The Challenges of Communication Amongst 21st Century Youth

A Paper

Presented to

The Faculty of Adler Graduate School

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of Master of Arts in

Adlerian Counseling and Psychotherapy

By:

Mary L. Chedda

Chair: Susan Brokaw
Reader: Amy Foell

September, 2016
Abstract

In our ever-evolving world of reliance on personal electronics for entertainment and social media for popularity; we seem to be losing some of the interpersonal communication skills required for resolving conflicts and for getting along with others. It is quickly becoming the job of the classroom instructor to teach the self-regulation, listening, and communication skills necessary for navigating life. This project will look at the history of social media and the use of personal electronics, their impact on youth, and the role they play in daily communication. The presentation will discuss these points and will train teachers in the art of instructing students to practice their social media etiquette skills and to conduct successful conflict resolution lessons. It will incorporate role play to learn the steps for resolving problems, and will demonstrate how to train students to conduct appropriate interpersonal conversations while acknowledging their own feelings.

Keywords: Social Media, Conflict Resolution, Communication, Youth
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................. 2
Introduction ............................................................................................................ 5
Problem Statement ................................................................................................. 5
Socialization ............................................................................................................ 6
Social Media ........................................................................................................... 7
  Emotional Development ....................................................................................... 7
  Social Skills ......................................................................................................... 7
Media Addiction ..................................................................................................... 8
Attention Deficit Disorder ...................................................................................... 8
Parental Supervision .............................................................................................. 9
Online Gaming ....................................................................................................... 9
  Emotional Development ....................................................................................... 9
Emotional Health ................................................................................................... 10
Violence .................................................................................................................. 10
Adult Supervision .................................................................................................. 10
  Parent and educator .............................................................................................. 10
  Emotional competence .......................................................................................... 11
School response ..................................................................................................... 12
Communication cues ............................................................................................ 13
Academic inclusion of social and emotional skills ............................................... 14
Parental buffering ................................................................................................ 14
Behavioral Goals .................................................................................................... 15
  Goals of misbehavior ............................................................................................ 15
No bad children ..................................................................................................... 16
Bullying .................................................................................................................... 17
  Emotional coping tools .......................................................................................... 17
Crucial C’s .............................................................................................................. 18
Four-Step Mini-Conference .................................................................................... 18
Emotion Identification ............................................................................................ 18
Empowerment ........................................................................................................ 19
Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................... 19
References .................................................................................................................................... 22
The Challenges of Communication Amongst 21st Century Youth

**Introduction**

Audrey Quinlan states that “when educators mediate conflicts, instead of punishing, students get positive ways to deal with feelings and conflict, generating improved relationships based on mutual understanding and respect. This creates a safe school climate and less stress for everyone.” (Quinlan, 2004)

As an educator and a parent, I have noticed that our youth are spending a large amount of time on personal electronics, watching television, listening to music that may be inappropriate, and perusing social media and gaming sites. Drawing youth away from these electronic babysitters and helping them learn to have in-person conversations that are amiable and not confrontational is becoming more of a challenge in our schools. The common age of cell phone users is getting lower and the amount of time spent on them is shocking.

**Problem Statement**

The Kaiser Family Foundation has done numerous studies regarding media use by our youth and they published a report that studied the media use habits of 2000 8-18 year olds. Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts (2010) reported the following key findings: Youth are spending an average of 7 ½ hours a day exposed to media. However, because they are also often multitasking with their media, their media exposure is close to 11 hours a day.

These findings show an increase of nearly 1 ½ hours a day from their findings five years previous, so it could be reasoned that youth in 2016 are spending nearly all of their waking hours attached to media of one sort or another. Rideout et al. (2010) also point out that the various forms of media that our young people are observing on a daily basis expose them to a nearly constant stream of messages that can contain very adult content and include topics ranging from
fashion, to sex, gender roles, values, relationships and much more. Being able to accurately discern and weed through those confusing messages can be incredibly challenging to an overwhelmed young brain.

