

Today's Kids: Plugged up

I see them clustered in front of school. I see them in Malls. I see them walking by, on the road in front of my house. I see them in twos, in three, in multiples thereof. I see them- almost always, more and more, plugged up. Like the picture of the three kids all attached to devices on the front of the Sunday Telegram, like the picture of kids across the country- eyes, ears, mouth, senses- all plugged up. A body, a mind, so young, so full of potential, all its feelers drawn in, retracted from the world... How would it grow? How would it learn? How would it interact with the rest of society, with the rest of the world, when it doesn't with those around it?

Sending and catching far off signals, many of today's kids seem to be missing out on the world right around them. The natural world- of trees, birds, sky, earth, people in their immediate vicinity... In this urgent need to press buttons on mechanical devices, to train their eyes on a video screen, to tune in their ears to a cacophony of high decibel sounds, they seem to be missing the entire larger world of which they are a part. Whether any of us agree with her politics or not, at least Hillary Clinton got one thing right- "It takes a village to raise a child."

Where is that village? Where is that community of which these children are a part? What do we want for our children as they grow up? What do we want them to be a part of? Maybe, its time we asked these questions of ourselves once again. Because if we don't, it might be too late for our kids to learn to function in society.

I'm all for technological progress. Mobile phones have probably made more of a difference in the lives of people in far flung corners of the world than any other advance including computers. And, I'm all for computers of course, (as a matter of fact, I teach in

that field myself) for its capability to churn numbers and execute instructions at infinite speeds, for the internet, for bringing the world to my fingertips, so to speak. And I like to lift my feet to music as much as the next person, and even though I have reservations with the indiscriminate use of the word “cool”, I do find *ipods* pretty cool (Nope, don’t own one.) And yes, I do think television serves a purpose- *in small doses*.

So, where’s the problem? Exactly here.

Because cell phones let us connect anytime, anywhere, doesn’t mean our children should. Because internet is amazing in all the information it can bring to us, doesn’t mean our children should be spending all their free time downloading remote sites. Because there are a billion recorded songs, doesn’t mean they have to be serialized into passive ears during study hall.

So, why are kids plugged up in school? Why do they have cell phones on, earphones in, video games in hand? *Why are these things in school?* What kind of learning are they going to do if their fingers and minds are agitating over the next person to call, their souls are lost inside rock and roll or hip-hop or rap, their eyes and minds are locked on to an onscreen shooting spree or cars racing at breakneck speed?

We have research papers on these issues! Does this *need* research? What happened to simple common sense?

In the tiny nuclear world of today’s families, a school is probably one of the longest, continuous and closest things to a society that many of our kids have. A school is one of the most crucial places of learning, of forming the minds of our future generation, the launching pad for our kids to enter the world. Should their senses not be free, so they can engage effectively? Should their minds not be clear, so they can learn?

Not yet in college, these are tomorrow's adults, tomorrow's policy makers, peace makers and yes, if we're not careful, possible war mongers and violent offenders.

But today, they are kids. Our kids. Let's not stop "interfering" in our kids lives that early. Let's unplug them from their gadgets so they can plug in to their world. Let the study halls be for study after all.