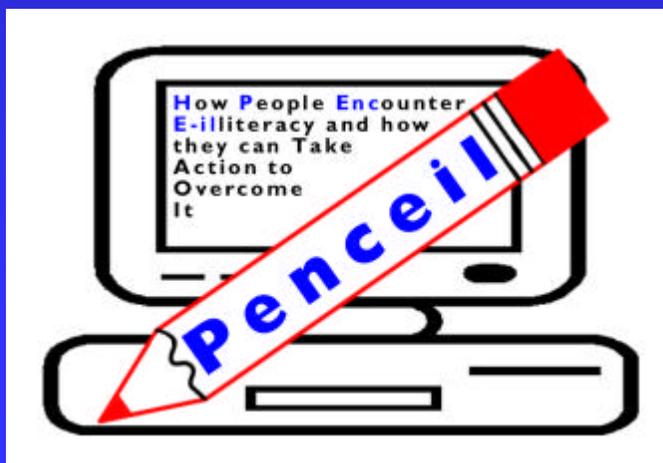


# Exclusion in a Digital Age: Problems and Responses

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# Outline

- About Penceil
- Digital divide discourse and initiatives
- Social and Digital exclusion
- How people perceive digital exclusion and new technologies
- Literacies for skilled ICT use
- An inclusion curriculum
- Some concluding thoughts



# The Pencil project

- How **P**eople **ENC**ounter **E-IL**iteracy and can take action to overcome it
- ESRC funded under its e-Society programme e-literacy stream
- LSE and NIACE
  - ◆ High Trees Community Development Trust
  - ◆ Lambeth College
  - ◆ Lambeth Adult Learning Service
- Action-research element - a Basic IT course based on findings from semi-structured interviews to elicit experience of non-use



# Context of our research

It is increasingly presumed that if people are to be able to play a full part in societies they must be able to mediate their interaction through electronic means.

But what if they can't?

Research aims:

- Contribute to the understanding of non-use of ICT,
- Where does the requirement/expectation of use come from
- The relationship between non-use of ICTs and social exclusion
- Propose ways of enabling people to understand and engage with ICT for their own purposes



# Digital divide discourse (1)

- A discourse of opportunities: economic (for individuals, communities and the society), consumption, learning, e-government and e-democracy
- A concern about the digital divide within the UK
- UK a world leader in digital excellence and the first nation to close the digital divide – Connecting the UK (2005)



# Digital divide discourse (2)

- When the Government set out its vision for the information age, it stated that the many must benefit, not just the few. ‘A society of ‘information have-nots’ would not just be unfair - it would also be inefficient. Competitiveness depends on the skills and creativity of the whole workforce. [...] For people living in low-income neighbourhoods, gaining and exploiting ICT skills can lead to opportunities to participate fully in the local and national economy (Department of Trade and Industry *et al.*, 2000 p 15).



# Critique of the discourse

- Technological rationality – one future to which we should all subscribe

Deploying these new technologies should be as easy and natural to everyone as riding a bike. They are the bridge to the future and we cannot afford to leave anyone stranded behind as we cross over. (Wills, 1999)

- Total discontinuity – ‘crossing over the bridge’
- Political statements – reflected in policy and practices
- Non-user as ‘the Other’



# Responses to digital divide

- Initially access perceived as the biggest problem – provision of public access points (Online centres)
- More recently, addressing problem of skills, attempts to overcome problems of confidence (different courses, informal learning, community initiatives)

BUT

- Difficulties in attracting socially excluded
- Who sets the agenda? Playing catch-up (Kvasny, 2006)



# Digital divide or digital exclusion

- There is a need to make a stronger link between digital divide and social exclusion
  - Digital exclusion
- Digital divide - a simple dichotomy between those who have access to ICT and those who do not.
  - ◆ Increasingly acknowledged there is a continuum between have and have-nots.
- Still too limited. Social exclusion provides a stronger theoretical (and practical) lenses for understanding digital exclusion
- Understand and address barriers to access, in terms of skills and dispositions that people require to exploit ICT, and their motivations for use, rather than just focus on physical access. Hence, **digital exclusion**.
- Also distinguishes national and global phenomena



# Social exclusion

- “A lack or denial of access to the kinds of social relations, social customs and activities in which the great majority of people in British society engage.” (Gordon et al. 2000)
- The length of time that individuals and groups spend in poverty is identified as distinctive in understanding social exclusion especially in relation to the decrease in social resources and mutually supportive local networks. (Gregg 1998, Walker and Park 1998).
- The concept of social exclusion is broader and therefore more ‘inclusive’ – so that in policy and ideological terms it provides a stronger hegemonic concept. (Levitas, 1996)
- Systemic and affected by structural change
- Process not a state (over time)
- Relational
- Multi-dimensional



# 5 Dimensions of Social exclusion

- Consumption
- Savings
- Production
- Political
- Social

## Contributory factors

- Individual
  - ◆ Characteristics
  - ◆ Life events
- Neighbourhood
- Structural
  - ◆ Social, civil and political institutions

Burchardt et al (1999)



# Weak v strong social exclusion

- Veit-Wilson (1998 p.45) draws a distinction between weak and strong concepts of social exclusion.
- Weak: linked to deficiency notions and places responsibility on the individual for failing to succeed, while;
- Strong: how people's lack of social capital inhibits their disposition and ability to engage with ICTs and the conditions under which access to technologies is provided



# Digital and social exclusion

- Digital exclusion – both a result of, and constitutive of, social exclusion.
- Strong or weak digital exclusion is the issue
  - ◆ individuals failing to take up opportunities to learn and use;
  - ◆ or as structural, about the type and availability of access to equipment and to relevant education, support and social capital (historical).
- Remedial actions: difficult and partial.