**Socialization**

With youth spending several hours a day fixated on their phones, tablets, gaming systems, computers and televisions; one may wonder when they find time to socialize in person? The Pew Research Center has conducted studies to determine how our young people are communicating with each other on a daily basis. Lenhart, Smith, Anderson, Duggan, and Perrin (2015) discovered in their research that significantly more teens spend time text messaging, using social media to contact friends, and instant messaging friends on a daily basis than spending time in person with their friends. In fact, they determined that only 25% of youth spend time with friends in person on a daily basis. Up to 80% of their communication with peers is conducted electronically.

There is much evidence that the age of cell phone owners has dropped into the single digits—just look around at the bus stop, the park, or the restaurant where you are enjoying dinner. The number of teens with cell phones is understandably significantly higher. Carroll and Kirkpatrick (2011) found that 75% of all teens owned a cell phone. It seems abundantly clear that cell phones are the preferred device for teens to communicate with. The authors also found that of teen cell phone users, 88% of them are texting and that 73% of all teens who are online are using social media sites.
Social Media

Emotional Development

What kind of an effect is social networking having on the health of adolescents? Carrol, and Kirkpatrick (2011) found some positive benefits to social media use. Teens are turning to social media for advice, support, and to find groups who share similarities in belief, lifestyle, hobbies, health, and likes with them. However, they also found mental health risks to social media use by teens. Most importantly, peer rejection and lack of close friends can be indicative of depression and negative self-views. Of the teens that they surveyed, those who used media the most reported as being less content and more apt. to be sad, unhappy or bored.

G. S. O’Keefe and K. Clarke-Pearson (2011) are pediatricians who have studied the effects of social media on young people and families and their findings corroborate what Carrol and Kirkpatrick discovered. O’Keefe and Clarke-Pearson stressed that because children and adolescents are limited in their capacity to self-regulate and because they are susceptible to peer pressure, they are always at risk when perusing social media. Because of the amount of time spent consuming media, much of the social and emotional development of this generation is happening while they read posts on social media and on the internet.

Social Skills

In 2008 Danah Boyd wrote about how exposure to uncensored biases and postings on social media can also foster the development of one’s identity and can influence social skills. This can be viewed as both positive and negative, depending on the skills that are developed. Creative expression is an important part of discovering what one’s personality and beliefs are and there are many examples of social media contributing in a positive way. However, without proactive parent involvement in determining what content is being viewed, and the ability to
discuss controversial items with a trusted adult; many adolescents can get confused about what is appropriate and what to do about those postings that are controversial.

**Media Addiction**

Andreassen, Torsheim, Brunborg, and Pallesen (2012), at the University of Bergen, Norway believe that there is compelling evidence to show that Facebook, or more broadly social networks, are highly addictive. In fact, they have developed the Facebook Addiction Scale. Their scale seeks data from users in regard to the six core features of addiction: salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. Andreassen et al. (2012) determined that persons possessing a tendency toward narcissism are the most prolific posters on social media. His group also found that extroverts tend to use social media to enhance their social tendencies, but introverts use social media to compensate socially.

Other professionals are also realizing that social networking sites are becoming a catalyst for compulsive and addictive behavior. The NEO Five-Factor Inventory is being utilized by many to determine levels of neuroticism, extroversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness in regard to social media use. Wilson, Fornasier, and White (2010) found that extroversion leads to higher levels of internet use. In regard to the results of the NEO Inventory, they found that lack of conscientiousness was the largest predictor of addictive tendencies; especially in those individuals who tested high for extraversion as well.

**Attention Deficit Disorder**

Agnieszka Ogonowska (2014) discusses how we have become a screen society and that our young people are now known as screenagers because they seem to be surrounded by multiple screens at any given time. He also refers to screenagers as the ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) generation. Ogonowski (2014) goes on to explain that the language and communication skills of
this generation are seriously lacking. In fact, he goes so far as to say that in the long run the IQ of a child who watches a lot of television becomes lower and that excessive television or screen time can also cause cognitive functions to be delayed. He summarizes his research by stating that increased exposure to media, is costing youth the development of language, communication skills and maybe most importantly, social competencies.

**Parental Supervision**

The most glaring bit of information that can be gleaned from all of these studies, is that many of those hours that young people spend utilizing various forms of media each day are uncensored by an adult. Namik Top (2016) found in his study that as children got older, parents spent less time watching television and playing video games with them and while they are more apt to apply limits the viewing content for their older children, they are not as involved in what they are watching or searching for on the internet or social media. Many parents are utilizing software or alerts from their cell phone provider to offer high level reports on what their children are using their cell phones for, but those reports have limits and let’s face it—adolescents are often smarter than the adults when it comes to technology.

