The Interplay of Third Place, Self-efficacy, Social and Human Capital in a New Zealand Community ICT Youth Project

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Abstract: Multiple objectives relating to Connection, Personal Development and Information were the stated outcomes of establishing a suite of computing facilities in a New Zealand city youth centre named Secret Level. The youth centre offered a wide range of both structured and unstructured activities and events. The computing suite included a wireless local area network with Internet access, six moveable, thin client terminals located in the café area and three high-specification multimedia computers with printer and scanner in a separate room. The project was financed from the government's Community Digital Strategy Partnership Fund that aimed to support local, regional and national initiatives to develop and achieve capability, confidence, relevant content and connection to realise community aspirations through information and communication technology (ICT). This paper presents the evaluation of the ICT youth project after just four months of operation. The mixed-method study, framed by the overlapping constructs of self-efficacy, social and human capital and third place, involved a survey, semi-structured interviews and observations. The findings revealed that most of the measures of success defined for the project were met but evaluation of many of the Personal Development objectives relating to an increase in the work, study, ICT and literacy skills of youth was not possible, due to the short evaluation period.

Keywords: social capital, computing, ICT, digital divide, third place, youth.

1. Introduction

The digital divide, defined as "lack of access to IT for certain segments of the population" (Servon, 2002: 1), continues to be a focus of nations and governments resulting in concerted and varied initiatives to reduce the inequalities of access to information and communications technology (ICT). In recent years projects aimed at addressing the divide have been socially situated, in a convenient location, and often targeted at demographic characteristics of the population such as gender, income and race. New Zealand, although a small country of just over 4 million people, is ranked "high" in terms of ICT access and use and high ICT skills (International Telecommunication Union, 2009). Despite the relatively high global ranking the government and local body agencies continue to encourage and support projects aimed at reducing digital inequalities, recognised as associated with other socio-economic factors (Head, 2006)

A major government initiative was launched in 2005. The vision for this initiative, the New Zealand Digital Strategy, was to create a digital future for all New Zealanders whether they are at home, school, work or in the community. To realise the focus on people within the community a Community Partnership Fund was established whereby the government provided $20.7 million seed funding over four years to partly fund initiatives by partnerships that would improve people's capability and skills to use ICT and develop digital content.

A Wellington charitable trust, Wellington ICT, was successful in its application to the Partnership Fund. This resulted in the establishment in January 2009 of an ICT suite with free Internet access in a city youth centre called Secret Level. The computer wireless network consists of six thin client terminals in mobile booths that can be moved around to create different spaces in the open café area, and in a separate room three high specification multi-media computers, with dual monitors, scanner, printer and specialist music and graphics software. The youth centre is located in a dis-used nightclub in Lower Hutt, one of the cities within the greater Wellington region. Secret Level attracts a large youth cohort (up to 200 with varying attendance) where they engage in a variety of activities that include live concerts, dance parties, band practice, school road shows and leadership programmes.

Two youth workers manage and coordinate activities and a group of social workers run leadership and outreach programmes to 70-80 Secret Level youth, many of whom attend the local secondary schools. The Trust commissioned the authors to evaluate the project and this paper presents the results of the mixed-method study, framed within the overlapping constructs of social and human

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capital, self-efficacy and third place (a term defined by Oldenburg (1991) to describe a non-threatening place where regulars gather and which has a strong sense of social inclusion and connection). The results contribute to the digital divide literature and an understanding of the effectiveness of providing computing with some targeted activities in a youth environment.

2. Evaluation objectives and framework

The Trust defined the overall goal for the Secret Level ICT project as: "to increase positive opportunities for youth development so that young people can become resourceful, responsible, socially aware, interactive and positive". The Trust also defined numerous, and detailed, "External Outcomes" under the four categories of:

1. Connection – the provision of a supervised information network, set up to meet the needs of youth.
2. Personal Development – the opportunity for youth to gain and extend IT skills for their own personal development and help prepare them for adult life.
3. Information – access to, and the opportunity to gain, information on a wide range of matters in a safe, welcoming and supportive environment.
4. Secret Level as third place – to increase the value and effectiveness of the Secret Level Youth Centre as a third place, particularly among youth.

We categorised these broad objectives under the three areas of social and human capital, self-efficacy and third place. Figure 1 depicts these areas as overlapping constructs central to our evaluation of the use, by Secret Level youth, of the ICT Centre. We examine these constructs in the following section.

