ZOHAR BIBER

Israel

Parental involvement in school-ways of communications between teachers and parents

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In the course of my research at PHD at the AMU University in Poland, I was exposed to patterns of communication between the school and the parents of the students. It turns out that these patterns change frequently: if in the past it was customary to write to parents in a contact notebook about the student's behavior at school, or make a call through Telephone line. Now we are exposed to new patterns of communication that may improve the relationship between the school and the parents, but on the other hand there are dangers and challenges that, if not considered, may harm the parents' involvement or contact with them. In recent years, with digital technological developments (Internet, smartphones, social networks), there has been a significant change in communication patterns between parents and teachers. The communication is immediate, the parents are connected to the school Site, and they are updated online by email, the WA messages, groups, etc. In this article I will examine the changes in communication between the school and parents and the significance of these changes. I will also relate to the gaps created between populations that can't afford some of these technologies and the intergenerational gap that is growing as a result of technological changes and their impact on students, parents and teachers.

KEY WORDS: Parent involvement, teachers, school, students, ways of communication, digital gaps, social network

The Involvement of the Parents in the School: Introduction

The research literature presents different models for the description of the reciprocal relations between the school and the parents[1]. In the present work, I based on the research of Bauch and Golding[2] for the examination of the contribution of the discourse on the new way of communication for the increase of the parents' involvement and relationship in the school activity. Information and communication technologies develop tremendously fast. They penetrate into every field, change our lifestyles, and become an important part of our culture and a main element in every field of existence. This model includes the following types:

1. Bureaucratic, characterized by little involvement of parents and teachers. This is the traditional model, in which parents have a passive role while the teachers maintain their autonomous place in the classroom.
2. Teachers' professionalism, characterized by great involvement of the teachers and low involvement of the parents. In this model the teachers are perceived as experts and as knowing what is good for their students.
3. Parent empowerment, characterized by high involvement of the parents, as opposed to low involvement of the teachers. In this model, the parents can constitute a threat to the professional prestige of teachers and in actuality weaken them. In this model, the relations between teachers and parents are characterized by tension and the teachers' aspiration is to distance the parents as much as possible.

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[1] C. Olmstead, Using technology to increase parent involvement in schools, *TechTrends*, 57(6), 2013, pp. 28–38. A. Addi-Raccah & R. Ainhoren, School governance and teachers' attitudes to parents' involvement in schools, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(6), 2009, pp. 805–813.

[2] P. A. Bauch & E. B. Goldring, Parent-teacher participation in the context of school governance, *Peabody Journal of Education*, 73(1), 2000, pp. 15–35.

4. Partnership, characterized by a high level of involvement of both the teachers and the parents. This model aspires to the optimal involvement of the parents.

The Involvement of the Family in the Education of Our Time

For many, the acquisition of an education is a key to success in life. There is a tendency to see education to be a means of social mobility and thus according to research studies there is a direct relationship between the children's achievements in the school and their chances of social advancement, happiness, self-fulfillment, and a better life.[3] There are many reasons for the relationship between the school and the parents: partnership between the child's family and the school improves the school's programs and climate, helps the teachers in their work, empowers the school staff, provides support services for the parents, improves the parents' skills and their leadership, and links between the families. However, beyond all these, one topic may connect between all the parents – the concern about the children's achievements in the school.

Recently evidence is growing stronger that the cooperation between teachers and parents indeed improves the children's achievements and their success in the school. The partnership contributes to the improvement in additional variables, such as self-esteem, behavior at home and in the school, strengthening of interpersonal skills and decision making skills. Moreover, it was found that when the student experiences a strong relationship between the school and the parents the child tends to take part in fewer risky behaviors. It should be noted that these findings were obtained in a series of research studies performed in the United States, and there are not,

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[3] D. Givton (2011), About What Student Is the Law Concerned? The Law of Student's Rights – Its Contribution and Role in the View of Legal Rulings, *Law and Business*, 14, pp. 767–768. (Hebrew)

as far as I know t any unequivocal findings on the influence of the parents' involvement on these variables in Israeli society[4]. It appears that the question on the agenda is not whether the partnership between home and school has a place and value but rather how and in what ways this partnership should be fulfilled and developed. Much has been written about the unique contribution of the home system and school system to the child's development. The partnership creates continuity and continuation[5].

