The Internet in Indian Country

Barbara Monroe

Washington State University, Pullman, WA 99164–5020, USA

Abstract

Even though access is still unreliable and under-supported, tribal councils and reservation schools are embracing digital technology with relative enthusiasm. Three main patterns of technology use emerge: (1) technology for communications and information-sharing is widely used at the tribal government level; (2) multimedia and presentational technologies are favored in tribal schools or small public schools with Indian majorities; and (3) stand-alone computer drills are exploited in large public schools with non-Indian student majorities. Despite the different patterns of use in these different contexts, most support a common agenda: to support Native ways of knowing and interacting in the world.

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1. Introduction

Although reservations have been making use of the Internet for the past decade, access in Indian country was still rare until very recently. Getting the infrastructure in place was no small feat, given the remote and sometimes treacherous terrain of many reservations. The great lengths to which many tribes have gone to accomplish that feat speaks to a pro-technology attitude. Even though access is still unreliable and under-supported, tribal councils and reservation schools are embracing digital technology with enthusiasm. This enthusiasm is all the more remarkable when one considers Indian distrust of federal government initiatives as well as the commercial intrusion into indigenous language and culture that the Internet potentially presents.

To understand why as well as how any technology is used, we must situate that technology within its context of use (Porter, 1998). For the study at hand, that context is largely historical. Public policy discussions on the digital divide often emphasize economic revitalization as the primary goal of expanding Internet access to remote communities, especially those historically
dispossessed. But that economic agenda receives less attention by tribal governments in Indian country where top priority for the past 15 years has been tribal preservation, or tribalism, a movement at once political and cultural as well as economic. Although many of the 550 surviving tribes and village groups in what is now the United States (Craig, 1999) share similar core values, contact history, and challenges that derive from that history, American Indians do not represent a monolithic culture. Culturally, tribalism aims to preserve ethnic boundaries, reaffirming tribal identity among members and educating the public about differences between tribes; politically, it is the active policy of self-determination and legal reassertion of treaty rights, including all of the rights and responsibilities of sovereignty as discrete nations within a nation. However, tribalism has not gone unchallenged, especially in the Pacific Northwest where an anti-sovereignty movement aims to terminate tribal status altogether and along with it, reservations as sovereign nations.

Within this context, with tribal sovereignty at stake, the question for most North American Indian tribes is not whether or not to use technology. Rather, the question is how to adapt the technology to support a way of life increasingly under fire. The issue thus framed, technology is not so much a thing as it is “a parliament of things” (Feenberg, 1991, p. 14), a site of struggle for debating. We make it into a site of struggle for debating and deciding how to use a new technology, and in effect redesign it to sediment other values and to serve other agendas. In Indian country, three main patterns of use emerge:

- Technology for communications and information-sharing is widely used at the tribal government level
- Multimedia and presentational technologies are favored in tribal schools or small public schools with Indian majorities
- Stand-alone computer drills are exploited in large public schools with non-Indian student majorities

Despite the different patterns of use in these different contexts, most of these technologies actively support a common agenda: to use technology to support Native ways of knowing and interacting in the world.

2. Technology use on reservations

Email and webbed databases are among the most favored digital technologies on reservations. These strong preferences might seem obvious enough, given the remoteness and isolation of most reservations. However, practicality and convenience do not completely explain what I believe is a distinctly cultural propensity for staying connected and, at the same time, staying physically mobile. Email and web sites are primarily a means of maintaining connections with each other between—but not in place of—physical meetings. The pace alone at which these technologies have been adopted in Indian country suggests that this synthetic system is very much an extension, not a disruption, of historical interaction patterns (Zimmerman, Bruguier, & Zimmerman, 1997).

These interaction patterns persist only in part for economic reasons. Because reservations are economically depressed areas, leaving the reservation for education and employment and then
frequently returning is a fact of life for most North American Indians. About two-thirds live off reservation but still travel home frequently to maintain familial and tribal ties, largely by participating in cultural and religious events such as pow-wows, sweet-grass harvesting, and repatriation ceremonies. Many Indians spend their youth on the reservation with aging grandparents to learn the traditional ways (US Department of Commerce, 1995). Staying on the reservation for education seems to be a higher priority for many tribes than staying on the reservation for employment. For example, the Havasupai Indians put in wireless infrastructure—which meant toting satellite dishes eight miles by pack mule to the bottom of the Grand Canyon—to stay in touch with children who have to leave home for their education. The tribe’s long-term goal is that their children will be able to earn college degrees online and teach the next generation on the reservation (Sink, 2000).

