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Title: *What Teachers Need to Know About Teens and Social Media*

SPEAKERS

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FULL TRANSCRIPT

INTRODUCTION:

CW: Our students are spending so much time on social media. Here's what we know for sure: teens that use screens the most are less happy than those who use it a moderate amount; those that use it a moderate amount are happier than those that use it not at all. So, it's about helping our students have a balanced life.

I love what Danah Boyd said, "Society fails young people when protectionism hinders teenagers' ability to become informed, thoughtful, and engaged citizens through their online interactions."

JO: Welcome to the Ayers Lunch & Learn podcast presented by the *Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning & Innovation* at *Lipscomb University* where we're all about education. These podcast episodes are sponsored by *Edsouth* which promotes interest and awareness of higher education opportunities to students, families, and schools. Each Ayers Lunch & Learn podcast episode provides bite-sized portions of professional learning.

Today's topic is "what teachers need to know about teens and social media." We'd love to hear your thoughts on this topic as well using the Twitter hashtags #ayerslunchandlearn and #digitalcitizenship. My name is Julia Osteen and I'm the Technology Integration Specialist for the Ayers Institute. Participating in the conversation today is Connie White of Woodward Academy in Atlanta, Georgia.

Welcome, Connie.

CW: It's great to be here. Thank you.

EPISODE BODY:

JO: So I know that this is a topic that you've been passionate about for a number of years. Tell us a little bit about your experience, your professional life as well as what brought you to this topic today.

CW: I taught high school chemistry, physics, and math for many years and because I used technology in my classroom I then started getting involved in the leadership of helping teachers use technology effectively. And it was while serving as a Director of Technology, in later years, in one of the first one-to-one programs in the country that we started realizing that social media and the impact on technology usage was important. And we had a responsibility to partner with parents to help them understand how they could support their children and help them to make choices in this area.

You know through the years I've helped develop materials for the state of Georgia and GaCSI. I've worked with Project Safe Childhood in developing materials and it's just been one of my passions. I also have three children and have interacted as a parent to see how much pressure exists today on children to stay connected and to be constantly on and to portray a certain image. So, I come at it from a variety of different perspectives.

I'm in my role now, I'm helping our school and working with our school to align the curricular components to ensure that students have opportunities to develop skills in order to make choices. Skills in areas of digital literacy, things like research and citation, just different social-emotional skills that are important in today's world. Some of the soft skills as well as the academic skills– so it's important to me.

JO: Because of that emphasis on the social-emotional skills that's really part of your expertise that you bring to your school. The topic of social media has been something that I know we've talked about a number of different times and the idea that it's so pervasive in our society today. So talk about the impact you see social media having.

CW: Well, because our students are spending so much time on social media, you know. 70 percent of teens report that they use it at least once a day and that's a huge increase in recent years. Most of them have smartphones and that's also a statistic that has increased. So, they are constantly on.

Here's what we know for sure about usage: teens that use screens the most are less happy than those who use it a moderate amount. Those that use it a moderate amount are happier than those that use it not at all. So, the idea of being connected to others and having friends online– there's a lot of positive with that. So, it's not necessarily a totally negative thing. You know, that's important for them and important for them to be connected to have opportunities to express themselves and even to post things that they're interested in. It can have a positive effect on how they feel about themselves but it's when it's in excess that it creates a problem.

There's a lot of side effects from the overuse of social media that has an impact on the classroom. One of those is the lack of sleep. It's a factor that as they are online and they get caught up and it just goes from one screen to the other– that they don't have the sleep that they need which, in turn, creates a situation in the classroom that they have a hard time focusing. And when they can't focus on learning then the retention diminishes and actually learning decreases. There's also the distraction effect that happens when children can't focus on homework. They think that they can sit there with their Snapchat on their phone and they're on their computer typing up their notes or doing problems but every time they're interrupted with a distraction or with a type of media, then it keeps them from getting into the deep learning that we want to happen to create those long-term memory type of the zone that they want to get into. And it takes a few minutes to get back into that. So the distraction also, not only does it cause homework to take much longer than it should but you don't have the deep learning.

