

John Buaas

Fundamentals of English—EG060

Paper #5—Definition

In the chapter “Anxiety” in *Alone Together*, Turkle explores that theme within the context of our interactions with others via social media. More precisely, she is interested in the stresses and strains involved in how young people present themselves via social media: what they say about themselves and how they say it, what pictures of themselves they post online (and the corollary knowledge/fear that they have no control over whether others may have taken less-than-flattering pictures of them, and what those people may choose to do with them). All of these questions, and many more besides, fall under the domain of “digital identity”: those traces of ourselves we leave in the virtual space of the Web.

Imagine that you are the Grand Poobah of Curriculum Development for Butler Community College. The Vice-President for Academic Affairs has asked you to read Eric Stoller’s recent essay in *Inside Higher Ed*, “Digital Identity Development” (attached to this assignment sheet); the VP would like for you to give some thought to how Stoller’s ideas and suggestions might be integrated into Butler’s classes. Note that Stoller speaks of digital identity chiefly within social contexts, but by arguing that colleges should “[a]ctively [create] learning spaces that foster positive development of digital identity,” Stoller clearly feels there is a role within formal classroom environments for discussions of this subject.

Your paper thus should answer the question of whether it is appropriate for Butler to incorporate discussions of digital identity into its curriculum and, if so, how best to accomplish this. In other words, do discussions of digital identity fit into Butler’s sense of its purpose—its definition of itself? Thus, *you will want to show some familiarity with Butler’s mission statement—both its actual language and your understanding of that language—and curriculum as you formulate your response.* If you come to believe that it is not appropriate for Butler to do this, be sure to justify your reasoning, again showing your familiarity with Butler’s mission statement and curriculum. In your paper, make use of material from Turkle, Stoller, the Butler mission statement, and one other outside source that addresses the subject of whether (and how) the idea of digital identity should be taught as part of a college curriculum.

“Digital Identity Development”

[Eric Stoller](#)

(*Student Affairs and Technology*. Inside Higher Ed. 12 Sept. 2012. Web. 11 Feb. 2014.)

Math, writing, science, history and a variety of additional topics are generally included in the core curricula for higher education institutions. They are the building blocks of education. Standards that have evolved over time. We tend to acknowledge their importance. Ideally, students will achieve a baseline of knowledge and skills that form the foundations of their educational experience.

As students develop their traditional academic abilities, another area of development has emerged. Digital identity may be the next addition to “the core.” The manner in which we engage, share, promote, and present ourselves online has become a major facet in many of our lives. No longer seen as being separate from “real life,” an individual’s digital identity is intricately connected to their overall identity. Developing the ability to use digital communication/interaction channels isn’t about the dusty rhetoric of “natives” versus “immigrants.” Instead, digital identity development occurs via a broader context. It’s about having a shared baseline of knowledge.

Currently, social media are the dominant set of interactional spheres where digital identities are made manifest. Critical development is taking place and higher education needs to be incorporating proactive digital identity development opportunities. Institutions should be teaching students about the importance of context in online communications, the fluidity of privacy, awareness of nuance, and the power of community-building through social media.

Balance is necessary. All too often, schools take a reactive and/or risk averse stance on digital identity. We should be encouraging critical dialogue about how we engage with one another. Critical discourse about social media requires critical awareness of digital identity.

One of the aspects of digital identity that we are just starting to acknowledge is the evolution of our culture of judging. For example, when an 18 year-old student heads off to college, are we going to fault them for their immature Facebook postings that they posted when they were 12? Digital identity development is a door that swings both ways. Students are learning and growing in tandem with faculty and staff. In the near future, judging someone’s social media postings from their pre-college days may be significantly reduced.

Another aspect of digital identity is access and sharing. Social media sites promote sharing. Good, bad, or ugly, we share a lot of our lives online these days. However, it’s important to note that social media are not the cause of our behavior, they are merely the public conduit. Acknowledging mistakes and dissonance is an important aspect of digital identity. Individual development, after all, takes time.

It’s no longer optional for institutions (and their administrators) to passively engage students via social media. Actively creating learning spaces that foster positive development of digital identity should be our mandate. It hasn’t been created (yet), but the addition of digital identity to

the current canon of student development theories seems like a logical evolution. Student Affairs practitioners can play an important role in both theory and practice. Developing intentional learning spaces about digital identity will not only benefit a student during their college experience, but it will also aid them as they enter into a world that has become increasingly-centered around the concept of digital wisdom/fluency.