

**TECHNOLOGY AND WISDOM:  
A NEW APPROACH OF COMBINING THE EGO AND THE  
ELECTRONIC EGO (E-ID@I) AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING  
WISDOM IN PRESENT DAY YOUTH**

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**Abstract**

Understanding what shapes the identity of a person in general and children in particular requires redefining the term “I” by including the Virtual “I”. The Virtual “I”, defined as e-Id@I, is an integral part of any person who is exposed to mobile, the web, TV, etc. Understanding the e-Id@I will provide educators with a powerful tool to develop programs suitable for today’s youth while providing a way to develop wisdom using technology in a humanistic way. Moreover, this is a methodology that tackles in healthy and constructive way dialog between communities in conflict.

**Introduction**

Understanding what shapes the identity of a person in general and children in particular requires redefining the term “I”. The term “I” has to be expanded to include the Virtual “I”.

**Existing Literature**

Before defining this term, we studied the existing literature in the fields of technology, sociology, psychology with a focus on education. We discovered that much material takes technology for granted and uses it without much concern for the moral consequences. On the other hand, much material is against technology, showing all the dangers and threats. There are few people who are not blinded by technology and neither are they afraid of it like Marshall McLuhan and Howard Rheingold, the latter being a world figure in social media who graciously helped us in previous projects.

Our main focus was to look for a simple way to develop principle guidelines around the identity that can serve as a compass for educators who wish to develop educational programs.

### Research Questions

The research questions we are facing are how to bridge the digital gap between

- generations?
- wisdom and smartness?
- information and knowledge?

The use of digital technology unites and creates a language and connectedness among the young generation on a certain layer. In other layers, digital technology creates threats and facilitates dangerous practices such as identity forgery, networks of pedophiles etc. The question is then: Can we take advantage of this common positive layer in order to overcome the current crisis of environmental and social crisis?

### Virtual “I” as e-Id@I

We shall define the Virtual “I” as e-Id@I. Indeed, today the e-Id@I evolves as an integral part of any person who is exposed to the Internet, mobile phone, computer, TV, etc. It has an innocent start just as a user of technology but soon it shapes and influences our inner life as well.

### Previous and Existing work

Our paper is based on previous and existing works that are grass root projects. Here is a short list of the main projects:

- The All-in-Peace movement that revived the ancient Olympic truce (“Ekecheiria”) as a means for sustainable inner peace — for Children from all over the world, but focusing on children from conflict areas. This project was honored during an International peace day of UN(1).
- The “International Book-Sharing Project” run by the Janusz Korczak International School
- The Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum in Israel
- Relationet ([www.relationet.net](http://www.relationet.net))
- eDialogue for English Teachers
- Michael’s Dialogue in Cooperation with “Sacred Parks.” This project received an award from EVZ Foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future” in Germany. The ideas and principles are inspiring programs and educators.(2)
- CD: kids reading books for blind kids. This CD was made by 7<sup>th</sup> grade pupils as part of the following lessons: grammar, literature and computer skills.

### **Business Opportunities**

The industry already recognizes the business opportunity of the virtual “I” and offers new services. As an extreme, here is the example of Legacylocker company (3) that promises online life after death. The ad starts with: “Your husband, an avid gamer and techie, dies of a heart attack, leaving his vast online life — one you don’t know much about — in limbo.”

Examples like this one force us to rethink about our definition of the “I”, but before we do so let us explore some daily episodes taking place in the classroom.

### **Digital Natives, Adults and Society**

The digital sphere is the place where youth are the digital natives and thus they feel as comfortable as a fish in water whereas adults hardly know how to swim. The digital gap between generations is similar to the situation inside the immigrant community. One main characteristic of immigrant communities is that children adopt quickly and in no time they become like natives in the local language, while adults struggle and never really feel at home in their new country. The situation creates an odd relationship between the adult and the child: the child is the one who knows and the parents become like a children who need the guidance of the “adult-child.” We know quite well how such situation easily undermines the traditions, traditional leadership and authority.

A similar situation occurs in the virtual world, where adults feel at loss and the children feel at home. A daily experience that illustrates this phenomenon is when an adult acquires a new digital device such as an iPhone. Recently, a friend of ours tried to operate her iPhone, she called a friend but his explanations were in vain, finally he lost his patience and shouted: “Is not there any child around you who can show you what to do!”

### **Youth in the Classroom**

We shall start our exploration of the relationship between the “virtual” world and the “real” one in a biology lesson in 12th grade. The teacher is trying to explain something about the cell, suddenly a girl bursts into tears and runs away from the class. The teacher is shocked, and tries to rethink his action that caused such a reaction from the girl. Later on, he finds out the girl had received a sms from her boyfriend telling her abruptly that their relationship was over!

Another example deals with some conflict taking place in the classroom between several pupils. The teacher would understand the roots of the conflict if she knew that several hours ago, during the previous evening, something happened between the pupils in Instant Messaging.

