

# Uncovering Privilege in Online Education: Applying McIntosh's Lens



**By Julia Hengstler, 2016**  
Professor & Educational Technologist  
Faculty of Education  
Vancouver Island University  
Nanaimo, BC, Canada



Image Credit: Anne Worner, "Tethered", July 24, 2014. Creative Commons: BY, SA. <https://flic.kr/p/owRoub>

This work licensed by Julia Hengstler, 2016, under [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

## ABSTRACT:

Drawing from literature in sociology and education, Hengstler outlines the concept of privilege described by Peggy McIntosh (1988;2012) and applies it to the context of online education. Hengstler identifies 5 key assumptions of privilege in online education and suggests ways they might be addressed.

# Uncovering Privilege in Online Education: Applying McIntosh's Lens

By Julia Hengstler, Faculty of Education, Vancouver Island University, 2016

## Contents

Terminology .....	3
Privilege .....	3
Online Education .....	4
5 Key Assumptions of Privilege in Online Education.....	4
Assumption 1: Everyone Has Internet Access.....	4
Assumption 2: Public Schools Level the Playing Field for Online Education. ....	7
Assumption 3: Online Courses (Like MOOCs) Democratize Education, Especially in Post-Secondary Education. ....	9
Assumption 4: Online Education is Accessible for Everyone.....	10
Assumption 5: You're Free from Discrimination in Online Education.....	10
What Can Be Done .....	12
Resources .....	14

## Terminology

### Privilege

The term “white privilege” was described by the American feminist and women’s studies scholar, Peggy McIntosh in “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”.<sup>1</sup> McIntosh identified approximately 50 daily effects of white privilege in her personal life. She described ‘privilege’ as “unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious”<sup>2</sup> and where “many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own”.<sup>3</sup> She says it is “hard to disentangle aspects of unearned advantage that rest more on social class, economic class, race, religion, sex, and ethnic identity than on other factors” and refers to the amalgam as “interlocking oppressions”.<sup>4</sup> McIntosh identified the dangers inherent in privilege: “The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these subjects taboo”.<sup>5</sup>

McIntosh groups privilege into two main categories that are further divided into two ways they can manifest: There is positive privilege—an advantage due to all members of a just society and “which we can work to spread” and “Negative types of advantage, which unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies”.<sup>6</sup> Privilege, positive or negative, manifests itself as either active (that which we can see) or embedded (which members of the dominant groups are taught to disregard).<sup>7</sup> Most disturbing are the implications: that such privileges and disadvantages can accumulate, link, and impact various aspects of an individual’s life.<sup>8</sup> The concept of privilege and its implications would extend to online education.

According to Pratto and Stewart<sup>9</sup>,

Members of powerful groups do not realize that they are privileged because they don't have the social-comparison information to recognize the discrimination they don't experience, the poverty they don't experience, the prejudice they don't experience, but which members of subordinate groups do.

Privilege resides in hidden assumptions. So in applying the lens of privilege to online education,

---

<sup>1</sup>Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A person Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women’s Studies,” (Wellesley: Center for Research on Women, 1988). <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED335262.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., ¶13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Elusive and Fugitive, ¶1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, Earned Strength, Unearned Power, ¶4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Earned Strength, Unearned Power, ¶7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Earned Strength, Unearned Power, ¶2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Earned Strength, Unearned Power, ¶5.

<sup>8</sup> Brett G. Stoudt, Madeleine Fox, and Michelle Fine, “Contesting Privilege with Critical Participatory Action Research,” *Journal of Social Issues*, 2012, 68, no. 1: 178-193.

<sup>9</sup> Felicia Pratto and Andrew Stewart, “Group dominance and the half-blindness of privilege,” *Journal of Social Issues*, 2012, 68, no. 1: 31.

we need to ask 3 questions:

- Are there assumptions of privilege in online education?
- If so, to what extent do they affect students' ability to access online education?
- If so, what can we do to address them?