**Online Gaming**

**Emotional Development**

Social media sites are not the only place youth are spending time interacting online with virtual friends. Online gaming has also become a large source of consumer time, especially for boys. Andrew Przybylski (2014) studied the psychosocial adjustment of children between the ages of 10-15 to determine how much time they spent online gaming daily, and how that affected their emotional adjustment. He found that those who spent less than one hour a day engaged in
online game play had a higher rate of life satisfaction and a lower tendency to externalize or internalize their problems. The opposite was true once that daily game time reached three hours.

**Emotional Health**

Mazurek and Engelhardt (2013) studied the results of gaming on youth who are on the autism and attention deficit disorder spectrum and found that increased levels of hyperactivity could be attributed to electronic gaming. Przybylski (2014) also found that excessive time devoted to playing video games was taking the place of group socialization, play utilizing imagination, and physical face time with peers. He also shares concerns over other problematic behaviors that excessive game play could be contributing to, such as depression and anxiety.

**Violence**

Some games can be quite violent and common sense dictates that not all children are able to handle violence equally. Goodman, Lamping, and Ploubidis (2010) studied this more intensely. They determined that the mature content contained in some games should be considered inappropriate for young players. They also stress that by employing virtual violence as an appropriate way to achieve a goal in the game, some children may think that externalizing or acting out aggressively is acceptable in a live situation. It is sometimes incredibly easy to watch outside play with elementary aged children and be able to pick out those children who are playing violent video games at home.

**Adult Supervision**

**Parent and educator.** The reality is that we are experiencing a generation that is growing up attached to multiple sources of electronics and who are tied directly into the World Wide Web. Parents have a very important job to do, in raising this generation. Teachers also have a very important role to play since many youths spend more waking hours in school, than at home with
their parents and in some cases teachers may have more influence and guidance over the development of communication skills than parents or guardians do.

Ask any seasoned teacher if children are different today than they were even ten years ago, and you will hear a resounding yes! Many may argue that emotional intelligence is what may have changed the most.

**Emotional competence.** Horner and Wallace (2013) have written about how emotional competence, or the lack thereof, is becoming a health epidemic in our country. In their article they point out that the American School Health Association (ASHA) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) have defined emotional competence as:

an understanding of one’s own and others’ emotions, the tendency to display emotion in a situationally and culturally appropriate manner, and the ability to inhibit or modulate experienced and expressed emotion and emotionally derived behavior as needed to achieve goals in a socially acceptable manner. (Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, p. 242)

To know that the CDC and the ASHA consider failure to be able to express emotions in an appropriate manner a health epidemic, is shocking. Is that what too much screen time and too little face to face interaction has caused amongst our young people? Horner and Wallace (2013) also wrote that the ASHA and CDC have been working to develop standards to help students develop the ability to use interpersonal communication skills in an effort to improve their health. They are also striving to reduce health risks and believe that the ability to organize and communicate about feelings is vital to strengthening interactions between students and minimizing or avoiding conflict.
Inhibited emotional intelligence can also be blamed for a plethora of other struggles we see increasing among adolescents. Cyberbullying, conflict avoidance, depression, anxiety, anger, humiliation, and aggressive behavior are just a sampling of what can be found in online forums and also carried over into the classroom. How do schools successfully combat this dilemma?

**School response.** Some schools have embraced technology in an effort to appeal to the multi-tasking, media saturated consumers. The 21st Century School is actively utilizing Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, text updates, and YouTube. In an effort to stay current, many school districts are providing their students with tablets, Chromebooks, or iPads rather than textbooks which quickly become obsolete.

Ron Schachter (2011) presents pros and cons to schools utilizing social media to connect with their families. He interviewed David Cawthorne, the technology director for the Weymouth, MA school district. Cawthorne agrees that Facebook is a great tool, and that it appeals to kids, but his concern is keeping students safe and he doesn’t see a safe way to monitor what others are putting on social media. Schachter (2011) interviewed teachers and principals who actively use Facebook, and others who refuse to use it because it is easy to abuse.