# Social and digital exclusion

Loss or breakdown of computer; loss of ICT support network; failure to keep skills updated; loss of competence through aging or disability

Excl **A** People suffering

**B** People suffering social exclusion but

**Individual:** Use of ICT skills to obtain employment or voluntary position

Provision of remedial training to compensate for loss of competencies

Education and public information programme to encourage people to re-engage

**Collective:** requires systemic change, requires the ability and resources to utilise ICT skills to mobilise with others to change social situation

**D** The majority population

affluent elderly

Get a paid or voluntary job not requiring use of ICTs

Lose job or position



# Aspects of digital exclusion

- Lack of access to personal equipment
- Lack of access to public equipment
- Can't use
- Won't use
  
- NOT digital withdrawal



# How people perceive digital exclusion (1)

- Non users of PCs:
- Well, it makes you feel like, I don't know if I am using the right words, but as if you are in the Dark Ages. [DA, Ghanaian female]
- Soon everything will be run by computer. So you can't really get too far behind because you won't even be able to live. [AT, English male, late 30s]
- Beginner:
- [If I don't learn] I think I will find that I'll be left in a very Stone Age period. And I will not be part of the society any more. And I'll be very much isolated. And I'll even be ashamed to speak about it, also. [MN, Nigerian female]



## How people perceive digital exclusion (2)

- Learners:
- If you don't know how to use a computer you are lost. Everything is changing so fast and you need to know how to use it. Very soon everything will be on the computer, it is almost on the computer anyway. And if I can check my balance on my account, I don't have to go to the cash point or the bank, I could do that on the computer. Or picking someone up from the airport you can check the flight, when it is landing, and if there are any delays and things like that. [AA, Ghanaian female, early 40s]
- If you can't use a computer you are nowhere. . Because the world is dynamic and if you can't change with it you realise you are just left behind, and you find it difficult to fit in. [...] If you have a couple of friends and every one of them could use a computer and you couldn't, how would you feel? You would feel like an illiterate, you can't read and you can't write. If I couldn't use computers there are a lot of things I would have missed out on. [FA, Nigerian female]



# Some interview findings

- Fear and anxieties about ICTs are numerous and debilitating
- Motivators: children, jobs, fear of being left behind and general acceptance that they should 'learn about computers'
- Understanding potentiality of the technologies very limited - cannot relate them to daily life
- But also curiosity and wanting to achieve tasks not just learn skills
- E-mail, E-mail, E-mail.
- Multiple exclusions: The importance of social network



# Educational route towards digital inclusion

- Beyond application-based curricula
- Beyond the vision of e-worker and e-consumer.
- How to use the Internet for consumption, civic engagement, communication and self expression.
- To challenge social exclusion an e-literacy curriculum must also, respond to Livingstone's media literacy (2004) demands  
“To access, analyse, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms”.



# Curriculum aims

- E-literacy needs: a negotiated set of understandings and competencies related to individually conceived tasks rather than an externally imposed programme.
- Skills sit within an individual's interaction with, and appropriation of, technologies not in abstract form to be banked for future application.
- Learner aspirations at the centre
- Engagement decisions as a dialogic and not an individualised process
- Confident user, open to new opportunities and able to evaluate the risks



# Necessary literacies

- Reading, spelling and writing
- Information literacy
- Media literacy
- Technological literacy (ICT literacy, Net/Web literacy)
- ...
- A too narrow understanding of e-literacy leads to conceptualising users only as consumers or workers not as citizens (except as docile users of e-government services).



# Pedagogic style

- Group discussion and learning leading to individual skill reinforcement
- Talk vs. screen
- Demote worksheets
- Spikey profiles



# New learning content

- Managing your computer
- How databases control your lives
- Evaluating information on the internet
- Creating your own content and using your voice
- Relate to other interfaces



# Opening the black box

- A new form of consumer durable
- Possibilities created in use
- High interpretive flexibility



# Discourses to bridge

- Government and service providers
  - ◆ Discourse of opportunity
- Non and minimal users
  - ◆ Discourse of fear and anxiety
- Can only be bridged through discussion and debate



# Limitations

- Only ameliorative - cannot address structural issues
  - ◆ The most excluded are the most reluctant to engage in educational ventures
- ICT skills only one part of learning needs
  - ◆ Study skills
  - ◆ Other literacies
- Still part of 'technological future'? Playing 'catch up' to someone else's agenda? .... Beyond office skills; empowerment through understanding; refusal based on choice not fear ...



# Thank you for listening

More information at

[www.pencil.lse.ac.uk](http://www.pencil.lse.ac.uk)



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