4-D: Digital, Dynamic, Diverse, Democratic - Conference on New Media and Multicultural America

July 2-4, 2007.

Antonio Lopez on Bridging the Digital Divide

File Antonio_Lopez_Clips.wmv

I worked many years as a journalist, reporter, material shooter and (inaudible) newspaper and arts reporter, I worked for magazines, writing about (inaudible) issues, but there was a certain point where I hit ceiling, or I should say, go to war with the press. And I felt like I was not able to explore my ideas the way I wanted to, and also I became very sick. My immune system collapsed about seven years ago, and I had to stop working, and I had to rethink about life. And I went on a pilgrimage, and I walked around Spain, and during that time I had one of those (inaudible) which is, okay, it's time to get back to your roots and start working with kids.

It's not a technological issue. All I really work with is access, and if there isn't access, it's gone I don't. The Digital Divide for me is between knowledge and wisdom. And what I was saying it was a lack of wisdom on the part of people who wanted to spend their money on reservation for native programs. And in a sense, when I saw how (inaudible) with computers, I just wanted to relocate the old parent-on education system bringing in computers, and now they can do Powerpoint and now they can do process and now they can share some files, but in terms of Internet: not really happening. It's still a big problem with these native schools, where in these huge (inaudible) students cannot access MySpace.

At the Santa Fe Indian School, they had this really amazing program called 'The Journey Inside'. It was, I think, unique for Santa Fe. The way the program worked was: the eight grade science class at the beginning of the fall semester had to build a computer from scratch during the whole year, and then they had to install software, and they had to set up some programs, when I say scratch, obviously they're not building circuit ports, but they're assembling the computer, and if they keep their grades up, they got to take their computer home.

One of the things really lacking in terms of Digital Divide is, they don't have proper training. If I find this beautiful equipment, bring it to schools, but no one knows how to use video recorder, none of them knows how to make movie. Making a movie takes training. So these are kinds of things that need to be settled down, too, when we think about Digital Divide it's not just crack a computer together, let's also think about (inaudible)

This is a lesson in multicultural media practices. Please respect the communities that you're working. Listen. We have a Tennessee teacher just walking into San Reno: 'And now, you know, we're gonna show you what to do', and then we don't respect their rights, we don't respect their culture. And we can talk a little bit about how it relates to tobacco, the media literacy education.

This is one thing I wanted to talk to you about, because it's very interesting. The Santa Fe Indian School had this program called a 'community-based education model', where they had a program that – well, one of the problems that happens when kids in poor communities and in Third World communities (inaudible) the level of skill. They often get hired off by corporations and never come back to their communities. So, what we decided to do was create this program that was science and math based, and also based on Native American law. And they would research environmental issues like water or forests, ecology, and they would do projects in teams for a whole year, using GPS satellite technologies to go back to their communities, they come back and finish their maps to do that thing on their computers, and then before the (inaudible) year started, the faculty and the program directors would actually go to the communities and say: 'Okay, for one year you have those students, what do you want them to do?' And the community actually decides what project they're going to work on. And so those kids were going to sometimes, for example, testing water, or making a map of one of all the different parts of the reservation, and they were doing these maps and presentations though the whole year. And it's really amazing.