



## TRANSCRIPT

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**Education and Schools**

### **Commentary - Digital Natives!**

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Amanda is 13, she sits at her computer doing her homework. The Ipod headphones are in, she answers her emails and msns as they pop up, while replying to a text message on her mobile phone. Her mother walks into her room and goes to turn off the TV blaring in the corner and is met with the response by Amanda “do you mind, I’m watching that”.

Welcome to the Digital Native. The name was coined by Marc Prensky in 2001. It describes the next generation of students that are progressing through our school system. The characteristics of this generation are – multi-tasking, random access, high twitch speed, information seeking, interactive, games orientated, parallel processing and connected.

They are strongly bound to their friendship groups. You need only watch how often they check their mobile phones for messages to verify this point. Driving past any bus stop and see them staring at their mobile phones willing them to respond. The greatest punishment for a Digital Native is to confiscate their mobile phone. It’s not the sending, but the receiving of a message that is important. It means you belong to the group.

The Digital Natives now have an arsenal of electronic devices at their disposal and are more than comfortable in the virtual world of the internet. They msn, podcast, vodcast, blog and mob. They use youtube, myspace, facebook and ebay. They access Wiki, I Tunes, chatrooms and Skype. They possess Ipods, smart phones, laptops, and any number of x box or playstation toys.

You will often hear parents and teachers saying “I don’t understand how they can think like that”. The problem is we probably can’t. The neurophysiology of the brain indicates that the way we think is determined by the processes we are exposed too. The Digital Native have had, for the want of a better term “Time on Toys”, their exposure to the new screen culture means that the way their brains think is very different to the present adult way of thinking.

Marc Prensky describes the rest of the community as the Digital Emigrants. We are the ‘strangers in a strange land’. We don’t know the vocabulary, our pronunciation is wrong and we have a pronounced accent when we use the technology. You can call yourself an emigrant if you – don’t type with all fingers, you use email instead of msn, you use drop down menus in programs instead of shortcut keys, you tend to use new technologies to accomplish old known tasks faster, you print off work to check it, and probably the most damning of all is you need a 13 year old to change the ring tone on your mobile phone or program your DVD to record a program.

The issue for education is described by Heather Watson as the Digital Divide. Teachers too are emigrants in this new digital environment, or at worst are only tourists who will not attempt to utilise the new technologies.

They say that when the 'tom toms' are beating the natives are restless. Well at present there is an orchestra of drums playing out there. There is a great danger in our schools today, that if we continue to teach in a didactic fashion – the sage on stage approach, that we will disenchant. If you don't engage you enrage or worse you "englaze" this present generation. It is sometimes said that 'schools today are places where young people watch old people do work'.

What the Digital Natives need is a change in paradigm of pedagogy. The hallmark of a new approach would be tasks that are open-ended, contextual, issue based, real problem solving, collaborative, hands on and challenging.

To enthuse and encourage involvement of these Digital Natives it will be essential to incorporate a greater use of ICT's (Information Communication Technologies) in delivery of teaching. By utilizing ICT's their learning will be commensurate with their leisure activities. ICT's also allow for ease of differentiation of curriculum in terms of learning styles and allowing for different abilities. ICT's also provide a scaffolding of learning for weaker students. In fact there are now schools, work places and universities that incorporate ICT's such as Ipods in instruction.

Within schools ICT's such as mobile phones, secure blog sites, mobs, Wiki and any number of on line learning management systems could also be incorporated to engage the Digital Native.

The challenge for teachers of the Digital Natives will be to incorporate a greater use of ICT's in their delivery while still meeting reporting standards, developing appropriate criteria of assessment and coping with limitations within schools. I

Clark Ross  
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