

Hanging Out Messing Around And Geeking Out Kids Living And Learning With New Media Author Mizuko Ito Dec 2009

Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids, New Media, and Mizuko Ito's Groundbreaking Work

Mizuko Ito's influential 2009 book, **Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media**, provides a compelling and insightful look into how children engage with technology and how this engagement shapes their learning and social development. This exploration goes beyond simple screen time statistics, delving into the nuanced ways children utilize digital spaces for creativity, collaboration, and identity formation. This article will unpack Ito's key arguments, exploring the book's central themes, its lasting impact on the field of digital childhood studies, and its continuing relevance in our ever-evolving digital landscape.

Understanding Ito's Central Argument: Youth Digital Culture

Ito's work challenges the often-negative portrayals of children's online activities. She argues against simplistic narratives framing technology as purely harmful or beneficial, opting instead for a more nuanced understanding of how young people actively shape and are shaped by their digital interactions. The book's title itself, **Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out**, encapsulates this approach, emphasizing the social, playful, and exploratory nature of children's online experiences. These activities, far from being unproductive distractions, are crucial for learning, skill development, and the construction of social identities. The book meticulously details how this "messaging around" often leads to unexpected learning outcomes and innovation.

Key Concepts: Participation, Appropriation, and Learning

Ito introduces several key concepts that underpin her analysis. *Participation* highlights how children actively engage with new media, shaping its use and meaning according to their own needs and interests. They are not passive consumers but active producers and creators within the digital realm. This active participation directly relates to *appropriation*, where children creatively repurpose technologies and online spaces, bending them to their own expressive and communicative goals. Finally, the book highlights *learning*, demonstrating how seemingly casual interactions and playful explorations with digital tools cultivate vital skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, and critical thinking. These skills are often developed organically, through trial-and-error, and collaborative experimentation within peer groups. Ito's research extensively utilizes ethnographic methods, including participant observation and interviews with young people, demonstrating the importance of understanding youth digital culture from their perspective.

The Significance of Peer Cultures in Digital Spaces

A significant contribution of *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out* is its focus on the pivotal role of peer cultures in shaping children's experiences with new media. Ito meticulously documents how young people learn from, teach each other, and negotiate social norms within online communities. These online communities, whether gaming worlds, social media platforms, or online forums, provide unique opportunities for collaboration, shared learning, and the development of social skills. This collaborative learning, often facilitated through shared projects, challenges and problem-solving, contrasts sharply with traditional models of education.

Beyond the Classroom: Informal Learning Environments

Ito demonstrates that significant learning occurs outside the confines of formal education. The informal learning environments fostered by online communities are crucial spaces for exploration, experimentation, and the development of crucial 21st-century skills. These informal settings allow children to take risks, make mistakes, and learn from their peers in a low-stakes environment, fostering creativity and innovation. This aspect strongly counters traditional notions of learning solely occurring within structured educational settings.

The Impact and Legacy of Ito's Work: Digital Childhood Studies

Ito's work has had a profound impact on the field of digital childhood studies. Her book has become a seminal text,

influencing subsequent research and shaping policy discussions on children's engagement with technology. The book's focus on the agency and creativity of young people in digital spaces has challenged dominant narratives that often pathologize or underestimate children's digital competence. Her emphasis on understanding children's experiences from their perspective paved the way for a more child-centered approach to research in this field.

Continued Relevance in a Changing Digital Landscape

Despite being published over a decade ago, **Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out** retains remarkable relevance in today's rapidly evolving digital landscape. The core themes of participation, appropriation, and peer-based learning remain central to understanding children's experiences with new media, even as the specific platforms and technologies continue to change. The book's emphasis on understanding children's agency and the importance of informal learning environments remains strikingly pertinent in an era defined by increasing digital immersion. This enduring relevance highlights the book's insightful contribution to our understanding of the complex relationship between children, technology, and learning.

Conclusion: Understanding and Embracing Youth Digital Culture

Mizuko Ito's **Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out** is more than just a scholarly work; it's a call to understand and embrace the dynamism of youth digital culture. The book's enduring relevance lies in its ability to challenge preconceived notions about children's engagement with technology and to highlight the vital role of informal learning in shaping their development. By understanding and appreciating the ways children creatively engage with digital spaces, we can better support their learning, creativity, and social development in the digital age.

FAQ

Q1: What are the main methodological approaches used in Ito's research?

A1: Ito primarily employed ethnographic methods, which involved extensive fieldwork, participant observation, and in-depth interviews with young people. This qualitative approach allowed her to gain rich insights into children's experiences and perspectives, rather than relying solely on quantitative data. She focused on observing children in their natural environments, both online and offline, to gain a comprehensive understanding of their digital practices.

Q2: How does Ito's work challenge traditional views of learning?

A2: Ito challenges traditional views of learning by demonstrating that significant learning occurs outside formal educational settings. She highlights the importance of informal learning environments, such as online communities and peer groups, where children learn through experimentation, collaboration, and play. This contrasts with traditional models that emphasize structured instruction and teacher-led learning.

Q3: What are some examples of "messaging around" that lead to learning?