In many cases, children feel they know more than their educators as far as technology is concerned. They feel more “intelligent” than their teacher, than their father or grandfather. Some interactions have become standard for youth and yet are complex for adults and educators.

Those examples force us as educators to understand what the “I” is in first place and as a consequence to re-examine the needs of the young generation, understand the way they behave and function and thus see how we can prepare them to be better human beings and citizens.

## **The Virtual I: A Definition**

Traditionally we speak about the I (ego) without taking into account the identity of the I in the virtual world. The e-Id@I is our virtual I, and yet it shapes and influences the “normal” I in many different ways. This e-Id@I influences daily life with some consequences on personal and interpersonal levels as well as in the education system. The e-Id@I is made of two parts: conscious and unconscious.

### **The Conscious e-Id@I**

The first part named conscious e-Id@I is built by us in the way we choose to create and maintain our profile on the Internet. It starts with the e-mail address that people choose, their nicknames, and their avatars in Social Networks such as Facebook and Second Life. It continues with blogs, personal pages, Twitter accounts and all kinds of information that we present to others.

### **The Unconscious e-Id@I**

The second part is the unconscious part that is created by others; it can be entities such as governments, businesses as well as by other people. It is built from the virtual footprint that we leave when using our credit cards, phone call records, bank accounts, web search history and any other means that record and keep digitally our actions and movements. People may also create a faked profile of us, stealing our digital identity. For instance, an angry husband presents his ex-wife as a prostitute, and a student opens a Facebook account on behalf of his school headmaster and presents him as a pedophile and more. The unconscious e-Id consists of all the parts that people are unaware of but may impact us greatly when gathered and used against us. People are not conscious that what they write in some social networks may be visible to everyone and can stay forever even if the information stored is problematic.

### **Humorous Map**

Below is a humorous map that circulated in 2007 of the eWorld (4). Note that Facebook was very small at that time.





## Technology and Wisdom

After reviewing the trends of technology, and since technology shapes and influences on our real life and relationships, we need to raise the question of the link between humanity and technology.

A senior officer from the UN expresses it quite well (6):

I've dealt with many different problems around the world, and I've concluded that there is only one real problem: over the past hundred years, the power that technology has given us has grown beyond anyone's imagination, but our wisdom has not, if the gap between our power and our wisdom is not redressed soon, I don't have much of hope.

### Challenges

The challenges are great and already take a heavy toll on us and the environment. The emergence of and understanding of e-Id@I along side with future trends of technology will help to better prepare our children for the complexity of the relationship between virtual and real life. The emergence of a man-machine relationship obliges us to rethink our education system and methods. What can we practice differently? Is there a way to make our children wiser? Can we find new ways that speak to the souls of the children and enable them to build healthier egos? Can we develop a consciousness that can work with technology and is not just enchanted by it? In what ways can we use technology to help us become wiser, make moral decisions and thus build a healthier civil society?

### Turning Theory into Practice

Neil Postman in his provocative books such as *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (7) points out that our social institutions have, in effect, become dominated by the technologies that permeate our society. People have allowed the use of technology to substitute their own thinking. A major part of this reshaping is done via the e-Id@I.

The idea may be taken from McLuhan's view on a human being and how technology affects a human being. Quoting Wikipedia on McLuhan (8):

The main concept of McLuhan's argument (later elaborated upon in *The Medium is the Message*) is that new technologies (like alphabets, printing presses, and even speech itself) exert a gravitational effect on cognition, which in turn affects social organization: print technology changes our perceptual habits ("visual homogenizing of experience"), which in turn affects social interactions ("fosters a mentality that gradually resists all but a . . . specialist outlook").

Understanding the e-Id@I as a whole gives us a direction to develop and find use of technology that brings meaning and helps us to close the gap created by the power of technology and our wisdom.

Our findings came out of many years of working in conflict areas while dealing with the relationship between society, people and technology. They provide a way that will enable us to overcome stereotypes, conflicts and create hope and empowerment for the youth to tackle the painful past of their cultures in a way that will lead them to shape a better future.

## **Educational Programs**

Out of these insights and understandings, we have developed and implemented educational programs.

### **Guidelines and Principles**

The educational programs are based on the following guidelines and principles:

- interdisciplinary learning combining historical, social, psychological and artistic aspects;
- multicultural dialog, with listening to and acceptance of the “other”, governed by the rules of Netiquette (network etiquette);
- the formulation of personal and community identity;
- examining the significance of communal and national affiliation; and
- personal and group research using online databases.

Those guidelines when apply with e-dialog enable us to tackle sensitive issues in a deep way that is hard to achieve in a face to face dialog.

### **Concept of the e-Dialog**

We have put those ideas into practice by developing the concept of e-dialog. We tackled the sensitive and mostly untouchable issue of the Holocaust between German and Israeli youth. The e-dialog opens the younger generation to talk openly and frankly about the Holocaust. It deals with the way their grandparents were involved and what was the impact of WWII.

