Students are not mutants!

By Laure Endrizzi, Institut français de l'éducation, ENS de Lyon, France

Being an IT user is not sufficient to become an expert when it comes either to teach or to learn with technologies! This applies to teachers, who have become major consumers of standard technologies (email, word processing and slideshow), but whose digital uses are most often confined to privacy. This also applies to students who are definitely not as skilled as we may like to imagine them, although their use of technology is more intensive than ours at the same age. This is not my say: these are the results of dozens of empirical research conducted over the past decade, analysed in the literature review I carried out in 2012 on *Digital Technologies in Higher Education*.

This may sound obvious. Nevertheless, our way of thinking is shaped for years by discussions about the growing gap between the society and the school system, the latter being blamed for failing to integrate digital technologies and thus contributing to students' dropout or failure. At the basis of such beliefs, we find the works addressing the so-called Millennial generation, also known as generation Y, based on a binary argument that differentiates the 'skilled' born after 1980 and the 'underskilled' who have not been exposed to digital technologies from birth.

Though young people are not born tech-savvy. Their actual uses of technologies are often rooted in routine practices and are mostly driven by a normative goal, since the point is to be a member of the peer group. Besides, the underlying assumption that practices are homogeneous cannot be verified. On the contrary, researchers provide evidence generational approach is ill-adapted, other discriminating factors, such as age, gender and social context, having a stronger influence on digital practices: ICT sharpen the curiosity of younger, girls use them mostly for communication purposes while boys develop more interest-driven practices, and those with disadvantaged backgrounds tend to have more limited uses. In other words, it is not that technologies change values and attitudes, but rather that values and attitudes influence how technologies are used.

It is also commonly assumed that the rise of technologies has widened the range of learning opportunities. Nevertheless, it is very clear that not every single undergraduate student can benefit from these opportunities and develop personal strategies. Some may have some kind of control over their exploratory uses, but the great majority of them are confined to basic uses, as all research indicate. Additionally, recreational digital practices, whatever the level of use, don't provide general transferable skills applicable to study practices. There is conversely strong evidence that 'followers' are much more numerous than 'leaders' and this lack of autonomy is consistent with a deficit of learning literacies and a dependency on guidance. That is why formal education must be responsible for undermining this new 'digital divide' and for putting the teachers in control. How? The discussion is to be continued on Friday 13th December (session *Online behaviour and its impact on media supported learning*)!