## Online Education

For the purposes of this paper, "online education" refers to courses delivered in whole or part by an institution through means of the internet and hardware devices (e.g. computers or mobile devices). The North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL) claims that "Online education is one of the fastest growing phenomena in K-12 education in the United States today".<sup>10</sup>

## 5 Key Assumptions of Privilege in Online Education

When I examined online education through a lens of privilege, 5 key assumptions of privilege emerged:

1. Everyone has internet access.
2. Public schools level the playing field for online education.
3. Online courses (like MOOCs-massive open online courses) democratize education, especially in post-secondary education.
4. Online courses are accessible for everyone.
5. You're free from discrimination in online courses.

### Assumption 1: Everyone Has Internet Access.

It seems rather obvious to state that to take an online course you need access to the internet with adequate bandwidth to support the course materials, and adequate hardware (PC, laptop, netbook, etc.). I class these as infrastructure considerations. Looking at online education through a lens of privilege, assumptions regarding access to infrastructure are the first assumptions of privilege we encounter—and they are foundational.

Much of the discussion around Internet access manifests in the term "digital divide". The digital divide is commonly understood to be a gap between groups (social, geographical, economic) in their access to the Internet. Early discussions of the digital divide were focused on gaps in simple connectivity and availability of hardware. From an educational perspective, the focus was on in-school access with the building of infrastructures like British Columbia's Provincial Learning Network (PLNet) and obtaining the hardware for schools to connect to it. Over time, that infrastructure-type definition has begun to expand—acknowledging varying levels of connectivity (e.g. bandwidth, wifi) and including the skills and dispositions needed to effectively use information technologies for daily life, education, and employment. This shift is evident in the emergence of terms like "digital literacy" and "digital citizenship" in K-12 curriculum discussions in Canada and the US. The digital divide has largely dropped out of

---

<sup>10</sup> Raymond M. Rose, and Robert L. Blomeyer, "Research Committee Issues Brief: Access and Equity in Online Classes and Virtual Schools," (North American Council for Online Learning, 2007), 2.

common discourse by schools and educators who assume ubiquitous access to Internet and computers via schools. As you speak with educators in rural or low socio-economic status (SES) schools in British Columbia, you become aware that Internet connectivity is neither ubiquitous nor reliable. Also “the homework gap” is emerging as a term in US education to describe the lack of access students in low SES families experience *outside* of school hours.

North American governmental data around "access" has an infrastructure bias with a primary focus on connectivity and computer ownership.<sup>11</sup> Location of access has been given some attention; yet today, mobile access is also increasingly assumed. Undiscussed in the literature is the way US and Canadian governments communicate connectivity percentages so that they tend to inflate numbers in common understanding (e.g. relating broadband connectivity as a percent of *connected* population versus percent of *total population*). Even so, this body of data reveals persistent inequities among different income, education and racial groups—especially in relation to access from home. For example, researchers found in the US that while Native American broadband access was 29.8%, Asian American access was at 69.1% (as percentage of total population, not connected populations).<sup>12</sup> Though the US gap in student-to-computer ratios in schools has narrowed over time with government funding, home access (to internet and hardware) seems to be more significantly linked with effective student use of the Internet and computers<sup>13</sup>. This has clear implications for student readiness for online education.

In British Columbia, Canada, The Pathways to Technology Project is working to connect 203 First Nations groups to broadband Internet. Pathways to Technology provides a no-cost infrastructure, but there are monthly costs for connectivity. (While decreasing costs and increasing accessibility, we must assume some people in the served communities will not be able to afford monthly costs.) By early 2014, approximately 175 (86%) of BC’s 203 First Nations had access to broadband.<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that provision of broadband access is not always synonymous with providing the 'last mile' into homes—and it is this last mile into homes that makes the difference in student and family access to and use of the internet.

