Wi-Fi -a help or a hindrance for students

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An important new development in The Kings Hospital School is the increased access to Wi-Fi throughout much of the campus.

This provides great opportunities for teaching and learning. Students and teachers alike can benefit from the web for research. The teachers welcome the access to this essential tool.

However, all of us need to be aware of Wi-Fi access becoming a source of distraction if we don't manage and monitor our use of this technology carefully.

Over the past few years, I have become increasingly aware of the emotional and psychological consequences of excessive engagement with social media by teenagers, and indeed adults, as well as the potential negative impact this is having on their wellbeing.

Recently, Joelle Renstrom, a Boston University lecturer, published a paper on this topic. Highlighting that her students were rarely entirely present in class, due to being addicted to texts and technology, she asked if there was any hope left for learning?

According to Joelle, research indicates that up to 80% of students send text messages during class and nearly 100% text before and/or after class.

Often, during the minutes before class started, teachers would spend time chatting with students about TV shows, sports or other topical issues. That no longer happens, as students sit in technologically-induced silence and rarely even talk to each other.

It is very important to talk and listen to our friends and colleagues. That's why I regularly ask our students to put their phones away and to chat with each other after class.

My good friend, known to her 9 and 10 year-old Montessori pupils as Ms. Susan at their primary school in San Diego, tells me that she has had to introduce scheduled class time for 'social interaction', as she felt they had lost the ability to play together.

Research found that 85% of students who were allowed to use their mobile devices to take notes during classes, did something unrelated to classwork on their laptops at that time.

Studies show that students who take notes on their laptops miss out. We process information better when taking notes by hand, because writing is generally slower than typing, an argument often spun in favour of laptops, which helps students to learn and retain the material.

Similarly, we comprehend better when we are reading material on paper, rather than on the screen. Seemingly when reading on screens, students don't annotate or reread. They get glassy-eyed, zone out, and then struggle to find quotes they only vaguely remember when it comes to writing essays.

Technology demands a significant amount of time and attention and has conditioned many of us not to question it. Consumed by technology, users cannot bear to disable or ignore their technology. So they lose awareness of what's going on around them.

They don't know or realise what they've missed. The official term for this obsession is 'Techno-Stressed', with many of us suffering from FOMO, the Fear of Missing Out!

Cultural and professional expectations play into this behaviour as well. Employers and parents expect responses to emails at night and on the weekends – as do students. Many of us feel pressured to oblige, even if we are out socialising.

My favourite pastime is getting to the cinema. However, I am finding it increasingly frustrating that other cinema-goers need to constantly look at their phones.

Recently someone beside me answered a phone call during the film until I confronted them in my best teacher voice with: "You can't be serious"! Needless to say the call ended abruptly.

The challenge at Kings Hospital is to make sure that students and teachers alike take control of technology, rather than letting it take control of us, irrespective of the unlimited access to Wi-Fi.

Education is defined as: *'The process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life'.*

All of us must make sure that we to use technology and social media effectively so that it does not interfere with our education or control us either physically or mentally.

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