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INQUIRY INVESTIGATION AS CRITICAL LEARNING

AN EXPLORATION OF LIGHT WITH INFANTS AND TODDLERS

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VISUAL ARTS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ONLINE TRIAL

AKO AOTEAROA CONFERENCE 2011

STUDENT WORK

LEARNING ART IN THE DIGITAL AGE

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION: LEARNING ART IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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This is an edited transcript of a roundtable session held as part of the ANZAAE CONFERENCE art works • mahi toi held at the Dunedin School of Art at Otago Polytechnic in April 2009. The session was hosted by Rachel Gillies and Susan Ballard from the Dunedin School of Art at Otago Polytechnic.

Rachel: Hello and welcome. I'm Rachel Gillies and I teach photography in the Design Department and the School of Art, and with me is Su Ballard, Head of Electronic Arts at the School of Art. We have been thinking for a while about the implications of digital cultures and contexts on art practice, and in this session would like to address some of the issues surrounding the kinds of experiences we have had incorporating these ideas into the classroom. We are going to begin by introducing the development of our undergraduate digital literacy paper. We will then move into a broader discussion of the implications of digital materials and literacies in art contexts.

So, who are we and what do we do? In 2008, as part of the development of the Bachelor of Visual Arts I introduced a paper called Digital Literacy. All students participate regardless of what studio subjects they major in. In 2007 we started developing the course out of curriculum needs, and as the result of research I was doing into flexible and distributed curricula. Within the school, digital literacy arose out of an identified need in our senior and graduating students and the things that they didn't understand about the digital world. We saw that it was important to get this information to them early, at the start of their undergraduate education so that it didn't become cumbersome to learn and a problem that might stop them from delivering or developing the art that they were focussing on. The Digital Literacy paper first ran in 2008, and we continue to develop and reflect on it. We have a lot of ideas around why we do what we're doing, where we think we need to go, and what we need to acknowledge as we go along. Central to the curriculum design is the notion of 'situated media'. Situated media are digital media contextualised or understood within art practice. Digital literacy is not about teaching something that's separate from what the students do; rather it's something that applies across disciplines. Understanding the cultural and critical context of the discipline is important in order to use the tools however you want to use them.

Su: One of the things that happened when we first mooted Digital Literacy as a core paper was the need to address our own particular location. We made a strong argument from day one that what we were doing was situated within

the Art School. My key concern at the time was what I considered to be buy-in from the students who were resistant to digital technologies. The best way get buy-in was to demonstrate how digital literacy was already central to engagement with any studio, that it was already happening within many different art contexts. As soon as we started to do this, it made sense on a broader scale and we could then turn the discussion around and start engaging back out with other courses that were already offering tools for learning some of this technology. In the first year of teaching, digital literacy was core for both year one and year two. This gave us an immediate learning experience, and a lot of challenges because we captured everyone: the people who were brand new to Art School, and also the people who had been at Art School for a year already had established practices and were asking us: 'well, why do I need to do this?'. We maintained that any digital tools are context-specific: they've got to be useful to a student's own kind of practice.

Rachel: We believe that digital literacy is relevant to all people who study art, all people who are interested in art's theory and history. Initially there was some discussion with students saying, 'I want to do painting, I don't want to do digital stuff, I don't want to be a video artist, I want to be a painter.' We carefully contextualised what painting has to do with digital media and why that could help or be important to their practice. We also addressed learner profiling, and the range of students entering the paper who are already quite diverse in their uses of digital media. We turned to other discussions and research in the field and initially worked with the distinction between 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants' as coined by Marc Prensky. Prensky's work offered us ways to name different student knowledges, and ask how we teach our students whilst engaging the digital divide.

Su: When we started to think about this question of a divide, we began to ask the same questions of ourselves: 'am I a "digital native" or am I a "digital immigrant"?' We realised that to some extent we are all digital immigrants but in starting to 'naturalise', we're starting to feel at home in this environment. However we also realised that we'll never be truly indigenous to this kind of place, it's a different kind of place for us because we didn't grow up with it in the same way that some of the students have.