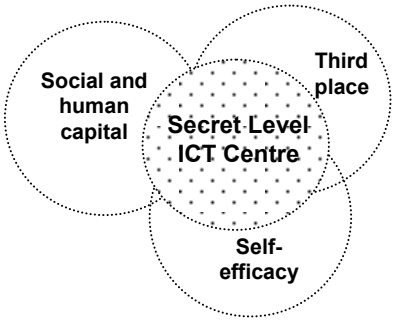


Figure 1: Concepts relevant to goals for the Secret Level ICT project

2.1 Social capital

The concept of "capital" has broadened over time. In neo classical economics capital is one of three factors of production (land and labour being the other two) and is often described as physical items such as tools and buildings. In the mid 20th century the term encompassed other forms of capital, such as social and human capital. Social capital refers to connections and communications within and between social networks that foster social cohesion (Putnam, 1995), two main components of which are bonding social capital and bridging social capital Putnam (2000). The inward-looking strong ties of bonding social capital are the social networks developed between homogeneous groups. These ties, closely associated with kinship, family and circles of close friends, engender "thick trust" based on information about the group members. The weak ties of bridging social capital are "outward looking" networks developed between heterogeneous groups, typically "across diverse social cleavages" (Putnam, 2000: 22), for example, clubs and social groups. The trust associated with these weak ties' networks is normative and related to faith in strangers rather than information. If an individual does not have information about them, then they must trust in order to operate in a complex world (Svendsen and Svendsen, 2009). The trust that is formed by both types of social capital thus enables different groups of people to cooperate and act collectively for their mutual benefit (Putnam, 2000; Svendsen and Svendsen, 2009). Bourdieu (1986) views social capital as the actual and potential resources that could be mobilised by an individual through their social and organisational networks.

Therefore individuals with a good stock of social capital will have positive "relationships that enhance their ability to solve collective-action problems" (Ohstrom and Ahn, 2009: 20).

2.2 Human capital

Putnam (1993) argues that communities with high stocks of social capital also have high levels of human capital and economic prosperity. Human capital is the notion that our most important resources are the skills and knowledge gained from experience, education and learning. It includes such attributes as persistence, communication skills and teamwork (OECD, 2001; Pennings and Wezel, 2007), and is about giving people "skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways" (Coleman, 1990: 304). Such characteristics also support social capital and therefore human and social capital are closely intertwined. However, where social capital exists as an attribute of an individual and their social relationships, human capital resides in the individual (OECD, 2001; Ohstrom and Ahn, 2009). Investments in human capital result in increased economic returns in terms of higher employment rates and earnings. Some research has linked the accumulation of human capital as well as access to social networks and social capital to improved health and greater overall happiness and self-efficacy (OECD, 2001). However, Field (2005) suggests that social capital does not necessarily increase human capital as in some communities the traditional ways of using contacts for gaining employment prevents individuals from gaining higher qualifications.

2.3 Self-efficacy

Social capital acquired by an individual can increase their perceived self-efficacy – the belief that they are able to perform in a certain manner to reach certain goals. High self-efficacy is where the person perceives that they are good at something, whether or not that is true. It is the basis of motivation and achievement. Without the belief that they can achieve a person will have little incentive to attempt to overcome challenges (Bandura, 2006). A person with high self-efficacy is more likely to approach life in a positive fashion and see difficult tasks as challenging opportunities rather than threats. Their motivation to perform will be higher than those with low self-efficacy. People with high self-efficacy are therefore more likely to have good social and human capital thereby being able to cope better in demanding and stressful conditions (Bandura, 1994; Maciejewski and Prigerson, 2000). Self-efficacy affects one's motivation to undertake certain activities and impacts on their choice of how long to continue with an endeavour in order to achieve the required outcome (Bandura, 2001). The most effective way of achieving high self-efficacy is through having successful experiences. A second way of strengthening self-belief is in observing other people similar to oneself achieving. Thirdly, people can be persuaded verbally that they have the capabilities to achieve their goals (Bandura, 1994). Bandura (1994) also emphasises that the higher the perceived self-efficacy of the individual, the more likely they are to consider a wide range of career choices, which in turn will impact on their education, interests and social networks, thus increasing their human and social capital.

An important factor in self-efficacy is that beliefs are malleable. Ramalingam and Wiedenbeck (1998: 379) found from their novice programmer self-efficacy survey results that the "self-efficacy of beginning students of programming was highly responsive to performance accomplishments in the early stages of skill attainment, and this was particularly true of initially low efficacy students".

