

The Lure of the Screen: Developing Communication Skills in an Electronic Age

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Boys and Communication

- From the beginning boys are slower to develop communication skills because:
 - 1. Male brain develops a bit slower in verbal areas
 - 2. Boys are more likely to have ear infections as infants
 - 3. Boys are less likely to look at faces
 - 4. Parents do not talk to boys as often as to girls
- The result is that boys are later to begin to talk
 - The problem in school is that the uncommunicative boy looks either like he is not paying attention or he does not understand what is said to him
 - He may not be encouraged to develop communication skills
 - He may be identified with learning issues which he does not have

Effect of Screen time on Children

- Earlier research found that infants who watched a lot of TV had language delay
 - This included the use of videos which were designed to help children learn language
 - Paediatricians around the world recommend NO TV before age 2
- New findings indicate that Infants and toddlers who have easy access to handheld screens are more likely to develop language delay
 - For every increased 30 minutes of screen time, there was a 49% increase in expressive speech delay
 - No other communication delays noted which included in social interaction, body language, or gestures

How much time on the screen?

- In US and Europe, 92% of teens report going on line daily and 24% say they are on almost constantly
 - In US, average kid spends 3 hours on TV and 5-7 hours total on various screens (does not include required school work)
- Amount varies in different countries. In Australia, as of 2016, during the week, 4-5 year-olds watch 2.2 hours daily, and 12-13 year-olds watch 3.3 hours, more on weekends
- Two opposing articles
 - Jean M Twenge, “Have Smartphones destroyed a generation?” *The Atlantic*, September, 2017.
 - Carlin Flora, “Are smartphones really destroying the adolescent brain?” *Scientific American*, February, 2018.

Destroying?

- As use of smartphones increases, teens spending less time together, less time driving a car, less time dating, and less sex
- They are more likely to report that they are lonely and feel left out of things
- Less likely to get adequate amounts of sleep which is linked with depression (not sure if depression leads to lack of sleep or the other way around) – backlit screen issue
- Concern is that adolescents are not developing adequate social skills

But, maybe not...

- The brains of adolescents have increased malleability which means that they are better able to adjust to new challenges. As they reach adulthood, that flexibility disappears.
- The amount of time adolescents spend on the devices is concerning
 - They are missing out on developing communication skills
- The major problem is what teens are not doing
 - Face-to-face communication – FaceTime?
 - Sharing feelings – texting and other social media
 - Sleeping – that is an issue

At What Point is This an Addiction?

- In the 11th edition of the International Classification of Diseases, the World Health Organization defined gaming disorder as:
 - Poor or a lack of control over gaming behavior
 - Gaming takes priority over other interests and daily activities which are then ignored or delayed
 - Despite undesirable consequences, gaming continues
 - <http://www.who.int/features/qa/gaming-disorder/en/>
- Dopamine circuits are involved in gaming addiction
- Problem of course is that in this digital age, some screentime is necessary for students and there are a wide variety of reasons, some very useful, that individuals spend time in front of a screen

Varieties of Screentime

- Not all screentime is equal:
 - Passive consumption - just watching
 - Interactive consumption – playing games and browsing Internet
 - Communication – video-chatting and using social media
 - Content creation – using device to write, make art or music
- There is a difference when another person is along side, particularly true for girls
- Middle schoolers who spent 5 days away from electronic devices, were much better at reading human emotions – so reduce time on line
 - Suggestion is to limit use of devices at school and to help parents limit use at home

Serious concerns

- Bullying
 - A problem with Tweens as they are unaware of the permanence of the Internet
 - Need lots of instruction in this problem and how to deal with it if you are a target
 - Increase in relational aggression – used to be rare in boys
- Emotional instability
 - With more access to others, adolescents with emotional issues more likely to spiral out of control
- Pornography
 - Difference between static pictures and video is immense and more likely to result in beliefs that this is normal behaviour

Fake News (and other Lies)

- Can you tell what is fake news and what is real?
 - Melania Trump has a body double who fills in for her because she does not like appearing in public OR woman dies in Russia after being given formaldehyde instead of saline in IV drip
 - Snopes.com, FactCheck.org, and PolitiFact can help you figure it out
- Fake news is hard to correct, once people hear something, they tend to persist in their beliefs even after being told the news is fake
- <https://to.pbs.org/2yyR0sr>

Limit time/Join in

- Be aware of how much time a student is spending on a screen via smartphone, tablet, computer and whether on Internet or not
- All accessible devices are in public areas of the home or the school – including TV
- Educate students about Internet – Laws affecting them especially about sexting, pornography, permanence of posting, fake news, use by others to manipulate them
 - “Most sought-after mental health therapist is Siri”
 - Discuss pornography where appropriate especially why it is a problem and what affect it has on women and men
- When screentime is used in class environment, encourage students to work together in pairs or larger groups to increase communication
- Be a good role model – temper your use of devices

What students need

- Electronic skills to effectively use devices which are uniquely designed to find, store, and manipulate information
- The human brain is the only device presently available which can create new material, students need LOTS of practice in that skill
- Students need experience in real-time communication to develop skills in reading body language and emotions in others
- For health, students need lots of time outdoors engaging in vigorous physical activity, a minimum of 150 minutes a week.

How does your school deal with electronic devices?

- What are the policies for cell phones, tablets, laptops?
 - What is the difference between free time and class time?
 - How often are electronics used in class exercises?
- Do the same policies apply to staff?
- How well are those policies working?
 - Do teachers complain about the time students spend glued to a screen?
 - Do students complain that teachers are not very available to help them?
- What would you like to see?