

July 2014

Digital Natives Discuss the Digital World

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Recommended Citation

Masland, T., Himes, K., & Ibsen, S. (2014). Digital Natives Discuss the Digital World. *OLA Quarterly*, 16(1), 31-33. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1275>

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OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

Digital Natives

Discuss the Digital World

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To read the full transcript of the Turner's, Kirsten's and Serenity's discussion, click here:

<http://tinyurl.com/ydbn8o3>

Digital native: dig-it-al na-tive [dig-i-tl ney-tiv] 1. A person who was born after the advent of digital technology

My first memory of using a computer is playing the original “King’s Quest” on my father’s old Apple IIe. It was 1988 and I was five years old. I had a computer in my third grade classroom. The first time I conducted online research was middle school. During my sophomore year of college, I thought it was repugnant that they were letting high school students onto Facebook. What was the point of having an .edu e-mail address if you couldn’t flaunt the elitism that went with it? Welcome to the world of the digital native.

With the rapid advancements in communication and information technology, entering library school at the end of 2009 felt like entering a snow globe after a good shake. (We’re waiting for the snowflakes to resettle.) On a recent afternoon, before the start of our second term, I sat down with two fellow classmates and digital natives to discuss our impressions on the relationship and disparity between print and digital content. Kirsten Himes, an English major who recently graduated from Portland State University who works with me in the Access Services department of Oregon Health & Science University Library, and Serenity Ibsen, an art history major from University of Oregon who manages Access Services at the Pacific Northwest College of Art, were gracious enough not only to talk with me, but also let me record our conversation. We’d like to invite you to not only read, but also listen to, what we discussed ...

Click here to listen to our introductions
Sound clip (0:00 – 1:23)

http://www.ohsu.edu/library/videos/olaq2010spring/turner_audio_clip_1.mp3

Yes, we are digital natives, but the three of us will always have a love for print. We love holding it in our hands, interacting with it, having that sensory experience that a book, a magazine, or a newspaper offers. In many ways, books are easy. They are easy to write in, marking up the margins and highlighting passages that speak to us. Serenity mentioned how easy it is to give books as gifts. Even if they’re never read by the recipient, the books we pass on will always house the emotions we invested in them. Kirsten touched on the safety and protection books wield. Like gold coins locked in a safety deposit box (or buried under the rose bushes), if we have a technological meltdown, our storehouses of information should still remain.

And, of course, there is the major role that print plays in cognitive development. We discussed the opportunity our cohort had to meet with Nell Colburn, an Early Childhood Librarian with Multnomah County’s Public Library and coordinator of their “Raising a Reader” program, and the insights she shared with us. She brought to our attention the important research that has been done surrounding the relationship between reading a book to an infant and the important brain development that happens in their first few months.



Print plays an important role in cognition well beyond our developing years. Serenity and Kirsten both shared that not only feeling the book in their hands, but also between-the-lines note taking and highlighting are major techniques in their ability to mentally retain their scholarly content.

Click here to listen to our conversation: Part 1

Sound clip (1:24 – 6:54)

http://www.ohsu.edu/library/videos/olaq2010spring/turner_audio_clip_2.mp3

Some aspects of what we like about print are what we also like about digital content, except digital is much, much faster. As Serenity said, sharing a book is a wonderful experience—but I had to counter that sharing digital information is an instantaneous experience. In our online dalliances, when we come across a recipe, funny story, or illuminating essay we can shoot off an e-mail to a loved one, or post it on a friend’s Facebook wall. Within seconds, the content is shared. The three of us agreed that we are spoiled by our familiarity of digital content. Who needs yellow pages when you have Google?

“I’m definitely attracted to the immediacy of digital,” Serenity says. “I am really spoiled, as well, in that I don’t use a phone book anymore. I feel really anxious if I can’t immediately look something up, if I’m out and about and I think ‘Oh, where’s that one store,’ or something random like that. So being able to find something, when you want it, or in a few seconds ...”

We talked about how searching for digital information has become almost incomparable to browsing book shelves. Kirsten mentioned a conversation she had with Andrew Hamilton, Senior Reference Librarian at Oregon Health and Science University Library, where they discussed the navigation of electronic databases:

“I was absolutely amazed by Ovid,” she said. “PubMed is kind of like Google, it gives you fast, big searches. But I had no idea that the information retrieval could be so precise without knowing the right things to look for. So I think that it’s already improving [libraries] a million times more.” We might have been raised on digital search engines – but as library students, we still have a few tricks to learn. Of course, as Serenity pointed out, through digital browsing you lose an element of serendipity that is there when browsing traditional bookshelves.

We also have concerns about the increasing prevalence of electronic information, and remain on the constant lookout for the man behind the curtain. “With this migration of digital content ... one of the very important aspects of libraries is keeping information accessible to whoever needs or wants it,” I said. “Libraries are very democratic institutions and that’s something I want to ensure continues. I think when you see rapid advancements of technology, there is potential for censorship and denying access.” Serenity brought up the point that ownership of information in a digital age exacerbates class issues. Do you have the capital to afford a computer or an electronic reader? Did you buy the book on your Kindle or are you just renting it from Amazon.com? Kirsten and I pondered beyond the question of class, asking what happens if you are sight impaired, but your professor hands you an e-reader rather than a textbook?



Of course, just like digital, there will always be issues of accessing printed information. When trying to track down texts for school, and trying to save a few pennies, I mention how it can be hard to find what we need: "... as a student, especially a library student, sometimes it can be very hard to access the books, especially text books, especially when you don't want to pay for them. You're trying to get them through the library ... and they're often different avenues I have to go to get it ... it's always sort of tricky to track it down." I think anyone working in a library today experiences the phenomenon that young patrons typically expect the library to just have the book. After all, Google always has the information when we want it. Whether the information is relevant or not is another issue entirely.

Click here to listen to our conversation: Part 2

Sound clip (6:54 – 16:14)

http://www.ohsu.edu/library/videos/olaq2010spring/turner_audio_clip_3.mp3

We drew our conversation to a close by projecting our sights onto the future, drawing our perceptions and learned lessons together like a laser, trying to imagine what the snow globe would look like once the flakes settled down. We think that in the future we will continue to see librarians fighting the "good fight." Not only will they be the ones to ensure that information sharing remains a democratic practice, but they will also ensure that we use the digital migration to strengthen the bonds between and among our diverse communities.

Serenity sums it up best: "Something I think that we can use technology for is just connectivity, networking in a sense, and really being able to be a library advocate. Just having connections to communities that you would never have had ten years ago even. I think that can be very powerful, it's sort of overwhelming, of course, but passing on the benefits to your patrons or connecting them to your communities, too, I think that's pretty exciting for me."

"Definitely," agrees Kirsten, "and that's obviously important for all libraries, but even more important for the public libraries to understand and to be there for all of its communities. They are the ones really fighting the fight, helping to provide to the public that might not be able to afford or access other information."

We all agreed that we were thankful to be earning our degrees here in Portland. This is a city where librarians' professional principles are practiced. The three of us are amazed at Multnomah Public Library, the different ways that they connect to the community, and their ability to circulate so many materials with such limited space. We are also pleased with the variety of libraries found in this town, and the different perspectives the individuals who staff those libraries share with the wider community.

This is a pretty exciting time to be earning a library degree—the snow globe may not stop shaking anytime soon, but we're certainly going to enjoy the blizzard!

Click here to listen to our conversation: Part 3

Sound clip (16:14 – 22:27)

http://www.ohsu.edu/library/videos/olaq2010spring/turner_audio_clip_4.mp3

