

Book Report: *The Digital Divide*

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EDCI 887

October 28, 2011

Imagine our current high-paced, digital, constant multitasking world for a moment. Now picture the average day in a classroom. Are they anything alike? “Our students have changed radically. Today’s students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach” (Bauerlein, 2011, p.3). This book, *The Digital Divide: Arguments for and Against Facebook, Google, Texting, and the Age of Social Networking*, takes the reader through a series of essays written by multiple authors who examine the astonishing and revolutionary changes that have occurred within the past decade. The book is broken up into three sections. First, “The Brain, the Senses” claims the human brain is being reprogrammed due to our technological advanced world. Then in section two, “Social Life, Personal Life, School” authors investigate the effects of social media on our personal identify and relationships. Finally, the third section, “The Fate of Culture” examines what this digital lifestyle means for our society and the future.

One of the first essays in the book written by Marc Prensky investigates the difference between digital natives and digital immigrants (Bauerlein, 2011). Prensky states, “Today’s students think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors...our students’ brains have physically changed” (Bauerlein, 2011, p. 4). Children who do not know a world without cell phones, the Internet, and video games are what Prensky calls “digital natives.” People who did not grow up in this type of world but who now belong to and participate in such a world are called “digital immigrants.” The biggest problem our world currently faces is that “digital immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language, are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language” (Bauerlein, 2011, p. 5). Today’s young minds are trained to respond to speed,

interactivity, and instant feedback they receive from computers, video games, and televisions, it is no wonder they come to school bored out of their minds.

Another essay written by Nicholas Carr provides an eye-opening reality about our current inability to stay focused and read comprehensively through long pieces of writing. He states, "I've lost the ability to [read a book]. Even a blog post of more than three or four paragraphs is too much to absorb. I skim it." (Bauerlein, 2011, p. 65). Furthermore, as our brains evolve and shift the focus towards technological skills, it pushes out fundamental social skills (Bauerlein, 2011). This evolutionary change in the rewiring of our brains is occurring over a period of a couple decades, it is frightening to think what will be next.

Next, we have to think about the effects of technology on our personal lives and identities. Don Tapscott claims the current net generation expects freedom, customization, scrutiny, integrity, collaboration, entertainment, speed, and innovation in all aspects of their lives (Bauerlein, 2011). We are becoming difficult to be persuaded by the media and advertising companies because we have so much power at our fingertips through the Internet. We are in constant and instantaneous communication with everyone around us. Our life is now online through various online profiles, blogs, and search engines. "The human desire for attention" is fed through online interactivity (Bauerlein, 2011, p. 173). Every day, people choose virtual communication over face-to-face communication, such as, texting versus speaking in person. It is all about convenience. Why meet a friend at the coffee shop when you can stay at home and Skype with her instead?

Finally, what does all this mean for our society as a whole? The scariest analogy provided in this book by Tim O'Reilly was that of comparing the World Wide Web to a newborn baby. At first, she has been fed information but cannot focus. She recognizes her

parents, but cannot understand them. She has little control over her environment. Then everything slowly starts to make sense. She makes connections on her own without someone doing them for her. Tasks become automatic. The big question is, "Is the Web getting smarter as it grows up?" (Bauerlein, 2011, p. 233). One has to wonder the consequences of feeding a machine such valuable information for so many years, encoding and creating algorithms to solve unbelievable problems. Web 2.0 has forever changed our world, giving power to the average Joe down the street. However, Andrew Keen provides a downside to all of this. He states, "One of the unintended consequences of the Web 2.0 future may well be that everyone is an author, while there is no longer any audience." (Bauerlein, 2011, p. 248). Are we becoming so wrapped up in putting information out there in virtual space that we are unaware that no one may be paying any attention to it? It is a thought to consider as blogging, tweeting, and updating our status becomes our main goal when we log on.

In conclusion, *The Digital Divide* will take readers on an epic rollercoaster ride through the startling changes that have occurred over a very short period of time in the history of our world. The ideas in the book helped me make sense of what is happening when we look at the big picture of this generation, as well as the pros and cons of such a lifestyle. Technology does make our world more convenient and enables us faster communication with constant connectivity, but it takes away some of our fundamental skills. Our ability to focus and pay attention to what is happening around us has become limited and pushed aside to make room for other advanced skills. Are we losing the ability to sit still and enjoy solitude? Is it all worth it in the end to have endless entertainment and avoid the dreadful feeling of boredom? It will be interesting to see what happens next.

## References

Bauerlein, M. (2011). *The digital divide: Writings for and against facebook, youtube, texting, and the age of social networking*. New York: Penguin Books.