Digital Divide or Media Divide? Competing With MTV and Nintendo

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Digital Divide or Media Divide?

Competing With MTV and Nintendo

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As educators and socially responsible citizens we are all probably aware of the Digital Divide concept – some students/families have a disproportionate access to computer technology. Generally this is along the usual socioeconomic lines. However, I’d like to call your attention to what I believe is an even more insidious problem that reaches across all demographic strata, I call it the Media Divide.
The Media Divide is a relatively simple concept and has many parallels with the Digital Divide. The term as I use it refers to an inability to use Media Technology to communicate a message.

The problem has two major components:

1. Lack of access to the technology to create and disseminate media messages

2. Knowledge of how to use this technology effectively

The first cause noted, lack of technology access, is very much a part of the Digital Divide question. Since most of the new technology that can be used by individuals to create media messages is digital, access to computer technology is critical. The second part of the equation, how to use the technology, strikes at the heart of 21st Century citizenship and deals with the over arching question of Media Literacy and a Media Literate Society. Both are elements that educators must be aware of and deal with on a daily basis in order to be effective. We must be able to compete with MTV and Nintendo for the minds (hearts?) of our students.

.02 The average k-12 student participates in 5 hours and 46 minutes of media a day. Kaiser-Permanente Study 1999 (http://www.kff.org/entmedia/1535-pressreleasefinal-doc.cfm) (return to index)

Media Literacy is obviously an essential skill if a student is going to successfully navigate the modern communication landscape. Yet it is generally given short shrift at best in the halls of learning. As educators we are appalled by most of what is on TV and in the movies, we naturally and for good reason want to turn away; unfortunately this often does a great disservice to our students and undermines the effectiveness of the learning experience that we are trying to create. In addition, most teachers feel unqualified to deal with Media Literacy issues.

What’s the answer? Well, here is a crash course in Media Literacy so that any educator can teach/learn along with her/his students. It is much easier than many experts make it out to be, though it can have many levels of sophistication.

Media Literacy (a working definition):
The ability to **read (understand)** and **write (create)** media experiences. The Media is a language, it is representational in nature – you do not see a person on TV, you see shapes and colors that you translate into “person.” Simply put, literacy means that you can understand and communicate using a certain language. Thus, here is a working definition of Media Literacy based in language skills – Can you understand it? Can you use it to communicate?

If an educator is willing to practice what we call **deconstruction** with her/his students a terrific skill can be readily acquired.

**Deconstruction:**
View an the ad(s) with a class, asking the following questions:

- What is the purpose of this communication? *(to persuade you to buy...)*
- How is this purpose achieved? *(good looking people use this product and are having fun, I want to be good looking and have fun...)*
- Reality Check – Focus on a person in the ad. What does s/he do for a living? *(lifeguard, construction worker, doctor – no, no, no, they are ACTORS!)*

Yes it is all so obvious, but students are bombarded daily and deconstruction must be practiced all the time or students will be seduced.

What about actually making media communications? This was quite complex until the recent digital revolution let the genie out of the bottle. Now a student can use a relatively inexpensive digital camera (still or video), or even just grab images off the internet, and create a powerful communication. Using a computer and either imovie, Pinnacle Studio, Quicktime (all either free or less than $50), or PowerPoint a student can create a wonderful media piece even acceptable by today’s broadcast standards. Combine this with the internet and we are talking personal empowerment and the literal spanning of the Media Divide.

Of course this begs the questions plaguing 21st Century education:

1. Are we going to give educators the necessary technology?
2. Are we going to invest the time and resources to **train our teachers** to use this technology so that they can compete with MTV and Nintendo? Do we, as a society built on a few controlling the Media for the many, even want to?

Can educators compete? Of course, **most Media is empty calories.** As educators we have Shakespeare, Pythagoras, Einstein, our past and future. **We are substance rich.** We don’t need the fancy production values of MTV, but we do need to use the accepted means of communication, the media, to get this substance into the language of our students and our culture.

It is a prerequisite of a functioning democracy to break the Media Divide. If teachers and students are equipped with computers we may feel that we have addressed the Digital Divide.
issue. But if this technology is only used as advanced typewriters and grade books we have done nothing to break the Media Divide.

As educators we have the power, the right, and the responsibility to use the latest technology, rather than being used by it.

> Democracy is the best form of government only if truth is the primary value of a society.

*Plato*
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**Kids & Media @ The New Millennium**  
http://www.kff.org/entmedia/1535-pressreleasefinal-doc.cfm  
Surveys on media use contained in very clear acrobat (pdf) documents

**KiSS of the Panopticon: Cultural Theory For The Rest Of Us**  
http://www.geneseo.edu/%7Ebicket/panop/compindex.htm  
Doug Bicket’s incredible site of simplified explications of the theories of Media and Visual Literacy, really all related 20/21st Century philosophy in a nutshell – very teacher friendly

**Subvertising**  
http://www.gn.apc.org/rts/subvt.htm  
Provides some balance to advertisements.

**AdBusters.org**  
http://www.adbusters.org/home/  
A site that takes an aesthetic often humorous view of contemporary advertisements; “culture jammers,” activists

**Teachers Network**  
http://www.teachnet.org  
You know these good people. Amazing resource site for educators.

**Children’s Media Workshop**
Yours truly

John Schaefer (john@mediadivide.org) is the director and founder of the Children’s Media Workshop – a nonprofit organization that uses media experiences with teachers and students worldwide. He has conducted teacher training workshops on the use of technology in the classroom in diverse locals, from the Museum of Modern Art to the International School in Casablanca. He was the creator of the Visual literacy Workshop program using Polaroid cameras (550,000+ teachers 1987-1991). The Media Savvy Classroom is his latest project. It is an online course and hands-on workshop through Cambridge College and The Teachers Network. It can be found at www.mediadivide.org.

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2 THOUGHTS ON “DIGITAL DIVIDE OR MEDIA DIVIDE? COMPETING WITH MTV AND NINTENDO”

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on January 30, 2014 at 6:13 PM said:

My brother suggested I might like this blog. He was once totally right. This post actually made my day. You can’t believe just how a lot time I had spent for this info! Thank you!

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on February 4, 2014 at 10:40 AM said:

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