Parents and teachers have an important place in the students' developmental and educational process. Parents and teachers are partners in the process in which the adolescents acquire values, education, and behavior norms. The educational system in Israel encourages in different ways the parents' involvement in established education. It was found that the parents' involvement contributes both to the students' social adjustment and to their academic achievements (Neal, 2012). A main part of the parents' involvement (of any type) is the existence of a system of reciprocal communication between parents and teachers – two-way communication that has the goal to create a system of relations based on trust, to give information about the curriculum and its goals, to give information about problems at home, to hold a discussion, to exchange opinions, to increase the teachers' accessibility to the parents' requests, and to update the students' situation in the studies.

New Channels of Communication between Parents and Teachers

This section focuses on a number of issues relevant to the examination of new channels of communication between teachers and

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[4] Z. Greenbaum & D. Fried (2008), *Family relations in the framework of early childhood education: Picture of the Situation and recommendations*, Israel National Academy for Sciences. (Hebrew)

[5] N. Bilha (2014), *Whose Child Is It? On the Parents' Relations with Their Children's Schools*, Tel Aviv, Mofet Institute. (Hebrew)

parents and their implications on their involvement in the educational process of their children and students. The involvement of the parents, including the communication with the staff in the school, has influences on the student's wellbeing, cognitive development, and consequently achievements[6].

A direct, personal, and quality relationship between the parents and the teaching staff is an essential condition for the optimal parental involvement in the life of the school[7]. Effective communication between parents and teachers and an open channel of communication are very important and have a positive influence on the problem solving, which may improve the quality of education, sense of belonging, and success of children. The researchers further found that the parents' involvement will increase as they feel that the school trusts them and as they feel identity with the school values. In reality, in contrast, the process of parental involvement encounters difficulties. For instance, the Committee for Family Relations in Early Childhood Education and Connection to the Child's Development and the Success in the Educational System expressed frustration regarding the parents' involvement in the school because of the fact that the school turns to the parents only in the case of a conflict or a problem. The committee members' evaluation is very important to the involvement of the parents in the successes and positive messages[8].

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[6] A. Plotkin & T. Shapira, *Contribution of the cooperation between the school and the parents in the construction of educational authority*, Trends in the Administration of Education 2103 Conference, Book of Abstracts, Gordon Academic College, 2013. S. G. Kosaretskii & D. Chernyshova, Electronic communication between the school and the home, *Russian Education and Society*, 55(10), 2013, 81–89. C. Olmstead, Using technology to increase parent involvement in schools, *TechTrends*, 57(6), 2013, pp. 28–38.

[7] Y. Friedman, *Relations between School and Parents in Israel: Background Material for the Work*, 2010. Y. Fisher & Y. Friedman, Parents and the school – Reciprocal relations and involvement, Pages, 47, pp. 11–37, 2002. A. Mor, To speak with the parents even when 'everything is alright', *Echo of Education*, 90, 2012.

[8] Greenbaum & Fried, 2008. *Family Relations in the framework of early childhood education: Picture of the Situation and recommendations*, Israel National Academy for Sciences.

Information and communication technologies develop tremendously fast. They penetrate into every field, change our lifestyles, and become an important part of our culture and a main element in every field of existence[9]. The same is true for the channels of digital communication between the school and the parents. The availability of new channels of media, for example, email, social networks (such as Facebook, WhatsApp), systems of institutional communication (as in the example of Mashov[10] and Smart School) and smartphones offer synchronous and asynchronous, interpersonal, intergroup, dynamic communication that did not exist beforehand.

Research studies show that electronic mail (email), an old digital implementation from the period of Web 1.0, is one of the most common means for communication between parents and teachers. According to teachers, the evaluation of the parents through the email facilitates with the adoption of the steps required for the assistance of students who need help[11].

Electronic mail is found to be effective in the management of the students by the teachers, in that the messages are conveyed immediately to the parents. However, the main communication between the two groups occurs around negative issues, both in terms of the

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[9] G. Salomon, *Technology and education in the information era,* Haifa and Tel Aviv: Haifa University and Zmora Beitan, 2000.

[10] Mashov is a Hebrew acronym for Immediacy, Transparency, and Supervision. The word means feedback. It is an Internet-based system of school management developed in the year 2006. As of the year 2014. it has been deployed in 549 schools and educational systems in Israel. The use of this software by the school staff, the students, and the parents contributes to the transparency of school activity through regular updates, for the improvement of the relationship between the school staff and the student and his parents and the improvement of the efficiency of the daily work in the educational staff.

