

Digital Natives + Others = First Year Students

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Abstract:

Over the last few years the 'Digital Natives' have received a great deal of attention in both academic writing and the popular press. This group of individuals, born roughly between 1980 and 1994, has been characterised by their familiarity with and reliance on information and communication technologies (ICTs). A number of commentators have assumed that all commencing first year university students are Digital Natives and, therefore, have a sophisticated knowledge and understanding of ICTs. This paper takes this assumption as its starting point and reports on a study carried out with almost 2,000 first year students at the University of Melbourne. Students were asked about their access to, use of and level of proficiency with a wide array of ICTs and tools. The results show that many students regularly use a wide range of traditional and emerging technologies in their daily lives. However, these data also provide confirmation that there is little empirical support for the stereotypical view that all first year students are Digital Natives. When one moves beyond entrenched technologies and tools (e.g. computers, mobile phones, email), patterns of access to and use of other technologies (e.g. MP3 players, social networking, file sharing) show considerable variation.