

Digital Era? No Educator Left Behind!

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Research Questions

1. How do urban educators' computer access, skills, and attitudes influence their implementation of EE programs?
2. How do NYC community educators use the Garden Mosaics digital resources?

Background

Websites, DVDs, and computer-mediated communication help EE programs to:

- Reach a wider audience,
- Facilitate youth learning,
- Facilitate networking among educators and youth.

However, the “digital divide” may limit the use of computer technologies in communities with limited resources. We explored this issue using the Garden Mosaics program in NYC.

Garden Mosaics

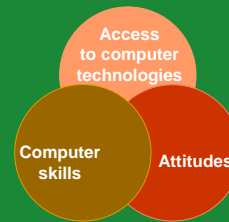
is an international environmental education program that targets urban youth.

- The **website** offers free curriculum materials and databases for youth to submit results from investigations.
- The interactive **DVD** helps educators to learn how to implement youth activities.
- The **Internet Forum** supports networking among educators.



www.gardenmosaics.org

The concept of “digital divide”



Sample

I interviewed 8 community educators from different NYC community organizations and after-school programs.

- > 6 implemented Garden Mosaics in summer and fall 2005.
- > 2 plan to implement Garden Mosaics in the future.
- > 6 of 8 educators are ethnic minorities or immigrants, and all conduct programs in low-income communities.



Methods

1. Semi-structured interviews focusing on educators’:

- Garden Mosaics plans and activities.
- Access to computer technologies, computer skills and attitudes.

2. Participatory observations while training two educators and their youth how to use digital technologies.

3. Content analysis of contributions of 3 NYC educators to the 6-week Internet Forum.



Results

1. Educators’ attitudes towards digital technologies may limit the use of computers in EE programs. Computer access and skills are not limiting factors.

Access

- All educators have unlimited access to computers and the Internet at home and/or at work.
- 4/8 organizations have computer labs with at least 6 computers available for youth. One organization lacks computer support, which sometimes makes computer use difficult.
- All organizations have the basic peripherals (scanners, copiers, printers, and DVD players) for use in EE programs.

Skills

- 7/8 community educators are experienced users of computers and the Internet, and only one educator was not comfortable using the Internet.

Attitudes

- 4/8 educators do not use digital technologies in their education programs.
- 4/8 educators are enthusiastic about learning to use computer technologies, and integrating them into their EE programs. They use the Internet to download lesson plans and illustrations for their programs, and to check grant information.
- None of the educators networked with peers via the Internet before this study, and they were not sure whether such networking would help them in their programs.

2. Most educators did not use the Garden Mosaics digital resources because they were unaware of their purpose or did not have time, rather than because they lacked computer access and skills.

Website

- 6/8 educators did not use Garden Mosaics website, because they were not aware that it contained other resources besides the curriculum.
- The Garden Mosaics website has databases where youth submit their data from their investigations and action projects. 7/8 educators did not use the databases in their programs. One educator helped youth submit their results to the database and explore information about other programs, which was a very important learning experience for the youth.

DVD

- 5/8 educators did not watch Garden Mosaics training DVD after the face-to-face workshops.
- 1/8 educators successfully used the DVD to introduce Garden Mosaics to the youth.

Internet Forum

- 5/8 educators did not participate in the Internet Forum because of lack of time or incentives.
- 3/8 educators participated in the Internet Forum. They found this experience helpful in networking with peers and obtaining new ideas for their education programs.

Conclusion

- Urban EE programs that incorporate digital technologies may need to do a better job demonstrating their use to educators.
- After I showed the educators how to use the Garden Mosaics computer resources, they became more enthusiastic about using them in the future.