---

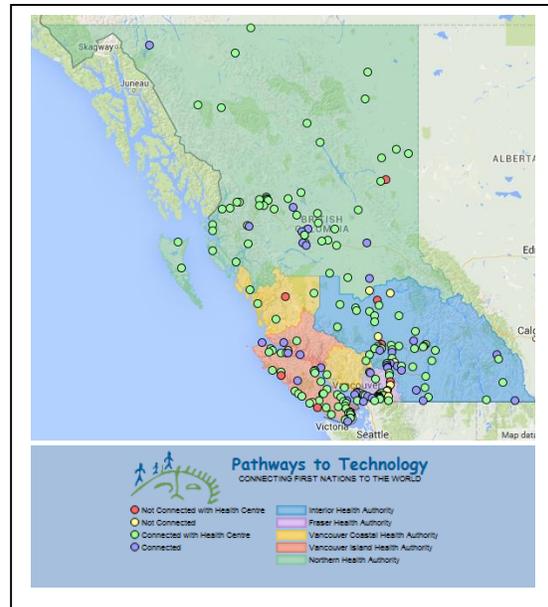
<sup>11</sup> Mark Warschauer, and Tina Matuchniak, “Chapter 6: New technology and Digital Worlds: Analyzing Evidence of Equity in Access, Use, and Outcomes,” *Review of Research in Education*, 2010, 34: 179-224

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Pathways to Technology, *Connectivity*, Summer 2014.

If you look at the snapshot from the Pathways to Technology's Interactive Map<sup>15</sup> (at right), you will see that connectivity is classified as *connected*, *connected to health centre*, *not connected*, and *not connected to health centre*. The majority of communities seem to be "connected to health centre". Though recent Canadian data is scarce, from 2005-2009 the overwhelming majority (70-80%) of Canadians accessing the Internet accessed it from home.<sup>16</sup> In BC, that range over the same time period was from 70% to 85%.<sup>17</sup> When looking at Canadians' location of access, school and public libraries lagged significantly behind home, work, and "other locations".<sup>18</sup> While public libraries can be said to provide points of community access to the Internet and computers by which students could pursue an online course, like health centres, there would be significant constraints: need for transportation to/from the library, access only during operating days/hours, availability of hardware, ratio of hardware to users and user time limits. Even with those constraints, J. Ireland wrote of her high school experience that her "local library, with its *one computer for patrons* [my emphasis], was a very important part" of her life because during high school her family was very poor, no one owned a computer in her home, and her school did not have a computer lab until her senior year.<sup>19</sup>



**Note:** While social pressures for technological consumption (e.g. buying hardware and getting connected) are implied in assumptions of ubiquitous access across socio-economic classes, they are outside the scope of this paper.

<sup>15</sup> Pathways to Technology, "Interactive Map" (n.d.; April 11, 2016 screen capture).

<sup>16</sup> Statistics Canada, "Table 358-122: Canadian Internet Use Survey, Internet Use, by Location of Access, Canada, Provinces and Selected Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs), Every 2 Years (Percent)," *CANSIM* (database) (2010).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Justina Ireland, "On Missing the Mark and Technological Privilege," *Justina Ireland Young Adult Author and Purveyor of Awesomeness: This is Not a Blog. Okay, Maybe It Is. Dammit*, April 22, 2015, <http://justinaireland.com/dammit-this-is-a-blog/2015/4/22/on-missing-the-mark-and-technological-privilege>.

## Assumption 2: Public Schools Level the Playing Field for Online Education.

As McIntosh pointed out, a tight focus on infrastructure can keep our understanding of the situation incomplete.<sup>20</sup> Given historical data trends in the US and Canada, home internet access is not ubiquitous, therefore there we cannot assume that homes, in and of themselves, can provide opportunities for all students to take an online course. Rose and Blomeyer wrote, "Public schools that operate educational programs available only through students' own computers are not truly accessible".<sup>21</sup> Schools then bear significant weight as an access point for students. Warschauer and Matuchniak report US school access and hardware gaps have largely closed under federal funding programs.<sup>22</sup>

Does providing connectivity and hardware access in schools give everyone an equitable opportunity for online education? Apparently not. Researchers found that for Latinos in the US, language was a significant factor regarding limited internet access—even when controlling for other factors like education, income, immigrancy, etc.<sup>23</sup> Warschauer and Matuchniak also state that social factors are an issue in "shaping access": people are far more likely to use computers to go online if they know other computer users.<sup>24</sup> In fact, one study found that not knowing a computer user was more significant than ethnicity, income, and education level in affecting lack of computer use.<sup>25</sup> Computer mastery depends heavily on social support, both from peers and family members and "many low-income or immigrant youth...[might] have few friends or relatives who are sophisticated users of digital media".<sup>26</sup>

