

PROCTOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS I.S.D. 704

# Engaging Digital Learners



Transforming Learning Environments

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## CHAPTER 1

# Rationale for Change

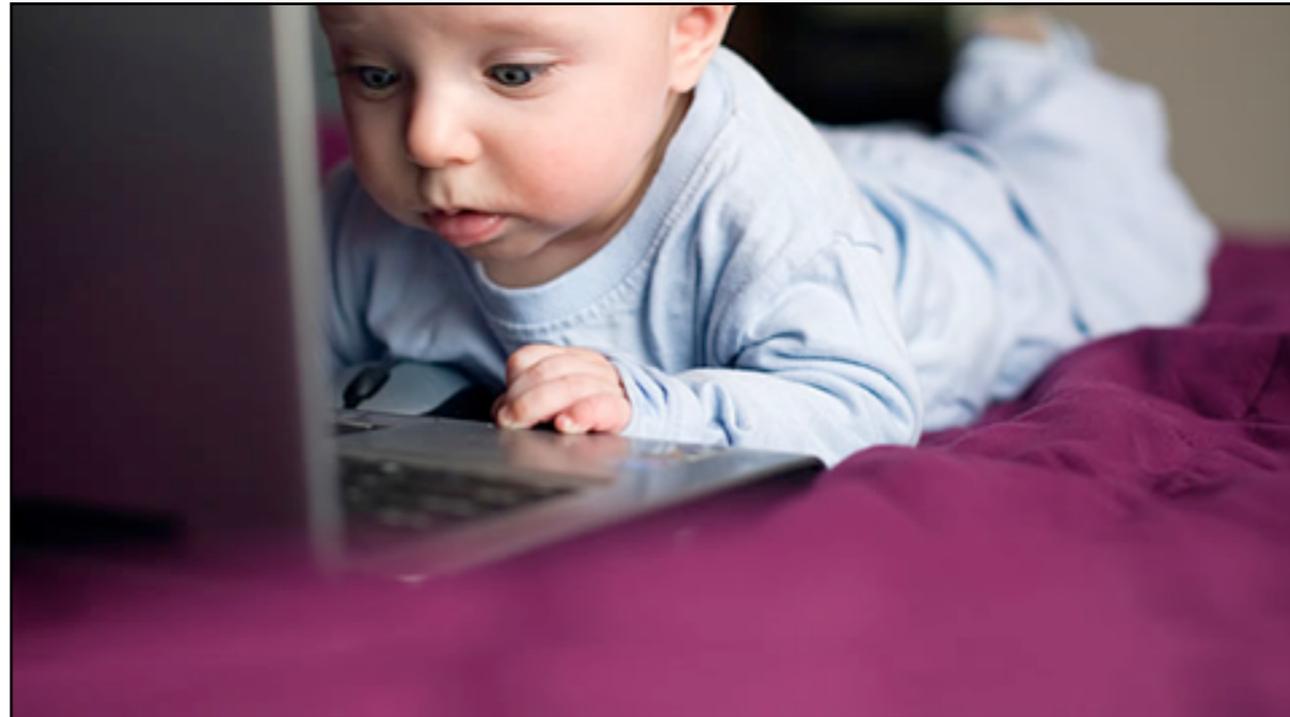


This chapter explores the rationale for expanding digital environments in schools and examines how our how today's students learn.

# Digital Natives

## Questions for Reflection

- Are you a Digital Native?
- What do Digital Natives look like or act like?
- Are our classrooms prepared to address the lifestyle of Digital Natives?
- Are our teachers delivering lesson that engage Digital Natives?



*Today's Digital Natives have only known the Internet and develop neural pathways that are much different from traditional learners who are not digital natives.*