It was easier for the youth to share and discuss those dark times first, online via the e-dialog system and then have “in real life” discussions face to face. The e-dialog was developed in order to fill in a void in today’s education systems and it is designed to integrate and develop the e-Id@I concept.

The first step of the e-Dialog requires the student to present himself and his community. “Hot” or sensitive subjects, like the Holocaust for Israelis and Germans, will open the student to question his own roots, explore his society through a lively dialog with his family and community as well as with the other side.

In the program “Michael’s dialogue” (2) that took place during one year in 2006 between German and Israeli youth, the leading question was: “How will the memory of the

Holocaust look like in twenty years?” This led the participants to check their own family biography and share it online.

The subject that seemed untouchable among German families became a subject of open debate that drew the parents of both sides to become part of the e-dialog. That was an e-inclusion between generations and communities bearing a painful past with deep wounds.

### **Sustainable e-School: Understanding the Relationship of the eID@I**

Sustainable e-School (9) is an initiative based upon the understanding of the relationship of the eID@I and the impact on the youth and society.

This understanding led us to emphasize interdisciplinary learning and multicultural dialog. It combines English as a foreign language, computer literacy, and a chosen subject as a backbone for the program. A dialog can be established between communities with shared interest. The shared interest can vary from environmental issues, classic literature or a conflict between two communities such as the Israeli and Palestinian conflict.

The Sustainable-eSchool projects contribute to shape the future because the e-Id will be a way for the individual to interact with his community and the rest of the world. Deeper understanding of the impact and influence of the e-Id require rethinking and reshaping our educational institutes. If we want to meet today’s children we need to rethink what and how to renew the teacher training programs. Education is a field of major interest for the new mobile Internet applications as well as a powerful mean for e-inclusion.

### **Training Programs**

Sustainable-eSchool provides training programs that integrate civil society real issues by connecting Local Authorities and NGO activists to the formal educational system. It is possible, with small extra funding, and in kind resource of each organization to create sustainable solutions — something lacking in most training programs that are not multi-disciplinary nor focus on sustainability. The principle of sustainability states that building the future must start from existing systems and programs. There is a need to work with the ministries of education and local authorities in participating countries in order to integrate the program into school curriculum, so that its contents is taught through existing lessons of English, history, sociology, etc.

Sustainable-eSchool was presented in October 2008 at the Global Forum Think Tank Conference (10) and is supported by its organizers.

### **Sustainable e-School Framework**

Sustainable-eSchool is an initiative using open source platforms or existing systems offered by private companies. It is organized in the framework of POLITECH Institute (11), which is a not-for-profit international association (AISBL) and a European Centre of Political Technologies located in Brussels, Belgium.

POLITECH is dedicated to promoting novel concepts and innovation empowering the different stakeholders in a 'citizen-driven' digital world, as well as support the development of effective strategies, policies and share of good practices in the converging domains of Political Technologies — e-Politics, e-Participation, e-Democracy, e-Diplomacy, e-Citizenship, e-Governance and e-Government.

## Conclusion

The skilfulness of youth in the digital sphere along with the fear of the adults towards technology creates a situation where the adults, the society, and the education system leave the kids on their own in front of their computers or electronic devices. They are alone in this ocean that is the Internet with sharks and waves that can swallow their souls easily.

The main powers that shape the virtual world are commercial companies that seek to capture the children mind in order to enter the parents' pockets. So far, there is an absence of a power whose priorities have humanistic values with a deep concern on the well being and the wisdom of the human being and of the society.

Where and who are the wise people of the tribe that may lead the way with wisdom and morals?

The surrender of culture to technology is leading the way to huge investment in what is called "the Web of things". So our staff may be connected but who is developing and investing in the Web of humans?

We need to shift from the world of Newtonian billiard balls to a new world view that is best defined by the word Connectedness: connecting the "outer world" with the "inner world", the "virtual world" with the "real world", the "I" and the "e-Id."

While philosophers and spiritual leaders have long ago spoken about connectedness, we need to develop an educational world-view of connectedness that connects wisdom and technology as shown in the examples of this article. With a proper development of educational programs based upon the guiding principles, this will create a healing influence on the self and the society.

Who can lead the desirable change? It rests on the shoulders of educators who are not afraid of technology, on one hand, and understand how the virtual world shapes human and humanity, on the other hand. Those teachers must accept the fact that their students may know more about the technical sphere but still need their guidance in terms of ethics and humanism.

Those who stand in the front can lead the way to make the society wiser and show youth how to become moral humans who can find their way in the stormy and risky world.

Some people dream that furthering technological breakthroughs will solve social and environmental crisis. Yet, we should focus on what exists on this planet and make it sustainable for us and for future generations. We should put an emphasis on the content and not on the technology; a content that connects people, knowledge and action. As indicated, a sustainable-eSchool is a small step in the right direction.

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