Warschauer and Matuchniak identified a list of other considerations beyond connectivity and hardware availability that affect students' use of computers and the Internet in schools:<sup>27</sup>

- low SES (socio-economic status) schools tend to have less stable staffing—teachers, administrators, IT—which hinders technology planning;
- high SES schools tend to fund more professional development, full-time technical support, and established user networks encouraging "more widespread teacher use of new technologies"<sup>28</sup>;
- low SES teachers tended not to trust that the technology would work or assumed they wouldn't have adequate IT support, so they didn't plan to use computers in lessons;

---

<sup>20</sup> McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies."

<sup>21</sup> Rose and Blomeyer, "Research Committee Issues Brief: Access and Equity in Online Classes and Virtual Schools," 3.

<sup>22</sup> Warschauer and Matuchniak, "Chapter 6: New technology and Digital Worlds: Analyzing Evidence of Equity in Access, Use, and Outcomes."

<sup>23</sup> Robert Fairlie, "Explaining Differences in Access to Home Computers and the Internet: A Comparison of Latino Groups to Other Ethnic and Racial Groups," *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 7, no. 3 (2007): 265-291.

<sup>24</sup> Warschauer and Matuchniak, "Chapter 6: New technology and Digital Worlds: Analyzing Evidence of Equity in Access, Use, and Outcomes," 187.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 189.

- low SES teachers generally needed to allot more time to deal with complex instructional environments (supporting ELL, at-risk students, limited computer experience, as well as providing for high-stakes standardized test-preparation);
- in low SES schools, teachers usually used computers more for drill and practice;
- in high SES schools computers were generally used for higher order thinking skills-such as simulations and for creative production;
- there were differences in the characteristics and quality of student use of digital media (level and sophistication of engagement) between low and high SES students;
- there were differences in student connections with others from “diverse ages and backgrounds around the world, rather than principally with their own local peers” between low and high SES schools<sup>29</sup>;
- there were differences in skills and knowledge between students who had computers at home vs. those who didn't: “Whites were more likely than Blacks or Hispanics to use word processing, e- mail, multimedia, and spreadsheets or databases.”<sup>30</sup>;
- computers were more widely used by students from homes with higher income levels and higher education.

School district size also has clear implications for online education. *Keeping Pace with K-12 Digital Learning: An Annual Review of Policy and Practice* lists a host of challenges faced by small districts (up to 2,500 students)<sup>31</sup>:

- typically less significant users of digital content and tools than larger districts;
- often in remote areas and may have little or no digital education due to the lack of availability of digital education delivery capability and/or Internet bandwidth constraints;
- where there is good Internet access, online courses are often an important method by which the district augments the small number of courses offered by its own schools;
- unlikely to develop their own content or have their own teachers instructing online courses;
- tend to use online courses and teaching that is offered by private providers or state virtual schools;
- because they have few full-time district level administrators, it is rare for them to have someone dedicated to managing digital education across the district, and the provision of devices and infrastructure (if being done) often falls to some with less experience and expertise than a person in a similar position in a larger district.

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>31</sup> Butch Gemin, Larry Pape, Lauren Vashaw, and John Watson, “Keeping Pace with K-12 Digital Learning: An Annual Review of Policy and Practice, Twelfth Edition,” (Durango, CO: Evergreen Education Group, 2015).

This type of data challenges assumptions of equitable access to online education for students via schools. Yet as of 2014, high school students in 7 out of the poorest 11 US states (economic rankings c. 2013) were required to take at least one online course to graduate. Across the US, 14 out of 50 (28%) states now have similar graduation requirements.<sup>32</sup>

### Assumption 3: Online Courses (Like MOOCs) Democratize Education, Especially in Post-Secondary Education.

In the last few years, increasing numbers of colleges and universities have been experimenting with MOOCs (massive online open courses). This echoes the situation mentioned in Assumption 2 where small K-12 districts consume online courses and content created by private vendors or state virtual schools rather than produce the content and courses themselves. This has been identified as a type of academic and cultural imperialism in the case of smaller post-secondary institutions with regard to MOOCs—even if the courses are ‘for free’.