Other schools are realizing that their students use social media anyway, and are finding ways to incorporate it into the classroom by encouraging Facebook study groups where classmates can exchange notes on homework assignments and study for tests together. Gennifer Davidson (2013) stresses that it is very easy for internet relationships to cross the line between teachers and students and that strict rules need to be adhered to so that a level of professionalism is maintained. Common belief seems to be that in order for schools to continue to engage the interest of students, and their parents, technology and social media must be utilized.
Schachter (2011) and Davidson (2013) both interviewed Trevor Timmons, the director of technology and information services at Weld Re-4 School. Both quoted him as saying that “Our society needs to generate guidelines and values about social media, so that everyone can benefit from the opportunities social media has to offer for our youth as they develop into active citizens.” In other words, the schools do need to assume at least some of the responsibility of helping our young people learn appropriate ways to communicate both electronically and in person when dealing with both difficult, and routine situations.

Communication cues. In order to do this, it falls upon the teacher to train students to accurately assess a situation and to react appropriately to it face to face. Assessing a situation via the internet is difficult because young people are not able to see the body language of the person writing a post or order to accurately gauge the tone of the message. Because less and less communication is happening face to face, students are not getting practice in accurately reading body language and facial expressions either.

Rosen and Lara-Ruiz (2015) talk about the most recent generations as the iGeneration with birth years from 1990 to 1999 and then Generation C as the first generation of the twenty-first century. They share that the iGeneration is the first generation to prefer texting or instant communication. This suggests a perceived aversion to having difficult conversations, especially, face-to-face. Look around any restaurant, sporting event, in the car next to you and you will notice young people glued to their cell phone—even when in a social situation. The classroom teacher has much work to do when attempting to cater to the preferred learning styles of multi-tasking adolescents while teaching them the interpersonal communication skills that they need to succeed in society.
Burke, Ayres and Hagan-Burke (2004) discuss the importance of education as one of society’s mightiest tools in the prevention of anti-social behavior. They also make note of the import role that schools take on as a buffer against the influences of society on our at-risk youth, especially. Burke, et al. (2004) seem to agree that schools are environments where children can learn not only academic studies, but social values and skills as well.

**Academic inclusion of social and emotional skills.** Academic learning is almost taking a back burner to the emotional and social education that this generation is so badly needing. Effective behavior management requires that schools focus on engaging an approach that will intervene in cases of anti-social behavior as well as mitigate situations with children who are displaying behavior that goes against the social norm. (Mayer, 1995) Conflict resolution programs need to be incorporated into the classroom and should be modeled all year long in order for students to learn to solve problems without employing destructive behaviors (Beane 1999).

Because of the dramatic rise in emotional struggles carrying over into the classroom, the twenty first century classroom teacher needs to be armed with tools to guide students toward developing the skills needed to successfully navigate life. As part of this project, I worked with the teachers at Christian Heritage Academy in Rosemount, MN to identify the mistaken goals behind misbehavior. We also looked at examples of common conflicts that are occurring in the classroom and practiced identifying the goal behind the behavior and ways to define, acknowledge, and resolve conflict in the classroom.

**Parental buffering.** The seasoned teachers at CHA were quick to note that the most astounding change in their 20-30 years of teaching experience is the change in the parents. They find that with the advances in technology, parents are quick to email as soon as their child gets
home to explain to the teacher how their child should not be punished for their behavior, that it was someone else’s fault. Sometimes the parents even take the blame for their children not having their homework done, or for doing poorly on a test, breaking school dress code, or any other multitude of daily dilemmas that their child might encounter. Rather than allowing children to make mistakes, learn from them, and correct their behavior; parents are excusing their behavior and blaming other entities rather than the child’s own poor choices.

Dinkmeyer, Dinkmeyer and Sperry (1987) wrote that Alfred Adler, the founder of individual psychology, stated that the children most likely to misbehave are those that are pampered, over-protected, and spoiled along with children who are neglected or hated. Those same descriptions seem just as appropriate in 2016, or maybe even more so, than they were in the 1920’s when Adler first made that observation. Adler also believed that all behavior has a goal, but that we often are not aware of what the goal behind our behavior is.