Clearly, email can foster the social and cultural cohesion of a tribal group even when members must leave for school or jobs. The Web is used for much the same end for both inter- and intra-tribal communications. Most notably, web sites are used not so much for one-way information retrieval from mainstream culture as for information exchange within and among tribes, and not so much between individuals as among groups, or consortia. These consortia, variously configured, are most often inter-tribal, such as the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, physically based in Portland, Oregon, which virtually links four tribes of the Pacific Northwest (Casey, Ross, & Warren, 1999). In like manner, the Southwest Navajo Nation Virtual Alliance, comprised of the Navajo, Hopi, and Havasupai tribes, pooled their resources and partnered with Northern Arizona University and Starband, a private telecommunications company, to provide wireless infrastructure to 120 far flung meeting halls and community centers. Each tribe and reservation in the consortium, however, has individual priorities: For example, the Havasupai want current weather conditions to help support their tourism economy, and the Hopi want to tap into the FBI’s information center (Sink, 2000), most probably to reassert the right of tribal law enforcement on the reservation. Other Native groups are finding web-based database applications an important vehicle for information exchange, especially for tribal and indigenous genealogies. Establishing ancestry is important not only for legal reasons but also for cultural identity, the loss of which has taken a tremendous toll on Indian society in terms of social and personal problems. Thus, webbed information-sharing represents an electronic extension of the multivectored connections that tribes have always maintained historically.

However, the Web can also undercut the goals of tribalism. Although tribal web sites might educate the public about tribe-specific histories and cultural knowledge, the sheer numbers of Native sites make it difficult to ascertain which sites are authored or authorized by distinctive and authentic tribes. For example, the web site <IMDiversity.com> targets its “villages” to different audiences, including African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, Native American, plus two others, as if thrown in for good measure: Women’s Village and Minorities’ Global Village. Sites like IMDiversity promote a pan-Indian identity, which was a rhetorical move of the Red Power movement of the 60s and 70s aiming to foster political coalition across tribal and village groups pan-nationally, preparatory to grassroots activism (Lyons, 2001). But such a move does not foster public awareness of distinctions between tribes in this new century. Many online indexes are now lumping North American Indian groups with other indigenous and aboriginal groups worldwide, further diluting ethnic boundaries and regional histories (Zimmerman, Bruguier, & Zimmerman, 1997).
Flattening distinctions between tribes is just one of the problems of (mis)representation for North American Indians on the Web. An additional problem is ethnic fraud and racial "passing" similar to the case of an America Online chatroom in the early 1990s. This chatroom was presided over by an Indian poseur named Blue Snake, a self-proclaimed Shawnee who was really a White software consultant from Ohio. Blue Snake initiated visitors into the Evening Sky Clan of the Red Heart Tribe with bogus rituals (in verbal form), such as exhaling smoke six times: once each to the four directions, plus the Everywhere Spirit and the Grandmother Earth. After a concerted protest from mainly the Shawnee, America Online shut down Blue Snake and his virtual teepee, from which one could only hear, according to the chat room description, night sounds, a chuckling stream, an owl hunting its prey, and a lonely coyote (Martin, 1995).

Cultural misappropriation, many would argue, is precisely why tribes need to actively police the Web. Although Blue Snake’s rendition of Indian culture was a pastiche of Hollywood stereotypes, the Web can nonetheless provide means for broadcasting accurate information debunking long-held misbeliefs about traditional cultures and contact history. One example is that of Chief Seattle, whose “Unanswered Challenge” oration supposedly delivered in 1854 or 1855 has been reproduced in North American literature anthologies for years. That so-called unanswered challenge has now been answered by a National Archive scholar who presented a document probably written in 1887 by one Henry Smith, a White pro-environmentalist who disapproved of federal Indian policy and so wrote Chief Seattle’s oration for public consumption (Clark, 1985). Several web sites, including some produced by students, have widely disseminated the news of the oration’s inauthenticity.

Going beyond simply policing the Websites and taking a more active role in Indian representation, however, presents concerns difficult for most Native groups to negotiate. Tribal web sites authored by tribes themselves, paradoxically, would threaten the very heritage such sites would aim to protect. Web-casting cultural knowledge and history actually enables commerce to appropriate and reproduce traditional knowledge—everything from parka patterns to locations of mineral deposits (Teitelbaum, 1997). Further, public dissemination of tribal knowledge is a sacrilege in many cases where that knowledge is decontextualized from its cultural functions. Using passwords for databases and archive materials to control access has been one response to insuring appropriate use and to insuring appropriate use by Indians only, if need be, with access controlled by the elders or tribal council. Such a solution would be consistent with the pattern of using digital technology primarily for intra-tribal and inter-tribal information exchange and intergenerational cultural preservation.

