

How Do Children View Social Media?

By Peter DeWitt

Social media surrounds us, and envelopes our daily lives. We cannot walk into a restaurant or mall without seeing people of all ages with a smartphone in their hands texting, Tweeting or Facebooking with one person while they walk with someone else. It is true that unfortunately people use social media when they should be driving...or watching where they walk.

Most times the media shows the dark side of social media. With a focus on cyberbullying and the damaging effects, many people still will not use social media because they think it is all bad. Those distracted individuals who text and drive, or text while they walk in our path don't help the naysayers change their view.

The adults who behave badly with it, may also be teaching their children or students, how negative social media may be. Whether we are at our best or our worst, our children and students are watching us...even when you think they are not.

In a conversation over coffee with my friend [Bill Brennan](#), we began talking about the power of social media. After all, Bill is the Director of Technology in Farmingdale, NY and we were meeting up for the very first time after over a year of Tweeting back and forth with one another. Guys like Bill see the negative side of technology, but they are overflowing with the reasons why it is so good.

Lately, my use of social media has been to connect with others about high stakes testing and accountability. There are times when I focus on the negative side of education and need to be reminded of all the good things about our present state of affairs. When we read blog after blog, or Tweet after Tweet of the negative consequences of accountability and top-down mandates, it's easy to think the world is completely upside down all the time. It's not and Bill helped me snap out of that.

And it made me think of our students growing up in such a connected world. We see images of 4 year olds playing on an iPad, or walking around with their parent's phone...or perhaps even their own. There are times when I hope that they get a chance to play outside and have time to imagine without being connected. But it really depends on the guidance they receive from the adults around them.

There are students who think texting and social media are all about...the drama of being a teenager. They want what they want because their friends have it. It's not only about how

they use it but about how they look when they use it. Let's face it, some of the adults around them don't help because they use social media for the same thing.

But is that the fault of social media?

The adults who seem angry all the time on Facebook and Twitter were negative long before the days of Facebook and Twitter. How our students use social media is dependent on the adults around them. If they are taught that it is used to vent frustrations and make negative comments, they will use it for those reasons. If the adults around them only care about having the latest and greatest model of Smartphone or tablet, they may be more likely to have the same beliefs.

When I was sitting having coffee with Bill I once again saw the other side, which is the more powerful reason to use social media and technology. The connection to information and relationships that can be created through it are much more powerful than the negative reasons to use it. The reasons to use it are much better than the reasons to not use it at all.

The reality is that kids who are growing up with adults around them who use technology to connect with others and learn new information are probably going to use it for positive reasons. Those children will see the benefits, and hopefully stay away from the dark side.

Connected Learning

There are people, some of whom comment on this blog from time to time, who wake up in the morning and think about how they can use social media to make negative comments. Under anonymous names they troll from one blog to another. They bounce from blog to blog happily making negative comments with malicious intent. Sad....but true.

Others wake up with a different mindset. They see the possibilities, and look at social media as a way to connect and learn from others. Using a growth mindset, they believe every day provides us with a chance to learn something new. They research how to help them solve issues they are having at home or at work.

Connected learning is a very large movement of teachers, leaders, parents and students who want to learn from one another. It's not about who is right and who is wrong. It is more about sharing information, and gaining insight from others. It's about the conversation, and then strengthening their own practices...whether they are educators, lawyers, business owners, etc. It's about building a community of learners.

In the End

Our students can use social media in a variety of ways. They can use it to say negative things about others and increase the drama in their lives, or they can use it to learn and connect responsibly with others. The adults in their lives have a big impact on which one they choose.

When I think of Bill Brennan, and other connected educators that I have learned from through [#edchat](#), [#satchat](#), and other social media venues, I think about fortunate their children must be, because they are growing up in a household where they are learning about the true benefits of being connected. They are growing up with a much more positive view of their flat world. And instead of waking up in the morning with a negative view of their connected world, they wake up wondering...*what if?*

Source:

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/finding_common_ground/2013/11/how_do_children_view_social_media.html