Digital Learners and the Implications for Open, Flexible and Distance Learning

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The Digital Natives Discourse

Today’s students think and process information fundamentally differently than their predecessors.

These students are not just multitasking....they are constantly searching, storytelling, collaborating, developing, and authenticating.
The Digital Natives Discourse

The current...model of education...is not appropriate for kids who have grown up digital.

The cognitive differences of the Digital Natives cry out for new approaches to education with a better fit.
Digital Native Claims

- Technology use
- Impact of digital immersion
- Personal / Behavioural characteristics
Technology Use
Impact of Technology Use

- Immersion in digital technology makes them fundamentally different than other generations
  - Technologies used
  - How they use technology
Impact of Technology Use

- What are the differences?
  - Sophisticated users of digital technology
  - Different relationship with information and media
  - Think and learn differently
  - Different expectations of school, work and life
Personal/Behavioural Characteristics

- Expert multitaskers
- Need immediate feedback
- Prefer teamwork, collaboration
- Experiential learners
- Social
- Ambitious
- Career-oriented
- Freedom
- Customization
Validity of Claims

- Claims not based on sound research
  - Proprietary research
  - Anecdotal
  - Speculation taken out of context
  - Biased samples
- Reviews of research do not support claims
- Good research tends to contradict many of the claims
Digging Deeper

- Do postsecondary students distinguish their social and educational use of ICTs?
- What impact do students’ social use of ICTs have on postsecondary learning environments?
- What is the relationship between social and educational uses of ICTs in postsecondary education?
Case Contexts

- BC Institute of Technology (Canada)
- Open University of Catalonia (Spain)
- Universitat Roveri i Virigili (Spain)
- University of Regina (Canada)
Profiles of Use

- Instrumental users
- Separators
- Integrators
Relationship of Social Use to Educational Practices

- Ease of use, convenience and cost determine selection of technology for both social and academic use
- Overlapping uses (e.g., email)
- Educational uses (program-specific technologies)
- Most students kept social and academic separate but few had exclusive technologies
- Some social technologies (e.g., Facebook) often used to communicate with fellow students on academic issues
- Mobile phone and texting are predominant practices
- Smartphone uptake limited
Recommendations for OFDL

- Instruction should be designed based on needs of the actual audience, not a mythical “net generation”
- Use program-relevant technologies
- Do not assume that all students have access to latest technologies
- Do not assume that all students are proficient in the use of latest technologies
- Distinguish social and academic proficiency
Thank you!

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