Announcing the Demise of the Digital Native

Presentation type
 ☐ Symposium

Abstract:

1. Overview

We challenge the assumption that students entering higher education are digitally prepared to navigate a digital learning environment and explore strategies to ensure students are able to develop into digitally literate graduates. Students from low SES areas at poorly digitally resourced schools tend to be less digitally fluent than students from high SES areas at well-resourced schools. Digital fluency is defined as the ability to create, re-formulate knowledge and to move with ease in a digital environment.

Digital literacy, the foundation for digital fluency, is the ability to identify and use technology confidently, creatively and critically to effectively meet the demands and challenges of living, learning and working in a digital society (Coldwell-Neilson, 2018). Supporting Russo's findings, Coldwell-Neilson found that there is a significant mismatch between academic staff expectations, and their observations, of students' digital literacy capabilities.

Therefore, digitally underprepared students could be disadvantaged if unsupported in a digital learning environment. Prenksy's (2001) concept of a Digital Native, defined as those who grew up with technology was flawed. Research demonstrates that extensive use of mobile technologies does not readily translate into being digitally literate nor does it provide the skills needed to navigate a digitally enhanced learning environment.

2. Target audience

The design of higher education digital learning environments assumes students are digitally fluent. As educators we must start a conversation to identify what support is needed to enable students to participate fully in these environments. The symposium is pitched at academics teaching undergraduate programs, educational designers and university administrators.

3. Intended outcome for participants

The intended outcome is to build a frame of reference for the development of student support structures.

4. Outline of discussion format

We will initiate discussion through two short videos, one defining digital literacy and the other exploring the mismatch in expectations of digitally fluent students. These will set the scene and provide participants with an understanding of the digital divide.

Using The LEGO®SERIOUS PLAY®, a "hands on, minds-on" methodology, we will generate innovative and creative discussion on strategies to build digital fluency. Participants will build 3D models for each question posed. Lego packs will be provided. Small groups of participants will share practice and build narratives to identify if a digital divide is emerging in their educational practice.

Conference Sub-Theme

Issues of social justice and inequity regarding the preparedness of students to participate in digital learning environments is examined. Focus is on prior technology use and student success thereby addressing the conference sub themes.

Students' ability to succeed could be impacted by their level of digital fluency. Discussion will commence with a synopsis of research conducted by Russo on first-year business students at regional and urban Australian universities which revealed students who attended technologically well-resourced secondary schools which used an LMS were more likely to be digitally fluent and prepared for university study. Students from low SES and/or first in family background were more likely to rate themselves as less digitally fluent and less prepared for university study. A shift is required in higher education to build digital fluency and not assume students can navigate digital learning environments.