2.4 Third place

The final concept relevant to this study is Third place, a term coined by Oldenburg (1991) that describes a café, pub, community centre and so on, where people like to meet informally and where they feel comfortable. Oldenburg believes such places are important in their contribution towards a civil society. He lists criteria necessary for a third place and these include:

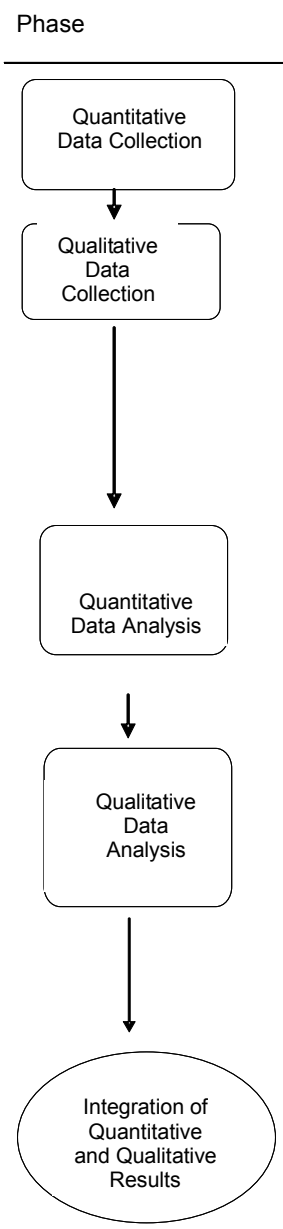
- A neutral place away from home and work where people feel comfortable and can come and go at will
- Little interference from a host
- Social inclusion in terms of membership/participation
- A place that stimulates connection with others and,
- Frequency of regulars

It was anticipated that the external outcome of increasing the value and effectiveness of the Secret Level Youth Centre as a third place would expand the "web of relational ties" (Pennings and Wezel, 2007: 53) and foster the development of trust by the youth participants within "a non-threatening, community-managed public place" (Liff and Steward, 2001: 16).

By evaluating factors relating to social and human capital, self-efficacy and third place, we will answer the research question: Is the Community ICT hub meeting the needs of its community of interest (youth)? Thus the evaluation addresses Wellington ICT's goal for the Secret Level Project.

3. Research design

A collaborative approach was adopted in the evaluation design and choice of tools. After meetings with the Wellington ICT Director, the Secret Level Manager and the youth worker it was agreed that a mixed-method framework be adopted. The components are shown in Figure 2's visual model (Ivankova et al, 2006).



Phase	Procedure	Product	Sample Description
Quantitative Data Collection	Centre co -ordinators and researchers administered paper - based survey.	Numeric data	97 Secret Level computer users.
Qualitative Data Collection	Observation	Text data: notes.	Approximately 57 Secret Level computer users.
	Semi-structured interviews. Approx 23 conversations	Text data: transcripts, environment description, computer room typologies).	26 participants (30 interviews): Secret level manager, youth worker, officials from Police, city council, museum and librarians.
Quantitative Data Analysis	Excel statistical functions	Descriptive statistics	94 usable surveys.
Qualitative Data Analysis	QSR N6 qualitative software used for coding and thematic analysis of qualitative data.	16 interview transcripts 7 conversation scripts 6 telephone interview scripts 3 email scripts	Secret Level youth, manager and youth worker. Wellington ICT Director. The New Dowse Museum Director. CEO Secretary, Hutt City Council. 2 Hutt Community Police officers. 2 Hutt librarians.
Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Results	Interpretation and explanation of quantitative and qualitative results	Discussion Implications Future research	

Figure 2: Visual model for the Secret Level Project mixed methods design (after Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006).

The evaluation project was recorded on the Low Risk Database of Massey University's Ethics Committee. Secret Level operates on a drop-in basis and the sample was the youth of Lower Hutt who logged in to the computers. There were 94 completed, usable questionnaires and, for the qualitative data, 26 interview participants.

3.1 Quantitative data collection

The following principles guided the development of a two-page, 45-question instrument:
a) question/item wording in clear, simple English
b) it could be completed in 5-10 minutes
c) it could be completed unaided.

The questionnaire related directly to the goals and objectives of the project. The Secret Level Manager, youth worker, Wellington ICT Director and system designer met with the researchers and analysed the survey questions. Several changes were made to the questionnaire based on this feedback and additional suggestions from the pilot testing with six volunteer youth.

Questions were divided into two sections. Part one covered:
a) demographics (questions 1-7)
b) respondents' perceptions of Secret Level (question 8)
c) frequency and length of time of visits (questions 9 and 10)
d) reasons for attending Secret Level (question 11) and
e) applications used.

Part two consisted of 30 items grouped around the three themes of social and human capital, self-efficacy and third place. Participants circled one of the five choices (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree).

The final two questions (44 and 45) invited respondents to state "things that are good" and "things that are not so good" at Secret Level.

