Foreword

A POWERFUL EXPERIENCE: MEETING THE MARGINALIZED PARTICIPANTS IN THE INFORMATION AGE

It is not uncommon for me to engage in conversation with those who speak of the Digital Divide in the past tense and assume that the abundance of computers and technology in our homes, schools and workplaces has decreased the need for attention to issues of digital access and equity. This naïve argument that the Digital Divide is now disappearing due to increasingly more accessible, cheaper digital resources usually extends to the developing nations of our global arena as well. When I participate in these conversations, I remain deeply concerned about the inequitable affordances provided by technology in both developed and developing countries for learners in our school systems and for adult citizens in our cultures and I am worried that the recent proliferation of technology will move focus away from this issue. Reading this book has helped me address this concern and has provided me with a much deeper understanding of the specific issues that make the Digital Divide an important ongoing issue and of the complexities of providing truly equitable opportunity through technology. I am confidant that this book will provide similar positive experiences for other readers.

International Exploration of Technology Equity and the Digital Divide: Critical, Historical and Social Perspectives provides a riveting account of the deep historical, political and cultural issues underpinning the potential opportunities and challenges provided through digital technologies. The reader will have the opportunity to experience and learn from the often-unexamined inequities in the global arena and will emerge from this experience with a much deeper understanding of the current state of the Digital Divide and the complexities that surround digital inequities. Appropriately, the book does not provide solutions for this complex issue, but it does provide important knowledge and tools for understanding and addressing the Digital Divide.

The first two chapters in the book provide an ideal backdrop for later chapters through a careful examination of the caste system in India and a thoughtful explanation of the inequities connected with the caste system in India for potential use of technology. Taken together, these chapters provide an ideal introduction to the book since these chapters describe both the immense challenge of making technology available to underserved populations (Chapter 1) and the potential for using technology to create a "democratic opening" for marginalized populations such as the Dalits in India. The challenges and opportunities for making digital technologies accessible and powerful for people in India provide a useful beginning frame for similar challenges and opportunities in New Zealand, Brazil, Africa, Canada, China, Japan and South Korea, and the United States.

Readers will become immersed in captivating stories and descriptions of marginalized peoples from a variety of countries, including the United States. The depth and detail in these descriptions makes a

strong point about the uniqueness and value of each of these cultures and the need to address issues of technology from a perspective of knowledge and appreciation for each of these cultures.

Although one of the basic premises of this book is that uses of technology are unique for different cultures, the situations in each of the cultures described in the book provide knowledge and insight for those interested in understanding and addressing Digital Divide issues. The idea that technology has the potential to help activate the silenced voices of marginalized people in the global arena runs through several chapters in this book. Authors point to the capabilities of technology in communicating visual and auditory messages from cultures for which visuals and the spoken word are two of the major ways stories are handed down and communicated. Facilitating the use of technology to help preserve and strengthen different cultures is an exciting approach to addressing the Digital Divide. Through using technology in this way, technology can become a tool to reinvigorate people and cultures that have been oppressed. Ultimately providing tools to strengthen and celebrate different cultures and different people has the potential to truly use technology to address the deep historic issues that have created the conditions that feed the Digital Divide.

This book effectively addresses the naïve assumption that more technology is the key to addressing issues of digital inequity. The rich descriptions of indigenous people and their cultures makes it very clear that different populations will use technology in very different ways and that part of a solution to the Digital Divide issue involves understanding and addressing the complex contexts of different cultures. Although it remains tempting to assume that cheaper and more accessible technology will solve our digital equity challenges, experiences in schools in the United States have demonstrated that just providing technology for children in low SES schools does not solve the Digital Divide issue. The issues for children in these schools involve how the technology is used and how well prepared the teachers are to use technology to address the individual needs of the students. We have compelling evidence from these experiences on the ineffectiveness of merely making the technology available. The cases described in this book provide similar insight on the need to adapt the access and use of technology to the individual needs and goals of marginalized groups.

Several authors in this book demonstrate an ability to make the cultures of indigenous people come alive for the reader. Descriptions of individual personalities within cultures help the reader begin to experience and celebrate the diversity of cultures often marginalized in today's world. The rich, in-depth stories of the Inuits, Maori, Gullahs and Black Brazilians use specific cases to make clear the important point that different cultures and traditions will use technology in very different ways. The potential of technology to help the Gullahs address their land issues, the Maori to create community and the Inuits to share their culture provide specific examples of the diverse ways technology might serve diverse cultures.

The informative articles in this book also provide a strong opportunity for scholars to learn from the experiences of countries that have been relatively successful in providing ICT access for a majority of their populations. The chapter on East Asian countries provides useful and transferable insights into specific national policies that have worked for Japan and South Korea, two countries who are among the international leaders in providing access for citizens.

It is clear to me that this book has deeply affected my understanding of the complexity of the global Digital Divide issue. Examining issues of digital equity through the lenses of other cultures provides help in understanding and analyzing our digital equity issues in the United States and these same lenses provide the same affordance for other countries in the global arena. I am confidant that the next time I am engaged in a discussion on the current state of the Digital Divide I will be able to speak much more specifically and knowledgably about the importance of this issue and the need to understand and ad-

dress causes of the Digital Divide using individual contexts. One of my insights from the book is that appropriate access to technology may help groups of people begin to address the inequities and power imbalances that created the conditions for the Digital Divide in the first place. Reading this book will not only reaffirm the importance of this issue, but also provide intelligent, contextualized approaches for addressing digital inequities.

I can promise readers that they will find a "good read" in these chapters, as well as a possibly life-changing experience with marginalized participants in the global information age.

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Ann D. Thompson, *Ph.D., University Professor at Iowa State University, has devoted her career to designing, studying and implementing effective uses of technology in education. She is the Founding Director of the Center for Technology in Learning and Teaching at Iowa State University and has been involved in preservice teacher preparation and educational technology research and development for more than 25 years. She served as Chair of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction for seven years and the department received the AACTE Award for Best Practice in Technology Integration in 2000. She is currently pursuing initiatives in technology pedagogical content knowledge, technology professional development, and technology in teacher education. She is a past president of the Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education (SITE), co-editor of The Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education, and has led grant supported projects totaling more than $5 million. She was elected to the Iowa Academy of Education in 2001. She is the author of more than 50 refereed journal articles, 3 books, and numerous book chapters.*