**Behavioral Goals**

We are certainly seeing many pampered and over-protected children in our schools. We are also seeing neglected children. They might be neglected because of parents working long hours or living in a single parent home where there isn’t enough time and attention available to the children. Or, they may be playing second fiddle to their parent(s) personal electronics and electronic media fascination.

**Goals of misbehavior.** Rudolf Dreikurs studied with Adler extensively and took that statement a step further where children are concerned. Dreikurs (1949) wrote of the goals of misbehavior, and we are incorporating some of his philosophy into our teacher training program at Christian Heritage Academy. The goal is to help our educators understand the goal of the child that is behind their bad behavior.
Dreikurs and Soltz (1968) defined the four goals of children's misbehavior to help teachers and counselors in the process of recognizing, understanding, and correcting significant self-defeating behavior. They elaborated on the reasons for children to behave in those self-defeating ways and came up with these four goals: (1) attention getting, (2) power, (3) revenge, and (4) compensation for inadequacy that is experienced by the student. Dreikurs suggests that children who are misbehaving, are doing so in order to fulfill their own needs and that they unconsciously choose one of these ways to act in order to achieve their goal, whether it be seeking attention (negative attention is still attention and gives them the resolution they were seeking), or exhibiting that they have given up.

**No bad children.** Dreikurs and Soltz (1968) also wrote that there are no bad children, there are only discouraged children and we know that misbehavior is a compensation for feeling inferior. Therefore, the best way for school counselors and teachers to mitigate that behavior is not by punishing the child, but by identifying and modifying the child’s motivation (Thompson & Rudolph, 1992). The teachers at CHA admitted during our training session that it can be difficult to not feel threatened or to be triggered or escalated by the misbehavior of their students at times. Learning that the motivation behind the behavior is not merely to be disobedient gave them pause to think and helped them to understand that there is much more that contributes to bad behavior than they originally thought.

I spent time training the teachers at CHA on recognizing what the four goals of misbehavior are and also how to identify the child’s goal by recognizing the way the behavior is making the teacher feel. We will continue to use the mistaken goal chart created by Jane Nelson (Nelsen, Lott, & Glenn, 2000) and will also refer to the resources on her website: www.positivediscipline.com. As an ongoing part of this process, I will continue to assist
Christian Heritage Academy’s staff in recognizing the motivation behind the behavior and will offer solutions for empowering the child, rather than punishing.

**Bullying.** The teachers at CHA also identified that they often feel that they get pulled into mediate situations that occur outside of school, such as cyber-bullying and exclusion from activities that classmates are invited to. They asked for guidance in dealing with these situations when they come back into the classroom and become an issue that the teacher or the school principal ultimately end up mediating.

The Center for Disease Control reports that students who experience bullying are at a greater risk for anxiety, depression, issues with sleep, and adjusting poorly to school. The students who perpetrate the bullying are at risk as well. They are more likely to have academic problems, exhibit violent behavior later in life, and suffer from substance abuse. However, the CDC reports that individuals who can identify with both groups; the victims and the perpetrators, are at greater risk for mental health and behavior problems. (Center for Disease Control, 2012)

Susan Porter (2013) has written about how our approach to bullying and the shift in what is defined as bullying, along with how our culture deals with aggressive behavior has dramatically changed during her 25 years of experience as a school counselor. Just as the CHA teachers have noticed, behaviors like teasing, sarcasm, and social exclusion have now crept into the expanded definition of bullying and virtually any behavior that makes another feel upset or sad can now be called bullying (Porter, 2013).

**Emotional coping tools.** Much as the CDC has determined that our youth do not know how to appropriately cope with their feelings in order to avoid conflict (Horner & Wallace, 2013); Porter (2013) states that we have set unrealistic guidelines for children’s behavior with the goal of preventing them from feeling pain. She believes that by doing this, we have neglected to
help kids learn from their mistakes and develop resiliency. The teachers at Christian Heritage Academy have also seen evidence of this failure to adequately cope when faced with adversity and are determined to do their part to change how they address bullying and conflict in order to help their students.