Democratization of education, especially at the post-secondary level, has been a significant element of MOOC press. A recent post by Charla Bear questioned that rhetoric.<sup>33</sup> In the post, the president of the California Faculty Association warned, “[We] continue to be concerned that folks might imagine they are getting an Ivy League education, when in fact, they are watching other people get an Ivy League education.”<sup>34</sup> In fact, one professor from San Jose State University reported his troubling experience:

*We have a very diverse student body [at San Jose State University] and we're very proud of that. But they would watch Michael Sandel teach Harvard students and he would interpolate into his talks and dialogues how privileged they were. And they were for the most part, certainly to a greater extent, white than our student body. So we've got...this strange sort of upstairs/downstairs situation where the lower-class people could look at how the upper-class people were being educated. We thought that was just flat out insulting, in a way to the students and certainly not pedagogically reinforcing.*<sup>35</sup>

The rise of online courses like MOOCs and the outsourcing of online content and courses by smaller institutions seems to parallel the wider economic movement in North American manufacturing to post-industrial thin-production structures intensely focused on lowering production costs at the expense of other considerations. The president of the California Faculty Association stated “we saw thousands of pronouncements about how after MOOCs

---

<sup>32</sup> Gemin, et al., “Keeping Pace with K-12 Digital Learning: An Annual Review of Policy and Practice, Twelfth Edition.”

<sup>33</sup> Charla Bear, “Is Online Education Widening the Digital Divide?” *Mind/Shift: How we will learn*, August 16, 2013, <http://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2013/08/16/is-online-education-widening-the-digital-divide/>.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶14.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶17.

get rolling, there will be 10 universities in the country and there will only be five professors giving lectures".<sup>36</sup> This comment also leads one to wonder to what extent a post-industrialist thin production motivation regarding economies of scale might also underpin the growing US high school graduation requirements for online courses.

#### Assumption 4: Online Education is Accessible for Everyone.

In education the term "accessibility" is usually reserved for educational materials that can be readily used by students with special needs—e.g. visually impaired, mobility challenged, etc. In actuality, "Students with physical handicaps may have problems accessing online content if it's not intentionally designed with them in mind".<sup>37</sup> More specifically, multimedia objects in courses require specific accommodations for accessibility, specially designed devices for motor control challenges, and require specific screen navigation layouts so designing for accessibility from the *outset* is the easiest path.<sup>38</sup> In fact, in the US, failure to make courses accessible can have legal ramifications:

*In those situations where online courses are the only way particular content is delivered, it is very important to ensure these course are as accessible as possible. Students with disabilities should not be denied access to specific educational opportunities because the school is unwilling to make reasonable accommodations. Otherwise, the program could be found to be unlawfully discriminating.*<sup>39</sup>

Though Canadian educational law does not have the same case history as the US with regard to challenges regarding the accessibility of online education materials, such challenges are provided for under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The time for Canadian accessibility challenges in online courses are not far off. Many Canadian K-12 and post-secondary institutions are moving to more accessible online course designs as a result of numerous high profile legal cases in the US.

#### Assumption 5: You're Free from Discrimination in Online Education.

While Rose and Blomeyer cite a scarcity of research regarding the influence or effects of characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or religion for K-12 students in online courses, the report does highlight recent findings regarding effects with adults.<sup>40</sup> For example, in a study of librarians providing online services, results indicated "marked inequalities in tone and speed of response, as well as quality of service" based on the ethnicity of the names of the clients.<sup>41</sup> In the context of these findings, as well as the

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., ¶11.

