective, and the moderator summarizes the debate. Interested parties could augment each section with comments, related information, and relevant news items.

This framework can best be visualized using the following table:

Introduction	
Viewpoint A	Viewpoint B
Follow On A	Follow On B
Conclusion	

Deploying ETD using this configuration was risky - this design broke away from the usual online discussion convention of showing the most recent post at top of the page, for one that had subsequent posts below an opening statement.

Current Design

After the first six months, the ETD team assessed the success of the design layout and realized that chronological lists of posts left readers confused. They would see the

original post at the top of the page and not realize the conversation had progressed with new posts below it.

As a result, the main ETD layout was modified to follow the standard reverse-chronological conversation. The most recent post is now presented at the top of the main page, and readership has increased as a result. Each topic archive is still presented in the original format, to provide a context for each post, and has been well received by visitors.

Numeric Results

While quantitative results cannot express true levels of influence or reach, they can be used as a proxy for success. And by these measures, ETD is quite successful.

Content Metrics

To date, there are 92 posts on ETD in 15 categories that span the breadth of the educational and technology topics discussed in the ICT4E space. These posts were written by 56 thought leaders in either ICT or education and stimulated 732 comments, for an average of almost 8 comments per post. This is well above the usual comment levels seen on niche website communities.

Viewer Metrics

ETD takes a two-pronged approach to expand it's reach - it publishes to a website and sends its posts as emails to an opt-in subscriber list. For the website, there have been 33,500 unique visitors to ETD, who've read 56,200 pages of content from May 2009 to June 2010.

In addition to website viewers, each post and comment published on ETD is emailed directly to the inbox of 547 subscribers who have entered their email and requested ETD delivered to them. So while they may not be counted in website statistics, they add an additional 1,000+ views a week, or approximately 58,000 additional page views of content over the time period.

Discussion Highlights

During the first year of ETD, there have been three great highlights in our discussions, as measured by participation metrics.

Most Viewed Post

In June 2009, Wayan Vota asked "Mobile Phones: Better Learning Tools than Computers?" and a year later, almost 3,500 people have read the post, trying to find an answer to that question themselves. Almost 25% of those viewers went on to read the related posts in that topic, diving deep into the educated analysis of Robert Kozma and Michael Trucano.

Most Commented Post

In December 2009, Mark Warschauer proclaimed, "OLPC: How Not to Run a Laptop Program", resulting in 65 comments from OLPC supporters to avowed ICT4E critics. It also happens to be the second most viewed post, with 2,300 page views and counting.

Most Watched Event

In April 2010, ETD had a Live Debate at the World Bank offices in New Delhi, India on the question of "Are Most Investments in Technology for Schools Wasted?" The live event featuring six discussants attracted an in-person audience of approximately 40 people and a live webcast of over 400 people, many of who discussed the debate on the Twitter social networking platform in real time.

Conclusion

The Educational Technology Debate is just 13 months old in June 2010, and yet it's already a commanding presence in the ICT4E conversation - its stimulated discussions on 15 topics central to educators and technologists, with almost 550 experts subscribing to its every post and comment.

It's bridged the on and off-line world with a Live Debate that was broadcast around the world, and incorporated email and social networking into its idea promotion. The ETD is well on its way to achieve its three original goals:

1. Stimulate a public, holistic, and documented discussion on appropriate low-cost ICT solutions for educational systems in developing countries.
2. Become a primary knowledge repository and knowledge transfer mechanism to support implementations of low-cost ICT devices in education.
3. Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of low-cost ICT device implementations in educational environments of the developing world.

In the next year, expect ETD to expand its dialogue and continue to push for a greater discussion on low-cost ICT initiatives for educational systems in developing countries.