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This is the first in a series of articles in which I will discuss the current state of the "digital divide" and identify a number of resources that educators and leaders can tap to decrease this divide.

As is our way in the US, the factor that separates folks who have resources and power is money. This fact was made clear to me when I was a twenty year old undergraduate in my teacher education program. I had the opportunity to see Jonathan Kozol (1) speak about the inequities of school funding.

This was before the digital age but his message resonates forward very effectively. His main point was that if we continue to fund schools on a local property tax base, the quality of the physical resources students have access to will never change. The communities with highly-valued property will take in sufficient revenues to fund their schools, and the communities with low-valued property will struggle to provide basic resources for their schools. In his words these "savage inequalities" will continue to exist. The phrase is a title of one of Kozol's most famous books. *Savage Inequalities* (2). As a result of his and other's attention to this issue, there has been a gradual shift toward equitable funding of schools regardless of the economic status of the community.

In his talk, Kozol cautioned us to pay attention to language and power. Notice how people use language to frame an issue. To highlight his point, Kozol shared with us a conversation he had with a U.S. Senator after Kozol testified in support of increasing federal funding to schools. In his testimony, Kozol described-and I saw in my own public school teaching-schools with history books that were twenty years, no playgrounds, and classes held in basements and gymnasiums. After the hearings a senator approached Kozol and asked him if "throwing money" at education problems would really help these children. Kozol responded quickly; "yes, it will help buy books, pay teachers, build new schools at the same level of schools from more affluent districts. Today he would have added computers to that list. He then asked the Senator why he said we "throw

money at education" and "allocate money to defense". Kozol got no response.

In the last fifteen years, a new factor in the great divide between rich and poor schools has surfaced. Access to digital technology Thus, the phrase "the digital divide" was coined to describe the drastic disparity that exists between folks who have access to technology and those that don't. As we know now, this directly impacts people's access to money and power.

Despite the widening gap between the rich and poor in this country the Bush Administration proposed to cut federal programs that help underserved communities get online. The 2003 budget outlined cuts in programs in the Education Department and the Commerce Department that helped low-income communities use computers and the Internet for education, adult literacy, and job training. The Commerce Department's report concluded: "With more than half of Americans using computers and the Internet, we are truly a nation online." (3).

This statement begs the basic question: What about the other half of the nation? The half of the nation that these programs were designed to help. So instead supporting programs that help to eliminate the divide, the Bush administration has simply defined the divide to be squarely in the middle and declared success and a commitment to ignore half of our country. This line also separates people by income, access to affordable health care, and housing, and race.

So, what can we do about it? I would like to direct you to a web site that provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of the digital divide and offers a number of funding sources and ideas for educators. The site is The Digital Divide Network (4). Its stated goal is to help everyone succeed in the digital age. More specifically they are probably referring to the other half of the nation as well as the world.

The site is home to a current comprehensive look at the digital divide. The site has a number of links to studies that provide the reader with all the latest government and non-government data available on the issue. The initial home page also gives the viewer access to a list of feature stories that describe programs attempting to close this divide. The section called "voices of the net" gives the reader a connection to the kinds of personal stories that show the powerful impact of empowering people with technology skills. The organizations that are highlighted speak to the diversity of people effected by the digital divide. Native American groups, African-American groups, and senior citizen groups all have their stories to tell.

The part of the site that I will be highlighting in my next three columns concerns funding that is available from a wide variety of organizations who are committed to decreasing the digital divide. The Digital Divide Network divides these sources into three groups government funding, corporate funding, and private funding. Each group, for different reasons, has a vested interest in the continued strength of the other half of our nation and has decided to "allocate" money to help empower them.

References:

(1) http://library.brandeis.edu/about/nsf/kozol/biography.html

(2) http://www.ascd.org/readingroom/edlead/9212/scherer.html

(3) http://www.digitaldividenetwork.org/content/news/index.cfm?key=698

(4) http://www.digitaldividenetwork.org

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3 THOUGHTS ON "HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES: THE DIGITAL DIVIDE"

africa
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My husband and i ended up being fulfilled after Chris could conclude his look for from your ideas he was given inside your site. It's now and once again perplexing to just possibly be handing out secrets and ways that several some other persons may possibly have been selling. So we recognize we have got the writer to appreciate because of that. Those illustrations you've made, the easy site menu, the friendships you'll help to produce ilt is everything about this content is good, that is surely particularly essential. Thanks for the whole thing!

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Thanks , I've just been seeking info about this subject for a lengthy time and yours could be the very best I've came upon so far. But, what about the conclusion? Are you particular on the supply?