THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN PREPARING DISADVANTAGED YOUTH FOR THE WORLD OF WORK:

Findings from Three Latin American Projects

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

international **youth** foundation®

entra**21**

Connecting Disadvantaged Youth
    with Quality Employment

Entra21 Program

The *entra21* Program was launched in 2001 by IYF in collaboration with the Multilateral
Investment Fund of the Inter-American Development Bank, to improve the employability
of disadvantaged youth in Latin America and the Caribbean. *Entra21* with market-relevant
training or to create decent work opportunities. Phase I of the Program, which ended in 2007,
benefited 19,649 youth through a comprehensive set of training and job placement activities.
54% of those youth were found to be working six months or more after graduation. Due to the
success of *entra21*, a second phase was launched in 2007, to benefit youth at higher risk from
being un-or under-employed due to factors such as being rural based, disabled, or associated
with violence. Additionally, Phase II works to scale up best practices validated in Phase I so
youth employment training and services could be available to more youth. This phase will run
through 2011 and benefit more than 50,000 youth.

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Knowing how to use information and communication technologies (ICT) has become increasingly indispensable for any young person—regardless of geography, socio-economic status and ethnicity-- to learn, participate in society, and secure decent work. Javier Lasida, the author of a two-year study commissioned by the International Youth Foundation (IYF) on technology and job training in Latin America, underscores this point, arguing that given the extent to which digital and mobile technologies have been incorporated into the workplace, any person lacking digital literacy faces significant obstacles in securing well-paying employment.

Background

In response to the critical role of technology in life-long learning and the workplace, IYF required all organizations applying for funding under Phase II (2007-2011) of the *entra21* program[1] to specify how they would use ICT to train youth and help them find quality jobs. Based on a competitive bidding process, IYF awarded 24 grants to organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean, three of which were selected to be part of this study based on the types of technology they used and the fact that their implementation schedules coincided well with the study's timeframe. The projects chosen to be the focus of this report were implemented by the **Fundación Universitaria Panamericana** (**FUP**) in Bogotá, Colombia; the **Fundación E.dúcate** in Quito and Guayaquil, Ecuador (**E.dúcate**); and the **Fundación Chile** (**FCH**) in Chile.

Table 1. Project Characteristics

Characteristics	E.dúcate	FUP	FCH
Type of Entity & Date of Foundation	Private, non-profit (2002)	Private, non-profit (1981)	Private, non-profit (1976)
Project Length of Time	November 2008 – January 2011	November 2009 – September 2010	July 2008 – October 2011
Training Length of Time	7 Months (310 hours)	11 Months (920 hours)	2-5 Months (Depends on the type of technical course)
Project Location	Quito and Guayaquil, Ecuador	Bogotá, Colombia	Santiago, Valparaíso, Coquimbo, Maule, Bío Bío, O'Higgins, Chile

Conducted over two and one-half years, the study included two site visits to each project and extensive consultations with each project team via email, webinars, and other forms of communication. During the site visits, the researcher conducted focus groups with staff and youth, interviewed key informants and observed training sessions. To the extent possible, the researcher also engaged project leaders in the research process, tapping their knowledge to document which technologies were being used and how, and engaging them in the interpretation of the findings.

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[1] For more information on *entra21* please go to www.iyfnet.org/entra21 to access the Final Report on Phase I.

In Bogota, Colombia, training was offered at one of the Universidad Panamericana's campuses where youth used digital classrooms to gain competencies in such areas as digital illustration, networks installation, bookkeeping, and data management. FUP assigned a full-time tutor to each classroom to help students learn how to navigate the software and deal with any computer glitches.

E.dúcate in Ecuador trained youth in various occupations related to the hospitality industry, using software developed specifically for E.dúcate. Unlike FUP's approach, which was self instructional and allowed youth to work at their own pace, E.dúcate used its digital courses in a more conventional manner. All youth worked on the same material available through the digital platform at the same time. This approach was followed due to technical problems with the software that did not allow youth to evaluate their performance as they progressed and the participants' low levels of education. It proved harder for the Ecuadorian youth to learn independently and therefore E.dúcate had to assign tutors to work with trainees as they worked through the digital content. E.dúcate, on the other hand, used social networks, specifically Facebook, more than the other two projects.

The FCH project operated at a larger scale than the other two as it was part of a national youth employment initiative implemented by Chile's National Training and Employment Service (SENCE)[2]. Through a portal created by FCH called *TeOrienta* (It Orients You), youth accessed information on more than 400 occupations to help guide their career planning as well as a variety of tools such as how to create an e-portfolio. The portal also allowed employers to screen youth and youth to be matched with job openings. Technology was also used in Chile to train job placement counselors whose job it was to help youth define their career path and make use of digital and other resources to find suitable work.

Table 2. Project Components in the Training Process and Main ICT Tools in each Project

Project Components	E.dúcate	FUP	FCH
Career counseling			Tests and tools available on *TeOrienta* portal
Technical training	Digital courses which all youth used at the same time and same pace	Digital courses in which youth work at their own pace	
Internship and Job placement tools?	Facebook		e-portfolio and *TeOrienta* portal

Basic characteristics of the youth served by each project and their certification and employment rates are described in the table on the next page.