The responsibility of transmitting cultural knowledge to the next generation has traditionally fallen to the elders, not the reservation schools—or at least not until the creation of a parallel tribal school system, an advent that roughly coincides with the rise of the tribalism movement. Indian education is still very much contested ground. To that issue we now turn.

3. Technology use in reservation schools

As we have seen, communications and information-sharing technologies have been adapted for culturally relevant uses in reservation life by tribal governments. Technology use follows very different patterns, however, in public and private reservation schools. The distinction is
important because these schools have, very different missions which in turn affect how technology is used for instruction. Tribal schools are most often jointly funded and governed by the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs, and tribal governments. Public schools, which fall under the aegis of state boards of educations, also serve reservation residents, many who are, in fact, non-Indian. The Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887 opened reservation lands to White settlers, a government policy that effectively reversed, Orwellian-like, the reserving of land exclusively for the tribes. Although some public schools on reservations have majority Indian student populations, many do not. Other cultural majorities may prevail—for example, Latinos/a or Euro-Americans—but students in any case are still socio-economically poor if not destitute.

Non-Indian administrators and faculty generally constitute the majority of the staff in reservation schools, both public and tribal. They are usually drawn from the local community itself, in part because the reservations are rural and isolated, so commuting to a relatively poorly paid job is not an attractive option for most teachers on the job market. Whether administrators and faculty themselves are Native or not, coming from the same community, they often share common Native values and perspectives. However, they can also hold prejudicial views toward students of color, whether the students are Indian or not. These multiple variables make it difficult to generalize about how technology is used in reservations schools. Still, certain patterns emerge relative to the respective missions of public schools and tribal schools on reservations: In public schools, computers are often used for individual work doing stand-alone drills on CD-ROM; in tribal schools, computers are frequently used for multimedia and presentational authoring and, to a lesser degree, for communicating with the “outside” world.

Many of the public schools on reservations in the state of Washington, for example, use drills programs such as Accelerated Reader or other supplemental basal curricula, especially in credit-recovery programs at middle schools and high schools. These credit-recovery programs target “at-risk” students—that is, students of color, most often Latino/as and American Indians. This kind of technology use with this student population aligns with the mission of public schools that has been in practice since the mid-nineteenth century. At that time, mass public schooling became institutionalized as a social and political response to immigration and to economic shifts that required retraining a workforce to meet the demands of a new economy. In short, public schooling aimed—and still does, to a large degree—to “Americanize” waves of immigrants by instilling Protestant morals and homogenizing cultural traditions to a Euro-American norm (Graff, 1979).

This success-through-assimilation model in its purest, most culturally genocidal, form was deployed from the 1880s through the 1920s as a system of Indian boarding schools, which aimed to “kill the Indian and save the man” (Hodgson, 2000; Marr, 2001). The assimilation agenda of public schools continues to serve the status quo, with the hidden curriculum tracking students for certain vocational futures (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993). In keeping with that agenda, technology activities implicitly sort students: electronic drills for working class students and students of color that only demand that students follow directions and take orders; communications projects for students, usually White and wealthy, that entail having choices and making decisions, skills necessary for a managerial class (Becker, Ravitz, & Wong, 1999; Warschauer, 1999).

Interestingly, tribal schools favor the technology use patterns of wealthy, suburban schools, but for very different reasons. In contrast with the stand-alone computing in public schools on the reservation, tribal schools demonstrate preferences for multimedia and presentational
authoring and, to a lesser degree, online asynchronous discussion. Their use of these technologies support an anti-assimilationist mission for students of tribal descent who have dropped out or have been expelled from public schools. The curriculum, which is often coordinated across disciplines on central themes, focuses on tribal knowledge and traditions, such as root gathering and canoe building, and students often spend as much as three hours of the school day learning the Native language from elders or other Native speakers in the community.

The patterns of technology use in tribal schools, then, suggests the importance of tribalism. Multimedia production on the web, on writeable CDs, and in PowerPoint allows students and teachers alike to engage in cultural representation, an activity important to preserving tribal traditions. One Indian educator at White Earth reservation observed, “We find that our kids absolutely love the computer and are comfortable with it... But there are those who have given us some flack. ‘Isn’t this against your tradition?’ They’re non-Native people—and that’s what’s interesting... Our response has been: ‘Who would you rather have producing Native American software than the Native American people from the reservation you’re talking about?’” (qtd. in Simonelli, 1993).