**Crucial C’s**

CHA has also decided to adopt the Crucial Cs as defined by Amy Lew and Betty Lou Bettner (1995). These go well in conjunction with the four mistaken goals of behavior because they define what all children are seeking: feeling connected, being capable, knowing that you count, and developing courage. Recognizing the goal of the misbehavior and understanding what the student is really looking for are important tools for teachers to incorporate into their vernacular. Developing strategies that allow children to achieve these Crucial Cs will assist our teachers in taking back control of the classroom and empowering students at the same time.

**Four-Step Mini-Conference**

When arguments or conflict occurs at Christian Heritage Academy, the protocol used is to hold a four step mini conference, as adopted from the Friends School of Minnesota (n.d.). Our students are quickly learning the rules of the conference and know that the steps that we include are: 1. Agreement of Rules, 2. Clarifying the Issue (learning to summarize and identify feelings. “I” statements are an integral part of this step.) 3. Making a Plan, 4. Closure (everyone involved must agree to the plan, or else a new plan must be brainstormed.)

**Emotion Identification**

Putting all of these pieces together allow the classroom teacher to quickly gain control of a situation while addressing the issues that fueled the situation. Helping children learn to identify what they are feeling and how those feelings are contributing to their behavior is another step
that most teachers had not considered prior to this training. Nelson, along with Lott and Glenn (2000) noted that in order for children to succeed in school and more importantly, in life; there are some basic concepts that they need to believe.

**Empowerment**

The three empowering beliefs that Nelson et al. (2000) believe need to be a part of every child’s core beliefs are that 1. They are capable. 2. They are needed and contribute in meaningful ways. 3. They can use their personal power to make choices that positively influence what happens to them and to the community. On her Positive Discipline website, Nelson also outlines how important the morning meeting or daily circle time is in the classroom. She outlines Eight Rules to be used by this format and what surprised most of the CHA teachers is that Nelson advocates for teaching children to recognize the goal behind their own behavior in order to understand what they need to brainstorm healthy solutions to the problem.

The Eight Rules as defined by Nelson et al. (2000) are 1. Forming a Circle, 2. Practicing Compliments and Appreciations, 3. Respecting Differences, 4. Using Respectful Communication Skills, 5. Focusing on Solutions, 6. Role Playing and Brainstorming, 7. Using the Agenda and Class Meeting Format, 8. Understanding and Using the Four Mistaken Goals. These first four skills are normal parts of morning meeting or circle time, but steps 5, 6, and 8 will require practice and perhaps can be integrated in during other parts of the day as well.

**Conclusion**

As the 2016-17 school year begins, many changes are happening at Christian Heritage Academy. Our returning students are remembering the four steps of the conference and our new students are quickly learning to take turns, use “I” statements, and work collaboratively to come to a mutually agreeable solution. Teachers are learning to focus on encouraging, not praising.
They have learned that praise easily leads to discouragement by fortifying that idea that work that is not praised, has no value. We are so focused on winning the prize or the reward that doing the work for the satisfaction of learning is no longer coveted. (Hitz & Driscoll 1988). The language of praise is to flatter, reward and/or compare and Hitz et al. (1988) warn that “to praise children is to commend their worth.”

Children are so anxious to receive praise from their teacher that it is quite easy to fall back into a habit of doling it out to the eager achievers in the classroom. However, research shows that commonly using praise works to actually lower students’ confidence in their responses (Rowe, 1974). Timothy Evans (1996) suggests that encouraging statements are much less controlling and can help children to appreciate their own work and their behavior while keeping their work and their worth separate from one another. Focusing on a specific behavior, rather than a finished product is much more encouraging.

Alfred Adler (1964) in his infinite wisdom stated that an educator’s most important task is to ensure that no child is discouraged at school and that learning is only possible when children can look to the future with joy and hope. Nearly eighty years ago he stated that equipping teachers for this task would require training in offering encouragement, and that a fundamental change would need to happen in the way that teachers view and relate to the students in their classroom.

What a pioneer Adler was, and how profoundly meaningful those words are as our teachers face the ravages of social media and electronic media overload on the young, impressionable minds of our twenty-first century students. I can only hope that by working to train teachers to change the way they approach discipline in the classroom and trusting children
to learn the motivation behind their behavior that we can truly begin preparing today’s youth for a successful future.
References