The questionnaire was attached to an information sheet that explained reasons for the evaluation and invited participants to complete the questionnaire.

3.2 Qualitative data collection

Over a four-month period 30 semi-structured interviews were held with Secret Level youth workers, youth computer users and members of the community. Most interviews were face-to-face with some follow-up interviews by telephone and email. Eight informal visits were made to Secret Level at varying times and days. During this time the researchers observed youth behaviour, their involvement in the various Secret Level activities and specifically their work on the computers. The number of computers being used, type of onscreen activity, length of time individual users spent on computers and interactions amongst the users were noted.

A very informal approach was adopted for the youth interviews. As participants sat at the computers the researchers would engage them in "conversations" relating to the type of computing activities and the programs they used, their frequency of computer use, and their perceptions of the benefits of the Secret Level computer access.

4. Results and discussion

This section presents results and discussion of the data. Of the 94 survey respondents, 47% were male, 34% female (19% did not indicate sex) and the average age was 15½ years. Most respondents (78%) attended the local secondary schools. Eighty-three percent of the youth indicated that they had a computer at home.

4.1 Computer use

On each visit to Secret Level we noted that the computers in the open cafe area were in use. Exceptions were on Wednesday afternoons when the majority of youth attended the youth leadership programme in an adjacent room. Bebo (social networking media with a mid-teen majority

membership) appeared to be the most popular program (confirmed by the results of the survey with 52% of respondents indicating their use). Table 1 shows email and YouTube were also popular and observation confirmed this. Females were more likely to use email than males and males were more interested in YouTube than females. Playing music was also popular (29%).

Some of the students said they used the Secret Level computers for homework and school research with one young man stating that he did research on World War II for a speech he had to give at school. Two young men were very appreciative of the computers and when we explained that we were evaluating the ICT project so that the funders would be informed they said: "Love the computers. Say thanks to them".

Table 1: Computer activities at Secret Level by gender

Activity	Male %	Female %	Total %	Unknown %
email	19	27	46	7
Bebo	40	32	52	11
Word Processing	2	5	7	4
Youtube	29	14	43	7
Multi-media	7	5	12	61
Creating CD/DVDs	6	4	10	1
Creating Graphics	6	2	8	1
Creating music	6	1	7	1
Play music	18	11	29	4

The wireless environment was an obvious attraction for some, particularly for those with iPods. They could connect to the Internet, do their emails and engage with other applications. While iPods are still relatively expensive for this group, and not a lot owned them, those who did made use of the environment. Marc, the youth worker, said:

> *There has definitely been a noticeable number of new people because of the Internet; kids printing off photos of friends and family …"*

Table 1 shows the low numbers for the activities relating to the multi-media suite (creating CD/DVDs, graphics, music). A number of reasons could account for this. First, the suite (for security reasons) is in a locked, separate room. Anyone interested had to request the room be opened. Second, at the time of the evaluation there had been no advertising of the multi-media suite but plans were in place to begin publicising it. Use of this space was limited and sporadic. The youth worker, noted:

> *the only people who want to use it are those with a special interest – specialists. The broad spectrum of other stuff at Secret Level is enough for a lot of people but the multi-media room provides for another section of the youth community … I want to make it cool.*

However he also pointed out:

> *The suite is not run anywhere near what it could be but I need time to promote it. It is definitely working and the potential is there.*

Marc also noted that the multi-media suite attracts "different sorts of kids". Perhaps Chas may be a "different sort" as he is a 20-year old (nearly five years older than the average age of Secret Level computer users) who said:

> *I walked past one day and could hear music so came up and found out it's [Secret Level] a youth centre.*

Chas "*got into music*", producing, recording and said he was learning to compose using the software. He noted that he's finding "*it pretty easy because you have all the help, especially on the music side*". Many Secret Level members were very enthusiastic about music and making music.

The multi-media suite thus provides another dimension which contributes to the synergy of the youth centre. The Manager said:

> *Now thanks to the Wellington ICT programme we have actually landed it; [the multi-media suite]. That will make the whole thing [the youth centre] work.*

The results indicate that the computers were very popular and the next section shows that Secret Level as third place is a factor in this popularity.

4.2 Third place

The majority of respondents to items relating to this concept perceived the Secret Level environment as a comfortable, familiar, safe place that stimulates connection and social inclusion with others (key characteristics of a third place).

The results for the individual items of the third place scale, see Figure 3, show that the majority of respondents are comfortable meeting friends and using the computers.