Rachel: Another key question in the development of the paper was whether everybody had to engage. We argued that digital cultures are shifting so quickly that there is always something that we can't predict, or have knowledge

of. Digital literacy is not about learning tools, but critiquing and understanding them. We also looked at graduates and asked where these students were going to be. In Ken Friedman's talk this morning, he introduced the 'sixth economy': the people we are teaching now who are going to be the people shaping and leading the economy in ten years' time. How then, do we deal with the way that these people work and make sure that they are best prepared for that world that they emerge into, which we know will be a digital world? Danny Butt has also argued that new technologies and the changing economic environment have driven significant changes in tertiary education over the last 20 years. Butt argues that a new undergraduate education model which integrates critical, creative and technical skills is required specifically in light of the rise of information and communication technology.

In terms of the tools that we engage, we have developed this paper as a flexible and blended delivery model, as a response to distance students as well as the technologies themselves. The course is not only digital or only about computers or technology. It's blended.

Su: We use paper sometimes.

Rachel: Yes, we use paper worksheets. Some of the other tools that we use are: WikiEducator; various web 2.0 platforms, and face-to-face labs so students interact in different ways. We have weekly lectures and this is where contextualisation comes in. Before the students touch the tools, they get a lecture about why they're going to touch the tools, as well as tasks that then bring the theory and the materiality and the experience together; and help the students critically question, understand and represent what they are doing and what they are thinking about.

Su: We thought very carefully about how we delivered digital literacy. I believe it is necessary to have a division between lectures and labs. Learning does not happen if students are placed in front of a computer and told 'click this button, click this button'. In digital literacy the students come together for a lecture where they are presented with the context for that tool. The lecture first explains not just what software tools are available and how to use them, but demonstrates how software is often an applied tool and concept. We focus on

Topics! Collaborative Authoring & Editing

project-drawing-signs

★ home PAGE DISCUSSION (6) HISTORY NOTIFY ME

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Existing Signs
New Creations
Contributors

This is a wiki created by students at the Dunedin School of Art at Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand.

It is a collaborative portal for the project
Sigils, Signs, and Symbols: The identification of symbols that have influenced language, culture, and society
from the paper *Drawing* (VA501001) in the Bachelor of Visual Arts, run by Lecturer Michael Morley in conjunction with the paper *Visual Arts Core Studio 1 - Digital Literacy* (VA503100) run by Lecturer Rachel Gillies, and Technical Teacher, Max Bellamy.

Image: Seance for Nam June Paik, Andrea Clifford, Ada Symposium, Christchurch, 2008

artists who have been doing interesting and critical works using these tools. Instead of 'how' and 'what', we focus on broad contexts.

Rachel: We then get the students to work out what level they are at for this particular topic; beginners or intermediate, or advanced. This allows us to cater for different learners, because it's not just the 'digital natives', or 'digital immigrants' who are studying the paper. It's important to remember that the student coming straight from school doesn't necessarily know the critical context for the tools they may use daily. What they do know is very much based on what they've done, it's an experiential thing.

Su: Another example. Vicki Smith has been working on the West Coast leading the development of the ICARUS project involving six primary schools. ICARUS uses ICT to enable development through shared data and resources developing network spaces from the Coast and connecting children with children in international environments and also nationally. This image is of a classroom where students at Northland college are working towards credits in Māori performing arts by tutoring students at Harihari via video conferencing. Nationally networks are enabling ongoing relationships that students will have, not just with the technology, but with each other across New Zealand. In this context Prensky's ideas become a little problematic. 'digital native' and 'digital immigrant' are neat little boxes, but they contain colonialist implications that treat the network as another type of land to be owned, and digital matter as something that cannot be shared and differently occupied.

Rachel: It is necessary then to look at the future of what we do and how we address some of these ideas and what new ideas we might have to address in the next few years. We continue to frame the discussion around the ideas of creativity, collaboration, criticality and communication. What are the shifts that have already taken place and might take place in the next 5-10 years, within the technologies, within the types of students that we're working with, and within classrooms? Thinking about shifting contexts means that we move around the subject of digital media rather than focusing on the tools themselves, on the software which it's not necessarily about.

Participant: What kind of web 2 tools are you using?

