

Schools, Children, and Digital Technology: Building Better Relationships for a Better Tomorrow

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Some Current Societal Trends

- New digital divide = generational;
 - Technology
 - But also lack of understanding and trust (nothing new)
- Increasing limits on children's physical boundaries;
- Culture of (somewhat misplaced) fear;

Kids and Technology Use

- Technology as an essential part of life; it's a new social space;
- Media creation and sharing, social networking, communication;
- Creation of a digital presence (but also a digital trace);
- Importance of technology for learning.

And How Do Schools React?

Ban and Punish!!
(in the name of student safety and eliminating learning distractions)

Resulting Issues

- Schools regulating the lives of students *outside* of school, which has raised many eyebrows among civil rights watch groups;
- Schools *failing to use* new digital tools to teach with and about;
- *Blaming technology* for deeper rooted social problems and issues.

Regulation

- With regards to usage outside of school:
 - No creation of web content (esp. when critical of school);
 - No use of sites like MySpace (e.g. St. Hugo of the Hills Catholic School, Bloomfield Hills, MI, "delete your MySpace account or be expelled.");
 - Raises 1st Amendment issues of freedom of speech and press (will they pass the Tinker test??);
 - Creates potential conflict re authority over kids: parents v. schools; law enforcement v. schools.

Non-Use of Technology

- Ban rather than learn and teach about digital tools;
- What responsibilities do schools have
 - With regards to technology standards?
 - With regards to moral responsibility?

Blaming Technology

- For deeper rooted social problems and issues related to puberty;
- The problems existed before the Internet; they just weren't as visible;
- Not a new issue; in the past the medium was just different (e.g. cars, telephone, TV...);

Implications and Challenges

- Technology is fundamentally changing our culture, but not our schools;

"Technology has become the "pen and paper of our time" and "the lens through which we experience much of our world." (Warlick 2006, ¶4)

Implications and Challenges

- Kids want flexible access to a variety of digital tools in school *for learning*;

"School technology is fixed to one subject. Outside you are free to roam in whichever way suites your learning."

"At school we don't get to use it how we like to."

"I would like more freedom, and choices."

"It's important that the technology fits us, not what the adults think will work for you."

(student responses)

Implications and Challenges

- Need to know how to consume and create information within a digital context, so teaching kids *about* technology is not enough;

"In our constantly changing world, we can make kids memorize all the information we want, but it "won't make much difference if we don't teach them how to learn first. And they do that not by spitting back at us what they 'know,' They do it by being creative, by trying and failing, by succeeding and reflecting" (Richardson 2006b, ¶13).

Implications and Challenges

- Need to teach kids to learn *with* technology in safe, ethical, and productive ways.

"When we block our portals, we close our eyes and leave millions of our kids out there alone, vulnerable, and unprotected. We have a duty to un-block access to social networking sites and get in there to help them understand this new connectedness, make informed choices, and lead the transformation toward a greater good." (Elizabeth Igarza, South Texas College)

In sum

- Reconnect schools with kids and the real world;
 - Rethink teaching and learning;
 - Technology competency for teachers, administrators, and parents;
 - Constructive relationships with children *and* technology.
- Curriculum transformation.

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