
ONE LAPTOP PER CHILD

DISCOURSE IN AN INFORMATION SOCIETY CONTEXT

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A LAPTOP TO SAVE THE WORLD

In January of 2005 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland the (in)famous academic and capitalist innovator Nicholas Negroponte first announced the One Laptop per Child (OLPC) project and associated nonprofit organization. Over the next few years the group would design and release over a million colorful low-price laptops designed for kids to so-called disadvantaged nations and communities around the world in order to revitalize or revolutionize their education systems. The event tipped off a cascading series of responses, including news reports cast in the tone of technological determinism, blogs unpacking laptop capabilities and innovations, practical questions of the viability of developing world markets and distribution schemas, and even greater intellectual discourse about the education and social justice in the information age. The controversy was more than just talk; in the following years the OLPC organization suffered a number of setbacks, including drastic infrastructure and policy alterations, such as loss of employees and corporate partnerships, resistance from target markets and customer governments, and assault from rivaling corporate and NGO interests like other laptop makers and education initiatives. Despite this, the OLPC program has remained intact, and moreover has made a significant name for itself. Pictures of wide-eyed African children pointing at white and green plastic clamshells branded with the now familiar X-O person logo capture and brand a certain feeling of altruism and seem to integrate seamlessly into the rhetoric about bridging the digital divide.

The objective of this work is not to capture the specific aspects of the OLPC organization or scrutinize the XO laptop's technical details, but instead to examine their role in an encompassing emergent global discourse on technology, education and capitalism in the

developing world. It is in this social context that this paper presents a perspective of what the OLPC project may really mean or represent, both explicitly and implicitly. This includes political, economic and cultural ramifications and involves a preliminary interrogation of the outcomes of this discourse thus far. Herein lies an exploration of the assumptions and values integrated into XO's production, deployment, reception and use. These tie into the proliferation of information and ideologies that affect the continuance of power disparities.

This paper accomplishes three tasks. First, it overviews some of the background details behind the OLPC project and XO laptop. Second, it offers a preliminary content analysis of some of several leading newspaper publications from the past two years. Third, it relates both of these to the greater surrounding discourse.

BACKGROUND

Shortly after OLPC's announcement at the *World Economic Forum* in 2005 the program started to pick up sponsors and press coverage. The organization, formally a non-profit, received backing from a wide array of technology corporations and by the *World Summit on the Information Society* had revealed concept models (pictured) a working prototype. Negroponte originally intended the laptops to be purchased by governments around the world, ordered in lots of at least a million, and he estimated that over 10 million of the devices would go into circulation within just a couple of years (McCullagh 2005). The price that made the laptop so famous, 100\$ was really something of an imagined figure, and even within the first year was being bargained up to 115\$. Over the next two years the program would face significant challenges, including governments who had little interest in purchasing computers when faced with greater infrastructure problems (such as electricity and water), production and technology limitations (particularly development of the low-cost but adaptive screen) and problems with corporate partners and operating system development (Microsoft and Intel provided resistance).



By the time the first machines were rolled out in 2007 OLPC had a few governments on board and sites in mind, but little to no information about their plans for integration with regards to culture and classroom. The XO's were priced at 188\$ and donors and interested educators or developers could pick up one for themselves through the Give One, Get One (G1G1) program by paying 400\$ (200 for each). Though never intended for general consumer use the XO laptops came during the time of the mobile computing boom, the dawn of rampant smart phones and netbooks and satellite-provided internet. Some suggest that the concepts embodied in the XO may have contributed to this rise.