[11] S. G. Kosaretskii & D. Chernyshova, Electronic communication between the school and the home, *Russian Education and Society*, 55(10), 2013, pp. 81–89. B. Thompson, Parent-teacher e-mail strategies at the elementary and secondary school. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*. 10(1), 2008, pp. 17–25. B. Thompson, Characteristics of parent-teacher e-mail communication. *Communication Education*, 57(2), 2009, pp. 201–223.

scholastic achievements and in terms of the behavior in the school. However, it was found that the parents and the teachers attempted to phrase the negative information in a positive vein[12]. Thompson[13] in another research study found failures and fears in the use of this channel of communication: (1) erroneous interpretation of the message, (2) fears of the use of asynchronous media, (2) fear of crossing the boundaries between teachers and parents, and (4) fear of shifting the responsibility for learning from the students to the parents.

Comparison between communication through the school website and email indicated that the institutional systems for pedagogical and administrative management, such as the examples of Mashov, MNBST[14], and Smart School, are another channel of communication. Through these systems it is possible to obtain a daily report about what occurs in the lessons in the school and a report on the scores and scholastic achievements. The systems enable intra-organizational communication between staff members and communication with the students and their parents[15]. It should be noted that the educational system in Israel set for itself as an objective the incorporation of institutional systems as a main communication channel. The national computerized communication program that commenced in the year 2010 explicitly declared that one of the goals of the encouragement of communication between teachers, parents, and students is through information systems for pedagogical management[16].

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[12] B. Thompson, Parent-teacher e-mail strategies at the elementary and secondary school. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*. 10(1), 2008, pp. 17–25.

[13] B. Thompson, Characteristics of parent-teacher e-mail communication. *Communication Education*, 57(2), 2009, pp. 201–223.

[14] MNBST stands in Hebrew for Internet School Management System. It is a system open for use by all schools and is a work tool that enables the management of the school schedule and the report and follow-up after student attendance, behavior, and evaluation.

[15] Binns, Y. (2008). *The use of the Mashov [Immediacy, Transparency, Supervision] program in the dialogue between the parents and the school: The Kafr Kaana middle school*. M. A. Thesis, The Open University. C. Olmstead, Using technology to increase parent involvement in schools, *TechTrends*, 57(6), 2013, pp. 28–38.

[16] Ministry of Education, Adjustment of the educational system to the 21st century: Masterplan, 12th edition, http://goog.gl/6oKIJb, 2012.

Research studies found that the pace of the adoption of the institutional systems has increased and that these systems have a main place in the management of the school and in the communication between teachers, students, and parents. For instance, Blau and Hameiri[17] measured the number of entries into the Mashov system in seven secondary schools in the first three years of the system. The research findings indicate that as the teaching workers entered data into the Mashov system, the pace of entries of the parents (primarily mothers) and of the students increased and consequently the frequency of the interaction between the teachers and the parents also increased (the nature of the interaction was not examined). However, teachers (with the exception of beginning teachers) reported mental pressure and fear of criticism on the part of experienced teachers, management, and parents following the public documentation of their reports. One of the results was that in some of the cases the report was 'softened' and not fully faithful to the reality[18].

Additional new channels of communication are the social networks, like Facebook, WhatsApp (used to send immediate messages, photographs, and video and sound clips), Twitter, Google Plus, and so on. Social networks are the name of environments that include a variety of online tools and means that enable the creation and preservation of relations between users 24:7. The networks are a part of the variety of Web 2.0 applications, which are characterized by creation and collaboration of contents between users with

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[17] A. Blau & M. Hameiri, Smartphone in the school – Is the next generation really here? Pedagogical management of the mobile phone in the educational staff and in the families. In: Y. Ashet Alkaly, A. Kaspi, N. Gary, Y. Kellman, V. Silver-Varod, & Y. Yair (eds.) *The learning person the technological era* (pp. 17–24), 2011. A. Blau & M. Hameiri, *A new way to realize the right to know: Increase of the involvement of students and parents in what is done in the educational institutions through an online system for pedagogical management – Mashov [Immediacy, Transparency, Supervision], 2012,* http://goog.gl/BO1pxt

[18] M. Perlman, What are the reciprocal relations between the teachers' use of systems for information management and their sense of accountability? In: Y. Ashet Alkaly, A. Kaspi, N. Gary, Y. Kellman, V. Silver-Varod, & Y. Yair (eds.) *The learning person the technological era* (pp. 74–79).

shared interest. The world on the social networks is a world of 'here and now', when users look, respond, and are present[19]. Facebook is the largest and most known social network in the world. As its founders state, "Connect with friends and the world around you on Facebook[20]". The use of the environment is free and allows the user (from the age of thirteen up) to join a group or groups of users and to communicate with the other members of the group. The users can create for themselves a personal profile and a list of people to whom it is possible to send messages and with whom it is possible to share information, pictures, and films. The research indicates that this social channel still is in its infancy as a channel of communication between teachers and parents but teachers express a willingness in principle to use it[21].

