

As a “digital native” I have lived my entire life immersed in technology. I was born in the infancy of IBM’s personal computer era in 1984. I did not receive my first computer until I was eight years old in 1992 (an outdated IBM PC my mother purchased from friends); however, I had been exposed to computers in school and at friends’ homes as early as 1989. I simply don’t remember a time when personal computers were not available for public utilization. In his 2001 article “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants” Marc Prensky rationalized his newly created term “Digital Natives” by declaring, “Our students today are all ‘native speakers’ of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet.” I believe Prensky’s statement defines my own personal digital history. For these reasons, I am proud to affirm my status as a digital native.

One of my fondest childhood memories is waking up early on Christmas morning 1992 to our very first personal computer. In approximately one hour’s time, I had the computer and all the components hooked up, and I was completely engrossed in the inner-workings of MS-DOS. I devoted the entire day to the computer with my face glued to the shiny computer screen typing stories on the word processor, playing games (*PGA Tour Golf*, *Mixed Up Fairy Tales*, *Lemmings*), and figuring out the 3.5” floppy disks. All of the games were educational for an eight year old boy “learning the ropes” of the exploding technology market. I was reading, writing, and learning key mathematical skills at every turn. This primitive computer and all its components are the foundation of my digital existence.

Only two short years later my mother acquired a new computer with the impressively innovative Windows 3.1. This proved to be my first interaction with an operating system excluding MS-DOS. Measured by today’s criteria, the computer was also quite modest; however, the influence of the PC should not be minimized. This machine afforded me my first interaction with an interestingly distinctive invention: the Internet. Unlike ever before, boundless information was now at my fingertips. As a ten year old child, I felt my aspirations in a future career, as well as life in general, could truly be limitless. I was introduced to the original “mind game” *Minesweeper*, as well as other creative programs such as Microsoft’s *Greetings Workshop*. I spent hours creating birthday, holiday, and sympathy cards; I even created milestone cards for the family dog, Blackie. I also continued honing my typing skills on the new word processing program accessible in the Windows 3.1 operating system.

In early 1996 my digital world turned upside down when the family purchased a new PC that offered the revolutionary Windows 95. In the summer of 1995, I recall watching the television for hours hoping to catch a glimpse of the Windows 95 commercial featuring the Rolling Stones’ “Start Me Up”. This new operating system transformed the technology world for not only me but millions of others. Now I could access a “start menu” on the “taskbar” for easy access to the multitude of programs available in the new system. Coincidentally, the start menu and taskbar still exist today in Windows operating systems; this further proves the durability and sustainability of Windows 95.

The next few computers and operating systems came quickly and left quickly. I updated my Windows 95 based computer to Windows 98 in the hopes of broadening my technological understandings. I quickly updated to Windows 2000, survived the Y2K scare, and found little difference between the three systems. In early 2001 I switched to Windows ME and was again underwhelmed.

The highlight of all this constant change came in 1998 when I opened an ICQ account and was opened to the world of instant messaging. ICQ was a pioneer in the instant messaging industry attracting more and more clientele each day. This incredibly rudimentary IM program served my early educational needs. As a middle school student I began using ICQ to message with friends to gain better understandings of homework given in class or to discuss a lecture I may have misunderstood or to satisfy the social demands of a young adult while simply discussing the day's events.

These early dates in my digital [timeline](#), which can be viewed at [dipity.com](#), only serve as the groundwork for my continuing educational inquiry. Each year I find myself discovering more about the complicated relationship between learning and technology. Perhaps the most influential discovery came two years ago while I was teaching 7th grade language arts in a rural South Carolina middle school. I visited the South Carolina Middle School Association's Conference in Myrtle Beach and was introduced to a multitude of educational technologies. More importantly, I was not only introduced to the technologies, I learned practical uses of each technology in the classroom. Twitter, IPADIO, Glogster, Jing, ePals, Pearltrees, and the assortment of Web 2.0 tools available were all discussed at the conference. I currently employ a class Twitter account for delivering updates and vital information to parents, IPADIO as an at-home student response system, and Glogster as an innovative, enhanced presentation software.

Additionally, this past year I purchased an iPhone4. This device has radically altered how I live and work. As discussed in *Digital Nation*, the first and last object I handle in a normal day is my iPhone, which is similar to many other digital natives. I'm turning the alarm off my phone in the morning and surfing the web at night. It is becoming exceedingly rare to find me without my phone. I am connected to the world unlike ever before. I snap photos and upload these images to the class Twitter account in approximately one minute. I exploit numerous apps for daily educational and administrative uses. For example, I benefit from Voxer, an app that turns a smart phone into a digital walkie-talkie, which allows me to monitor the children's activities throughout the school. I also use many other apps including GroovyGrader, Classroom Organizer, and ClassDojo. I have recently begun using ClassDojo to monitor students' behavior. Teacherkit is another great app that I use to track attendance, easily produce and store seating charts, and send quick emails to parents regarding attendance or behavior.