THE DEBUT OF THE XO



The resulting machines (pictured) were relatively impressive feats in hardware. They included a durable plastic shell and no sensitive moving parts along with a dust and water-resistant design that would keep them intact in the face of prolonged abuse and rough environments. Their speed, while limited, was unimportant because they featured a custom-designed Linux-based operating

system, Sugar, which was intended for kids. One of the original notions behind this OS was that it could be reprogrammed by child learners, a reflection of the constructivist approach (which states kids learn best via creative experimentation and the creation of social objects) embodied in its software. The color, shape and size of the laptop, bright and playful with a tiny keyboard, was not intended to mark it as a toy, but instead emphasize its ownership by children and help detour theft. The XO could last for great periods of time on its battery and be recharged via a separate crank (about a minute of cranking for a minute of power) or through other more complicated means (such as solar panels). The screen, which would turn into a readable monochrome display in sunlight, could flip around and be operated to some extent by side buttons, allowing for its use as an e-reader. The laptops included microphones and a small web cam, and, most importantly for a device with such an internet-fueled education model, wireless

capabilities that would allow them to chain together to form a mesh network to connect to distant internet access points.

The laptops came with no manuals or instructions, but instead were dependent on community-developed wikis, a pro from the standpoint of language support and updatability, but a con for places with limited internet access. Recent developments indicate they are now beginning to ship a 1.5 model upgrade that can make use of existing laptop cases and screens, upgrades just require swapping out the motherboard. This version can support the use of Microsoft Windows (or boot two operating systems) and makes use of newer, but existent, technologies. By contrast, the XO-2, which was proposed in 2008 and later scrapped, seemed to echo the netbook-tablet rage thrashing about in the western world at the time, sporting a flashy set of two touch screens and smaller size and yet lower cost (pictured). A recent interview with Negroponte cited him saying a version 3 model is in the works for 2012, but gave no specific details other than that the new item would be like a sheet of paper (Roush 2009).



THE OLPC MISSION

One Laptop per Child organization broadcasts an often cited mission on their website (laptop.org and associated wiki) through the articulation of five core principles.

The core values are identified as child ownership, low ages, saturation, connection and free and open source. More specifically they state that they want kids to be able to take laptops home with them to keep as personal possessions. They feel that the earlier phases of education are a crucial time of development and thus the XO's should be used primarily by children between the ages of 6 and 12. They want complete saturation so children can take the laptop home with them and so that no kids are left behind. They want the laptops to be able to be used in networks that go beyond the classroom, be they locally based or the full-on internet. And

finally they push for active use of open software and the repurposing of XO laptops free of proprietary control. These principles, while they may initially sound valiant and virtuous, actually reveal something about the nature of the project.

First, they're predicated on a western model of ownership, which is often ground in capitalism and individual consumerism. We buy things and they help to define who we are, we own property and ideas and have complicated systems of attribution and permission when it comes to sharing. In places like Sao Tome, for instance, objects left out in the open become a kind of public property, and children don't have the right to own items independently of their parents. The first principle lacks awareness of the conditions occurring in the home of the child: they may not have power to operate the laptop, it could be easily stolen and their parents or siblings may prevent explorative use (or might claim it for themselves). Second, early-age focused learning relies on a substantial amount of child psychology cognitive development theory, which often is more reductionist and bound by structuralist ideologies. This stance simultaneously neglects socialization factors and yet makes use of them by subjecting children at an especially vulnerable age to western forms of socialization. It is important to note that this may not be intrinsically bad—some would pitch that growing up learning the value of free speech and creative production by individuals could help to benefit such cultures where it may be lacking. The third tenant, saturation, seems to be a thinly veiled agenda for greater dispersion (selling more) and network-effects-driven capitalism (use value goes up when more people have a technology). Non-saturation models might rely on shared resources, like keeping laptops in a school, which undercuts their value as objects that can empower learning anywhere. In addition only large corporations and governments can purchase laptops in mass, which ensures top-down deployment and less direct or specific concern for the end-user. Interestingly the statements on the wiki and in the website principles video only relate in passing to the ways the internet could be part of their connection principle, and presupposes that a networked community could happen in the context of extant power relations. In short, it assume a cultural compatibility with locally-driven networks and with the greater internet. Further, some places, like, again to use the reference of Sao Tome, have drastically limited internet connections. The internet does hold incredible potential for learning, but considerably

less so when it's fed in at about 6 kb per second for every laptop on the network to share. The laptops don't come with infrastructure, and don't have a standard for prerequisites that's written into their principles. And then finally, the open-source mission is contradicted by blatant reliance on proprietary technology: you must use XO-specific parts for most repairs, expansions and upgrades and recent developments have led to Microsoft Windows coming pre-installed on some machines, subjecting nations to the desires and interests of the corporate giant.

