Chapter IV

Rethinking Schools and Community: The Knowledge Producing School

Chris Bigum, Deakin University, Australia

ABSTRACT

Schools appear in some accounts of community informatics as part of community, one of a number of organisations that need to be taken into account, perhaps on the basis of them being useful physical or human resources around which community informatics might be based. For their part, schools, at least in Australia, have been an important, early element in the broad take-up of computing and communication technologies (CCTs) by the community. Apart from the possibility of using school resources to support community access out of school time and based on what is published in both fields, schools and work in community informatics have tended to operate independently of one another. There are, nonetheless, interesting parallels in these two broad areas of activity which promote the use of CCTs. This chapter outlines a new research agenda in which schools
produce knowledge for local community and in doing so develop new and productive community partnerships. The development provides interesting opportunities for the transformation of regions via this approach to community informatics. The background to this project is based in the long history of using CCTs in schools. The chapter will argue that the way in which schools understand CCTs is crucial to shaping what is possible to be done with CCTs in schools. Shifting the emphasis from information to relationships opens up alternatives that provide opportunities for significant, new relationships with community.

INTRODUCTION

The widespread deployment of computing and communication technologies (CCTs) is generally understood as being at the base of much of the current changes in social, cultural, economic and political spheres in many parts of the world. Interest in the use of these technologies to support and develop geolocal communities is a primary focus of community informatics (Gurstein, 2002). In a world which is much changed due to the use of CCTs, the needs of communities, particularly those that are distant from large population centres, have taken on new dimensions and forms. The literature related to Community Informatics reports a wide variety of responses to this challenge. In this chapter, I describe a project which has been developed in schools and which is based upon a rethink of the role of schools and in particular their relationship to local community.

Schools appear in some accounts of community informatics as part of community, one of a number of organisations that need to be taken into account, perhaps on the basis of them being useful physical or human resources around which community informatics might be based (for instance, Casapulla, De Cindio, & Ripamonti, 2001; Mzdid10, 2001). For their part, schools, at least in Australia, have been an important, early element in the broad take-up of CCTs by the community. Their importance in this regard was recognised by vendors who participated in fierce contests to become a preferred provider to school systems (Bigum et al., 1987). Since that time, schools have remained important in terms of the take-up of CCTs in Australian communities. Apart from the possibility of using school resources to support community access out of school time and based on what is published in both fields, schools and work in community informatics have tended to operate independently of one another. There are, nonetheless, interesting parallels in these two broad areas of activity which promote the use of CCTs. This chapter outlines a new research agenda in which schools produce knowledge for local community and in doing so develop new and productive community partnerships. The development provides interesting opportunities for the transformation of regions via this approach to community informatics. The background to this project is based in the long history of using CCTs in schools.
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