Although cultural knowledge has traditionally been transmitted orally by elders to the next generation, multimedia authoring is nonetheless consistent with the tribal agenda of self-determination. Culturally relevant curriculum materials, especially in the form of interactive, multimedia CD-ROMs produced by Native people for school use, are important as well as popular in Indian country. An example of note is Buffy Sainte-Marie’s *The Cradleboard Project*. Buffy Sainte-Marie (1999) explained her initial inspiration: “At home on the Reserve [in Saskatchewan, Canada] I’d think, ‘If only life here could translate into something meaningful for non-Indian teachers and kids, maybe our input could replace the junk they read about us in school, which does nobody any good’” (p. 32). Although, according to Sainte-Marie, the target audience for *The Cradleboard* CD included non-Indian teachers and students, it is most commonly used at reservation schools. Teachers are often non-Indians who welcome having culturally relevant materials prepared in consultation with tribal members or tribal consortia.

Alternately, students at reservation schools in the state of Washington are producing their own projects for presentation to the class, the school, parents, or the community. At White Swan High School on the Yakama Nation Reservation, for example, when teachers received laptops recently, they wanted to know, first of all, how to produce Microsoft PowerPoint presentations. Before the end of that year, students were sharing the laptops with their teachers to produce PowerPoint presentations for parent night and for senior presentations for the community. In another instance, a Native teacher at a K–8 public school in Hood Canal on the Skokomish Reservation in the state of Washington produced a noncommercial video on the Native language, but notably not with the comprehensiveness necessary for historical or archival purposes. Instead, the project focused simply on visual and auditory representation of lexical items rather than on definitive explanations of grammatical systems. Unlike the broadcast aim of *The Cradleboard*, this teacher’s goal was not so much to transmit content knowledge as to re-appropriate cultural heritage and language by reaffirming ethnic identity within his own classroom—a classroom located in a school where Indian students are in the minority and where the standard curriculum is decidedly Eurocentric.

Teachers in classrooms and schools that center on the needs of American Indian students find authoring capability attractive not just for curricular reasons but also for pedagogical
reasons. This kind of technology use exemplifies some of the best practices in Indian education. Learning styles are culturally bounded, and Native ways of knowing and learning differ greatly from the teacher-centered pedagogies that dominate public schools (secondary schools in particular) and higher education. Many of these preferences stem from baseline differences in understandings of the nature, purpose, and transmission of knowledge. In the Euro-American tradition, all knowledge is good and attainable for those who seek it. Inquisitiveness by nature and questioning as process are necessary for attaining this knowledge, which is then used to test past theories and propose new ones. The point of this quest for knowledge is change for the future—in a word, progress—for purposes of personal and social aggrandizement (Rhodes, 1994; Saville-Troike, 1984).

In contrast to this perspective, most Native groups view knowledge as proprietary, possessed by a chosen few. For example, fewer than a dozen Hopi in the world know the antidote for rattlesnake bite; this knowledge has never been shared with non-Indians or with the tribe generally (Rhodes, 1994). Further, knowledge should reaffirm truths and preserve cultural traditions, not question them, and it is to be used for the good of the group, never for personal reasons and never to hurt others. Nor is knowledge to be displayed or transmitted except at appropriate times and places, and certainly never by children or by uninitiated persons for public spectacle for nontribal audiences (Rhodes, 1994). Silence and simply observing are much better ways to learn than talking too much or talking first (Cajete, 1999; Rhodes, 1994). A Native teacher at Hood Canal K–8 public school in the state of Washington, for example, produced a videotape entitled “A Canoe’s Journey” to demonstrate making a canoe. The nonverbal narrative simply showed an adult cutting and carving a wood log for a canoe, with children and other adults watching, with just drums and chanting in the audio track. The preferred norm for teaching and learning in many Indian cultures is simply to watch and then do when one feels s/he is ready to accomplish a task.

