

Social Studies Special Issue: Another Look at Civic Literacy in a Digital Age

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Young children are immersed in a high tech world. However, as their functional technological capabilities evolve, they also need to develop skills for interactive and participatory engagement in online environments. Challenges exist as digital spaces transform the role of traditional mechanisms of adult oversight and supervision in guiding children as citizens within global mediums. This special issue contributes to the growing body of literature on new literacies needed in this technological age. Although the technology can be transformative, it is important to create linkages between our historical understanding of pedagogy and the development of children's decision-making capacities in novel contexts. Adaptation and application of this knowledge base frames our understanding of effective practices to promote a generation of children with the dispositions and skills to function as technologically fluent and engaged citizens who constructively contribute to our digitally mediated ways of being and learning.

The youngest children in our schools have never known life without the plethora of digital tools that are part of their lives. However, growing up in a digitally connected world necessitates that the young learn how to be wise users of these technological resources, optimizing the potential educational aspects while remaining safe and avoiding information overload. In Issue 8(2) we introduced readers to the challenges faced by social studies educators who are teaching these digital natives and attempting to foster citizenship skills that are relevant in digital spaces. Since the youngest children have such a range of experience with technology, technological fluency is not a prerequisite for instruction in cyberliteracy. In fact, social studies teachers have a critical role to play in establishing a strong foundation of skills for interaction in digital spaces that primes children as citizens who optimize the iterative functions of the Web for self-expression and participatory forms of citizenship. Otherwise, children will undergo an implicit conditioning by the commercial forces that have pervaded digital environments.

The intersection of these issues is the focus of this issue. Young children benefit from purposeful instruction that develops their capacity to function as citizens in digital spaces. Recognizing the importance of media literacy, all 50 states have included requirements for learning these skills in their educational standards. However, guidelines often are not connected to curriculum or specific instructional strategies to achieve these goals. Outside of formal education, many resources have been developed to raise awareness of safe practices and foster a culture of participation online that emulates constructive and productive social engagement. Berson et al. explore the complex process of fostering cyberliteracy and decision making skills with the young. Their analysis suggests that teachers need guidance in cultivating learning experiences that build on best practices while integrating emergent digital literacies into instruction. These efforts will assist us in identifying quality teaching resources to foster democratic engagement and an empowered citizenship.

The second James F. Ackerman Colloquium on Technology and Citizenship, held on the campus of Purdue University in July 2007 was designed to bring together a group of 30 scholars to present research and to collaborate on these and other technology related issues. The event was sponsored by the James F. Ackerman Center for Democratic Citizenship, housed in Purdue University's College of Education (<http://www.education.purdue.edu>). The Colloquium was entitled "Educating for Citizenship in Digital and Synthetic Worlds: Privacy, Protection and Participation." The goal was to engage participants in discussions related, but not limited to

1. The role of technology in the development of knowledge and skills required by citizens in an increasingly digital and global world, demonstrating connections between everyday individual actions and global well-being.
2. The tension between the constitutional right to freedom of speech and the protection of young people online.
3. Operationalizing privacy in a digital age.
4. The potential of social networking and MMORPGs for citizenship education.

The Colloquium provided a unique opportunity to interact with a relatively small circle of scholars and researchers working in this area in order to discuss common interests and take stock of the current state of this field of study. In addition to the paper sessions, participants toured Purdue's Envision Center for Data Visualization and had keynote addresses from Edward Castronova, an economist from Indiana University who has studied the economies of massively multiplayer online games, and Scott Ksander, Purdue University's Chief Information Security Officer.

Participants included Eui-kyung Shin (Northern Illinois University), Don Falls (Southeast High School), James M. Shiveley (Miami University), Joseph R. Feinberg (Georgia State University), Mark van 't Hooft (Kent State), Shreya Desai (Walker Middle School), Krista Glazewski (New Mexico State), Dan Zalles (SRI International), Joe Obrien (University of Kansas), John Lee (North Carolina State), Nick deKanter (Muzzy Lane Software), Dan Stuckart (Wagner College), Peg Ertmer (Purdue University), Gayle Y. Thieman (Portland State University, NCSS President), Brendan Calandra (Georgia State University), Tom Hammond (Lehigh University), Sarah Grafman (Muzzy Lane Software), Bill Watson (Purdue University), Angie Schoenbeck (Purdue University), David McDivitt (Oak Hill High School), Christopher McGrew (Indiana Department of Education), Christina Kapp (Harcourt School Publishers), Scott Ksander (CERIAS, Purdue University), Edward Castronova (Indiana University), Bob Evans (Purdue University), and Christian Mattix (Purdue University).

The colloquium was hosted by members of the National Council for the Social Studies College and University Faculty Assembly, Phillip J. VanFossen, James F. Ackerman Professor of Social Studies Education and Director of the Ackerman Center at Purdue University, and Michael J. Berson, Professor of Social Science Education at the University of South Florida.

Following the Colloquium, each participant was encouraged to respond to a call for manuscripts for this special issue.

In this issue, we feature the following article that further extends the focus on the theme of Civic Literacy in a Digital Age:

An Analysis of Electronic Media to Prepare Children for Safe and Ethical Practices in Digital Environments

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Donald Falls, Southeast High School
John Fenaughty, NetSafe, New Zealand's Internet Safety Group

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