Rachel: We're using a wiki to base the structure of the course. It houses the main structure, so the initial introduction leads the student here first of all. We're using many of the tools that we're teaching to teach. We're using the wiki to base the programme and we're using blogs. The key thing here is

that if you're trying to teach someone who has never used digital technologies you must give them a bit of paper to tell them where the wiki is, rather than just expect them to be able to find it somehow through Google or Blackboard or whatever management system you're using. Through the tasks the students keep a hard copy record of the things that we're asking them to do and it builds up week by week. For example there's a couple of weeks where we talk about the digital image and how it has evolved out of art history, and the students start making digital images, and they save them. After those initial few weeks, they start learning about how social networks can be created through the use of blogs and then they start adding the images to their blog. For assessment students present an online presence where they pull all these things together. I'm waiting for a student to realise they can go in and change the wiki, it hasn't happened yet, but that's my goal.

Participant: I think that in a way we seem to be reinventing a way that suits us. What about using Facebook or MySpace or something like that and actually grabbing some of that back for us? Because in a way it seems like an artificial place for them to park their stuff, they naturally go straight into these other sites.

Rachel: I agree. I currently have a social network on Facebook that involves the people I know from the UK, students that I work with, peers, colleagues, and that has become, as my mobile phone has become, another way to communicate with students. We need to include not just the quantifiable things, but those things that happen outside of the structured class. In some ways what we've done is to create this in the vision of ourselves: so there's step one, step two, step three; there's a workbook; this suits the 'digital immigrants' who come in and can't deal with finding the wiki week after week and need to have it written down somewhere. But in the next five years, as that demographic potentially becomes smaller, we will have to change the way that we're teaching. I'm teaching linearly, but the students who are 'digital natives' don't learn that way, they learn in a very non-linear way and they learn from experience: they go intuitively from one place to another. This came to light last week when I sent out an email to all the students who hadn't got to a certain checkpoint, and one of them sent back an email saying, 'oh I have done that, and I think I've done everything else', and she'd done everything within the structure of what we'd discussed in the classes, but she hadn't gone to the wiki each week, she couldn't even remember that there was a wiki there. By coming to those lectures she'd gone home (this is one of the advanced students who never came to the advanced class of course), and done the work. The teaching process must acknowledge these students too.

Su: I think it's important to remember that it isn't necessarily about using one technology over another it's about thinking about what the broader context is that those tools are used in. Everything continually shifts platforms. What is key for us is teaching the tools and using the tools at the same time. I don't want to be teaching one set of tools and making the students use a different set of tools, or making myself use a different set of tools.

Participant: Feeling uncomfortable with working with the wiki or learning the tools so you can teach the tools is something I face all the time. Computers were the size of buildings when I was a kid, it just seems like I'm constantly trying to catch up with the students that I'm teaching. However there's a body of knowledge, the caucus of knowledge that I've developed which was outside of that digital environment, that they don't have, and they've got this caucus of knowledge which I don't have. It seems like we need to find some arena where we can actually meet and meld, rather than actually have a guru that sits up the top and can mediate everything. I actually need to learn as much from them as they need to learn from me. Often they don't know what they need to know, and that's always a problem.

Su: Absolutely. This is where situated media comes in, because it's situated in context. So if you are a painter, your use of digital tools is situated in your context as a painter, not in my context as an electronic artist. I think the idea of melding is useful because I think that's what we're all trying to do. We all have different skills and different sets of knowledge and we meet in a classroom and there are students who'll be sitting there saying, 'but I'm using these open source tools, surely I can do it that way', and then we've got students who can't navigate the space of a desktop page. In any classroom environment we've got this massive range, it isn't a kind of either/or situation. Elizabeth Baynard talks about 'fluency' alongside 'literacy', and my feeling is that's a productive way of talking about it; we're all fluent in different ways.

Caro McCaw: Do you have an example of how digital fluency or blogging or using the wiki is relevant for a painting student?

Rachel: The way I present digital literacy to the students is that we're offering a range of tools and we're contextualising them within art and if at the end of the paper they find one, two or three of those useful in their study or in their practice, or in their own personal marketing, then that's a success. If it's just that they feel more confident that they are able to reply to an email that they get from a gallery, then that's a success. It's about giving them the choice, without them just going, 'oh, I don't like computers, I don't do computers', and then therefore it's never a choice that they could have a website or communicate with people that they may have to

as a painter or as a sculptor.

