

# Chapter 24

## Digitizing Our Common Memory

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines the use of digital repositories, libraries, and archives that serve as the collective memory of humanity. American Memory, Global Gateway, Memory of the World and the World Digital Library are discussed as technological sources for cultural and global learning as well as contributing to the perseverance and transmission of cultural heritage. The focus of the study is to demonstrate how these technological marvels can be utilized by educators to prepare learners for a global, diverse, and technological world. Despite problems with memory, access, and engagement, these digital repositories can be effectively used in the classroom if these underlying issues are dealt with. The chapter will also share data from a pilot study that sheds light on how American Memory, Global Gateway, Memory of the World and their underlying issues are dealt with in actual practice and implementation.*

### INTRODUCTION

The sustainable development of any nation is partially dependent upon its ability to become a knowledge society. The World Summit on Information Technology (WSIS) defines knowledge societies in contrast to highly technological and global communities that simply harness the power of the Internet for their own good (2003). Knowledge societies recognize and value the potential

of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to spur growth and progress. Knowledge societies invest in a cultural and economic system that creates intergenerational equity or in other words development opportunities that can be passed on to successive generations.

Most importantly, knowledge societies recognize the centrality of culture to development. The 1982 Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies endorsed culture as both a process and product of development (UNESCO, 1982). Societies committed to an educational experience that

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includes the language, the cultural experiences and expressions of others, more readily achieve the development aspirations of the people.

Globalization has not only created new channels for economic activity and development, but also for collaboration and dialogue among individuals and nations. Cooperation and respect among diverse peoples are needed as many of today's problems require collective solutions. This has heightened the need and necessity for greater global learning and understanding. Like arteries providing pathways for blood, technology can facilitate global learning through the preservation and digitization of cultural heritage.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) working since 1945 to create conditions for international dialogue, defines cultural heritage as everything from architectural and artistic wonders to etchings on a cave wall. Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, and former chairperson of the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO describes the possibilities of cultural dialogue and global learning as an "opportunity to share the world's intangible cultural heritage and to promote its preservation is contributing to a better understanding among peoples worldwide and is underlining the value and vibrancy of cultural diversity" (UNESCO, 2000b, p. 16).

Schools and other educational institutions are increasingly tasked with the responsibility to develop this better understanding among peoples. Cultural knowledge that includes both global learning and respect for cultural diversity and all forms of heritage is considered inclusive education. The Second Forum of the United Nations (UN) Alliance of Civilizations founded by former UN director Kofi Annan was held in Istanbul, Turkey in 2009. The focus of this international gathering was on promoting cultural understanding and strongly emphasized the role of education in preparing the youth for an interconnected and interdependent world. Schools, teachers, and others were called upon to provide students with

the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to communicate, understand, and respect diverse peoples.

What tools can educators use to provide students with an inclusive education? Technology can help, but not any technology. Technology in and of itself teaches nothing. It can be an instrument for good as well as bad, depending upon its design and use. In addition, teachers are tasked with helping students become multiliterate or capable in both technology and culture.

This chapter examines the use of four groundbreaking digital repositories that can be used to strengthen cultural awareness, if effectively used. These digital libraries or archives house the world's cultural heritage in the form of digitized artifacts and primary sources, such as books, manuscripts, maps, photographs, audio, pottery, sculpture, and more. One repository keeps safe the world's oldest surviving book. Another repository has recorded the voice of former slaves who speak across time and space to a contemporary audience.

The first technological marvel this chapter discusses is American Memory, which is a digital collection of web-based primary sources accessible through the Library of Congress. Primary sources are like stacks of old trunks forgotten in an attic. Inside these once locked trunks are letters, photographs, maps, receipts, legal papers, and more. Technology has opened the trunks and preserved their contents through digitization and placed them in cyberspace for the world to see.

Global Gateway is the second digital repository and is a multilingual cooperative effort between the Library of Congress and several multilingual digital libraries around the world, such as the National Library of the Netherlands, the National Library of Spain, the National Library of Russia, and the Asian Studies Virtual Library Project. It functions as the global outreach arm of American Memory.

The third online repository and a first of its kind is Memory of the World (MoW) developed in 1992 to safeguard endangered cultural heritage

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