

DIGITAL NATIVE LEARNERS VS DIGITAL IMMIGRANT EDUCATORS - NEW TRENDS IN ELT.

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Abstract

Our students, Digital Natives, are all “native speakers” of the digital language of computers, gadgets, videogames and the Internet. Those who were not born in today’s digital world but have, at some later point in our lives, become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of the new technology are, and always will be compared to them as Digital Immigrants. Teachers and students want and need access to techniques and strategies that effectively teach English. Depending on the specific context, teachers and students may have more or less access to various types of technology. Are teachers prepared for this?

Introduction

There is a wide variety of Information and Communications Technologies, including hardware and software, available for teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) and of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). A teacher working in an online program, whether ESL or EFL, might be able to use a variety of web technologies for her class.

These may include Skype, Ning, Learning Management Systems (Moodle) or other such online tools. However, a teacher in a developing country may not have classroom access to a computer, but have access at home so that she can find lesson ideas online to use in class. There are also other options that teachers should also be able to manage.

Our students today are mostly “native speakers” of the digital language of computers, tablets, the Internet and a variety of gadgets. Some teachers, in spite of not being born in today’s digital world, have become fascinated by technology and have adopted many aspects of the Information and Communication Technologies in their classes at some later point in their lives.

However, there are still teachers who are reluctant to use technology in their classrooms today; they just content themselves with having a traditional learning environment, whether their students like it or not.

Teachers and students want or need access to techniques and strategies that effectively assist the teaching-learning process in English. Depending on their specific context, they may have more or less access to various types of technology.

The use technological tools such as cellphones, multimedia, educational software, videos or television is the new kind of literacy that marks the generation gap between digital immigrants and digital natives. How can WE teachers of the XX century get prepared to evolve and follow the new trends of education in the XXI century?

Digital Native Or Immigrant

People call them different names: **digital natives**, **the next generation**, **the Google generation**, or **the millenials**. All these labels are used to describe young people studying nowadays from preschool to university. Why? To highlight the significance and importance of new technologies within the lives of young people (Gibbons, 2007).

On the other hand, people who have come late to the world of technology, probably parents of the children mentioned above, are **digital immigrants**. Most of us teachers are in this group. Are we not? Think about where do you stand? How confident do you feel about using the Internet, computers, smartphones, tablets, or any other modern electronic device?

Some people our age might fall somewhere between being a **technophobe** or a **techno geek**; but most old people fall into the first group and young people into the second one.

Text Speak - even the digital native language is different from that of the digital immigrants surrounding young people today. Text speak is becoming more and more prevalent ... and more and more obscure (to a digital immigrant!). Some examples of modern 'text speak' are in the table below. Have a look at www.transl8it.com/ to give it a go yourself and learn a 'new language' in Text Speak!

Even though technology has been around in language teaching for decades; most teachers are used to taking advantage of the simplest forms; from the tape recorders, the language labs, the use of videos, etc. since the 1960s and 70s most of which are still used around the world in ELT classes.

Although the use of **ICT** (Information and Communications Technology) is not quite spread with language teachers in the present, the use of technology in the classroom is becoming increasingly important, and it will be a normal part of ELT practice in the coming years. The reasons for this are:

- The Internet access either in private homes or at Internet cafés is becoming more popular and available for users.
- Younger learners are growing up with technology, and this is a natural and integrated part of their lives. (some of them might become teachers one day)
- English, as lingua franca, is used in technologically mediated contexts.
- Technology, especially the Internet, presents us with new opportunities for authentic tasks and materials, and access to a wealth of ready-made ELT materials.
- Technology is becoming increasingly mobile, so it can be used not only in the classroom, lecture hall, computer room or self-access center but also at home, on the way to school and even in public squares.
- Young learners expect language classes which integrate technology into learning.
- Learners who are geographically dispersed are offered excellent opportunities for collaboration and communication by the Internet.
- Technology is now offered within published materials such as course books and resource books for teachers.

- And the most important reason, using a range of ICT tools can give learners exposure to and practice in all of the four main language skills - speaking, listening, writing and reading.

Teachers should try to aim all types of learning styles students have, but we have to get up-to-date with this information, since it has changed recently. There are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles that relate to this preference.

A visual learning style means that a person has a preference for information presented in visual format or through observation such as pictures, diagrams, demonstrations, displays, handouts, video, and flipcharts.

An auditory learning style means a preference for receiving information through listening to speech and sound such as spoken instructions and songs.

A kinesthetic learning style means a preference for learning through touching or manipulating things, through physical movement or practical hands-on experiences.

