

Modern communication technology and children

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There is a general refrain of parents that their children are spending too much time playing with their smart phones by chatting, smsing or being on social media. Besides neglecting their studies the parents contend that the children are being exposed to bad influence from the webosphere. All of this has happened in the last 10-15 years and is being fuelled by the availability of communication technology like smart phones and internet.

If you ask the children about these issues they say that smart phones and internet allows them to be in touch with their friends and in the process they feel they know much more about the world than their parents ever knew. In the modern fast-paced society they feel they have to be up-to-date with the information otherwise they will loose out.

So who is right? I think both parents and children are partially right.

Communication technology which includes smart phones, internet etc. has powerful hold on children's brains. Their brains at young age have the maximum power which means that they require tremendous amounts of inputs and information to wire different neural pathways. The formation of various neural pathways helps in satisfying the desire and needs. An interactive technology like smart phones, ipads, internet etc. allows instant gratification and hence is very addictive. This fritters away the time and energies with the result that they are not able to focus on work at hand and results in their attention deficit behavior.

Instant gratification also fuels the greed impulse and with no discipline to control it is the genesis of greed exhibited in adulthood. This greed impulse has unfortunately resulted in young children exhibiting unsavory behavior for making more money like stealing cell phones, camera etc. in some places and be a prey of pedophiles and prostitution gangs.

Meenakshi Satpute (name changed) is a school teacher in a small rural town in Maharashtra. Her house was burglarized recently and her smart phone, camera and iPod were stolen. Needle of suspicion went to a young boy living close to her house. When he was taken to the local Police Station and questioned he informed them that majority of children in his 8th standard class steal these gadgets as a part of play and to show off about who has stolen the best gadget. It is a game to them and they also sell these stolen goods to get money. This is not an isolated incident. Quite a number of school children all over the country indulge in such behavior. How to curb this greed tendency in children is a great challenge for both parents and teachers.

Too often parents give their children smart phones and ipads or deposit them in front of a TV when they are toddlers. Part of the reason is that by giving such toys parents feel that the child will not bother them since he/she will be entertained and immersed in playing with the toy. But by exposing the children to such tools at a very early age the parents are playing with fire since there is no mechanism to provide discipline in its use.

It does not mean that we should not expose children to modern technology. Technology begets technology. Without being exposed to technology, children's imagination will not be fired and they will not be able to contribute later on for its development.

I became an engineer because I was exposed as a child to steam engines and the power of steam instilled in me the desire to be involved with the technology and getting engineering education was the first step. All great feats of science and technology have resulted from people who as children were inspired by some aspect of gadgets and technology. For example Einstein as a child was inspired by the magnetic compass. And there are innumerable examples of inventors world over who were inspired by technology when they were children.

However the old technologies were not very interactive and so the child had to use tremendous imagination thinking about it and what could or would be. That required quite a lot of effort and fired his/her curiosity.

With today's toys like internet, smart phones etc. which provide instant information and feedback, the result is that curiosity and the desire to think deeply on a problem

is lost. This is the reason why children today do not apply themselves very much in solving problems or creating new inventions but have tremendous amount of information at hand. Also with such interactive technologies children seemed to be losing an ability to daydream. Daydreaming is a very powerful mechanism for development of imagination and helps in sharpening the brain.

The biggest challenge for parents and teachers is how to teach children the discipline of using communication technology. It should be used for both fun and learning so that tremendous energies which children have can be channeled for betterment of society. There are already some interesting experiments being done in U.S. where as a part of [maker movement](#) children use smart phones and internet to design projects which they can fabricate using 3-D printing technology. If hands-on projects can be planned and made using the communication technology then children can be weaned away from only chatting, smsing and other less-productive use of this technology. For this the teachers have to work hard in developing appropriate curriculum.

So the communication technology for children is not bad at all if used with discipline and with children guided and inspired in the right direction.

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