

Chapter 93

Communication 2.0 at School: A Way to Connect Teachers and Students

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ABSTRACT

Today, among social networks, video games, selfies and video recordings, adolescents' lives are mainly centered on their web devices. This is a constantly and rapidly changing world where grown-ups are often hard put to keep up with teenagers' fashions. Therefore, schools have an absolute duty to help students find their way in this jungle of tools that provide both huge possibilities and serious risks. Teachers must therefore act as guides for their students, proving to them that they know, appreciate, and are not prejudiced against the tools used by them daily. A teacher-student relationship based on these premises is a requirement for any innovative educational approach. Therefore, creating a Communication Lab 2.0 in school is of great help towards several goals: building a good educational relationship, constantly updating teachers about teenagers' web mores, providing information about Web security and hints about possible new and innovative educational paths.

INTRODUCTION

Social networks, video games, selfies: today, a great part of teenagers' world is centered on their web devices. They keep chatting on WhatsApp, sharing selfies with Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook etc. Every moment is ideal for starting their favorite video games and they love to present all kinds of contents on YouTube videos, hunting for views and likes. This world seems light years distant from the youth memories of their adults of reference (parents and teachers), whose life was consisted of real meetings with friends, outdoor games, parties and socializing in school. Former chatting with friends has now gone digital, outdoor team games now are multiplayer PC games, socializing in school, with its entailed striving for popularity, has now moved to social networks where popularity can be more easily measured via data of effective enjoyment: the likes. Some fear the disappearance of real contact between people but actually, at least among youngsters, this is not happening. Sure, you can meet and discover great affinities on social networks but at some point, teenagers still look for real relations. You can fight and

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vent on WhatsApp, but sooner or later, youngsters seek face-to-face contact to settle issues. Teenagers have an absolute need of real life for self-experimenting. Actually, grown-ups, who also depend on the same web devices, may be more at risk of losing touch with reality. So there has not been a great change: means are different but the feelings of this awkward age remain the same, though maybe experienced at a quicker pace, with less time for processing them, but today's youngsters are not different from those of 30/40 years ago.

However, the very rapid tech-induced changes in society seem to have lead to an ever widening gap between grown-ups and teenagers.

And yet, precisely because tech has caused very fast societal changes in the last decades, probably, the gap between grown-ups and teenagers now seems much wider. Grown-ups find much harder to understand youngsters. Therefore they either enter a peer relation with them, as playmates where you cannot even tell apart the underage person from the educator – or they limit themselves to a distant relationship, making teenagers feel constantly under judgment.

This is an important premise from which every teacher should start. In fact, as educators, teachers are called to reflect on their students' world, try to know and understand it as deeply as possible, so that they can enact efficient strategies to help them learn and grow. It seems easy, yet there is a spontaneous tendency to judge some youngsters' behaviors as silly, forgetting how silly their own behaviors were a few decades earlier. There is a well-known tendency to confer a mythical aura to the past and to favor it over the present. But teachers are professionals, they can't just yield to commonplace opinions. Therefore they must know how to observe their students' world with curiosity and openness, and to challenge themselves together with them. Only so will they be able to bridge the gap between digital natives and digital immigrants (Prensky, 2001) and to think up really efficient learning models, based on the relation of trust and esteem that youngsters are happy to confer to those who really want to know them and "hang out with them".

It is therefore of essence to enter their world and learn to know it in a continuous updating activity, to be at their side wherever they most need a person of reference (Palfrey & Gasser, 2013), because teenagers are always keen on experimenting with the new aspects a technology that evolves faster and faster.

A useful tool to this end is perhaps a Communication 2.0 lab project, open to heterogeneous students' groups with one or more teachers ready to constantly challenge themselves, and above all, curious about their own students.

Such a laboratory has many aims: firstly, it helps youngsters find their bearings in a communication world, which has become so wide that it might drown information. Nowadays youngsters mainly get their news from social networks. They seldom watch TV news broadcasts or read newspapers. So they most often learn about news events through posts that are shared by their friends (Engage's survey, 2016). Hence a clear risk to trust fake, untrustworthy or simply biased information items. Therefore schools must help students find their bearings in the information world. With pre-teens, the best approach is to make them produce news that may concern their school, but also to explore their interests through articles about video games, apps, fashion and trends, etc. They often say things like "Nowadays most youngsters use Instagram." In such cases, the teacher's duty is to ask for a proof of such statement, for an analysis of its scientific basis, and perhaps to suggest making a survey within the school, so as to get more limited yet surer data. These are small hands-on activities, but they'll develop students' critical appraisal of facile statements published on social networks.

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