The Digital Divide and Education

Since the mid 1990s, the digital divide has received intense national attention capitalizing on the gap between those who can benefit from technology and those who cannot (Burbles, 2006). Unfortunately, there is a digital divide occurring on every possible level, even in education. Many people argue that the digital divide gives wealthy people and their children an unfair advantage to information and opportunities than to those with lower incomes. In addition, a similar argument debates whether technology has benefited society and how it will affect society in the future. Has technology created the digital divide? Surprisingly, it's not all about access. Nevertheless, the end goal resides in closing the digital divide.

The divide is much more than a “have” versus “have not” issue of technology. The digital divide is not only an American issue, but also an international one. Digital gaps in education, race and gender have already become worldwide issues and the educational divide is getting wider between established countries and developing ones—especially between the rich and the poor. Because of this, there is not just one divide and there is not just one gap to close. It involves the lack of technology that communities have access to, along with discrepancies in social, economic, political and cultural issues such as poverty and lack of educational funding. Researchers have found that closing the digital divide will be most effectively achieved through a two-prong approach that is directed to both the government and large businesses and public-private partnerships, most importantly, education (Burbles, 2006).

Through these two approaches, low-income masses have the opportunity to experience many of the same benefits as the wealthy. In hopes of closing the digital divide, the population must not only be traditionally literate, but technologically literate as well. Though technology will not be a quick-fix solution to poverty, poor individuals and communities can access educational tools to improve the quality of their lives—this appears to be a critical piece to solving the puzzle.

The National Coordination Office for Networking and Information Technology Research and Development, also known as NITRD, states that resolving the digital divide demands a national initiative. Community relevance and community involvement is agreed to be essential to solving the divide where communities must be strongly involved in strategies to increase the use of information technology tools to solve existing problems. In doing this, found solutions must be culturally relevant and acceptable to the community involved (NITRD). The communities must also rethink educational approaches and adopt constructivist methods. NITRD testifies that “using technology to educate is much more important than educating students about technology.” They suggest that by making the curriculum culturally relevant, the content must be the most important to educating communities. In higher education, there should be major strides taken to increase access in engineering, computer and information technology fields (NITRD).

All in all, technology is crucial to student learning. The impact of the Internet on education and communities are profound because it can be used in everyday life for education, business, personal communication, transactions, job searches, career development, etc. Regrettably, the digital divide prevents people from getting an education because they don’t have access to the right technology (Block, 2010). By bridging this divide, everyone’s ability to learn, share, interact and solve problems together will be bridged. Judy Block makes a significant observation stating, “…the gaps are impacting on the educational process because the on-campus student has access to the latest technology whereas the off-campus student, many of whom are in small towns, have to rely on outdated equipment and dial-up modems.” In conclusion, the Internet enables simple exchanges of information without regard to geographical boundaries (Block, 2010). Because technology skills are becoming increasingly important to applying for schools or finding a job, the lack of access to technology only reinforces negative outcomes in these fields. Where having access to computers and the Internet are critical in becoming a successful member of society, no one should be left behind as our nation advances.

Work Cited (for more detailed description, click here)