DEPICTING USE

Visual discourse analysis could easily constitute an entirely separate and powerful study. The way laptops, and more importantly environments, users and communities are presented in photos and film suggests that OLPC is as much about creating a sense of technology as altruism, freedom and progress as it is about mobilizing machines. The future conjured up in such images likely helps to promote a battery of ideologies and agendas, not the least being the replacement of teachers with technology as the answer (see picture) . Viewers are left with dystopian alternatives such as child soldiers, human trafficking or prostitutes, as illustrated by a rather [shocking internet-based video ad campaign](#) (Vota 2008), or utopian outcomes, such as [John Lennin's imagined world](#), which goes in stride with their literally stated motto, "give a laptop, change the world."



CONTENT ANALYSIS STUDY DESIGN

In order to assemble an understanding of the world's reception of the OLPC program this paper draws upon a preliminary dataset of news articles.

METHODS

Although newspapers have come under fire in recent years as a result of declining readership and customized and up-to-the-moment crowd-sourced production of news they still represent a method through which many people get information about the world around them. Further they present a fairly important voice of the discourse actively operating in society. Simply noticing what's mentioned in the news and the way it is framed sheds some light on an issue or topic's importance and demeanor. The news in many ways produces social norms as much as it might reflect them, and though reports on readership vary depending on metrics of circulation and audience (Saba 2009), the major news conglomerates still account for a significant chunk of America's population. By focusing on newspapers this paper helps to identify information sources targeted to a more specific population. According to the 2008 Scarborough Research report summarized on the [Newspaper Association of American website](#), a nonprofit organization representing nearly 2,000 newspapers that tracks major issues that affect the industry, this demographic includes mostly older white educated adults, who are currently or previously married, with a skew towards men and home owners, depending on if they're subscribers or single-copy buyers. This demographic likely differs from online readership and the blogosphere with regards to age, and other possible unknown variables, such as political orientation or profession.

Besides being illustrative of a more specific population newspapers yield another major advantage: they are comparatively easier to track down. So much of the news available on the internet suffers from drawbacks related to reliability and the nature of a dynamic information environment. Systems of documentation and attribution are inconsistent at best, and no single researcher has determined how to best capture 'the blogosphere' comprehensively and most studies of a topic involve a kind of digital ethnography to identify the major reputable sources scattered about the web. Indeed, archival of information on (and more importantly, systems operating behind) the internet has both disastrous and tremendous potential.

After consultation with a professional information science librarian the author chose an article sampling from Lexisnexis, one of the leading newspaper database providers in the world. All

materials on the natural language return of “One Laptop per Child” for the previous two years was reviewed, resulting in hundreds of newspapers, newsletters, magazines and small journals, industry trade press, and even limited web-based publications. The bounding date of 2007 was selected as this was the time the XO laptops first began active deployment around the world. It also allowed for a few years of discussion and speculation on the prototype laptop to settle into the reality of its production and deployment and kept the source count to a reasonable number. In all 278 articles appeared as formal newspaper publications from English speaking countries and cities around the world.

The author set about analyzing these with a sort of inductive qualitative content analysis. Over the course of reading and logging 78 articles that were sorted by relevance (the sorting logic behind this is a mystery, Lexisnexis does not explain it but it seemed to have to do with how much the article was actually based on directly relating to the topic query) a number of themes and regularities became consistently clear. The author stopped short of doing the entire set because the articles started to repeat so constantly that no new information was introduced, and the quality and length of the articles started to deteriorate. Time was also a factor, in an ideal world articles and magazines dating back 5 years (in this case it would have been close to 980 sources) would be addressed.