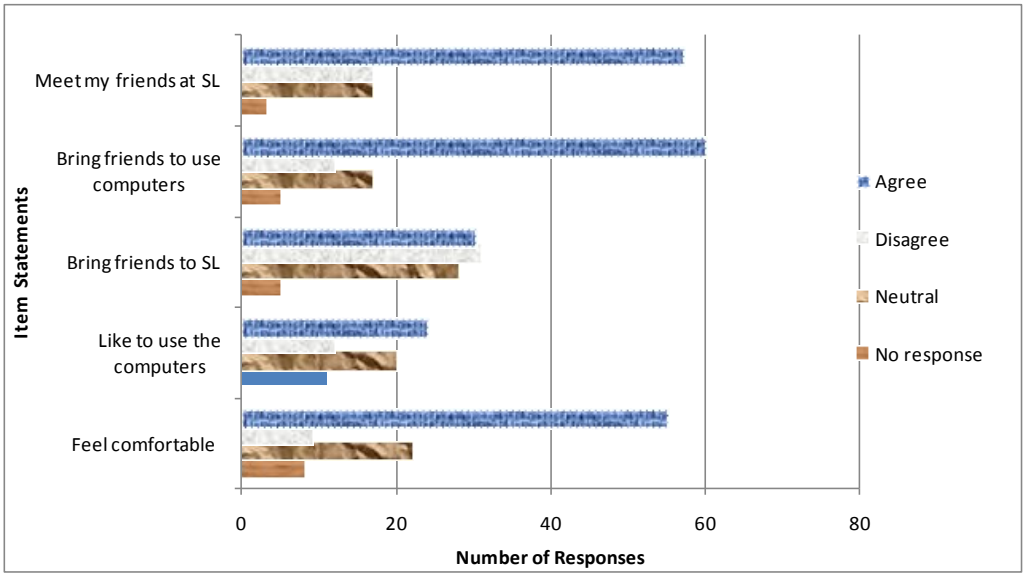


Figure 3: Responses for third place items

Sixty said they bring their friends to Secret Level specifically to use the computers indicating that the computers are attracting youth to the centre. Thus the use of the centre is contributing to one of the Trust's stated "measures of success", namely, "reduction of 'drifting' on city streets". The qualitative data support the survey results. Interviewees said it was a good place to socialise and a good way to meet people and make friends with youth from their own and other schools, demonstrating development and extension of weak ties and trust.

All youth with whom we spoke were extremely positive in their attitude towards Secret Level, the variety of activities, the people using it, and the youth workers. Responses to the item "Things that are good at Secret Level" related to the third place attributes of social inclusion, stimulating connection with others, a place where they feel comfortable, and little interference from the host (youth worker and manager).

Of particular interest was the way in which the young people interacted with each other when they were using the computers. We observed their tactile, relaxed behaviour. They leant into each other, draped arms over each other and helped each other with on-screen activities. This interaction was very friendly and casual, further indication of a comfortable third place. Jake said that he came to Secret Level "three to four days a week" and had heard about it "from the kids". Jake noted the safe environment when he said:

> *I feel good in this place; I think I belong here. I always wanted a place like this. The kids here don't cause trouble; the location is good.*

The poem in figure 4 illustrates the third place nature of Secret Level for another attendee. The use of the word "family" (twice), the repeated use of "together" (three times) indicates a sense of belonging. The fact that "No one can H8" [hate] suggests the safety of Secret Level. Such a poem demonstrates that Secret Level has many of the third place characteristics.

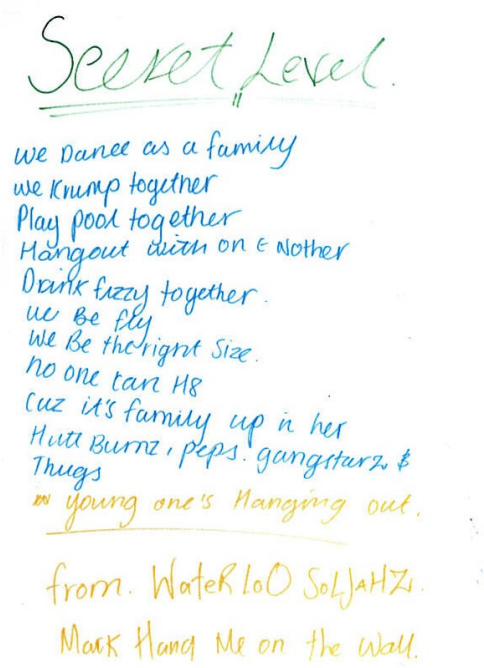


Figure 4: Poem indicating Secret Level as a third place

4.3 Social and human capital

There are 17 items (see figure 5) that relate to social and human capital: developing and strengthening relationships with friends and family and gaining skills and knowledge.