Brooks and Boskilla[22], who examined the incorporation of the Facebook social network as a means of communication between teachers and parents, found that most of the parents (81%) who participated in the research study maintained that Facebook is an effective tool for the improvement of the rapid communication between them and the class teachers, in contrast to traditional means, which are not rapid and accessible immediately for performance, such as contact notebooks and telephone calls. In addition, most saw Facebook to be a way that makes it easier for them to receive daily information from the teachers in the class, both through general messages and through personal messages and personal requests. The research study further shows that the relation between the parents and the teachers changed for the better as a result of the experience of communication between them using Facebook. They

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[19] G. Kortz & D. Chen, *Intentional online learning – A digital toolkit for the teacher*, Or Yehuda, Center for Academic Studies, 2012.

[20] https://www.facebook.com/

[21] C. Olmstead, Using technology to increase parent involvement in schools, *TechTrends*, 57(6), 2013, pp. 28–38.

[22] S. Brooks & D. Boskilla, *Incorporation of Facebook as a means of communication between teachers and parents: Action research*, M. A. Thesis, The Center for Academic Studies, 2013.

maintain that the communication through Facebook contributed to the extension of the trust and cooperation between the teachers and the parents. During the school year in which the research study was performed, the relationship between the teachers and the parents was extended from the contact notebook and weekly telephone calls to daily contact, which is independent of time and place. Many parents responded via their mobile phone immediately after the message was sent. The parents felt that the communication was strengthened and led to mutual relations of trust. Another finding of their research study showed that the transfer of information and the exposure of the parents to different contents contributed greatly to the feeling of partnership.

The accelerated development of wireless technologies infrastructures contributed to the appearance of mobile means a, including smartphones that have internet access and allow a variety of actions of communication and browsing. Smartphones provide possibilities of communication in a variety of visual, text, and audiovisual representations. In addition, they increase the frequency of the use of communication applications such as email, Facebook, WhatsApp, Webtop (a Smart School application for the mobile phone), and so on.

Blau and Hameiri[23] examined the use of smartphones for work with the Mashov system among teaching workers, students, and parents in 429 schools. The data were based on system data (not self-reporting). They found that the number of entries of teaching workers into the system from the smartphone influenced the number of entries of students and parents. In their opinion, the possibility of entering data from the smartphone in real-time during the lessons can reduce the load assigned to the teaching workers in the entry of continuous data into the system and in freeing their time in

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[23] A. Blau & M. Hameiri, *A new way to realize the right to know: Increase of the involvement of students and parents in what is done in the educational institutions through an online system for pedagogical management – Mashov [Immediacy, Transparency, Supervision], 2012,* http://goog.gl/BO1pxt

the recesses, stay hours, and after the work day for additional educational activity. Moreover, the use of the Mashov system creates a new culture of online interaction between the school and the students and their parents.

To conclude, the limited review of research studies presented in this section shows that the appearance of digital channels of communication and communication means such as smartphones offer a variety of communication processes that had not existed beforehand both in their visual design and in the access to them. One of the main questions addresses the degree to which the technological setting changes and may change even more so in the future the nature of the relationship between the teachers, students, and parents.

The Meaning of the Changes that Occurred in the Relationship between Parents and Teachers

Parents and teachers have an important place in the developmental and educational process of the students. Parents and teachers are partners in the process in which the adolescents acquire values, education, and norms of behavior. The educational systems in Israel encourage in different ways the involvement of the parents in institutionalized education. It was found that the parents' involvement contributes both to the students' social adjustment and to their scholastic achievements[24]. A main part of parental involvement (of any type) is the existence of a system of reciprocal communication between parents and teachers, two-way communication with the goal of creating a system of relations based on trust, providing information on the curriculum and its goals, providing information on problems at home, holding a discussion, changing opinions, increasing the access of the teachers to the parents requests, and receiving updates on the situation of the students' studies.

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[24] R. B. Neal, Checking in or checking out? Investigation the parent involvement reactive hypothesis, *The Journal of Educational Research,* 15, 2012, pp. 79–89.