FINDINGS

Several aspects of the sample were immediately obvious. North America (mostly the US) accounted for the majority of publications, both in terms of sheer publication count (104), and number of content producers (19). Europe (the UK, Ireland and France) and Australia followed, with 81 and 67 articles each respectively, accounting for 15 and 13 papers. Asia comprised the final 26 articles split between 5 sources, mostly pushed out of Singapore and Hong Kong. Notably none of the returned articles came from anywhere in Africa or South America or really the majority of Asia. This was likely an effect of language barriers but might illustrate another kind of disparity; a comparative between the ways OLPC is reported on in the global ‘north and south’ might reveal some interesting points of contrast. The top five news publishing authorities were *The Boston Globe* (31), *The New York Times* (25), *The Guardian* of London (22),

The *Straits Times* of Singapore (16) and *The Australian* (11). It is worth noting that *The Boston Globe* is actually owned by *The New York Times Company*, as is the *International Herald Tribune* (which only accounted for 6 articles), which suggests that the entity is responsible for at least 23% of the entire dataset, assuming it doesn't have other unknown subsidiaries. The topic of the OLPC program was covered relatively consistently by a few reporters, though these were generally technology specialists, like columnist Hiawatha Bray. The sample was too small to be leveraged to unearth any statistically significant figures, but it was pretty obvious that articles focused on deployment in OLPC sites were mostly those in Australia, and covered by Australian newspapers. The data quality was fairly good, most articles did have to do mostly with the OLPC organization, and only five were completely unrelated and thrown out (an article on one to one child computing and several articles that gave OLPC as a sort of credential and introduction for Negroponte). Seven of the articles had literal repeats, they averaged about 570 words, and many overlapped in story coverage.

The choice of headlines says something about the articles themselves. A significant number mention corporate technology groups, like Intel, Amazon or Microsoft and many others invoke words of altruism, like 'charity,' 'donate,' 'global aid,' and 'dream.' Several make reference to place (deployment site) and a few evoke John Lennin's recognizable name. The articles range in focus, from updates related to business ventures to stories from deployment sites to simple notices of company changes in policy. A few narratives appeared several times: the give-one, get-one program, the union and split between Intel and the OLPC advisory board, the departure of key developers from the program, the announcement that the laptops would begin to support Microsoft Windows, and the debut of the John Lennin 'imagine' commercial. Over the course of reading article after article a number of themes began to emerge, which were coded for discussion.

ANALYSIS

This study resulted in the identification of four major themes operating behind newspaper story discourse: technological spectacle, capitalistic emphasis, assumed altruism, and criticism of the OLPC endeavor.

TECHNOLOGICAL SPECTACLE

Focus on technology manifested itself in articles consistently in two major forms: machine capabilities suspended from practice and positive outcomes resultant from technological adoption.

Many of the articles enthusiastically detailed the inventive features of the XO laptop. This included technical references like processor speed and architecture that relied on an assumption of reader knowledge about these technologies, as well as more general aspects, like the machine's ability to flip its screen around for tablet and e-reader style viewing. They discussed its low power usage, storage capacity, webcam, and screen features, but always without reference in a context. We could learn that the laptop consumes a mere 16 watts of power but not what the typical power network it would be plugged into could sustain. The cute movable wireless antennas could surge data on to the computer at hundreds of kilobytes per second but there was very little information about its ability to negotiate connections through the mesh network, and what a realistic internet data throughput might look like for a set of computers in a rural area. Detailed description of the software package was nearly non-existent, as it couldn't be described in short quips of numbers. This technobabble rapport achieves two effects: making sense of the laptop in terms of western metrics of performance (making use of our own reference points of what 433 mhz means for speed or how much audio could be stored on 1 gb of storage) and also an abstraction from real-world practical use. Never mind that the laptop's use as an e-reader would be catastrophically inhibited by the available languages and translations of the freely released 1.6 million eBook library, it's all about the numbers. Such emphasis keeps reports away from substantive evaluation and exemplar application.

