

## **LBAR Lesson V: Digital Natives or Digital Immigrants?**

Today's subject continues the debate over Cyberspace by bringing it down from the abstract level of cognition, brains and the mind, and turning it to practical matters concerning education. Normally this is a rather taboo technique; teachers do not usually ask of their students to think critically about the very subject matter they are teaching. For instance, when you teach history or mathematics, you may well ask your students to think critically about a problem or issue so as to get them to come up with solutions on their own (and thereby to learn the lesson at issue for themselves). But you rarely if ever ask them to think about the subject as such; that would be similar to asking your students why they need to learn history or mathematics at all, a road you know-well to avoid.

Yet thinking about why this is so will help you to see why doing it in this instance is essential. You do not ask your students to think critically about subject matters as such because they must first learn that subject matter. The student is in no position to analyze critically the relevance of history or mathematics to education before he or she knows something of history or mathematics. For this very reason, however, the teaching of Cyberspace is essentially different. Your students are likely to know more about Cyberspace than you yourself do; indeed, you should take it for granted that your students spend more time in Cyberspace than do you. What you lack in experience, however, you gain in perspective; unless you yourself grew up in a home that was “wired,” i.e., that was connected to Cyberspace, then you know what life was like before Cyberspace, and hence have some sense of how Cyberspace has changed life. That very perspective, if trained, provides you with a certain critical distance from Cyberspace. Obviously, however, your students lack that distance. Thus, while they have been completely “socialized” to Cyberspace (remember, socialization is only a social scientific word for education), they have not been educated about Cyberspace, i.e., they do not yet possess the ability to think critically about the “Cyber-Culture” in which they have been reared. And if you do not help them to gain this perspective, then they will be unlikely to learn it at all. Thus, your goal here is to get them to put themselves into question by asking them to think about what they do.

The readings for this lesson have been selected so that your students get a glimpse of what important people who think about education for a living are saying about their education. The authors are thus talking about your students, which they need to pick up on and engage. Not only does the debate affect this very class – to what extent if at all should Cyberspace/studies be taught, especially if it displaces core subjects – but also their lives more generally, including their lives in Cyberspace. Hopefully, if you can get them to see both points, but especially the negative point (this is always *the* challenge), then a whole new framework will open up to them whereby they can put their activities in Cyberspace into context.

The Pro side/Prensky: Prensky will argue that traditional education does a disservice to today's students because they learn in a different way than had previous generations. Specifically, because students today have grown up completely immersed in technology – their world, so to speak, has always had Cyberspace as a part – they think technologically, that is, they think different from the rest of us for whom Cyberspace technology played little if any part. To that extent, educators must adapt to their way of learning rather than attempting to get students to adapt to the way we as educators learned; at a minimum, this means increasing the use of technology in the classroom, not only as it enhances the learning experience for students who are themselves already technologically immersed, but also as preparation for their futures, which is sure to be technological if anything.

The Con side/Bauerlein: Bauerlein will argue almost the opposite of Prensky – to the extent that

Cyberspace is playing an increasingly prominent role in students' lives, it is affecting them adversely, that is, it is hindering their personal development. In a way, Bauerlein is arguing for the continuing need for a perspective much like your own; if students do not know of life without Cyberspace, then they cannot critically evaluate it. But more than that, he is also concerned that an increasing reliance on Cyberspace brings with it a corresponding decrease in “core” awareness, that is, in the basic areas of information once known as “fundamentals.” Particularly, his point of emphasis is civic literacy; the technology that was supposed to make available limitless information – Cyberspace – has brought with it a diminished awareness of basic facts and ideas associated with our government. And to the extent that republics rely upon an educated citizenry to succeed if not prosper, his concern is that the displacement of civic literacy by Cyberspace is detrimental to our civic well-being

[Note: remember that the question here is both one of method and of substance; should we use more technology in education, and/or should technology (i.e., Cyberspace) itself become a more central subject of education. I cannot predict what path your discussion will take; it is really idiosyncratic to every group. However, you should be prepared for your discussion going down one of the two respective paths (pro/con), and that you must work to bring the students back toward the other, acting as a sort of foil or devil's advocate. The best way to do this is by giving a strong defense of the argument they tend not to like, even if you do not personally agree with it.]