And the idea and the truth: the fact that multitasking is a myth. Children can't do it. None of us can do more than one thing at a time. So, the importance of teachers communicating clearly and helping children understand that when they truly want to have that meaningful study session so that the learning will stick, they need to turn off everything else. Teachers that help their students understand how the brain works can truly have an impact as students take control of that learning.

JO: For myself, as an adult, I have to really be cognizant of what notifications I'm allowing on my phone and when I'm not. Because those notifications every time it comes up on my phone is a distraction like you're talking about.

CW: Right. And there are now tools that students can actually put on their cell phones to turn off these notifications during study sessions. It does have an impact.

JO: As we are talking about social media today and the impact, what are some other issues or trends that teachers really need to be aware of?

CW: Teachers that will listen to what students say about their social media experience will gain insights into how we can help them embrace the positives and avoid some of the pitfalls that are there. We know that students, teens in particular, that their prefrontal cortex is not fully developed until they're about 25. So the area of the brain that's responsible for linking consequences to behavior or executive function is not quite there yet. And because of that, students are often impulsive with their responses to different experiences that happen when they're online.

JO: What are those things that teachers need to be aware of that they might not know that their students are involved with online?

CW: Students are using Snapchat and Instagram as their major communication tools. You know it used to be Facebook but now only 15 percent of our students use Facebook. And when asked about Facebook, they'll say that the only time that they use it is to talk to their grandparents. So, they're online a good bit and the most favorite or the most popular tool is Snapchat. And teachers need to be aware of the fact that there are certain risk factors that they'll observe in their classrooms.

When we have students in our classes that are making bad choices, getting into trouble hanging out with people, changing their social group– this adds up to a cluster of risk factors. If certain students are engaging in risky behavior in other areas, that sometimes leads to risky behavior online. As teachers listen and really build that relationship with students they can have an impact with the guidance that's so important.

You know the biggest issues that our children are dealing with include things like sexting, cyberbullying, and then maintaining a positive digital footprint. In the area of sexting, this is becoming commonplace. We know that at least one in five and that number is going up for children and for students. And it has created some real issues with children that are being blackmailed to produce more and more and more extreme photos and videos. So helping students understand the consequences of making that choice, things like simulations of how would you act in engaging students in higher level thinking experiences can be very helpful.

Cyberbullying is another thing although I will say that the rate of this is actually declining. We think that 13 percent have had that occur in their online experience. And ways that teachers can help with this is to encourage our students not to ever respond to someone that is being a bully. And to remind our children that, in the end, it's part of our responsibility to be that person that supports others that are being mistreated. When we have the courage to stand up for others it makes an incredible difference and it can just be saying hey that's not cool. And that can truly impact another person's life.

And I love what Martin Luther King said. He said, "In the end we will not remember the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends." It's important for us to remind our students that to be a friend is incredibly important.

JO: Well, that's very encouraging to hear that the rate of cyberbullying is actually on the decline. I'm wondering if that could be attributed to– we have for a number of years now been focusing on trying to educate our students so hopefully those students are getting older and not participating as much.

CW: I think that's the case. And it's just so out there. You know it's not something that students can typically do in private unless they create an anonymous personality which does happen with catfishing and that kind of thing. But yes, I think it is a good thing. It might be that more and more schools are creating programs and we have acceptable use policies in our schools and the integration of curriculum components has had an impact.

The other thing is the footprint and how important it is to help our students understand the importance of maintaining a positive digital reputation and limiting that digital footprint. I see that online and the research is telling us that they're doing a better job than they did in the past with this sort of thing. And that might be because of some of the things that have been in the media with famous athlete making bad choices of things that they post and then getting in trouble or even politicians. But they're not making some of the blatant mistakes or as many. They'll still, of course, make them because of their prefrontal cortex, but I think there's an improvement. And the research helps us to see that. But still, we have to be reminded of the importance of cleaning up our digital footprint and the importance that everyone does see it. It's not in private.

Especially before they apply for college or apply for scholarships or even apply to be part of a sorority or fraternity. Our media presence, our online footprint, helps others to gain an understanding of who we are and the things that we value.

