

# Digital Poverty and Education

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## Chapter Outline

Introduction

Digital poverty

Demography and digital poverty

Digital literacy

Educational projects

Determinism or social constructivism

Conclusions

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## Activity

The gap between the information rich and poor is the most pressing civil rights issue of the millennium and education in both traditional and new settings is the key to creating equitable knowledge societies. Why do you think such significance is placed on access to information?

## Activity

According to the World Hunger Education Service (WHES) more than 1.3 billion people worldwide live in extreme financial poverty (WHES, 2011). Their daily income is less than one dollar a day. Becket and others argue that, rather than emancipate, digital technologies aggravate such inequities (Beckett, 2010; Guillén et al., 2005: 682). Why do you think Becket has reached this conclusion?

## Activity

Neill suggests that the savage inequalities of the past extend into 'the wired savagery of the future. There is neither empirical nor theoretical reason to believe this scenario will change for the better' (Neill, 1995: 184). Do you think he is right, and what would you do about it?

## Activity

Which do you think is the most important feature of digital literacy – skills or understanding and how would you teach it?

## New Technology and Education

### Activity

The educational establishment in Europe and America has been reluctant in the past to abandon its traditions and structures, particularly as a result of the advent of new technologies. Competing demands and limitations on spending and staff time mean that educationalists find it difficult to fulfil their current mandate yet alone embrace a visionary new one. What implications do you think this has for digital poverty?

### Activity

What lesson can be learned from both the Kenyan and American Samoan approaches to addressing the issue of digital poverty in countries with very low Infostate ratings?

### Activity

Clegg et al. (2003) contend there is a presumption that 'in order for citizens and workers to meet the challenges of the information age, they must become ICT proficient. In terms of debates about education the use of ICTs is over-determined by assumptions that link globalization and information to particular ICT competencies. As Michael Apple (1998) and others have pointed out manufacturers have been quick to capitalise on this assumption using parental anxiety as a way of targeting sales' (Clegg et al., 2003: 46). Do you think that sales and not need drives our desire to become digitally literate?

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## Big Question

Will giving the populace Pentiums (or the equivalent) prove any more useful in addressing social ills such as digital poverty than Marie Antoinette's apparent *cri de coeur* to the poor of Paris in the late eighteenth century that they should overcome hunger by eating cake? (Attewell, 2001)