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Digital Culture, Media Education and the Place of Schooling

Amid the familiar discussion of 'digital divides', this paper will propose that there is a further gap emerging, between young people's uses of new media outside school and their use in school. Evidence from UK and international surveys suggests that very few teachers are integrating new media into students' learning experience; and many schools are so preoccupied with the apparent dangers and distractions of new media that they place significant restrictions on students' use. Furthermore, there is only limited evidence that schools can overcome existing inequalities in cultural capital that derive from patterns of access outside the school.

Some of these constraints and limitations are well justified, or at least may be difficult to avoid; but others are not. In this presentation, I will argue that schools need to move beyond currently superficial attempts to incorporate new media; and I will challenge some of the more celebratory accounts of 'informal learning' via new media. I will argue that the school needs to equip young people with forms of 'digital literacy' that go well beyond the narrowly instrumental approach that currently dominates the curriculum, and that directly address the role of new media in young people's popular culture.