A3: Examples include children experimenting with coding to create their own games or modifications to existing ones, collaboratively designing and building virtual worlds in online games, or creatively using digital tools for artistic expression, like video editing or digital art creation. The "messaging around" involves trial and error, improvisation, and collaborative problem-solving – all vital elements of learning.

Q4: How does the book address the issue of digital divides?

A4: While not its primary focus, the book implicitly acknowledges the existence of digital divides. Ito's research highlights the uneven access to technology and digital literacy among different groups of children, emphasizing the importance of equitable access to opportunities for digital engagement. The lack of access prevents some children from participating fully in these crucial learning experiences.

Q5: What are the implications of Ito's work for educators?

A5: Ito's work has significant implications for educators. It suggests that educators should embrace and incorporate children's informal learning experiences into formal educational settings. This could involve designing projects that encourage collaboration, experimentation, and self-directed learning, mirroring the natural learning processes documented in the book.

Q6: How does the book address concerns about online safety and risks?

A6: While the book focuses on the positive aspects of children's engagement with new media, it doesn't ignore the potential risks. Ito acknowledges the need for responsible digital citizenship and highlights the importance of creating safe and supportive online environments. However, the overall tone emphasizes the agency of children and the need to

understand their online experiences within their social and cultural contexts, rather than solely focusing on potential dangers.

Q7: What are some practical applications of Ito's findings for parents?

A7: Parents can utilize Ito's findings by fostering a supportive environment for their children's digital explorations. This includes encouraging their children's creativity and experimentation with new technologies, allowing them to participate in online communities, and engaging in conversations about their digital experiences. Rather than imposing restrictions, parents can provide guidance and support, assisting their children in navigating the digital world responsibly.

Q8: How does Ito's work contribute to the ongoing debate about screen time?

A8: Ito's work significantly contributes to the ongoing debate about screen time by shifting the focus from mere time spent on screens to the nature of children's engagement with digital media. The book argues against simplistic approaches that equate screen time with inactivity or negativity. Instead, it highlights the quality of interaction and the active, creative uses of technology. This nuanced perspective helps move beyond the simple "more is bad" or "less is better" arguments often associated with screen time discussions.

Navigating the Digital Playground: A Deep Dive into Ito's "Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out"

Unveiled in December 2009, Mizuko Ito's seminal work, "Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media," presents a fascinating glimpse at how children connect with technology and the manner in which this connection shapes their maturation. More than just a study of digital competence, Ito's book reframes our perception of learning itself, arguing that informal, playful experimentation is crucial to a child's cognitive development.

The book's name itself perfectly reflects its main argument. Ito doesn't concentrate on structured, formal learning settings. Instead, she analyzes children socializing online and offline, messing around with technology, and becoming engrossed in projects that captivate them. Through qualitative research, primarily concentrated on youth culture, Ito illuminates the subtle ways in which young people master skills through these seemingly casual activities.

One of the key arguments of the book is the significance of "distributed learning." Ito claims that learning doesn't happen solely within conventional educational environments. Rather, it's a dynamic process that spans diverse places – homes, schools, online platforms, and communities. Children seamlessly combine these spaces, transferring knowledge and skills among them. For example, a child might learn coding abilities through an online game and then apply those skills to create a program for a school assignment.

Another significant discovery of Ito's work is the underlining of the communal quality of learning. Children learn not only from explicit instruction but also from collaboration, exchanging knowledge and experiences with peers and advisors. Online communities offer special possibilities for this kind of collaborative learning, allowing children to interact with others who have in common their interests and hobbies.

Ito also discusses the anxieties relating to children's use of new media, such as cyberbullying and exposure to offensive content. However, instead of promoting a controlling approach, she highlights the importance of technology proficiency and analytical thinking skills. By knowing how these technologies work and by developing the capacity to judge information discerningly, children can handle the difficulties of the digital world more successfully.

In summary, "Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out" is a groundbreaking work that redefines our understanding of children, technology, and learning. Ito's research shows that learning is a flexible process that flourishes in casual contexts, and that children's playful experimentation with new media is not only a impediment but a essential part of their intellectual growth. By accepting this perspective, educators and parents can cultivate more enriching and meaningful learning experiences for children in the digital age.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q1: What is the main takeaway from Ito's book?

A1: The main takeaway is that children's informal explorations of new media – "hanging out, messing around, and geeking out" – are crucial for their learning and development. Learning isn't confined to formal settings but thrives in diverse, playful, and social contexts.

Q2: How can educators apply Ito's findings in the classroom?

A2: Educators can create more engaging learning experiences by incorporating informal, playful activities and encouraging collaboration and peer learning. This might involve using digital tools in creative ways, fostering online communities, and integrating children's existing digital skills and interests into the curriculum.

Q3: Does the book address potential risks associated with children's use of new media?

A3: Yes, the book acknowledges risks like cyberbullying and exposure to harmful content. However, it emphasizes the importance of media literacy and critical thinking skills, empowering children to navigate the digital world responsibly.

Q4: Is this book relevant for parents?

A4: Absolutely. The book offers valuable insights into how children learn and interact with technology, helping parents understand and support their children's digital lives. It encourages a balanced approach that recognizes both the benefits and challenges of new media.

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