Some students have a very strong preferred learning style for taking in information, but many people are multimodal, meaning they use a blend of two or all three of these learning styles. It is important for students to understand that there is no best learning style and that there are different types of learning that are best for one's preferences.

A global learning style is a preference or tendency for seeing the "big picture" before "putting all the pieces together." Once global learners have an overview or holistic sense of what is being learned and its relevance, they are then able to focus on details or smaller concepts related to the whole.

A sequential learning style is a preference for "putting together the pieces" to understand the "big picture." Learning sequentially is taking small steps and focusing on one task at a time. These learners are sometimes called linear learners.

Another dimension of processing information is abstract versus concrete. An abstract learning style is a preference for visualizing or conceptualizing ideas, which are intangible (cannot actually be seen).

A concrete learning style is a preference for understanding things that can be seen, heard, or touched. A concrete learner is often excellent in processing factual information but may have difficulty understanding abstract ideas

What are Digital Native learners like?

Some of the most significant characteristics of Digital Natives are:

- They are intuitive learners rather than linear. (They do not use or easily relate to manuals.)
- They learn via participation rather than passively, as illustrated in the difference between Wikipedia and Britannica.

- Their brains have developed a high capacity to multitask and to rapidly task-switch (hopping).
- They see the world in less hierarchical terms - the Internet levels the playing field, making everyone more equal online.
- They live in the world of computers and video games;
- They are constantly connected to the online world;
- They have the capacity to use digital technology transparently;
- They express themselves in ways mediated by digital technologies (primarily mediators of human-to-human connections).
- They have plenty of friends in social networking sites (including people who they have never met in person);
- They feel comfortable in online spaces;
- They rely on online spaces to search for all the information they need (they learn through browsing);
- They have a tendency to attend to several things at once - multitasking
- They receive and process information at a rapid pace;
- They share photos and videos with their friends all over the world.

Here are some tips and points to remember:

- **Immigrant Teachers:** Before you criticize or label young clients, learn the unique characteristics of Digital Natives so you can be more effective in helping them live fully.
- **Parents:** Your kids are not addicted simply because they like gaming. Your kids are not ADHD because they can multitask and rapidly switch between tasks. Nagging is not effective, it just increases alienation.
- **Teachers and Educators:** It's time to re-vamp schools! Teaching English from textbooks is a way of the past. Realize that the natives prefer to participate and engage with others in the process of learning rather than learning passively, as previous generations did. Make good use of kids' love of gaming and employ the many available educational games.
- **Employers and Supervisors:** Understand that the natives multitask well, have different views of authority and often do not think in terms of company loyalty so much as innovation and creativity.
- **Therapists, Parents, Teachers, and Employers:** Take an anthropological approach to learning about the digital culture. It will help you connect with the young ones and increase your effectiveness. Once you know the ropes, you will be more effective in setting helpful boundaries.
- **Young Folks:** Your parents / teachers / grandparents / employers are not idiots for failing to understand technology or you. Be patient with them! Digital immigrants are new on the scene and did not grow up with the culture of technology like you did. Be helpful to them.

Ideas and suggestions to meet your students' needs

- Most ICT tools and many activities are suitable for young learners. Most of them are familiar with chat, instant messaging and email, even blogs. For younger learners there are thousands of webpages where teachers can find ready-made materials with a wide range of topics available for young learners.

- There are different Internet tools which provide ways to put learners in contact with learners from other countries and cultures. In this way, the teacher provides students with a realistic and motivating opportunity to practice English. Teacher can set up a project between classes via email, or more collaborative projects using blogs, chat or wikis.
- Creative writing with a word processor is an encouraging idea where students can work together, exchange documents and motivate peer correction; and the correction for the teacher is also easy to do. WPs include dictionaries, Thesaurus, and grammar tools that are user friendly, and students may take advantage of these tools.
- Useful websites can be found with the use of:
 - a) Search Engines. (Google) The trick is to try a specific search so that the results are not vague or totally different from what the teacher needs. Try to find websites which contain the letters: .gov, .org, .edu, where information might be supported by a real and trustworthy source.
 - b) Subject guides. These webpages, are similar to Search engines, but they divide their content into subject areas and the subdivisions of those areas. Users can browse a section that best reflects their interests and search, instead of a keyword search from the main page. (i.e. Yahoo! Search)
 - c) Real language searches. (Ask.com) Allow users to type simple questions and search queries. These kind of websites analyze and select the keywords from the query and constructs a search based on them. These pages should give a results page with the answer to the question at the top, and links to relevant sites below that.
- Emails. This tool allows teachers to keep in touch with colleagues around the world via mailing lists and discussion groups. It also permits Ts to communicate with learners outside the classroom for setting, receiving marking and returning homework or other written assignments. Reading and writing emails can give students more exposure to the target language, and real interaction with real people, for example with key pal projects where students can make contact and interact with people with different first languages and cultures.
- **Chats.** They allow synchronous (real-time) communication over the Internet. The teacher can link up classes and groups in different locations, as part of collaborative work or for a one-off chat session. Most learners are familiar with chats since they might use them in their social networks. The types of cultural exchanges might be greatly motivating, even though they occur only a few times during a term or semester. (Skype, MSN Messenger, Facebook, ICQ).
- **Social Software:** They can be set up and used by teachers and/or learners to connect to other communities of learners, probably in another country. The idea and content can be generated and created by learners, either individually or collaboratively.