Su: Students in other media use the blog as a reflective workbook. Within art school environments there's a huge amount of emphasis on documenting process. For example a ceramics student's world opened up because she could write reflectively in a blog about her practice outside of the muddy clay studio space, and she found ways to connect internationally with other ceramic artists. The ceramics community is very small in art schools now; there was this opportunity to have other people from around the world commenting on her student work, so it developed very strongly for her as a reflective journal. Blogging is a step away from the studio; it's a step that makes you think in a different way. In digital literacy we give students tools and tasks; for example: 'find a copyright free or creative commons image relevant to your practice and upload it to your blog'. In doing this exercise they learn how to upload an image to their blog, they learn how to find the right kinds of images online that they're legally allowed to use and reflect on the image and the process of finding it.

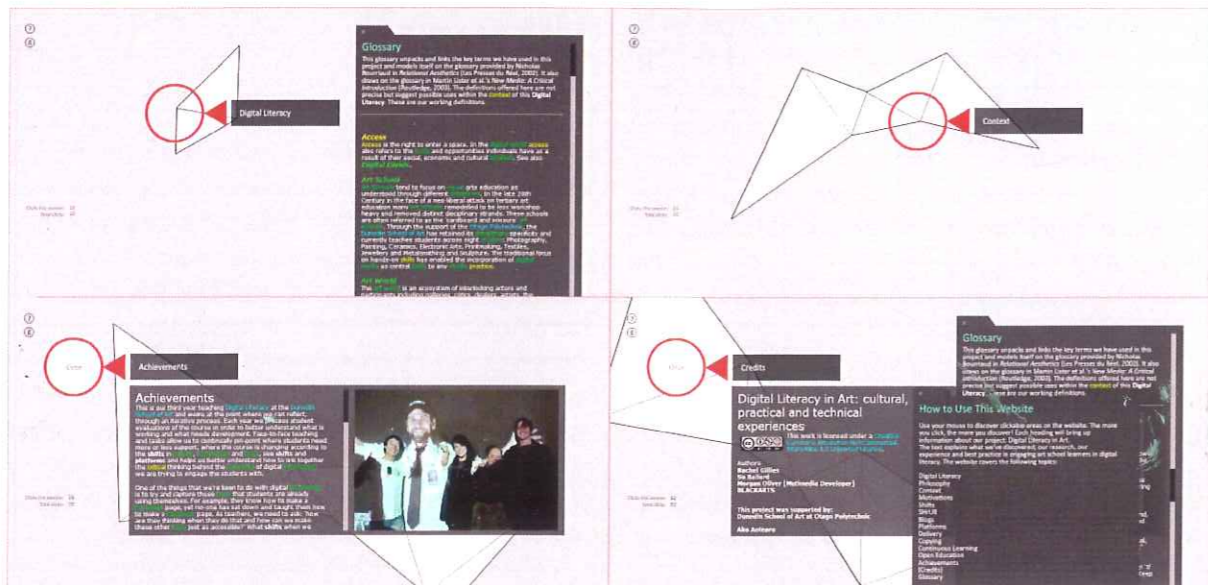
Participant: Have you ever had the reaction from students that they don't want to upload their own image because they don't want other students to copy it, or see it, or use it for their own design?

Su: That comes back to understandings of a collaborative context. We strongly believe that students need to learn how to be collaborative, so they understand issues around intellectual property and copying, so that the notion of copying is contextualised in a much broader way.

Rachel: This is an example of a student whose work was 'stolen' from their blog, and then had to deal with it. In this case, he's gone for the *Creative Commons, By Attribution, Non Commercial, No Derivatives* license so that he is protected. It doesn't stop people from copying it, but he also makes sure that his online images are low resolution enough that it's potentially not going to be an issue.

Participant: I was interested in what you said about blogging and thinking of something you want to tell the students on the weekend, does this mean that you're working all over the place, at different times and there's no sort of boundaries anymore, because you're working weekends?

Rachel: I think there's a fear that that's what's going to happen and I think that's what stops a lot of people perhaps opening up to an on-line model, or a distance or flexible learning model, but the reality is that I do think about things at the



weekend to do with my students.

