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 Screentime 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

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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
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

• 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 online
  • Suggestion is to limit use of devices at school and to help parents limit use at home

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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?