- a) **Blog:** (Short form for web log) Webpage with regular dairy or journal entries.
- b) **Wiki:** (The term comes from a Hawaiian word for “quick”) It is a collaborative web space that consists of a number of pages that can be edited by any user.
- c) **Podcast:** (Formed by the words iPod and broadcast) It is an audio and/or video file that is broadcast via the Internet and it can be downloaded to a computer or mobile device for listening and/or viewing.

These tools can be very motivating for learners and teachers, even though they might be fearful of the technology, they will discover that there is no specialist technical knowledge required.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, technology is here to stay. Teachers must act with an open mind so that there could be a possibility of bridging the digital gap.

With understanding, we can help our students navigate through the dark sides of technology.

With open hearts we can make home, school, and the workplace less conflicted and more harmonious.

With consciousness we can achieve a healthy relationship to digital technology and a healthy balance between our on-line and off-line lives (Zur Institute, 2014).

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APPENDIX

Text Speak - even the digital native language is different from that of the digital immigrants surrounding young people today. Text speak is becoming more and more prevalent ... and more and more obscure (to a digital immigrant!). Some examples of modern 'text speak' are in the table below. Have a look at www.transl8it.com/ to give it a go yourself and learn a 'new language' in Text Speak!

Top 75 text chat terms or text speak (txtspk)

1. **2DAY** Today
2. **4EAE** For ever and ever
3. **ADN** Any day now
4. **AFAIK** As far as I know
5. **AFK** Away from keyboard
6. **ATM** At the moment
7. **BC** Because
8. **B4** Before
9. **BF/GF** Boyfriend / Girlfriend
10. **BFN** Bye for now
11. **BOL** Be on later
12. **BRB** Be right back
13. **BTW** By the way
14. **DM** Direct message
15. **F2F/FTF** Face to face
16. **FB** Facebook
17. **FWIW** For what it's worth
18. **FYEO** For your eyes only
19. **FYI** For your information
20. **GLHF** Good luck, have fun
21. **GR8** Great
22. **HAK** Hugs and kisses
23. **HAND** Have a nice day
24. **IDK** I don't know
25. **IIRC** If I remember correctly
26. **IKR** I know, right?
27. **ILY / ILU** I love you
28. **IMHO** In my honest opinion / In my humble opinion
29. **IMO** In my opinion
30. **IU2U** It's up to you
31. **IYKWIM** If you know what I mean
32. **J/K** Just kidding
33. **J4F** Just for fun
34. **JIC** Just in case
35. **JSYK** Just so you know
36. **K** or **KK** Okay
37. **L8R** Later
38. **LMK** Let me know
39. **LOL** Laughing out loud
40. **MSM** Mainstream media
41. **NAGI** Not a good idea
42. **NM** Never mind
43. **NMU** Not much, you?
44. **NP** No problem / Now playing
45. **NSFW** Not safe for work
46. **NSFL** Not safe for life
47. **NTS** Note to self
48. **OH** Overheard
49. **OMG** Oh my God

50. **PAW** Parents are watching
51. **PLS** or **PLZ** Please
52. **PPL** People
53. **PTB** Please text back
54. **RL** Real life
55. **ROFL** Rolling on the floor laughing
56. **RUOK** Are you okay?
57. **SMH** Shaking my head
58. **SRSLY** Seriously
59. **SSDD** Same stuff, different day
60. **SWAK** Sealed with a kiss
61. **SWYP** So, what's your problem?
62. **TIA** Thanks in advance
63. **TIME** Tears in my eyes
64. **TMB** Tweet me back
65. **TMI** Too much information
66. **TMRW** Tomorrow
67. **TTYL** Talk to you later
68. **TY** or **TU** Thank you
69. **VSF** Very sad face
70. **WB** Welcome back
71. **WTH** What the heck?
72. **WTPA** Where the party at?
73. **WYCM** Will you call me?
74. **YLM** You love me?
75. **YW** You're welcome