Office of the United Nations

High Commissioner for Human Rights

Committee on the Rights of the Child
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

November 15, 2020

 **Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding the proposed General Comment on children’s rights in relation to the digital environment**

**About Us**

Enhancing Children’s Lives (ECL) is a 501(c) 3 non-profit philanthropic organization based in Richmond, Virginia. The organization was established in 2013 and it is organized to be a humanitarian unit that ignites the lives of children on a global level. The organization provides access to meal nourishment, education, advocacy, and medical care to children in need. It comprises of 16 board members and 115 volunteers working to deliver change for children around the world. Enhancing Children's Lives believes is a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation and our mission is to ensure every child has an opportunity for a brighter future. With the support of our trustees, and partners involving elected officials, concerned citizens, and corporations we ensure that children worldwide have access to food, clean water, free education, and efficient medical care.

Enhancing Children’s Lives invests in a better future, a different kind of future. It invests in a world in which no child left behind. Where children everywhere have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential. By partnering with local government, and various organizations, we provide opportunities for our members to get involved in our activities within the community and internationally. We believe that if we stand together and take action, we can create a world in which every child’s needs and rights are a priority. Enhancing Children's Lives Organization is pleased to have the opportunity to provide a response for the General Comment on children’s rights in relation to the digital environment. Enhancing Children's Lives Organization has the honor to comment on the Education section of the *UN General Comment article 28, 29.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Education is no more dependent on textbooks anymore, it is an entity available by the touch of a finger. Education is no more limited to the walls of a classroom. It is devoid of any boundaries. The entire internet is a school, where people are constantly sharing, re- sharing information making it easier for the next generation. Today, parents have an option of homeschooling their children in a safe and secure environment. Along with that it also has perks of reaching out to a wide and the impoverished strata of the society effectively and efficiently.

With technology becoming an irreplaceable part of our lives, it is wise to use it judiciously and also impart this knowledge to the new generation. Hence, Enhancing Children's Lives Organization effectively promotes digital education for young children. Education with the help of technology is becoming the way forward and is a necessary element of evolution. Care and consideration has to be taken by the institutional body, guardians as well as the governing bodies to ensure safe education and protection of rights and privacy of children.

Technological revolution in the past two decade has irreversibly drafted the people’s lifestyle to be dependent on it. Enhancing Children's Lives Organization supports the development of the General Comment on children’s rights in relation to the digital environment as it is an important statement acknowledging and recognizing the inherent rights of young people to engage in the world around them. **Paragraph 69 of Section VI (E, art.16 ) provides** the General Comment will act as a starting point to strengthen policy and legislation related to the digital environment, along with that also familiarize and educate the care takers about the sensitivity of the situation.

It will also provide a mechanism to ensure accountability and ownership of protection of rights of children. The last decades have phenomenally advanced and changed the outlook of information and communication technologies, and the pioneering along amplification of the Internet in the world of education has not only made possible education to cross classroom, school but also world boundaries. This digital Education evolution has created immense opportunities and benefits while bringing up the young generation face to face with new battles and risks. It’s important for the educator to be aware and educated about all the possibilities and perils to involved to take wise and informed decisions (1)

**DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES DURING CRISIS**

Digitalization is bringing about sweeping changes in the education sector. The Internet is now the principal enabling mechanism by which students assemble, spread ideas and sow economic opportunities. Hence, it is imperative that IT infrastructure can support a refreshed mode of engagements at today’s learning institutions. ECL recognized this opportunity in terms of the coronavirus pandemic, it came as a disguise to unveil the potential of how the internet can be utilized to reach out the pockets of the world and light it with information and education. We surprised a child prodigy Mahdi Jafri with a new laptop, study desk and other essentials along with a one year remote learning scholarship thus ensuring that locks on school doors doesn’t come in the way of learning. There is no substitute for an environment of classroom learning, but there are plenty of lessons that can be taken from this pandemic and applied to the future of learning.

**ROLE OF A MENTOR**

The new digitalized interdependence recreates the world in the image of a much closer global village. Technology is already taking us away from the school code to a more diverse system and into a virtual society that requires individuals able to create the world they desire. **Paragraph 33 of Section V (G, art.4 ) provides** educators, mentors, and coaches to develop the ability to work within a more personal advanced paradigm for education, rather than the previously socially accepted paradigm of schooling. There is more information on the web than a textbook could ever contain. The role of mentors is essential to provide sustainable education. Thus a teacher in the twenty-first century will be a digital teacher. In this digital age, the internet is full of supportive resources. When a teacher teaches the students from a collaborative perspective, the students will learn more deeply if they get the resources. It can be YouTube Video Tutorial, Digital Content, eBooks or even the printing documents (2). If the student receives the supportive materials on how to enrich Critical thinking, Communication skills, Collaboration, and Creativity, they can lead their own future. It will ensure better learning environments and the students will be engaged with the lesson. Teachers are not the only source of learning for the students, the entire World Wide Web is there textbook, Coaches need to harness the power of virtual simulation to understand global complexity and create solutions. For this mentors need to go through established training curriculum to be well versed with the pros and cons on online education. Through the use of virtual reality, games, and modeling applications that simulate real-world experiences through technology, teachers can test out theories while immersing themselves in the subject content, making the process more realistic, practical and a lesson to remember for the students

**INVEST IN EDUCATION**

As Uniceif mentions “ Education : the most powerful investment for the future”, Governing bodies in the world need to take appropriate steps towards insuring that every child in the world benefits from this all-encompassing source of information.

