

Who are Digital Immigrants?

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Abstract: *In short, the point I am making is that rejection of the philosophy and practice of traditional education sets a new type of difficult educational problem for those who believe in the new type of education. We shall operate blindly and in confusion until we recognize this fact; until we thoroughly appreciate that departure from the old solves no problems.* (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 25)

This quote written by Dewey comes from his book *Experience and Education* (1938/1997). In this text, he offers a response to the tension between traditional and progressive educational philosophies. By not falling prey to the dualistic framework of that period, Dewey can be observed offering a richer and more meaningful perspective on education. His approach entailed the undoing of dichotomies by offering complexity to the conversation. I argue that this approach is currently needed to respond to a contemporary dichotomy; namely, the divide between digital natives and digital immigrants.

At the close of the 20th century, society experienced a shift from a position defined as the Industrial Age to that of the Information Age; a shift which brought about both a social and an economic preference towards the access and control of information. This priority heralded and maintained an ongoing digital revolution that has redefined learning and altered the landscape of education. It is difficult to comprehend the constant changes in the midst of an ongoing revolution. Prensky (2001) sought to offer guidance by providing a before and after view of this reality. His twofold perspective succeeded in having educators reflect on what was occurring to learning by popularizing the terms *digital natives* and *digital immigrants*. Prensky's article "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants" brought needed attention to the shift occurring in education; a shift characterized by a younger generation of learners who "think and process information fundamentally differently" (2001, p. 1). However, it also heightened the tension between both sides of this dichotomy. Prensky argued that digital immigrants must reconfigure their methodology and content to better fit the epistemological structure of the digital native. This argument is based on assimilationist principles which position the ways of knowing of a native population as superior to that of an immigrant population.

This roundtable presentation began by researching ways to counter the deficit model Prensky and subsequent authors use to view digital immigrants. Through further research, I seek to answer the question: *What teaching methodologies are needed to meet the needs of today's diverse learners in an inclusive manner?* I speculate that the answers to this question will be found by defining and investigating the cultural interface zone inhabited by both digital natives and digital immigrants.

Before this research begins, consideration must first be given to the culture of each group. The literature on digital natives is extensive, including the fields of neurology, psychology, sociology, and education to name a few. The same could be stated for digital immigrants, if not more so. All research focused on the digital immigrant population until the birth of the digital native in the early 1980's. However, this research does not genuinely define this cultural group because it lacks the understanding of the digital immigrant as a distinct population existing in relation to a new native population. It is with this position that I ask—*Who are digital immigrants and why is their culture important to the future of education?*

This question will not be answered by checking birth dates or observing who uses an iPhone; rather it will begin with a discussion and continue through research that utilizes frameworks that encourage cultural understanding. An example of this is Darder's (1991) work in bicultural education. In her book *Culture and Power in the Classroom*, she presents the Sphere of Biculturalism which examines cultural response patterns located in the intersection of two continuums; the first being the interaction between the dominant culture and subordinate culture and the second being the relationship between resistance and domination (1991, p. 57). Darder's Sphere of Biculturalism offers a beginning lens to gain a holistic view of what is occurring within the cultural group of digital immigrants as well as this group's relations with digital natives. By synthesizing writings on cultural identity and digital shifts in society, I hope to add a critical voice to the developing study of digital learning and its effects on adult education.

References

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