Evidence in Action
A K20 Center Research Brief

The Role of After-School Digital Media Clubs in Closing Participation Gaps and Expanding Social Networks

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Introduction

This intervention brief explores the role of after-school digital media clubs in closing participation gaps and expanding social networks among high school students. The research by Jacqueline Ryan Vickery (2014) highlights the growing participation gap in digital media engagement, despite widespread access to technology. The literature review emphasizes the importance of informal learning environments in fostering digital literacies and social capital, particularly for marginalized youth. The study underscores the potential of after-school clubs to bridge the gap between students' in-school and out-of-school learning experiences, thereby promoting more equitable opportunities for participation and engagement.

Methodology

Research Design:
The study employed an ethnographic research design, conducted over the course of an academic year. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of students' experiences and interactions within two after-school digital media clubs at a large, ethnically diverse, low-income public high school in Texas.

Sample:
The sample consisted of 18 high school students ages 14 to 19, including a diverse mix of ethnic backgrounds and genders. The participants were selected based on their involvement in the digital media clubs and their willingness to participate in the study.

Data Analysis:
Data were collected through qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations, and textual analysis of students' digital communications. The research team employed a grounded theory approach to analyze the data, identifying emergent themes and trends related to digital media engagement and social network development.

Results

The study found that after-school digital media clubs provided students with reliable access to up-to-date technology and software, which was often unavailable at home. This access enabled students to engage in interest-driven learning and develop digital literacies through hands-on experimentation and peer collaboration. The clubs also facilitated the expansion of students' offline social networks by connecting them with local community members and professionals. However, restrictive school policies on social media and video sharing sites limited students' opportunities to develop network literacies and share their work online.

Implications:

- Enhanced Digital Literacy: Students developed valuable digital skills and literacies that could be leveraged for future educational and career opportunities.
- Social Capital: Participation in the clubs expanded students' social networks, providing them with access to resources and opportunities beyond their immediate environment.
- Policy Considerations: The study highlights the need for schools to reconsider restrictive policies that hinder students' ability to fully engage in digital media practices.

Application into Practice

To replicate this intervention in a school context, the following steps are recommended:

1. Establish After-School Digital Media Clubs: Create clubs that provide students with access to computers, high-speed internet, and digital media software.
2. Foster Interest-Driven Learning: Encourage students to pursue their interests in digital media through hands-on projects and peer collaboration.
3. Connect with the Community: Partner with local organizations and professionals to provide students with real-world opportunities and mentorship.
4. Review School Policies: Reevaluate restrictive policies on social media and video sharing to enable students to develop network literacies and share their work online.
5. Provide Support and Resources: Ensure that students have access to the necessary resources and support to fully engage in digital media practices

Work Cited

Vickery, J. R. (2014). The role of after-school digital media clubs in closing participation gaps and expanding social networks. Equity & Excellence in Education, 47(1), 78-95. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2013.866870