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[2] For more information on the Chilean project please consult IYF's Autumn 2011 edition of YOUth magazine, for an article entitled "Going for Scale Across Latin America", and a November 2011 IYF publication, "Taking Youth Employability Projects to Scale" available at www.iyfnet.org.

Table 3. Youth Profiles

	E.dúcate	FUP	FCH
Gender (Male / Female)	60/40	69/31	63/37
Location	Urban	Urban	Urban
Completed high school (%)	21%	88%	84%
Dropped out of high school (%)	53%	6%	8%
Successfully completed training (%)	54%	65%	54%
Employed at 6 months (%)	48%	46%	50%

*Based on Follow-Up studies 6 months post graduation.

Key Research Findings

The main findings from the IYF study into the use of technology in three *entra21* projects are summarized below.

- The study confirmed ICT as a motivating factor in recruiting and retaining disadvantaged youth in short-term job training programs. Youth value technology as a means of communicating and connecting with peers, in particular, but also with employers. Instructors noted technology's utility as a training tool, even for youth who had never used technology for educational purposes and who had difficulty reading and following instructions and learning in a relatively fast paced environment.

- Youth participating in the projects saw ICT as a powerful tool for creating and maintaining relationships with their peers and for helping them feel part of a larger youth culture. For marginalized youth who are relatively isolated from other young people living in their own city, let alone their country or region, technology helped them overcome feelings of being separate and disconnected from mainstream culture.

- ICT contributed to the development of youths' basic competencies. In E.dúcate, for example, trainers observed that some youth read mechanically without comprehending content or meaning. Trainers had to adjust to youths' low levels of formal education by providing remedial classes to increase youths' reading, writing and math skills. To do this, ICT was helpful not only to make learning more interesting but also to provide E.dúcate ready access to on-line math and literacy tools.

- Technology allowed trainers to adjust more easily to differences in how quickly youth mastered course competencies. With FUP, for example, each young person was able to complete the course at his/her own speed, allowing faster students to move ahead and slower learners more time to complete modules. Some youth objected to this self-paced, self-instructional approach because it required more self-discipline than what they were accustomed to in the formal education system.

- Technology helped many youth with their job seeking efforts. Young Chileans found the e-portfolio easy to use, update and share with employers. The online application allowed youth to upload diplomas, certificates and other documents required by employers, making it far superior to the traditional CV.

- Social media enriched the training process and facilitated the management of internships and placement of youth in formal jobs. E.dúcate introduced Facebook into the curriculum to help youth become more proficient in using a computer and accessing the Internet and to connect with the project, instructors and one another. Youth created their first email accounts under the *entra21* project and spent the first fifteen minutes of each day updating the project's Facebook page. Facebook also was used to help youth find jobs since it allowed E.dúcate to post information on vacancies and job requirements and to connect with employers. Youth used Facebook to post advice based on their own experience as interns or pass on tips about vacancies and how to handle the first day on the job.

- Using technology required projects to redefine the roles of its training staff. Depending upon the type of technology being used, how it was used, and youths' levels of education, these roles varied. It meant re-thinking the qualifications of the teaching staff regarding their knowledge of social media, digital tools and online resources. The research noted that job training providers in the region have not used technology extensively nor have employment offices. The study identified three new roles defined by the projects to facilitate the acquisition of competencies and/or the job placement process:

    1) Tutors who monitored the use of the digital courses and helped youth navigate the technology or use the hardware, but who did not have any content expertise (FUP);

    2) Community managers who encouraged and helped youth and instructors post content on Facebook, interact with employers, and manage a network (E.dúcate); and,

    3) Career counselors who advised youth in defining their education and career path and in their job search (FCH).

- The study underscored the need to ensure that digital or mobile technology not replace or minimize the relationship between the youth (trainee) and staff, be it an instructor, tutor, community manager or coordinator of job placement services. In this regard, the study reconfirmed a lesson gleaned from Phase I of *entra21* concerning the importance of providing disadvantaged youth with personalized attention.

- According to the research, projects used ICT in a prudent manner. While none of them used technology in all facets of the training cycle, the level of complexity was appropriate for youth who had little experience with digital learning methods prior to training. In the researcher's opinion all three organizations incorporated ICT incrementally. One recommendation from the research was to resolve software or other technical issues before adding any new features to the project cycle. In the case of Ecuador, for example, there were software problems that caused some trainees to become frustrated and drop out of class. It was important in the researcher's view for E.dúcate to resolve these issues before adding Facebook to the curriculum.

- Social media contributed significantly to the strengthening of links between youth, trainers and employers. However, using social media requires a higher level of training for teachers and a redefinition of the role of trainers in the classroom, which is traditionally viewed as direct and controlling the classroom work agenda.

- Youth in Colombia were able to acquire technical competencies using digital modules; however, in Ecuador, where participants had less formal education, youth needed more input from trainers and lacked the discipline or experience to learn at their own pace.

- Digital classrooms allow for greater scale and the potential for lower cost per trainee, once the initial investment in hardware and software is made. Unfortunately due to time constraints, the study did not include a review of the cost per course graduate or recommendations on how technology can contribute to greater efficiency in future training and job placement projects.

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The International Youth Foundation (IYF) invests in the
extraordinary potential of young people. Founded in 1990, IYF
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empowering youth to be healthy, productive, and engaged
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