The laptop was also cast as a driver of technological progress. In order to facilitate their use villages and schools would have to provide other infrastructure to get the laptops going. The kinds of outcomes that came as precursors to the laptops were almost always technological in nature: power, wireless and supporting tools. One such publication stated, for instance, *"This remarkable transformation has been made possible by solar power and innovative use of*

cellphone technology. Our partnerships with OLPC, the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Safaricom and CradlePoint have resulted in portable 3G wireless Internet coverage, durable laptops and reliable power for a rural Kenyan school of 200 students.” (Power & Inthinji, Globe and Mail).

The XO laptop development was also considered to be a motivating agent behind technology in the western consumer market. Beyond being understood to be an early attempt at a netbook many of the technologies found in the laptop were championed as possibilities for general use: *“Laptops with dual-mode screens that can switch from colour to high-contrast e-ink, based on work with the One Laptop per Child programme, are around the corner”* (Anderson 2009 in The Guardian of London). Indeed, the proposed version 2 of the XO looked like a smash up of an iPhone and a netbook, a device that would be hopelessly unrealistic in the rugged developing world but could sell in millions to home users.

CAPITALISTIC EMPHASIS

An artifact most likely due to the constraints of the sampling technique and newspaper medium, many of the articles involved prominent statements of numbers and names related to capitalistic enterprise. They spoke of mergers, support and clashes between major technology companies, almost as if they were a kind of set of sports teams competing with one another for domination. Numbers establishing current circulation rates, costs or production and potentials were continually broadcast into the text, as if they were informing a giant body of investors. They were frequently occupied with future expansions of business, in the form of new markets (countries) and technologies. A particularly thick Boston Globe article by Hiawatha Bray (2009) serves an exemplar, making reference to cost: *“But last year, it [OLPC] quietly raised the price of its proprietary XO laptop from \$188 to \$204, more than twice what the foundation originally hoped to charge. Now Negroponte is promising to cut the price of the XO by \$24, to \$180. “I believe it will go down another \$20 soon,” he added. But even at \$160, the laptop will cost far more than its original \$100 target price.”* The same article demonstrates the competing corporate interests: *“Chip maker Intel Corp., which for a time had an alliance with the foundation, has also made inroads with its own children's laptop, called the Classmate. Intel's machine sells for \$300 to \$400, more than the foundation's laptop, but Intel has done a better*

job of getting it into the hands of poor children. While fewer than a million foundation laptops have been issued, mostly to users in Peru and Uruguay, there are more than a million Classmates in use in 30 countries. Another one million Intel machines were ordered in September by Venezuela..." These kinds of statements were typical – a game of running numbers towards the goal of distribution and profit, without much attention paid to other perhaps more crucial numbers, like the budget allocations in target countries or if the competing technologies accomplished measureable outcomes of social good, like higher test scores or number of job applications.

ASSUMED ALTRUISM

The rhetoric of OLPC is a little reminiscent of Dewey: the XO stands as a beacon of enlightenment; economic bootstrapping, and takes on an almost messianic tone in publications with such headlines as "Laptop 'magic' lures young back to school," "Changing the World, one PC at a time" or "Children's Crusade." One article described it in saying *"The much-anticipated XO laptop is an upbeat little instrument, the size of a Bible with a handle. It's green, the universal color of contemporary virtue... Negroponte's XO laptop reveals a great deal about his worldview and how he and his colleagues perceive the benighted people they seek to enlighten."* (Heffernan 2008 in the New York Times). This article couldn't overtly state what's going on more accurately. The OLPC organization and associated news discourse actively construct a vision of altruism with their projections of need and significance. As stated above, it has a certain tone of progress and technological determinism but creates a distinct view of the digital divide as access, a gap that merely needs to be crossed, not a complex matrix of power relationships and institutional agendas. It is assumed that these massive deployments of laptops will bring education and economic prosperity by virtue of their presence alone. A weekend article of *The Australian* references Aussie OLPC executive director of charity Rangan Srikhanta in stating *"...the charity will deploy 400,000 laptops at a rate of 10,000 a month in some of the most remote corners of the country. 'People might think it's a pipe dream, but it can be done,' Srikhanta says. 'Uruguay did it in less than three years. It's just [having the] will.' Children who previously had no access to a library or the internet now have a world of*