There was a positive response for virtually all items which suggests that members of Secret Level are using the computers for a variety of reasons linked to increasing their knowledge, experience and understanding, and therefore contributing to their human capital. A number used the computers for their homework. There was enthusiasm for composing music and working on graphic art with the computers.

The multi-media equipment has the potential to contribute to the development and growth of members' human capital. However there were large neutral responses to the multi-media items, probably indicative of the fact that these high-specification computers are locked in a separate room apart from the other computers. For those with a specialist interest, the multi-media suite was very attractive and they were able to gain new skills and experience. The youth worker, who has a strong background in music and skills in creating and recording music on DVD/CDs, can now teach music production courses to a more sophisticated level with the new equipment. He noted that:

> *I have five kids that are really using it, as we envisage it. Two doing music stuff and three doing art in different ways. One is doing graphics and design at Vic [Victoria University] and architecture; he does art in his spare time. A girl comes in once every three months to have a play and up-date her portfolio.*

Making movies has always been popular at Secret Level. The purchase of a new camera, combined with the new editing software gives the youth the opportunity to develop their editing skills and produce a much more polished product. Both the staff and the participants believe that gaining skills and experience through the multi-media equipment will lead to obtaining work in their areas of interest.

In terms of social capital the most popular reasons for using the main computer suite were to keep in contact with friends and family (bonding) and to make new friends and develop new networks (bridging). In conversations with various members it was clear that both Bebo and e-mail were used extensively for keeping in contact. For example, one young Samoan man, brought up in Australia, kept in contact with his wider family by e-mail. He also used Bebo as a means of sharing personal information about his life and activities with both family and friends.

The interviews revealed that connections were also being developed within the wider community. For example, local librarians were interested in incorporating music produced by Secret Level youth into the library's collection and the Hutt City's New Dowse Museum were considering displaying youth art. Such connections should lead to the growth of more heterogeneous networks and help forge relationships within the community that youth may otherwise not experience.