These Native learning preferences translate into classroom practice when Indian students work on goal-oriented, interdisciplinary, self-paced group projects, allowing student teams not only to develop content of the group’s choosing but also to determine the process for reaching that goal. Teachers need to be guides who quietly, privately praise and who implicitly correct through demonstration. Peer teaching and peer coaching more closely conform to the direct teaching that Indian children are used to, where siblings are responsible for tending to younger siblings and relatives at home. Students need more movement and freer time limits than usually allowed in public schools, with more private space and more private time for experimentation and rehearsal (Rhodes, 1994). Kinesthetic learning that involves a full-sensory experience seems to work best in reservation classrooms, with follow-up visual and tactile reinforcement (Cajete, 1999). Certainly, student teams working together to produce multimedia and presentational projects would provide ideal opportunities for Indian students to learn in culturally relevant ways.

Beside multimedia production, tribal schools also frequently engage in communications projects, holding online discussions one-to-one as email “keypals” or many-to-many in listserves and online learning environments. While the use of presentational technologies focuses on intra-tribal audiences, these online discussions almost always focus on communicating with the “outside” world, mainly for purposes of representing a tribe’s perspective accurately to the public—unlike online discussions between non-Indian groups which tend to focus on individual
perspectives. For an early example, an online learning center set up on the Crow Reservation allowed students from all over the world to ask Crow students questions about their culture (Gale, 1995). This agenda was actively supported by the Bread Loaf network very early on (Maddox, 1992). For one example, students at a non-Indian school in the Midwest that had dropped its Indian mascot were connected via picture phone with an Indian school. At one point, a student asked, “Do we look like Indians?” to which the non-Indian student on the other end replied, “No. You look like people” (qtd. in Simonelli, 1993).

Other agendas are also served by communicating with the “outside” world. For example, in an online project supervised by the University of Texas, Indian students living in remote areas were paired with Indian mentors living all over the country who became role models for students trying to live in a bicultural world (Four Directions Mentoring Project, 1999). In another instance, teachers from the Yakama Nation Reservation schools as well as from White, middle-class, off-reservation schools sent, via email, class papers written by their students to future English teachers at Washington State University. The papers gave pre-service teachers an opportunity to see multiple rhetorical traditions in action. Thus, the Indian students were teaching White future teachers, not the other way around. Notably, communicating with the outside world in online discussions (or on tribal web sites, for that matter) is not a top priority for tribal governments. The distinctiveness in technology use between tribal schools and tribal governments—which actually govern the tribal schools—demonstrates how context can redesign technology, re-appropriating it to serve the purposes most useful in the specific situation.

What is conspicuously absent from this list of communications projects is online discussions within a classroom or school. Of course, the same could be said of most schools nationally. Recent studies have found that fewer than 7% of the nation’s teachers use email three or more times in a school year for cross-class collaboration (Becker, 1999; Cuban, 2001; Means, 2001). Interestingly, these studies did not measure intra-class use of communications technologies such as email and online learning environments. Presumably, such intra-class use is even rarer than inter-school use. Reasons often cited for this under-use in the nation’s schools are lack of technical support, lack of professional development, and lack of access—“access” here measured in terms of student-to-computer ratio, with a one-to-one ratio viewed as necessary for consistent instructional use. Certainly, these same conditions hold true for tribal school settings. The official access figures for schools with high enrollments of North American Indians present conflicting information, in part because of overlapping categories: In 1999, 90% of Native schools and about 96% of rural schools had inter-networked computers (Riley, Nassershirif, & Mullen, 1999; US Department of Education, 2001). Of the 185 tribal schools directed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, only 76 were connected to the Internet in 1999 (Casey, Ross, & Warren, 1999).

No matter how the data are presented, access cannot be measured simply in terms of connected computers in a building without also noting whether or not those computers are available to students and teachers. Nor can it be properly understood without also noting the cultural definitions of property and space embedded in the very rules governing the availability of computers to students and teachers. Although tribal schools have high student-to-(working) computer ratios, access is not really the same issue in Indian country than it is in schools generally. Having one computer for every student presumes a notion of personal ownership of
property and space that is foreign to Native cultures. For example, in the state of Washington, Yakama Tribal School and Pasco High School—a large high school with a Latino/a majority in a nearby town off the reservation—engaged in an online discussion about *The Crucible* for two months. On at least one occasion, the teacher at the tribal school had to post students’ comments from her home computer because the tribe’s server was down. Even when the server was up and running, the class only had 4 computers for 15 students. So students moved to other classrooms that had a few computers in them, and even to the school office, to find working computers not in use (Maguigad, 2001). It is hard to imagine a public school that would allow that kind of freedom of movement for students within the building. Open access to property assigned to another room speaks to a cultural understanding of both property and space very different from that of the non-Indian mainstream. Sharing resources, appropriately viewed as communally available, is one way that small tribal schools make good use of what they do have.