information at their fingertips.” (Robinson 2009). The stage is set: other countries are onboard and it’s all a mission to get laptops to achieve a yet to be described form of library and internet access. The debate as to if the internet actually provides the equivalent benefits of traditional libraries or what the ‘world of information’ actually contains is entirely ignored as a given. The laptops gift us with a new rewards-based way to engage kids in education, as if student motivation was a question that can only now be answered with the glories of technology. *“We want to use it as an incentive, come to school. And no computer if you don't come, simple as that.”* (Debbi Guest quotes school administrator Marcus Lacey in *The Australian*) We forget the TV and radio might have once also tried to step up to fill this role and resulted in a more varied set of outcomes.

CRITICISM OF THE OLPC ENDEAVOR

Though it was less common, some articles did take on a tone of critical analysis. Some were cursory remarks related to issues that might bother their readership personally, such as when OLPC failed to deliver some substantial portion of the Give-one, Get-one laptops to their donors, but others took on a stronger stance. A realistic recognition of the capitalistic nature of the project an article in London’s Daily Telegraph explained, *“In Rwanda itself, the government is not talking about software developers emerging from schools in their thousands; the aim is a population that is able to steal jobs from those in other countries where outsourcing is already a formidable part of the economy.”* (Warman 2009). The Irish Times went so far as to systematically review the controversy, relating resistance to the project by corporations, technologists, OLPC’s own software developers and highlighting severe drawbacks to the hardware, such as hibernation bugs that inhibited battery potential. It profoundly concluded that the so-called success outcomes might be just as scary: *“But what makes me more nervous is if it succeeds... what would a genius kid, with 21st-century tools, stuck on the wrong end of our violently lopsided global economy, do with this? Bring wealth to his or her country? Exploit his or her less smart fellow students for their underused CPU power? Or use this toy as ticket out of the global ghetto to locate, and violently and perhaps rightfully seize the other secret tools of*

the West that have been denied them for so long?" (O'Brien 2008). Though fewer in number these articles bring a healthy dose of perspective to the available discourse.

WHAT IS ABSENT

A great deal is absent from the discourse available on the OLPC organization in the news. Some of this is by nature of the medium, short articles on just about anything can't capture details very easily. The voices featured in articles, however, are predominantly statements from OLPC representatives and associated experts. Accounts from teachers and students in the countries of deployment, those average everyday people, are almost totally lacking. Over the course of the review the author was able to find one, which feels a little rough with translation, and may have been scripted: *"I feel happy about them," said 15-year-old David Mangaliso, who had never used a computer until the laptops came along. "They look nice. You can do maths on them, you can write or play games. And they have a camera, so we can see our faces on them."* (York 2009). Notice how these are simply his first impressions, not informed statements about their expected long-term impact in his life or their affect on the community. For the most part articles lacked direct connection to defined community needs and asset assessments, and measurements of educational effectiveness were muted by abstract statements of constructivism. Observations of cultural adoption and examples of integration with lesson plans weren't presented, even though they'd make the kind of uplifting material that might punctuate what are otherwise typically tragic news reports. It is possible these sorts of reports are coming, but the laptops have been in circulation for a couple of years now, the silence certainly suggests something.

DISCUSSION

The work is here wanting of a full-scale literature review that captures the entire scope of academic discourse surrounding the One Laptop per Child and its relation to the news. Due to time constraints this paper only draws upon the perspectives of a few major authors who have addressed the topic in some form.

So the question becomes: to what ends does all of this result? The answer is, at least in part, three fold: technology becomes synonymous with development, we suffer a perpetuation of western values, and witness the fueling of digital capitalism and as well as the opportunity for new forms of control and production.

