

The MacArthur Foundation launched its \$50 million digital media and learning initiative in 2006 to help determine how digital technologies are changing the way young people learn, play, socialize, and participate in civic life. Answers are critical to developing educational and other social institutions that can meet the needs of this and future generations.

“This is the first generation to grow up digital—coming of age in a world where computers, the Internet, video games, and cell phones are common, and where expressing themselves through these tools is the norm. Given how embedded these technologies are in their lives, do young people act, think and learn differently today? And what are the implications for education and for society?”

*Jonathan Fanton
President, MacArthur Foundation*

About The MacArthur Foundation

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation is a private, independent grantmaking institution dedicated to helping groups and individuals foster lasting improvement in the human condition. With assets of \$5.5 billion, the Foundation makes grants totaling approximately \$200 million annually. For more information or to sign up for MacArthur’s monthly electronic newsletter, visit www.macfound.org.

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Building the Field of Digital Media and Learning



How is digital technology changing young people and how they **learn**?

What **skills** will they need to thrive?

How should schools and social institutions adapt to meet these **changing needs**?

What do youth themselves think about the **new world** before them?

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Constructing a Portrait of the Digital Generation

An evolving portrait of the digital generation will emerge through research, active youth participation, and hands-on experimentation.

- Researchers are engaging and observing young people to better understand how digital media is influencing their social networks, peer groups, family life, play, learning, and civic engagement.
- Researchers are analyzing the relationships between digital participation and youth behavior as reflected, for example, in civic participation and social relationships.
- Young people themselves are contributing by explaining and exploring how digital media affects their lives.

Rethinking Learning in the Digital Age

Researchers are exploring how young people navigate and use the digital world informally on their own, and how they could benefit from additional support and guidance from social institutions. Key research questions include:

- How can digital skills be encouraged in after-school programs?
- How might classrooms, libraries, and museums adapt to meet the needs of the digital generation?
- How do young people use critical thinking skills on the Internet?
- How are ethical decisions and judgements made in digital environments?
- How can games foster experimentation, innovation, new identities, and learning?

Developing Resources

MacArthur is taking an active role in ensuring that the field of digital media and learning continues to advance through several efforts, including:

MacArthur Series on Digital Media and Learning

An evolving series of volumes will explore core issues facing young people in the digital world. Topics include:

- Civic Engagement
- Credibility
- Ecology of Games
- Innovative Uses and Unexpected Outcomes
- Race and Ethnicity
- Identity

Knowledge Network

An online community of scholars, practitioners, and media developers will share their ideas and new work. The network will build community, advance ideas and innovations, and serve as an important resource for the digital learning community. It can be accessed through the initiative's website: www.digitallearning.macfound.org.

Illustrative Projects

Mizuko Ito from the University of Southern California and **Peter Lyman** of the University of California at Berkeley are carrying out an ethnographic study on how and to what effect youth use digital media.

Henry Jenkins from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is developing a new framework and models for media literacy.

James Gee from the University of Wisconsin at Madison is designing and developing innovative game modules, curricula, and tools for media literacy.

Joseph Kahne of Mills College is conducting a study about the effect of digital media on young people's civic engagement.

Patrick Whitney of the Illinois Institute of Technology is developing designs for libraries and schools of the future.

Howard Gardner of Harvard University is exploring ethical decision-making in the digital age.

Edward Castronova of the University of Indiana is creating new approaches to social science research through the use of virtual worlds.

Global Kids is engaging young people through written and online discussions to learn about their use of digital media.

Competitions

As part of the Foundation's grantmaking in this field, MacArthur will host annual competitions to fund research, writing and demonstration projects. Check the website for updates.

Research, resources, and conversations are available online at **www.digitallearning.macfound.org**

The *Spotlight* blog, which features the work of researchers and practitioners that are part of the digital media and learning initiative can be found online at: **spotlight.macfound.org**