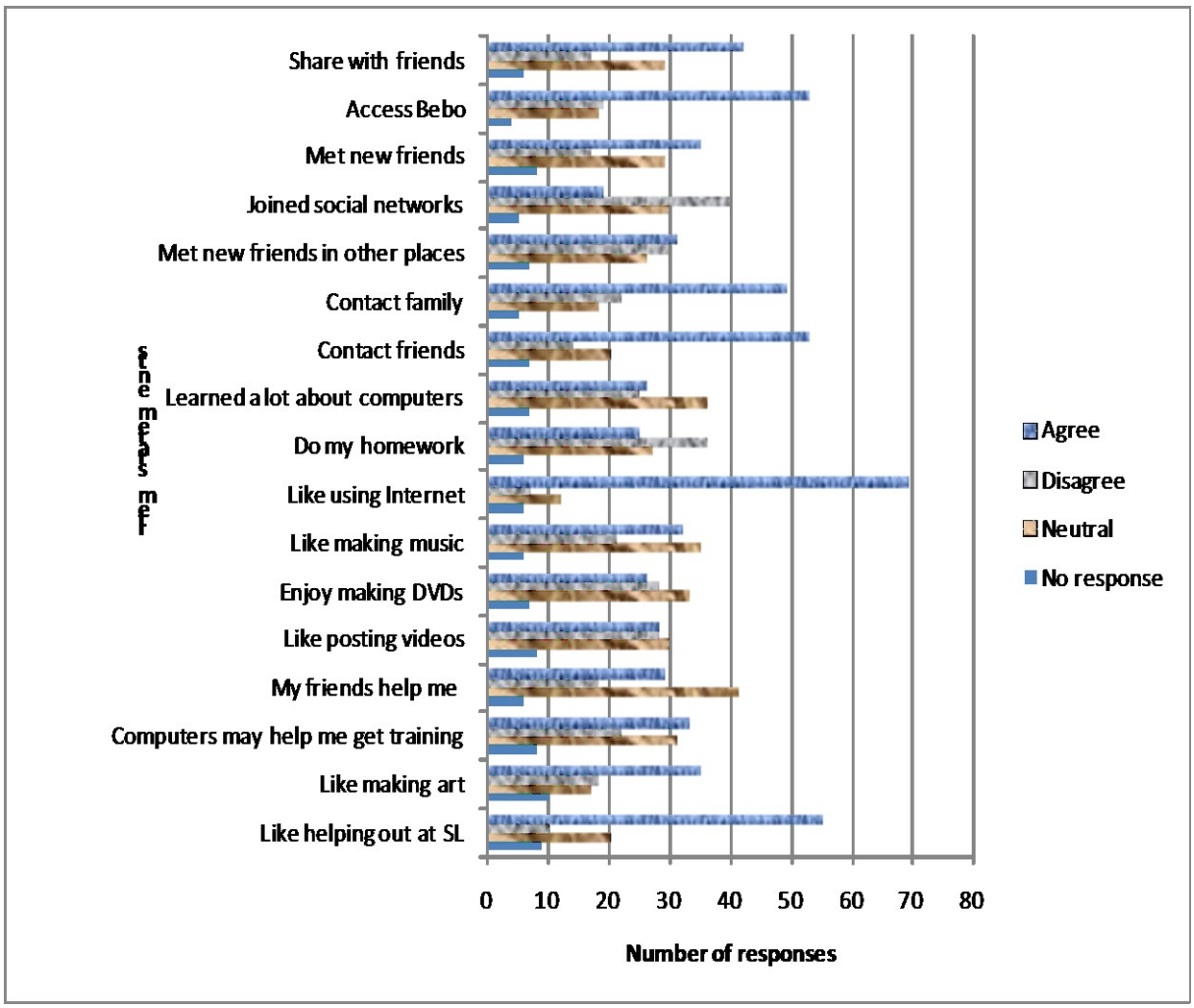


Figure 5: Responses for the human/social capital items

4.4 Self-efficacy

Responses to items relating to this concept (see Figure 6) are the least positive of the three concepts. However half (47) of the 94 respondents believed "*I am good at computers*" (this item also attracted the highest agreement), 43 said they found out many things and 41 said they liked to help their friends. While this may be expected in a generation brought up with computers and other technologies such as cell phones and iPods, it still indicates good self esteem regarding their use of computers. For two items, "*My schoolwork has improved since using these computers" and "I look up things about health on these computers*" more respondents disagreed than agreed. This is not unexpected for two reasons. First, 83% indicated they had a computer at home and the use of the Secret Level computers, alone, is unlikely to improve school work. Second, looking up "*things about health …*" is specific and unlikely to be of interest to the majority of youth.

In conversations and observations it was evident that those who used the computers were confident in their abilities and they enjoyed helping others. Secret Level provides a social setting for computing activities where those with lower self-efficacy can observe "*modeling influences*" (Bandura, 1994) of the more proficient computer users (including the more demanding use of the sophisticated multi-

media software). Those youth who had good skills and capabilities therefore become social models for others to follow and the influence of social models and social persuasion are ways of creating and strengthening self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994).

