

From the Digital Divide to the Participation Divide: Why Access is Not Enough

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Since the 1990s, scholars, policy makers, journalists and others have focused much attention on the digital divide [1] between people of varying ethnic and income groups. However, today, research from the Pew Internet and American Life Project and other sources indicates that in some areas (especially social networks [2] and the mobile Web [3]) people from communities of color are early adopters of digital technology. In addition, the young -- across socioeconomic and ethnic status groups -- are embracing and shaping digital technologies in ever greater numbers [4].

Although people seeking to close the digital divide have celebrated the fact that access to computer and Internet technologies is increasing, some have begun to look at differences in how people are participating in the digital revolution. For example, in a 2006 white paper [5], titled "Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century" published by the MacArthur Foundation, MIT professor Henry Jenkins and colleagues argue:

"What a person can accomplish with an outdated machine in a public library with mandatory filtering software and no opportunity for storage or transmission pales in comparison to what a person can accomplish with a home computer with unfettered Internet access, high band-width, and continuous connectivity . . . The school system's inability to close this participation gap has negative consequences for everyone involved. On the one hand, those youth who are most advanced in media literacies are often stripped of their technologies and robbed of their best techniques for learning in an effort to ensure a uniform experience for all in the classroom. On the other hand, many youth who have had no exposure to these new kinds of participatory cultures outside school find themselves struggling to keep up with their peers."

The Solution: Teach Media Literacy

Traditionally, educators and others have paid less attention to the need to educate youth and adults on how to become media literate. This is because it is assumed that exposure to digital technologies will lead to greater facility with these tools. However, given the growing participation gap between varying segments of the population, some have argued that proactively teaching people how to become media literate is critical. Jenkins and colleagues suggest [5] that educators teach youth several core media literacy skills, including:

- **"Play:** The capacity to experiment with one's surroundings as a form of problem-solving
- **Simulation:** The ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real world processes
- **Performance:** The ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery
- **Appropriation:** The ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content
- **Multi-tasking:** The ability to scan one's environment and shift focus onto salient details on an ad hoc basis
- **Distributed Cognition:** The ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand our mental capacities
- **Collective Intelligence:** The ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others towards a common goal"

For more resources and information on the participation divide and media literacy, please see below.

Additional Resources:

- Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century, MacArthur Foundation White Paper, 2006, <http://digitalllearning.macfound.org/atf/cf/%7B7E45C7E0-A3E0-4B89-AC9C-E8...> [5]
- UC Berkley School of Information Podcast, Confronting the Participation Gap: Why Media Literacy Matters, <http://www.ischool.berkeley.edu/newsandevents/events/dls20080206> [6]
- What Wikipedia Can Teach Us About the New Media Literacies, Confessions of an Aca/Fan, June 26, 2007, http://www.henryjenkins.org/2007/06/what_wikipedia_can_teach_us_ab.html [7]
- From Participatory Politics to Participatory Medicine, Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 29, 2009, <http://www.pewinternet.org/Presentations/2009/23From-Participatory-Polit...> [8]

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["A Sore That Never Heals": Why Native American and Alaskan Native Women Fare Poorly in Breast Cancer Survival & A Communication Approach to Wellness](#) [12]

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- [13] <http://community.pathoftheblueeye.com/wiki/dna-screening-key-issues-communications-challenges>