Ultimately these articles paint a story of the human condition: technology is seen as an uncontrollable force in modern social thought, the dominant interests and driving forces flow seamlessly into the background in stride with the common tendency to disregard social factors and emphasize progress towards a so-called common sense (or assumed) goal (Winner et al. 2008). This goal, of course, is the casting of development as the equivalent of the proliferation of and immersion in information communication technologies. As ridiculed above, the assumptions underlying the altruism in the articles are producing of a vision: technological progress. The absurd levels of attention given to XO laptop features and gizmos helps to solidify this notion, especially when the XO is held responsible for other kinds of technology-related development. But this progress is towards what kind of world?

The OLPC is certainly not the first time the west has taken up the cause to liberate nations and communities dubbed misguided or ill-fated. This charge has come in many forms over the centuries, first starting with religious missions and eventually evolving into the spread of science and industry, and, more recently, cultural ideals and values embedded in technology and capitalistic development enterprise. Indeed, as noted above, the language bears a similar religiously infused character, and the connotation of worthy pursuits becomes conflated with neocolonial ideologies backing the spread of technology (Luyt 2008). Further, the founding tenants of the OLPC initiative, their core principles, insist on laptops as personal property, a possible gateway to the adoption of intellectual property rights and western legal norms (Pieterse 2005). Once the laptops are connected to the internet their users find themselves swimming in a world with content they did not create and have limited control over; the spread is seemingly more likely to create disparities with the internet's influence than it is to minimize them. Never mind the impacts on crime or cultural upheaval the darker sides of the internet might produce.

The OLPC does not have to be an exclusively depressing tale, however. Understanding how power is produced, sustained and otherwise mitigated in cyberspace (Jordan 1999) and contemporary information society is key in identifying a framework for the possibility of positive change. Abdul Alkalimat captured the concept aptly, in his response during the Winner et al. conference session referenced above (abridged, 2008):

“This is all happening in a time of globalization – and we can make a judgment that a given country shouldn’t impose its will upon another country. Or we can step outside and ask another question: are there tools and methods that are expected to be used to participate in the global economy or global discourse? Can we look at any village in the world and say they’re in fact in a bubble and can proceed on the basis of tradition? Could we instead recognize that there are many strategies that exist to become part of the global experience and that it is going to happen whether they like it or not? Cell phones will transform Africa one way or another, it’s less about specific tools and about how technologies might help evolve ourselves and bring our species into conversation in real-time. Activism and resistance – the ability to respond to a corporate/government-based movement, use of tech tools for social movements, this is where much of the exciting and hopeful development is to be had. Global change is ever present, lately it has mostly been about changed technology and the speed of interaction between countries and peoples. The Internet is the biggest shift in human communications and knowledge production, storage and presentation ever, and ideas, innovations and human connection now move at the speed of electrons. Denying anyone, any kid, from being a part of that shift – no matter how small and regardless of the technology used to participate in it – is relegating them to a future of intellectual and knowledge poverty.”

Some measure of hope lies in the OLPC corps, a community/NGO-driven subset of the organization, which has sought to detach their efforts from the negative political aspects of the global corporate arena and facilitate autonomous teacher and student participation. Drawing upon the experiences of the Community Informatics Initiative and its partnership with Sao Tome, a small island African nation, and an embedded multi-purpose NGO, STeP Up, it becomes possible to see a future for the OLPC program that doesn’t fit the norms portrayed in the news rhetoric. The description of this project, however, lies outside the bounds of this paper.

FUTURE WORK

A great deal of research awaits down the road. Clearly the threshold of information harvested from news articles doesn't epitomize the discussion going on in the blogosphere, or even online news publications. Thought it may not be possible to assemble a 'complete' dataset of such materials it is still an essential study, the material pushed around online is more specialized and directly connected to the OLPC efforts. The presentation of the XO in other mediums, such as on TV or in magazines is another avenue for media exploration, too. And, as mentioned above, an evolving review of the academic publications and governmental reports on the OLPC program should inform any views of its encompassing discourse and world impact.

For now, however, this is an exciting beginning.

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For the full news article dataset, see the **attached Excel spreadsheet**.

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