

Research Brief

Screenagers

Question: What is a “screenager?” What are the implications for teaching and learning?

In a Nutshell

A “screenager” is a slang term used to describe teenagers who spend lots of time in front of digital screens (iPods, iPads, computers, other digital devices) (Webpopedia, 2011). The term is also used to describe the digital generation, students who are skilled at using technology to learn and communicate (Scherer, 2011). Given their comfort with the use of digital tools for communication, learning and productivity, screenagers are impacting the way schools are organized for learning. The digital tools used by these students have potential to make learning more relevant and engaging.

Summary of Findings:

In “Teaching the iGeneration” Larry Rosen (2011) discusses the new generation of students present in American schools. Earlier generations included the Traditional or Silent generation (1925-1946), the Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1979), Generation Y (1980’s), and the Millennials. Research from the George Marshall Applied Cognition Laboratory identified a separate generation “born in the 1990’s and beyond” labeled the iGeneration. The “i” reflects the common label attached to many forms of digital technology embraced by this generation, the iPod, iPad, iTunes, Wii, etc.

Data collected from thousands of iGeneration students found that they consume massive amounts of media. They use many different forms of media, often simultaneously. Data show that these students spend almost all of their day using media and technology (Rosen, 2011). For example, data collected by the Nielson Company (Nielson Wire, 2010) found that the typical teenager sends and receives 3,339 texts a month and receives only 191 phone calls during the month. That translates into a little more than 6 text messages every hour that the teenager is not sleeping. To provide context for these numbers, Nielson reported that two years ago the number of phone calls and texts was about the same.

Probably the greatest impact is that a teenagers phone is not just a communication device. It is a portable computer that allows them to access the Internet at any time from any location.

Implications for Schools

Teens will continue to have access to incredible technology and digital tools. Just as a decade ago we could not imagine the tools available today, the future will be shaped by even easier access to information and technology. Most schools continue to be organized as they were in the 1950's. Most students continue to be taught in ways their parents would recognize. The challenge for educators is to become far more comfortable with digital tools and use them to refine and strengthen instruction.

Rosen suggests that it is important to “teach with technology” rather than teach technology. He points out that technology provides powerful tools to more actively engage students in their learning. He suggests four helpful sites that teachers can use to access curricular development tools and audio and video components that can be used to enhance their teaching. Many of the resources are free or low cost.

Discovery Education's Lesson Plan Library	http://school.discoveryeducation.com/lessonplans
Teachers Helping Teachers	www.pacificnet/~mandel/index.html
TeachersFirst.com	www.teachersfirst.com/index.cfm
Thinkfinity	www.thinkfinity.org/lesson-plans

From: Rosen, L. (2011). Teaching the iGeneration, *Educational Leadership*, 68(5). 10-15).
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb11/vol68/num05/Teaching-the-iGeneration.aspx>

Other *Research Briefs* that discuss digital issues are available at www.educationpartnerships.org/resources_researchbrief.html. You may find these particularly helpful.

Digital Literacy
Digital Textbooks
iPad Use in Classrooms

Summary

Students in today's classrooms are more digitally literate than their teachers and prior generations of students. They are far more comfortable using digital tools for communication, learning, and productivity. The challenge for American schools is to build on these skills and use them to make classroom instruction richer and more engaging.

Online Resources:

Teaching Screenagers – The February 2011 issue of Educational Leadership was devoted to information about teaching “screenagers,” the digital generation. Some articles are available to the public but many require a membership in ASCD to access.
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb11/vol68/num05/toc.aspx>

Teaching the iGeneration - This article by Larry Rosen discusses instructional strategies for teaching this generation of students.
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb11/vol68/num05/Teaching-the-iGeneration.aspx>

U.S. Teen Mobile Report – This report from the Nielson Company provides information about patterns of communication by U.S. teenagers.
http://blog.nielson.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/u-s-teen-mobile-report-calling-yesterday-texting-today-using-apps-tomorrow/

Pew Internet and American Life Project – This site sponsored by the Pew Research Center provides many articles and other resources about the Internet and digital habits of American teenagers.
www.pewinternet.org

Kaiser Family Foundation – This site provides information about resources for teaching the iGeneration.
www.kff.org and www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/8010.pdf

Print Resources

Richardson, W. (2006). *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Tools for Classrooms*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Rosen, L. (2010). *Rewired: Understanding the iGeneration and the Way They Learn*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

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