<sup>37</sup> Rose and Blomeyer, "Research Committee Issues Brief: Access and Equity in Online Classes and Virtual Schools," 3.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 4.

body of cyberbullying research, and the availability of individual data (e.g. images, text, video) via social networks, Rose and Blomeyer point out "It's dangerous to assume that online interactions are free of discrimination".<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, when revisiting and extending the implications of the language barrier issue raised earlier in Assumption 2 and the upstairs/downstairs concerns raised in Assumption 3, consideration must also be given to the impact of cultural "cyber imperialism"<sup>43</sup>—the subjection of marginalized cultures to the dominant one in online or digital contexts. The effects of cyber imperialism—both direct and indirect—can extend to online education. This has particular repercussions for students from affected communities. Frits Pannekoek challenges us to consider the ways in which digital environments are substantially skewed toward dominant culture and how this skewing can further change and marginalize Aboriginal cultures emerging from years of systematic suppression.<sup>44</sup> Research findings about digital information posted by Native Americans seems to support this position: content targeted to general audiences portrayed more stereotypical content while content used and directed to a particular Native American community demonstrated "a more specific tribal identity".<sup>45</sup> Other research found some First Nations peoples in Canada expressed fears that technology may threaten Aboriginal languages and cultures already impacted by centuries of colonialism and residential schools.<sup>46</sup> When considering issues of discrimination in online education, we must also be sensitive to issues of cultural imperialism.

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Frits Pannekoek, "Chapter 6: Cyber Imperialism and the Marginalization of Canada's Indigenous Peoples", in *The Handing Down of Culture, Smaller Societies and Globalization*, ed. Jean-Paul Baillargeo, (Toronto: grubstreet editions, 2001).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Rhonda Fair, "Becoming the White Man's Indian: An Examination of Native American Tribal Web Sites", *Plains Anthropologist*, 45, no. 172 (2000): 203-213.

<sup>46</sup> E. Dianne Looker and Ted D. Naylor, *Digital Diversity: Youth, Equity and Information Technology*, (Waterloo, ON: 2010)

## What Can Be Done

Public schools "are obligated to ensure that all students can take advantage of and benefit from the particular services and programs they provide" including online education.<sup>47</sup> The following are some specific suggestions provided by Rose and Blomeyer that can be used to fight privilege and support equity in online education:<sup>48</sup>

1. Schools and districts need to track demographic data (including race, ethnicity, special needs, first language, and poverty) regarding the general student body as well as specific students who take online courses.
  - a. They need to be able to disaggregate the student data in identifiable groups—including race, ethnicity, special needs, first language, poverty, etc.—to monitor online enrollment and ensure it reflects "the demographic makeup of the total population of students served" and to ensure no groups of students are intentionally or unintentionally denied access to an online course.<sup>49</sup>
  - b. They need to monitor retention, participation, and grades to ensure that no groups are intentionally or unintentionally discriminated against.
2. The online school or program should advertise the school or district's non-discrimination policies and follow them.
3. "Any virtual education program that operates in a public school has a responsibility to make the program available to students who don't have their own computers, or who don't have the bandwidth to make participation in the online programs reasonable."<sup>50</sup>
4. Online courses should be designed with special needs in mind, using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and ensuring that existing courses are as accessible as possible.
5. If pre-screening programs exist to determine "readiness" for online education and to identify at-risk students for the purpose of providing support, schools/districts must be aware that such programs have "the potential to also be used as a screening instrument to intentionally exclude students with a 'low probability' of online success".<sup>51</sup>
  - a. Such programs must be justified and valid, and be closely monitored for any indications that an identifiable group of students (e.g. race, ethnicity, etc.) is being screened out or dissuaded from participation.

Educators should also be particularly vigilant with regard to the effects of cyber-imperialism in the content they select for use in online education, the activities they ask students to do online, the types of content they ask students to share, the ways of sharing and the people with whom students are sharing. Educators should seek out digital materials and exemplars that are

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 6.

culturally relevant and respectfully authentic to their students' communities. Honouring authentic ways of knowing and being in those communities is critical for online education in a democratic pluralistic society.