Unlike multimedia and presentational authoring, however, online discussion, especially in intra-school settings, works both for and against the best advice on Indian education. True enough, communicating by electronic network gives all students opportunities to be heard—a condition necessary for a group working toward consensus. Building consensus, rather than arguing for a position to win over a majority and outvote a minority, is a traditionally Native way of sharing power. Asynchronous electronic discussion gives students time to reflect before “speaking” and to rehearse what they might actually say in whole-class discussion orally. Electronic communications thus might favor the conversation style of many Native groups, a conversational etiquette that requires more wait time between question and answer (Rhodes, 1994). But insofar as online discussions promote individualistic expression, which in itself can become a kind of verbal competition, coupled with its agonistic tendency (Herring, 1996), they conflict with Native values of noncompetitive learning. Public verbal display is negatively valued in many North American Indian cultures, while self-effacement is positively valued, demonstrating the speaker does not want to “show off” and be differentiated from the group (Polacca, 1962; Radda, Iwamoto, & Patrick, 1998; Swisher & Deyhle, 1987).

These potential conflicts in culturally contingent learning values and preferences that online discussions present, however, can be largely mitigated by actual classroom practice. For example, in the cross-school online discussion of *The Crucible* mentioned earlier, the Indian students worked on their responses often in pairs, either hand writing or word processing their responses, working at their own pace until they were ready to post publicly. Saving their work to disk, they would then seek out a working computer in the building, so they could post their response, or alternatively, give the teacher the disk to post for them from her home computer off reservation.

4. Technology and identity in Indian country

The potential disconnect between Indian education and network theory, which is described as collaborative learning applied to electronic networks (Barker & Kemp, 1990), may be attributed not to Indian education but to our scholarship that implicitly values the democratic potential of virtual communities and alternative identities. That potential would not be heralded as utopian
by most North American Indian tribes, who value terrestrial place as divinely designated land from which a people’s identity springs.

The Internet has been popularized by writers such as Howard Rheingold (1993), who saw early adopters as pioneers on the electronic frontier, a metaphor that resonates with particular violence in Indian country. In like manner, ethnocentric metaphors animate not only our scholarship and popular rhetoric but also technology design. As Cynthia L. Selfe and Richard Selfe (1994) pointed out, the graphic interface of the Windows and Mac operating systems, with its desktop and file folders, maps out a White corporate world alien to many people living on the reservation. At the same time, the implied values embedded in such design can be overturned—and the technology redesigned, to recall Andrew Feenberg’s (1991) concept—when the technology is put to different use based on decisions driven by different perspectives on the world. A New Yorker cartoon illustrated this point: Two dogs are studying a computer screen on an office desk. One dog is seated with its paw on the mouse; the other, standing beside the seated one, said, “Let’s see if we can’t scatter the trash all over his desktop” (May 28, 2001, p. 85). The dogs read the icon of the trashcan from their own perspective, unforeseen by the designer, no doubt. The cartoon made the case that the values embedded in digital technologies, like so much iconic trash, might be overturned and scattered. Re-reading the interface, the dogs in effect redesigned the interface from their own experiential framework. Design is not necessarily destiny.

On balance, North American Indian groups have never been slow to adopt and adapt technology to support a way of life. The horse, the gun, the teepee, the cooking pot—all were embraced by Native groups in the Pacific Northwest. Nonetheless, each of those innovations destabilized the political, social, and economic ecosystems of these tribal and village groups (Hunn, 1990). Technological innovation undoubtedly dilutes ancestral ways, but adaptation and change are also part of many Indian belief systems. Just how much a technological innovation, in concert with other developments, will effect unwanted changes is rarely foreseeable. So is, ultimately, the case with the Internet in Indian country.

Notes

1. I use the term American Indians as well as Indian and Native as adjectives throughout the text to refer to the indigenous peoples of what is now the lower 48 states of the United States. I have deliberately excluded the term Alaskan Natives, which is usually coupled with American Indians in the literature, because I have limited the scope of this article by not including examples from the northern regions of the North America. Native Americans as a noun and Native American as an adjective are rarely used by Native people themselves, at least in the Pacific Northwest. Although Native American is still used to describe Native American literature in academic circles in English studies especially, it is almost never used in scholarship on Indian education.

2. For scholarship on this phenomenon, which seems particularly endemic in MOOs, see Race in Cyberspace, edited by Beth E. Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert B. Rodman (2000).

References


