NOVEMBER 2017 RESEARCH REFLECTION:

The Use of Social Media

By Dr Sue Bagshaw

There has been much discussion in recent times about the destructive effect of social media on the development of young people, especially under 15 year olds. This ranges from the dangers of pornography to the disappearance of the skills of non-verbal communication and the rise of social phobia.

Parents complain of the fact that they can't make their children switch off their "devices" because of the aggression they encounter as a result, and also complain that their children are tired all the time and won't join in with activities both within and outside the family. Bullying has long been a problem for society but the ability to bully people through the internet has the potential to be 24/7, if the internet is accessed "24/7"

Statistics from Net safe released this year state that 80% of New Zealanders own a smart phone or tablet and 88% use social media every month. Many of the uses are interwoven with the Kiwi love of sport. Richie Mcaw has facebook followers that could fill the stadium at Eden Park ten times over and 8 out of 10 most googled New Zealanders are sports people.

The number of interactive sites available grow by the month almost, and apps and advice abound. No wonder parents feel overwhelmed.

A Clinical Report put out by the American Academy of Paediatrics to be found here

file:///C:/Users/User/Desktop/impact%20of%20social%20media.pdf

defines social media as any Website that allows social interaction including social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter; gaming sites and virtual worlds such as Club Penguin, Second Life, and the Sims; video sites such as YouTube; and blogs. This doesn't even refer to the many apps that abound.

The piece of the report that struck me was the fact that, like all of our human "inventions" there are enormous advantages and disadvantages associated with the internet just as with the motor car and nuclear power.

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Advantages including increased communication, growth of ideas and creativity, not feeling alone, enhanced learning and access to health information can be outweighed by more widespread exposure to bullying and harassment, exposure to images that may not happen without the internet, risks to privacy and the pressure of both personal and corporate advertising that diminishes contentment.

The article made me reflect on how in fact all these issues have been around for much longer than the internet and maybe even electricity. Human nature and behavior has evolved slowly and although interaction is now faster than it ever has been, maybe it is the speed of interaction that is the issue rather than the nature of it.

Advice to parents and professionals working with young people seems to be the same wherever it is accessed both in this report or on Netsafe and at the site below.

http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/parents/telling_the_difference.html

- Understand the various sites yourself; if in doubt ask a young person to explain it
- Understand that they are an online extension of normal behavior, and how the stages of brain development need to be taken into account when forming guides for use
- Discussing rules around access (and role modelling them) is probably better than using electronic controls that can be bypassed.
- Teach critical thinking by talking through the implications of what they are viewing

The second thing that struck me was the lack of research on the association between the rise of anxiety especially social anxiety and the use of social media. It stimulated me to do a very brief literature scan and I could find very little.

In conclusion my reflection ended with more questions than answers and as usual more research needs to be done on how the electronic age of communication is affecting the development of young people, especially their social development. We may find that it is doing more good than harm.

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