As educators move forward with online education, we would do well to keep in mind the specific responsibilities Peggy McIntosh charged us with in 2012 :

*[Educators]... must develop cultural competence, knowing themselves and their locations and positionalities in history and in society. They must understand where their students "come from," and where they themselves "come from." They must look at their own assumptions about teaching and about learning. They must locate themselves within the history of education. They must understand theories of how students develop and how they differ. And I would say they must understand the multiplicity of their own personal and institutional locations both above and below the hypothetical line of social justice.<sup>52</sup>*

Just such critical reflection is required in the field of online education. This paper has attempted to uncover a number of assumptions of technological privilege inherent in online education and suggest ways that some of that privilege could be addressed in order to make access to online education more equitable for all students. According to McIntosh, it is not enough to be aware of such privilege and its detrimental effects, but we must identify actions that can be taken to better the situation, and take them.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Peggy McIntosh, "Reflections and future directions for privilege studies," *Journal of Social Issues*, 2012, 68, no. 1: 194-206.

<sup>53</sup> McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A person Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies" and "Reflections and future directions for privilege studies".

## Resources

- Bear, Charla. "Is Online Education Widening the Digital Divide?" *Mind/Shift: How we will learn*, 2013. <http://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2013/08/16/is-online-education-widening-the-digital-divide/> .
- Fair, Rhonda. "Becoming the White Man's Indian: An examination of Native American tribal web sites," *Plains Anthropologist*, 45, no. 172 (2000): 203-213. <http://www.istor.org/stable/25669656>
- Fairlie, Robert. "Explaining Differences in Access to Home Computers and the Internet: A Comparison of Latino Groups to Other Ethnic and Racial Groups," *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 7, no. 3 (2007): 265-291.
- Gemin, Butch, Larry Pape, Lauren Vashaw, and John Watson. "Keeping Pace with K-12 Digital Learning: An Annual Review of Policy and Practice (2015 Twelfth Edition)." Durango, CO: Evergreen Education Group, 2015. [http://www.kpk12.com/wp-content/uploads/Evergreen\\_KeepingPace\\_2015.pdf](http://www.kpk12.com/wp-content/uploads/Evergreen_KeepingPace_2015.pdf)
- Ireland, Justina. "On Missing the Mark and Technological Privilege," *Justina Ireland Young Adult Author and Purveyor of Awesomeness: This is Not a Blog. Okay, Maybe It Is. Dammit*, 2015. <http://justinaireland.com/dammit-this-is-a-blog/2015/4/22/on-missing-the-mark-and-technological-privilege> .
- Looker, E. Dianne and Ted Naylor. *Digital Diversity: Youth, Equity and Information Technology*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier Press, 2010.
- McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies" Wellesley, MA: Wellesley Center for Research on Women, 1988. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED335262.pdf>
- McIntosh, Peggy. "Reflections and Future Directions for Privilege Studies," *Journal of Social Issues*, 68, no. 1 (2012): 194-206.
- Pannekoek, Frits. "Chapter 6: Cyber Imperialism and the Marginalization of Canada's Indigenous Peoples". In *The Handing Down of Culture, Smaller Societies and Globalization*, edited by Jean-Paul Baillargeo, 64-80. Toronto, ON: grubstreet editions, 2001.
- Pathways to Technology. "Connectivity." Summer 2014. <http://www.pathwaystotechnology.ca/downloads/ptt-connectivity-summer-2014.pdf>
- Pathways to Technology. "Interactive Map." n.d. <http://www.pathwaystotechnology.ca/interactive-map>
- Pratto, Felicia and Andrew Stewart. "Group Dominance and the Half-Blindness of Privilege," *Journal of Social Issues*, 68, no. 1 (2012): 28-45.
- Rose, Raymond and Robert Blomeyer. "Research Committee Issues Brief: Access and Equity in Online Classes and Virtual Schools." North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL), 2007. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED509623.pdf>

- Statistics Canada. "Table 358-122: Canadian Internet Use Survey, Internet Use, by Location of Access, Canada, Provinces and Selected Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs), Every 2 Years (Percent)." *CANSIM* (database), 2010. <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26?lang=eng&id=3580122>
- Stoudt, Brett, Madeleine Fox, and Michelle Fine "Contesting Privilege with Critical Participatory Action Research," *Journal of Social Issues*, 68, no. 1 (2012): 178-193.
- Warschauer, Mark and Tina Matuchniak. "New Technology and Digital Worlds: Analyzing Evidence of Equity in Access, Use, and Outcomes," *Review of Research in Education*, 34, no. 179 (2010): 179-224.