Su: Your question is also to do with immediacy; we expect if we use these tools we get an immediate response. A colleague in Australia, who I've worked quite closely with, just started each day to wait for 10 minutes before she responded to an email instead of responding straight away, and then the next week she waited 20 minutes. Now if you write to her you will not get a reply for two days. And everyone expects that and understands it, she is working at her own speed, in her own way, and has removed that immediacy, it doesn't mean she is doing any less. If you think of something you store it on a blog, that doesn't mean you are available to the students at four in the morning.

Rachel: But my blog is available. It's also about distribution; instead of having that one conversation with one student about that thing that was interesting, it's up online and my students (and anyone else) can then benefit from that thinking. Which means instead of me collating and presenting more lectures, I can put those bits up and it's available when the students are ready. In lots of ways we're all potentially working more flexibly and it's not necessarily about catering to other people's needs but to our own as well.

Participant: Have you had any experiences with learning management systems such as Blackboard? I've found that some of the aspects of Blackboard like online journals have been good for our students who upload their videos into YouTube and then embed them in their journals and things like that, and then stream them in.

Su: There is an issue about the platforms, about the tools; our key thinking is all about context. The students are using

YouTube, using Wikipedia, so how do we pull those things that we are using into different contexts, not just into Blackboard, but into a whole range of different places?

Participant: Maybe this relates to this notion of what materials you can and can't bring into the classroom. One thing that I've noticed about Gen Y's that make up most of our classrooms presumably, is they have a very difficult relationship with understanding distinctions between public and private. The thing that I've noticed in teaching a unit here, is that there have occasionally been issues where this is something they should be treating as their journal. But it's also a public document, at least in as much as the rest of the class can access this thing and potentially modify it as well. How do you engage and deal with those sorts of the ethical concerns?

Rachel: We deal with ethical concerns from day one. I check regularly to see if someone has gone in and written anything in the wiki because they've worked out that it's editable. With blogs they can be private, you can lock off access.

Participant: And do the students get it though? Because I find that the idea of the public is very, very nebulous ...

Su: The first time a student gets a comment from a stranger on their blog they understand it. That's all that needs to happen.

Caro: I've had different experiences. I find it harder to get good critical and analytical thinking on a blog than I do on a workbook, because there's a culture that comes with saying



anything on the internet. So maybe our students are doing that, crossing boundaries in the digital space which they wouldn't in a piece of paper; and I don't know how you stop that, other than talk regularly about the issues of public/private.

Just to open this discussion out a little bit I'd like to ask how many educators in the room use social networking software as tools in the classroom? Are there risks involved with using social networking software, are there benefits, are there particular relationships to art; are there ones that are relevant to other aspects of education that we're engaged in?

Participant: I teach theory, and I use Moodle and I know that students love YouTube, so when I give lectures I make connections to YouTube, it's very easy. Then I use Moodle to analyse YouTube. I do try and limit the kinds of responses by being very specific about what I want from the students when I ask them to analyse it. I am very specific with my questions, and what I want them to answer because they tend to be over-productive, excessive.

Participant: I'm trying to create some dialogue between secondary school students who haven't used these tools before and I haven't used them before, and we're trying to do this online and with videoconferencing and the thing that I find interesting is the assumption that the students are these 'digital natives' but in reality, in my experience, they also need quite a lot of technical support, particularly using it in an educational context. We're drawing on other people to help, specialist people, but there are not a lot of them out there in the secondary school sector and if they are out there they're very busy. In the tertiary sector it's coming across as easy, it's

not so easy in the sector that I'm in because I think it lacks the support and the resources, yet there's this expectation that teachers are going to cross over into this world and if we haven't already we should be.

Su: I understand that, it's definitely not easy. This is our third year doing this and we're at the point where we can reflect. We spent time trying to think through this as an idea first. One of the things that I'm keen to do with this technology is to try and capture those tools that students have themselves. For example, they know how to make a Facebook page, no-one has sat down and taught them how to make a Facebook page. We need to think, 'well how are they thinking when they do that and how can we make these other tools just as accessible?' What shifts is the critical content; we introduce students to processes of thinking critically while using these tools, and so that's why we returned to the lecture format for digital literacy. It's about blending that older style of teaching with these digital tools and pulling them together.

