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HU2642 Introduction to Digital Media

Major Assignment 2: Technological Access, Fluency, and Literacy Proposal

10/11/2012

Computer literacy and the global village

Talking about problems with technological access in the Upper Peninsula is an unfamiliar topic for me and there is one main reason: I don't have any problems with it. I was born and raised in Mexico, and having a 4g network in my cellphone for a suitable price and high speed broadband for free in certain places is not something I'm used to, but for the meanwhile I'm taking advantage of these opportunities. The point of departure is: why am I not used to this technological infrastructure created around internet? The reason is simple: In Mexico internet access is a very controversial topic, due to the telecommunication group that has complete control of the internet there. In the following paragraphs a brief comparison of internet access between U.S and Mexico, and how this ease to internet access affects to create and develop computer literacy and fluency. According to Kate Williams for computer literacy it's understood to have the basic knowledge for use basic computer applications, and the other term used is fluency, this term involves computer literacy, certain skills and adaptability to use properly computer technology. (Williams) Once the situation of the internet and computer literacy are clear, it is necessary to understand the important of these elements in the present and near future.

As mentioned before internet access is a controversial topic in Mexico; the reasons are the way it is distributed, who provides it, how much is costs and why is it in this way.

Back in 1990 an economic recession was taking place, this due to problems with the currency all over 1980's and bad economic policies made by the former presidents and TELMEX, a company which provides telephone service to the whole country, was a government property, and during this recession Mexican government being unable to sustain it, sold TELMEX to the highest bidder: a Mexican business man named Carlos Slim Helú. Twenty two years later Slim is the number one billionaire in the Forbes list, according to the list published in March 2012, and in this list he is over Bill Gates and Warren Buffet. (Forbes) After Slim bought TELMEX he made private investment to modernize telephone service in Mexico and during the 90's all the profit made by TELMEX was going to Slims companies. An article written in Time may give an idea of Slims yearly profit, this article is 5 years old, which means this number has grown. "*Carlos Slim isn't just Mexico's richest man — he possesses an astronomical 8% of the country's GDP*." (Padgett) With these profits Slim bought around ten different private companies in Mexico or either became a high investor in other powerful brands (Zepeda Patterson). The breaking point comes when the internet became relevant and it had to be provided by telephone companies. TELMEX being the only telephone company in the country, back in 2002, was the only option to Mexicans if internet access was wanted in house or office. Soon Slim had the control of both internet access and telephone service, in top of that Slim became full owner of TELCEL the main company that provides cellphone service in Mexico. A brief comparison of Slims companies would be if he owned Charter, Comcast, AT&T, Verizon and T-Mobile all together.

After this brief lesson of Mexico modern history it is easier to understand the limitations of technological access that exist in this country: The control that TELMEX

monopoly has in telecommunications makes difficult to have internet access. Also it must be understood that half of the population lives in poverty (Padgett) and the main concern in Mexico is bringing public school to every kid in the country, not improve internet access; with the purpose of getting rid of illiteracy, because by 1990 people who were not able to read or write was about 14% but by 2010 decreased to 9%, according to 2010 national census. (Consulta Mitofsky) It is worth to mention that in Mexico the terms computer literacy and computer fluency are not well known, because people with internet access in México is about 33% of the population. (Consulta Mitofsky) This is a low number if compared to the number of homes in the U.S (numbers from 2009): "home broadband penetration remained in a narrow range between 54% and 57%." (Horrigan) And this only considering homes; considering work and school, the number raised up 69% in 2010 (Pew Internet) of the population with internet access. This high percentage of people with internet access demands a whole infrastructure built around it, in order to support it and to make it work. One point that is very important is the competence, because users not only look for internet access as it happens in Mexico, users in the U.S look for high speed internet for a suitable prince and they have several options to choose from. Other important point in this infrastructure is the education level of people using the internet, because educational institutions are now also focused in providing this kind of knowledge, and even the knowledge acquired highly depends on the social context of the student (race, economical level), the knowledge is there. Considering that in the United States people are exposed to this technological access and to computer literacy since very young, they are making this computer literacy part of their lives, from an early age kids are exposed to all sort of technological devices and this helps to develop skills that will help them to develop fluency.

With technology evolving every day, constantly changing for the users who are able to keep up with it offers vast of applications for different purposes such as education, work or entertainment, but, what happens in countries that can't keep up to this process of evolution? As seen, the difference of technological growth between US and Mexico is abysmal, and with the globalization, the world is becoming what is denominated global village (McLuhan y Fiore) which means media makes everything being closer and even this term was first published in the 60s', now technology is making possible be in constant touch with remote places. But there are some countries being left out of this global village for their limitations in matters of technological access, Mexico being one of them, but eventually the need of becoming part of this global village will impulse them to improve their technological access, and it is going to be interesting how things turn out when this moment comes.

Offering a solution to the problem of the difference between technological access in Mexico and US is a matter of economics, politics and education. The comparison offered before shows that the needs of these two parts are completely different. For Mexico the need of competition is needed and antimonopoly law is required, so new options can be offered. Slowly this is happening but it will take a few years to establish a true competition. In the US the need to keep expanding internet access is a main concern. Falling behind in matters of computer literacy and technological access is being left out in the new education that world demands, and this affects the future development of the society, not only in matters of technology, but also in the way of life.

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