* Invest in more sources for the primary grade and instill digital education application in primary schools.
* Ensure the reach of technology to even the most remote and backward areas of the society with basics such as internet connection, laptop, study material and reducing
* Strengthen policies and methods to ensure investment by education bodies on children relating to advancement in technology
* Strengthen learning assessment systems and implement accountability measures that involve guardians and community heads

**As mentioned in paragraph 107 of Section XI (A, art. 28, 29 )** excessive care and strategized planning should be done when technology is used in the curriculum of primary school students, it should be included into the learning program and used in rotation along with other learning tools such as art materials, writing materials, play materials, and books, and should give early learners an opportunity for self-expression without replacing other classroom learning materials.(2) There are additional considerations for educators when technology is used, such as whether a particular device will displace interactions with teachers or peers or whether a device has features that would distract from learning, which should be highly taken care of. [[1]](#footnote-1)Devices and technology used should be user-friendly to ensure its correct and efficient use. Proper education and training should also be provided to the guardians to assist the child in learning through technology and to avoid any malpractices which can lead to exploitation or harassment of the child. (2)

Just as with other educational tools, school-aged children should be taught how to care and use this devise to their optimum potential. The devices should be user-friendly and safe for use.

Lessons should be planned accordingly to fit these digital learning skills along with the content of the lesson rather than established as a separate class. This will ensure practical and sustainable use along with cognitive and creative thinking growth.

For students pursuing higher education, technology can be used to broaden students’ exposure to opinions from other sources through digital media such as blog posts, podcasts, and videos as well as dialogue via comment boards, video-conferences, and any number of collaborative technology tools to facilitate cross- cultural exchange of education and opening a Pandora of new learning opportunities for the youth of tomorrow. Students can use the new perspectives they gained through online exchange to create collaborative productions and raise awareness and advocate issues they are keen about, thus ensuring a new generation of sensitive, responsible and caring world citizens.

**PRIVACY AND SECURITY CONCERNS**

**Paragraph 51 of Section VI (E, art.16 ) provides**,to ensure that technology has a positive impact, adults who use technology with children should continually update their knowledge and equip themselves to make sophisticated decisions on how to best leverage these advanced tools to enhance learning and interpersonal relationships for young children. In addition to privacy and security, care should be taken when downloading an application about advertisements and data sharing, guardians, institutional bodies, and teachers who are ensuring education for young children will have to strictly evaluate and test whether the application offers any other element or service such as in app purchases or advertising particularly those applications which are free of cost, offer advertising or in-app purchases, both of which are generally inappropriate for young children. These resources need to be strictly monitored before involving them in the curriculum. Many algorithms of digital marketing and cyber use have the ability to track a user’s behavior across multiple sites and services, putting a child’s privacy and security at risk. (2)

**Paragraph 40 of Section V (E, art. J ) provides,** guardians should also go through training to spot any malpractices during the use of digital education to protect the children’s privacy and identity. While adults can sometimes protect from in-app (3)purchases by using appropriate encryption system to disable in-app purchases at the device level, it would be in the best interest of the young individuals involved to choose software that avoids services like in-app purchases and advertising altogether.

**CURRICULUM PLANNING**

Education through technology must contain a vibrant curriculum embracing real-life situations

The syllabus should include multidisciplinary streams such as

* Health education
* Sexual health education
* Political science
* Cyber safety
* Awareness about law and Rights
* Co-curricular activities
* Cultural diversity
* Modern and Ancient History
* Life skills and finance

ECL believes that there needs to be set guiding principles for guardians, educators and children set in order to ensure the smooth establishment of digital learning as a new adaptation in the 21st century. **Therefore, in relation to paragraph 13 of section III (B) ( art.3), 4 principles to be kept in mind while drafting a resolution should be:**

**Principle #1:**

Using technology as a important creative tool for learning, if used with diligence and monitoring, ensuring its appropriate use.

 **Principle #2:**

Technology can be used to access new opportunities, learning and access to a huge expanse of possibilities and idea’s for young individuals of tomorrow

**Principle #3**:

Technology can be used to reach out to remote and marginalized children and can help to live by the sustainable developmental goal of quality education

**Principle #4:** With monetary support and advocacy from the governing bodies and the state digital education can be the future of tomorrow’s education service.

We are witnessing a change, a shift in the global environment. The digital environment though brings us into close proximity with others, extending our living experience in a media village full of multiple thoughts. Schooling, the establisher of acceptable mannerism and social behavior, must travel beyond its old purpose and grasp the metaphor of giving identity and knowledge to an individual. Thus, schooling becomes education, forming a society whose citizens embrace diversity and engage in critical conversations, even those mediated through small glowing screen.

**Authored by:**

Wajma Soltan is the Co-Founder of Enhancing Children’s Lives Organization, an author, philanthropist and an aspiring pediatrics physician based in Richmond, VA.

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)