Supporting Digital Natives to Learn Effectively with Technology Tools

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Abstract

Majority of learners in our classrooms are digital natives or Millennials – a category of learners who tend toward independence and autonomy in their learning styles. The primary challenges then facing instructors include: How do digital natives learn and how do you teach them? The answers to these questions will help instructors to: (a) identify and develop learning instructional offerings that are appropriate to their cognitive learning patterns, and (b) find strategies that focus on millennials’ interest and use of technology. This article highlights the need to integrate active student-centered strategies into classroom instruction to support digital natives to learn effectively with technology.

Keywords: Constructivism, Digital Natives, Learning Styles, Millennials, Net Generation, Student Learning

Introduction

Educational technologies have become so pervasive on our campuses today that students and faculty cannot ignore them. Growing investments in technology (Cuban, 2001; Oppenheimer, 2003) coupled with the increasing access to technology resources characterizes digital native in our campuses. Today’s youth are exposed to digital technology in many aspects of their day-to-day existence – this has a profound impact on their personalities, including their attitudes and approach to learning.

The Millennials have a strong connection to the Silent Generation’s upbeat and trusting attitude (Coomes & DeBard, 2004). The Millennials are loved and protected child who have been encouraged to believe in themselves in all that they do (DeBard, 2004). Millennials trust their parents and grew up central to their parents’ sense of purpose; contrast to Baby Boomers, 40 percent of whom thought they’d be better off without their parents (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Strauss, 2005). Millennials will make up 75 percent of all higher education enrollment by the year 2012 (Coomes & DeBard, 2004, citing Center for Educational Statistics, 2002).

There are different attributes that differentiate the millennials from the baby-boom and X generations: they are sheltered and protected...
in ways that previous generations were not; they have a conventional/ traditional point of view; they are pressured and feel more stress at this age than previous generations; they like to work in teams rather than as individuals; they are considered as belonging to an entire group that is achieving and individuals must keep pace with the group; they are much more confident, with a sense of empowerment, than previous generations (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

The Millennials prefer to learn in collaborative learning environment and exhibit a preference for teamwork incorporating cooperative learning and constructivist principles (Sweeney, 2006). Further, they prefer to learn in flexible, personalized and customized schedules, in environment that makes learning interesting; in structured environments; in environment that uses technology to enable them to be more productive and connected; in environment in which individuals are respected and all members of the group are supported; in environments that is goal and achievement orientated (Sweeney, 2006).

Millennials expect immediacy in all that they do and want accurate information on their accounts, class schedules and grades in real-time (Strauss, 2005). Additionally, they expect to buy "what, where and how they learn" (Carlson, 2005). The Millennial learners possess sophisticated knowledge of and skills with information technologies. As a result of their upbringing and experiences with technology, digital natives have particular learning preferences or styles that differ from earlier generations of students (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008).

This generation of learners is distinctly different in their characteristics and learning expectations. This generation of students is the most racially and ethnically diverse group in history and are "fully accepting of diversity and typically do not perceive the same divides as earlier generations. In general, they are extremely independent, due to a combination of day care, single parenting, divorced, and working parents (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008, p.1). Further, they are blunt, highly expressive, looking for and expecting instant gratification, easily bored, team oriented, crav-

ing the spotlight, and expecting to be rewarded for their efforts.

Outside of school, a majority of digital natives are using a variety of social networking media technologies, including the following: TV, computer, Internet, Playstation, digital cell phones, iPods, and more (Cox-Holmes & Lodde, 2006). They are also typically able to have better access of information in their home environments, yet not always prepared on how to protect themselves from potential Internet predators.

UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING DIGITAL NATIVES

As much as evidence shows that there is a majority who fall into the categorization, or generalizations, of being considered part of the millennial generation or called digital natives, there are also some concerns for many within this population who may be falling through the cracks of this entire generation. According to Bennett, Maton, and Kervin (2008):

"Such generalizations about a whole generation of young people thereby focus attention on technically adept students. With this comes the danger that those less interested and less able will be neglected, and that the potential impact of socio-economic and cultural factors will be overlooked. It may be that there is as much variation within the digital native generation as between the generations (p.779)."

Unlike the previous generations, digital natives are more comfortable creating and constructing their own knowledge rather than being instructed. The student-centered approach is based on the understanding that students learn more when they take responsibility for their own learning (Henson, 2004). Further, the instructor assumes a new role of guiding, mediation, modeling, and coaching active learners (Sharp, 2006). Pierson and McNeil (2000) recommend the “purposeful creation of collaborative, authentic, and content-focused
Participatory Architecture: Web 2.0 Education in the Uganda National Museum
www.igi-global.com/chapter/participatory-architecture-web-education-uganda/68241?camid=4v1a

Return on Investment in Training
www.igi-global.com/chapter/return-investment-training/11991?camid=4v1a