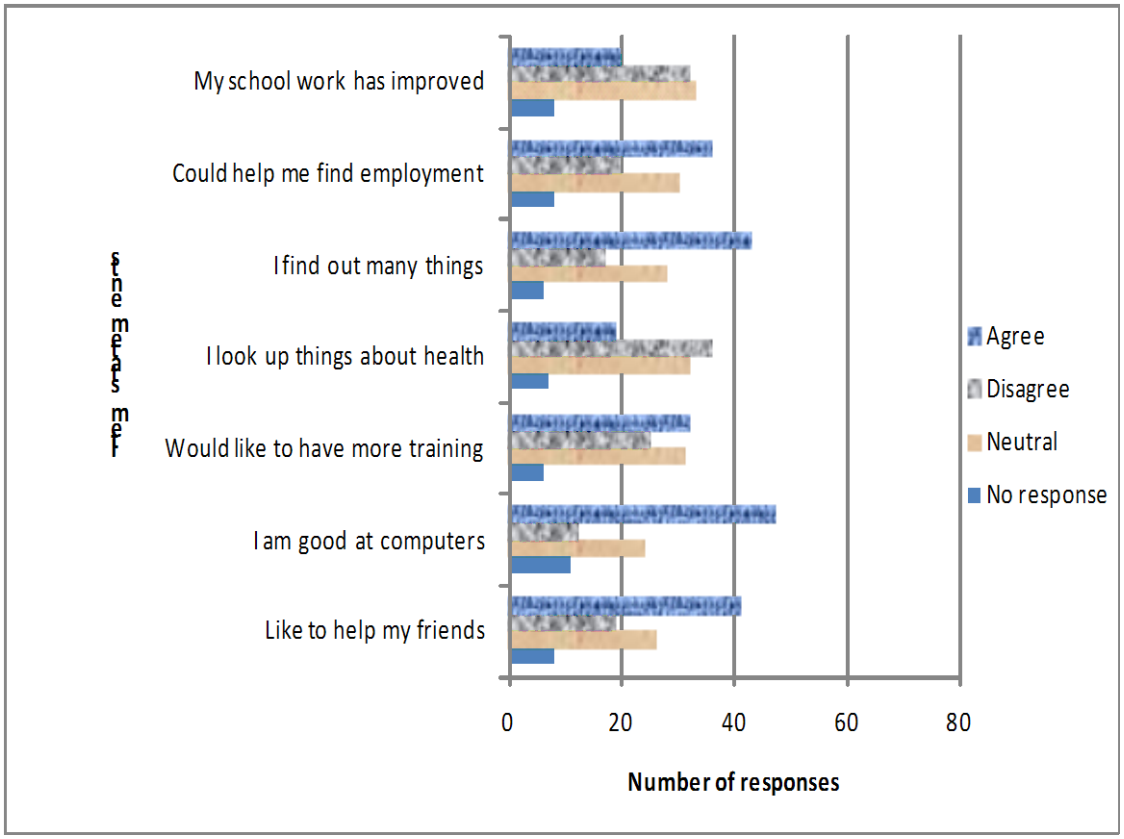


Figure 6: Responses for self-efficacy items

5. Conclusions

The evaluation of the new ICT suite at Secret level took place over a four-month period, immediately after the implementation, a timeframe stipulated by Wellington ICT. The quantitative and qualitative results show that the implementation of the ICT Secret Level Project has been successful. Access to computers and the Internet within a safe, friendly, non-threatening environment has added an important dimension to the Centre. Many of the "measures of success" defined by Wellington ICT for the external outcomes of connection, personal development, information and third place have been met.

The Connection "measures of success" that have been achieved are:

- The youth have access to a supervised information network which is appreciated, provides direct access to information on their areas of interest and therefore meets their needs.
- Connection with their peers, society and family is facilitated by the ICT centre, situated in a youth-friendly environment.
- Secret Level provides an environment where youth feel safe in communicating their concerns and issues.

The evaluation suggests that the ICT centre has strengthened participants' networks and trust, important dimensions of social capital. To a lesser extent, there are indications that self-efficacy has also been influenced. The students use technology to obtain social support, found to be of consequence in emerging adulthood (LaRose, et al., cited in Subrahmanya, Reich, Waechter and Espinoza, 2008). Further, the high numbers of Secret Level youth who are using Bebo are "self-disclosing", identified as another important component of emerging adults' feelings of intimacy in friendships (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). It appears that this relationship building is supporting the loose social ties (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007) of Secret Level youth. The external outcomes

of Information and Secret Level as Third Place have also been met. The results show that Secret Level is a third place for the majority of youth providing them with a place to "hang out" where they feel comfortable and safe, attend regularly and gain a sense of connection. The varied activities that include the organised Training Programme (70-80 youth participate) to the less-organised activities in which anyone can engage all contribute to Secret Level as third place. The addition of this new ICT suite with its Internet access and extension to the multi-media room that enables digital music making and editing has "rounded up" the third place; in effect, Secret Level acts as a "one stop shop" for youth.

The outcome for Personal Development is stated as: "Youth will have the opportunity to gain and extend IT skills for their own personal development and help prepare them for adult life". The results indicate that some of the measures of success have been met by some youth extending their IT skills, especially those using the multi-media suite and the sophisticated graphics and music software. The skills and experience gained in the multi-media suite contribute to the development of human capital in that these skills are transferrable into the workplace thereby increasing their opportunities for employment.

However the evaluation does not show that Wellington ICT's ambitious 'Measures of success' of literacy skills being developed and enhanced, educational achievements enhanced, greater knowledge and understanding of health and similar issues and work and study skills increased have been achieved. Therefore the results for the fundamental human capital elements of education, learning and experience (Pennings and Wezel, 2007) that often function as filtering and screening devices for entry to higher levels of education, work, promotion and social standing are mixed and do not suggest that many participants will have increased their stock of human capital in these areas and therefore their value in the marketplace. This highlights one of the limitations of a short evaluation timeframe. To measure these objectives a much longer evaluation period is needed and future research over a longer period would be able to assess how ICT influences the literacy and educational achievements. A further limitation is that Secret Level is just one youth community and therefore we cannot generalise our findings to the wider population. The self-report nature of the survey, done within the busy Secret Level environment, may mean that participants' responses are subject to biases and influences that may not have occurred had they been in a more controlled, quieter environment. However our findings are supported by observation and interviews which contributes to the veracity of the evaluation.

Despite these limitations the evaluation shows that most measures of success have been achieved and the evaluation question Is the community ICT centre meeting the needs of its community of interest (youth)? has been answered positively in large measure. Secret Level, as a third place, is increasing opportunities for youth development so that they can become resourceful, socially aware, responsible, and interactive.

Acknowledgement

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