Participant: I think the other thing that works is great tutoring, because when you are mediating with a discussion board, a blog or something like that you need to pull people back to a particular focus. I have a methodology class with post-grads, and most of them are not digital natives, most of them have come back to want to pick up a research career; and we run our subject over two weekends with a month or so in between, and we set up a discussion board and they all go, 'I'm not going to get in and do that', and I said, 'well you've got to, and every time you go in and make a post you must finish with a question, not a rhetorical question, but a question that directs the next person to start the conversation', and they come back a month later and say, 'gee, I had no idea how much material we could get through in our own time when we have reflective opportunities to think about what

somebody has said, to come in, to bring some evidence, to do all of those academic scholarship kind of models.' I just feel how inadequate my face to face tutorials have been, because the depth of some of the responses just blows you out of the water; because they come in with these responses that are so focused, and you think, 'wow!', you know, 'I'm almost redundant', and I think, yes, that's what I want to be, I want to be completely redundant, to set this ball in motion and let it run its course with clever people who have got all of the tools, all of the learning capacities to take this somewhere.

Rachel: But I don't think you're redundant, I think you're facilitating, and without you it would be too hard for the students themselves to get things rolling.

Su: What we're experiencing all the time is shifting and moving. In the general framework there are shifts happening in the technology that we can never predict and we can never fully understand, and that's why there is absolutely no point in teaching software. Secondly, we've got shifts in the student body, they are not necessarily digital natives, they are people who may or may not be able to use certain sets of tools in certain ways. Thirdly, we've got shifts in the classroom, we're the people who kind of embody that classroom and facilitate that, whether we're redundant or not, that's where we're operating.

Participant: It's taken me 20 years to be convinced that the online stuff is a good thing. I was incredibly resistant, and my students, generally mature age students, were incredibly resistant, but YouTube for me is the key for my learning and I think it is for students' learning too. I give lectures and then I notice on YouTube there's all the same information presented much better. There's nothing better than Ali G interviewing Noam Chomsky for example, I mean it's fantastic, and you couldn't replicate it in a lecture. So why not just make that a little bit more accessible for the ones that don't know how to do it, so that's mostly what we're doing; and I agree with your sense of redundancy, because I kind of feel like that too, but at the same time we know how to research those areas and we know how to put it together for the students, and the students will do that too in quite remarkable ways.

Postscript: Su and Rachel: March 2010

A year later and we are in the third session of teaching digital literacy at the School of Art. Our perspectives have opened up as we re-learn many of the technologies, and attempt to engage with these in a critical and specific way. This debate at the ANZAAE conference was a great chance to focus on what it means to integrate the tools of digital media within a

teaching context that is often open yet resistant. In one sense, our aim with digital literacy was to make people open enough to listen, critique and engage with a culture that often does not stop long enough to reflect on its own practices. We hope that digital literacy is a core of any art school education that offers all students unexpected experiences embedded within the digital milieu; situations and tools that will allow them to negotiate spaces, experiences and situations that we have not yet thought of.

Marc Prensky. "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants!" *On the Horizon*, 9, no.5, 2009. pp.1-2. HYPERLINK "<http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part%20I.pdf>" <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part%20I.pdf> last accessed 24 March 2010.

Prof. Ken Friedman, "Research Makes the Difference: The Future of Design and Art in a Global Knowledge Economy." ANZAAE CONFERENCE *art works • mahi toi* 20-23 April 2009 Dunedin School of Art at Otago Polytechnic.

Danny Butt. *Designing Graduates: Reshaping Undergraduate Study in New Media* HYPERLINK "http://praxis.massey.ac.nz/fileadmin/praxis/papers/Danny_20Butt_20-_20Final_20Paper.pdf" http://praxis.massey.ac.nz/fileadmin/praxis/papers/Danny_20Butt_20-_20Final_20Paper.pdf last accessed 10 October 2009

see: http://wikieducator.org/School_of_Art_Digital_Literacy

Elizabeth Baynard, Donna Bell, Kathy Bohnstedt, and Bonnie Nortz, *The Natives are Restless*. 2009 <http://digitalfluency.org/> last accessed 24 March 2010

For more on the research surrounding our digital literacy project please visit: HYPERLINK "<http://digitalliteracyinart.net/>" <http://digitalliteracyinart.net/> an AKO Aotearoa funded multi-media online presentation which reflects our approach to thinking about digital literacy research in the online environment

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