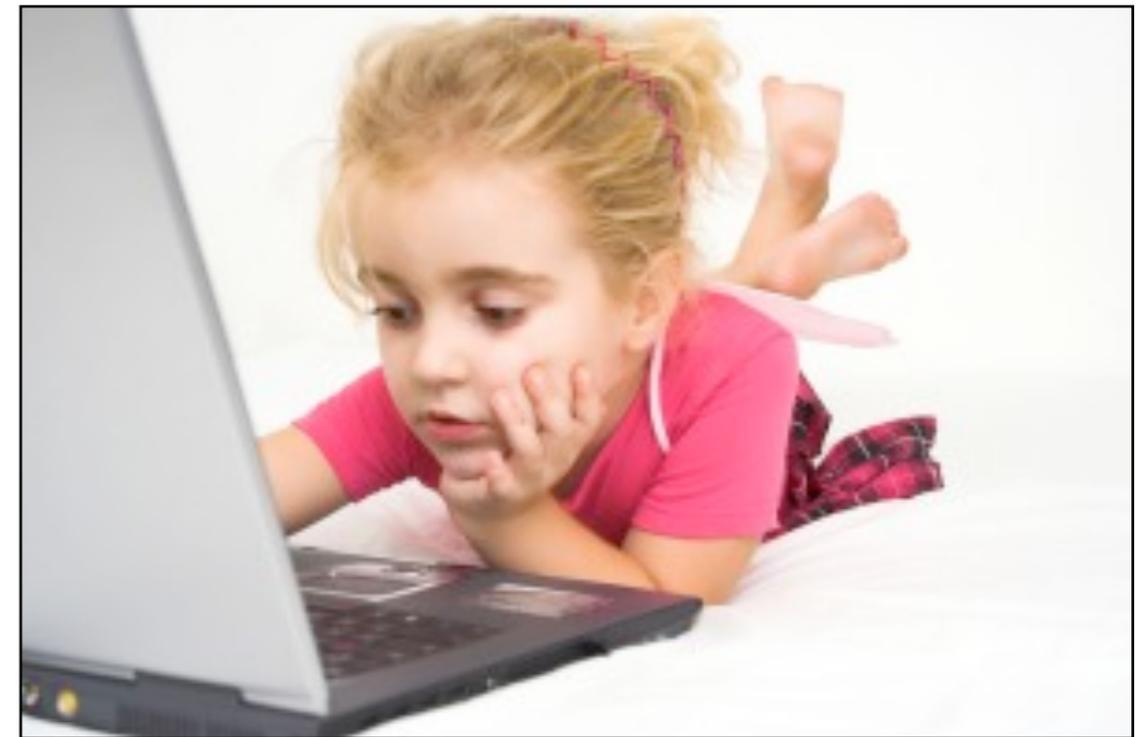
Stop and think for a moment about when you first began using the Internet. If you're like me, a non-digital native; you probably will recall a browser named Netscape or perhaps Mosaic. If that's the case, you might be smiling right now contemplating how much the Internet has changed. Digital Natives have always known the internet. Because of that, we need to understand that today's students come to us with some very different skills.

It doesn't take too much effort to make some pretty accurate assumptions about how intuitive kids are when it comes to technology. Just give a young child any digital device. It doesn't matter if they have ever seen it before. Within a few minutes, they'll have it figured out. It's not magic. It's what they know. It's why they are called Digital Natives. Being connected to technology is part of their brain circuitry and its part of how they learn.



Oh sure, kids go outside and play and they should be encouraged to embrace activities and to be involved with the outdoors. That also happens naturally. But, today's Digital Natives are a little different than kids who were not Digital Natives.

One major element that separates Digital Natives from traditional learners is the overwhelming amount of digital information that is available. Just try to think of everything that is available in a digital format. The list is pretty amazing and includes: music, books, photography, documents of all kinds, phones, games, movies, animations and the list goes on to include many more items of which our Digital Natives are acutely aware.



So, here we are! Faced with an emerging learner whose brain is wired to relate to technology and digital information. An emerging learner who is natively able to access digital information, access answers to questions they have and to send queries to search engines, An emerging learner who is able to collaborate with other learners in digital environments. An emerging learning who is engaged in understanding how to edit digital information, who is capable to accessing reading material, and able to looking up words they don't understand in a digital environments. But most importantly for teachers and school administrators, an emerging learning who is waiting for us to help them use the digital information they access. They are waiting for teachers who are ready to guide our Digital Natives in educational environment in which they are most comfortable.

### Experiential Learning:

Certainly teachers and administrators need to be acutely aware of the importance of experiential learning and continue to provide opportunities for hands on learning and opportunities to interact with environments that are available to students. Experiential learning allows students to apply knowledge they have gained to practical situations. These types of learning experiences are invaluable and often are leaning experiences that have lasting effects on learning and personal development.

However, educators need to remember that the style of teaching in which teachers “stand and deliver” needs to be changed. Students



no longer need to come to school to learn facts from their teacher. Facts, information and data are at our disposal 24 hours a day through the internet and digital resources.

A.I. Jedlicka Middle School in Proctor, Minnesota experience releasing a hawk at Hawk Ridge, Duluth, Minnesota. October 2012



### Access to Information:

The fact remains that our Digital Natives are “wired” to understand how to access digital information and that access is on demand, 24-7. Just think about what that allows students to do. Just think what this does to the amount of

time that students of all ages have to engage in learning. This access to information has allowed students to continue to learn well after the school day ends. In fact, try to tell a Digital Native to stop learning. It just isn’t going to happen because of their access digital information.

Today’s schools need to provide learning environments that are rich in experiential learning as well as focused on good lessons and coherent curriculum and that require meaningful reading and writing. But schools need to allow students to access information in environments they thrive in natively. There is no mystery to understanding Digital Natives. It truly lies in one’s awareness of how students are learning everyday and one’s ability to capture their innate talents. This includes providing devices like iPads and promoting changes in our curriculum to allow gateways to further learning. Educators need to be guides for our students and help them interpret, analyze, and synthesize the information they have access to in their learning environments.