The online resources for *Digital Nation* were enlightening and compelling while successfully getting me to think critically about "significant questions of technology." I found the segment on Philip Rosedale's "Second Life" fascinating. One must definitely be inquisitive of a program that boasts about bringing people together by keeping people at a distance; however, I can foresee practical applications of this program. This school year we experienced ten snow days. Most of these days have been forgiven, essentially meaning each day is another lost possible educational experience. A program such as "Second Life" could revolutionize the snow day in the future. I could still meet with my students for a normal school session from the luxury of a snow-packed home. Another aspect of *Digital Nation* I gravitated toward was Mark Bauerlein and his "Dumbest Generation." I may take offense to the title of Bauerlein's novel; however, I believe he commands essential questions regarding technology and the current generation of students. The online *Digital Nation* explanation of Bauerlein's segment states, "As we hurtle along with technology, it's important that someone reminds us what's being left behind." Similar to what Bauerlein stated in the video, as a digital native I sometimes feel as if it is impossible to ever "press pause." I wonder if we, as a human race, will be able to actively and accurately evaluate the

causes (and potential harms) of our recent technology explosion. The *Pew Internet and American Life Project* questionnaire, "What Kind of Tech User Are You?" bestowed upon me the title of "digital collaborator." The survey further explained, "If you are a Digital Collaborator, you use information technology to work with and share your creations with others. You are enthusiastic about how ICT's help you connect with others and confident in your ability to manage digital devices and information." I absolutely approve of this assessment. I have always been confident in my digital abilities and revel in the possibility to share any technological creations with others. Coincidentally, I was asked this week to be a member of our school's newly created technology committee. Our first task is to create a technology plan for the upcoming school year that will obtain a mission statement, needs assessment, technology inventory, goals and objectives, and curriculum integration.

Autobiographical inquiry is as essential as the other inquiries discussed this semester in ED 800. It may, in fact, be the most essential inquiry being used by educators today. The uses of autobiographical inquiry are limitless; teachers create thousands of educational blogs each day, educators write autobiographical novels explaining key insights into the education world, and instructors generate Twitter messages with educational importance. This particular mode of inquiry can serve as a vehicle for teachers to improve understandings of important education concepts. There are countless autobiographical resources available for teachers on the Internet. For example, the folks at Open Education Database (OEDb) say there are over 30,000 blogs on edublogs.org alone! There are limits to this style of inquiry, though. An instructor utilizing autobiographical inquiry is limited to personal experience such as inquiry as participant observation. As a participant observer you make "interpretive judgments based upon your outsider's point of view." When we interpret particular events vital information can be ignored. Even with the limits, I can envision using all three stated autobiographical inquiry examples seamlessly in my own educational career. I already produce educational blogs and Twitter messages. In my future career I anticipate writing novels of autobiographical value, reflecting on my teaching practices, such as Vivian Paley.

This is a terrific final essay, and one clearly connected to your own exploration of the growth in your uses of new information and communication technologies in your educational experiences. You very artfully portray your own journey, including various stages through which you developed to arrive at the place you are today. However, what I appreciated most in your story is the evolution of your own thinking, as you take up notions like the “constant” presence of computers, the “radical” changes that can be induced by new pieces of technology, and the tension surrounding “distance” and interpersonal relationships. You say, “One must definitely be inquisitive or a program that boasts about bringing people together by keeping people at a distance.” Later you say, “I wonder if we, as a human race, will be able to actively and accurately evaluate the causes (and potential harms) of our recent technology explosion.” Taken together, these are some of the more serious issues surrounding new ICT, right? You also seem to describe your relationship with new ICT as developing first within the personal realm, and later expanding to your professional work. Thus, your story reflects some of the realities of how technology continues to shape our thinking (as Americans) and connections to teaching and learning. Still, there are some negative influences of ICT in the ways in which some people use such technologies, right? However, these losses unfold with greater gains of accessibility to information in a host of interactive forms and greater convenience related to the complexities of your life. You might remember Nicholas Carr’s resources related to the influence of new ICT on our lives, including our cognitive abilities. Do you see evidence of what he describes in your own story? Turning to your comments on autobiography as a form of inquiry, you identify how this form of inquiry is integrally connected to your professional development. You say, “It may, in fact, be the most essential inquiry being used by educators today.” You also pose some of the strengths and weaknesses associated with such an approach to learning. Without question, autobiography introduces bias, though research today increasingly is acknowledging these starting points regardless of the form of inquiry. However, autobiography as a form of inquiry provides a catalyst for deep thought and the provoking of significant questions, as is evident in the excellent string of issues prompted in the writing of this essay. In this sense, your own self-inquiry offers a place from which you not only can look back, but from which you can also gaze ahead, looking for opportunities to integrate a lifestyle of inquiry into the processes of teaching and learning throughout your life.

Grade: 4.0