

# Teaching kids from a new kind of world

People often ask me, "Mike, you've been teaching for 27 years. Do you notice any difference in kids over the years?" For the first 20 years of my career, I used to grope for an answer. "Kids are kids." In the past five years, I have changed my answer. "Yes, there is something fundamentally different about the kids coming into our schools today."

The Internet went public around 1993. Kids born in that year are now in Grade 11. Whether they are heavy users of technology or not, kids have changed because kid culture has changed. In the 1960s and 70s, everyone was worried about the influence of television. The Internet is ten times more complicated than television and ten times more influential.

The changes brought about by the Internet, the personal computer and video games show up in three specific areas in our schools: kids are not as proficient at processing text (reading and writing) as they were in the past, kids'

attention spans are shorter and their attitudes toward authority have changed drastically.

Cyberspace is a spatial world. Spatial thinking is right brain. School is a logical linear verbal world. Logical linear verbal thinking is left brain. Boys tend to be more right brain dominant. They love the spatial world of cyberspace — especially video games. Their brains are hardwired for this kind of activity.

When they come to school, they enter another kind of space, one in which logical linear verbal functioning rules. This explains the current "crisis" in boys' literacy rates. Boys are spending more and more time developing a particular kind of brain functioning that is simply not valued or rewarded in school. In school, the stickers are given out to those who can read and write.

School is also a place that rewards those who can sit still and pay attention for extended periods of time — even if they are not particularly interested in the sub-

ject. In cyberspace, as soon as you are no longer interested in something — click, click — it's gone. You move on to something else.

This is not how school works. In high school, each class is 76 minutes long. Who would stay on one website for 76 minutes? Kids are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain attention over long periods of time. This is true in the classroom and it is true for the process of reading as well. In order to read a book, one must sit still for a significant period of time and follow one long string of

printed symbols. You cannot click it away.

The third area in which the effect of the Internet and cyberspace is felt in our schools is in the attitudes students have towards authority. In cyberspace, everyone is equal. There is no hierarchy. Everyone has a voice, and everyone's voice is equal.

Most adults grew up in a world that was hierarchical. There were people in charge who told you what to do and, for the most part, you did it. Cyberspace has levelled every playing field. This is not necessarily a bad thing. We adults bowed down to a lot of sacred cows that maybe didn't deserve being bowed down to.

Kids today do not have the same kind of unquestioning respect for the roles people play. Kids today expect you to earn their respect. Again, I'm not sure this is such a bad thing. "My way or the highway!" doesn't work

like it used to. Kids want to be listened to, and they want to have their point of view understood.

On Wednesday, Nov. 4, I'll be at Westside Secondary School to speak on the topic "Raising Kids In A New Kind Of World." Having taught for 27 years and raised four kids of my own, I'll be dealing with the issues every parent faces: What are the new rules? Do any of the old rules still apply?

This article was written by Michael Reist who is a frequent speaker to parent groups and education conferences. To reserve your seat, please email [info@dpsn.ca](mailto:info@dpsn.ca) or call 519-940-8678. You can visit Michael Reist's website at [www.michaelreist.ca](http://www.michaelreist.ca).

Ask a Parent is a monthly column on parenting issues provided by the Dufferin Parent Support Network. If you have a parenting question email [info@dpsn.ca](mailto:info@dpsn.ca) or call 519-940-8678.



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