

Chapter 4.5

Teaching Technology to Digital Immigrants: Strategies for Success

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ABSTRACT

Someone has to prepare faculty who are in need of technology skills. For example, in Louisiana, in response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, every faculty member at the university level has to have a Blackboard presence and a disaster plan so that classes can continue in the event of a catastrophe. Those faculty called upon to assist their peers in complying with the directives are often chosen only because they are more comfortable than others with technology. Often, trainees are uncomfortable in such training, and senior faculty, often later “digital immigrants,” can be resentful. The researchers and authors of this paper have garnered \$443,658 in grants involving training faculty in instructional technology. Through

their experiences, the authors and researchers have isolated seven key practices that make such training successful. This article describes those practices and supports the findings of the primary research with secondary research on andragogy and Marc Prensky’s ideas of the literacy divide that exists between “digital natives” and “digital immigrants.” By considering the basic tenets of adult education, we can be better facilitators of valuable training sessions that will bridge the digital divide.

INTRODUCTION

John Dewey was a pioneer in the field of education, namely with his contribution to educational theory. One of the basic tenets of Dewey’s 1938 publication *Experience and Education* is the idea

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of a democratic educational experience, also known as the progressive movement. Dewey believed that education should be both “accessible and [enjoyable]” (p. 34) rather than the traditional authoritative experience in which the teacher is the holder of all relevant knowledge and the student is an empty vessel to be filled with that knowledge. Like Freire (1977) decades later, Dewey valued the prior individual experiences of the learner and claimed that “all genuine education comes about through experience” (Freire 1977: p. 25).

In 1973, another educational pioneer, Malcolm Knowles, introduced us to his theories of education. While Knowles’ predecessors theorized about learners in a more general way, Knowles himself focused on the adult learner. With Dewey’s progressive theories in mind, Knowles established the “groundbreaking” idea of “andragogy and the concept that adults and children learn differently” (Knowles, et al, 2005, p. 1). Knowles and his co-authors define andragogy, in part, as “an honest attempt to focus on the learner” (p. 1). Whereas Knowles pioneered the actual theory of andragogy, Galbraith (1990) and others have made significant contributions where actual teaching methods are concerned. In Galbraith’s *Adult Learning Methods* text, eight chapters focus on foundational perspectives of adult education, a few center on instructional design, and this text, currently in its third edition, clearly has college instructors in mind, which is the focus of our research in this article. Specifically, we will examine, in part, the literacy divide that exists between “digital natives” and “digital immigrants,” terms coined by Marc Prensky (Prensky 2001). Then we will use that information to support and explain what we have found to be best practices in educating digital immigrants in instructional technology. Our best practices are derived from over ten years of educating high school and college-level faculty in instructional technology. This training was funded by \$443,658, total, in grant funds from Louisiana Systemic Initiatives Program (LaSip) (\$222,741), Louisiana Board of Regents Traditional Enhance-

ment Grant Program (\$120,159), Louisiana Board of Regents SELECT Grant Program (\$89,258), and Louisiana Tech University Research (\$11,500). The result of our primary and secondary research is a list of seven key “do’s” when training faculty in instructional technology.

BACKGROUND

When the term “digital divide” was first mentioned in a 1995 report from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), physical access was the primary topic of discussion. The subtitle alone, “A Survey of the ‘Have Nots’ in Rural and Urban America” attests to the goals of this report on the digital divide (*Falling*, 1995). But since the publication of this report, researchers (Warschauer, 2002, 2003; Cooper & Weaver, 2003; Solomon, et al, 2003; van Dijk & Hacker, 2003; Enoch, Y. & Soker, 2006) have noticed other trends—cultural ones rather than physical ones—that prevent certain people from reaping the benefits that technology has to offer. Some of these barriers include gender, social class, urban versus rural community, and age. In US society, as some researchers (van Dijk & Hacker, 2003; Warschauer, 2003) have discussed, physical access to technology is widespread; therefore, “the key issue is not unequal access to computers but rather the unequal ways that computers are used” (Warschauer, p. 46). Indeed, there exists a clear gap between digital natives and digital immigrants in terms of how these groups utilize available technology.

In Prensky’s words, “Today’s students—K through college—represent the first generations to grow up with this new [digital] technology” (2001, p. 1). So if we think about this fact from the perspective of established faculty members, it is apparent that many of us are the immigrants whereas our students are the digital natives. This potential dilemma places faculty members in the interesting position of being behind the learning curve when it comes to our students and technology.

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