JO: So in thinking about that digital footprint and the importance of building a positive digital footprint, what are your suggestions for how teachers can really support their students in building that positive footprint?

CW: When students publish things that they're passionate about and they have opportunities to create artifacts of understanding that truly help others, this is a great way to build a positive footprint. You know teachers are actually getting more and more involved in social media and as we post things about– and we have to be careful of course all of the rules have to be followed with the regulations with that. But, as teachers involved students with opportunities of service or working on social issues and creating opportunities to not only develop but then share those findings and learnings and service opportunities with others, it does create a positive thing online. And that can be a good thing. So in some cases, it's thinking intentionally about using social media for good. You know how many positive entities are out there that are doing just that.

JO: As we are finishing up our conversation today, I'm just wondering, what would be your final words of wisdom for the teachers who are listening as they want to work through this topic of social media usage with the students in their classroom?

CW: I would say as we think about our students, engagement is a huge factor. It increases learning by something like 80 percent and that involves having a relationship. And when our students know that we care about them and they are confident that we believe that they can be successful in their learning it tremendously increases what they achieve and what they set as their own standards and goals. So, part of having that relationship is taking the time to listen to our students and think about our own curriculum and those opportunities that we have in our classes to integrate experiences that can help our students gain the skills that are Important for them to be successful in the future. It may range from research and citation skills to help our students understand things like fake news and biases and even how to post

information or produce and create information legally so that we are not plagiarizing. It could also be selecting a novel that would reinforce empathy and implement things like restorative justice practices which would empower students to resolve conflicts on their own or in small groups. But this can help with occurrences of things like bullying and basic satisfaction and happiness as students have opportunities to air their grievances. It helps strengthen our relationships.

Looking for those opportunities in our curriculum to teach these soft skills in addition to the academic skills that are on our plate truly applies that real-world context and makes a huge difference.

The bottom line I'll say is that all of this with all of social media, social media can be a huge positive in the lives of our children. But it has to be managed and you know unless children have opportunities to make choices they don't learn to make choices. So it's important that they have those choices. I love what Danah Boyd said. She said that, "Society fails young people when protectionism hinders teenagers' ability to become informed, thoughtful, and engaged citizens through their online interactions." So bottom line is, our children today are less likely to drink, smoke, do hard drugs, and have sex or commit crimes than previous generations. They're going to be OK but certainly, with our response and our caring relationships, we can help them make fewer mistakes along the way.

JO: You have certainly given us a lot to think about.

CW: Well great. I've enjoyed it and it's– you know, as I said our children, our young people, our students are making a lot of great choices. So, sometimes they get the brunt of constant negative complaints when, in fact, they're worth it. They're worth the time that we spend and we'll be tremendously enriched with any efforts that we put in place toward trying to help and support.

CONCLUSION:

JO: In our conversation today, Connie shared research around social media and its impact on teens. She also shared some trends, issues, and suggestions for teachers in supporting students with their development of a positive digital footprint. She has given us a lot to think about and discuss with colleagues. A probing question for you and your colleagues to explore is, "What steps can you and your school take to help students develop a positive digital footprint?"

As we close today's episode, we would like to encourage you to continue the conversation on "what teachers need to know about teens and social media" with your colleagues. There is a graphic organizer file available for download as you continue thinking about this topic. The graphic organizer along with links to resources are found on eduTOOLBOX – at eduTOOLBOX.org.

Don't forget. We love to hear your thoughts on supporting students with creating a positive digital footprint using the Twitter hashtags #AyersLunchAndLearn and #DigitalCitizenship. Also, follow and like the Ayers Institute and Lipscomb's College of Education on Twitter and Facebook @AyersInstitute and @LipscombCofED. You can also follow Connie and Woodward Academy @CWhiteTech and @WoodwardAcademy.

We hope your appetite for bite-sized portions of professional learning was satisfied with this podcast presentation sponsored by *Edsouth*. Look for other episodes of "Ayers Institute Lunch and Learn" and other professional learning podcasts at http://podcast.ayersinstitute.org/.