The parents' involvement occurs in the best way when there is ongoing and effective communication between them and the teachers[25]. In recent years, with the extension of the use of new technologies of communication and information, the use of these channels of communication between the parents and the teachers has increased.

The concept of 'new communication technologies' refers to communication such as computers or smartphones, which are based on the Internet. In the context of Internet-supported communication channels, we discuss the use of a school communication system supported by the school website (such as Mashov), email and social networks, technologies supported by mobile phones that primarily address messaging (SMS) and WhatsApp messages. Since the new communication channels enable the direct transfer of messages, without the mediation of the students, at any time and at any place, the use increases significantly the mutual availability existing between the parents and the teacher.

This part focuses on the characteristics of communication between parents and teachers in the era of an information society and the types of communication that exist today in the schools. The main goal is to present a number of conclusions regarding the adjustment of every channel to the different types of relationship between teachers and parents. The fundamental assumption is that communication between parents and teachers is a process of the exchange of information, formation of conventions, involvement in the educational processes, coordination of actions, fulfilment of needs of the different sides, and effective emphasis of educational goals. The literature notes that to create effective communication between teachers and parents, the teachers' initiative is important. They must create a high frequency of contact with the parents and

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[25] K. V. Hoover-Dempsey, M. C. Whitaker, & C. L. Ice, Motivation and commitment to family-school partnerships, [in:] S. L. Christenson & A. L. Reschly (eds.) *handbook of school-family partnerships*, New York, Routledge, 2010, pp. 30–60.

encourage the parents to be involved both in the school activity and in their children's learning process[26].

In this sense, the communication between teachers and parents needs to be positive and supportive, so that it can create opportunities for cooperation and for the encouragement of the continuation of the mutual communication. It is important to state that despite the feeling that exists in the public, according to which access to the Internet and use of smartphones are universal, the data indicate significant differences between different groups in the population, both in accessibility to the Internet and in the use of smart devices. The knowledge about these gaps is important, since it defines the target population that can benefit from this communication as opposed to a population that can benefit only from face-to-face communication or communication by regular means (letters or class notebook).

Digital Gaps. In the discussion of technology-supported communication, it is necessary to take into account that in Israel there are 'digital gaps'. A first order digital gap is the difference between the ability of groups in society to use information and communication technologies such as the Internet and smartphones. A second order digital gap is the gaps that exist in the computer use skills between groups that have the possibility of using these technologies. Regarding digital gaps of the first order, in Israel the data are relatively current. It becomes clear that 80% of households in Israel have a home computer but only 71% have an Internet connection. In the division by the decile according to average net income per person, there are large gaps in ownership of a computer and Internet connection: 95.5% of the households in the top decile have a computer in comparison to only 60% of households in the bottom decile, while 93.2% of the households in the top decile have an Internet subscription as opposed to only 38.1% in the bottom decile[27].

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[26] L. Ho, C. Hung, H. Chen, Using theoretical models to examine the acceptance behavior of mobile phone messaging to enhance parent teacher interactions, *Computers and Education,* 61, 2013, pp. 105–114.

[27] Central Bureau of Statistics, Findings from a Survey of Household Expenses, 2012, 2013.

A clear conclusion that derives from the data presented in the previous paragraph is that the use of new technology channels in the school obligates the examination in every class and in every school of the level of accessibility of these means to parents and the degree of use of computers and smartphones. Especial attention is required in making intelligent decision on the level of the use of technology, so as to prevent a situation that the parents remain disconnected from this relationship with the teachers.

Technological availability. The research study differentiates between reliance on stationary technology (such as the home computer) and reliance on mobile technology (such as smartphones). The use of mobile devices significantly changes the frequency of the communication between parents and teachers[28]. The possibility of carrying the device everywhere at all times causes the contacts of parents with teachers and teachers with parents to be held very frequently and at all hours of the day, even after the end of the studies in the school. It appears that the fundamental assumption of the contacts is that the very use of mobile devices dictates a norm of availability, which primarily obligates the teachers to be available for the parents at all times and places. This creates a load of communication and the blurring of the boundaries between the private life, both of the teachers and of the parents, and the educational obligations of the teachers and the reciprocal expectations of immediate availability. The accessibility and availability that develop may harm the effectiveness and efficiency of the communication and the teachers' ability to meet the parents' expectations. The teachers report overload and possible harm in their private lives because of the difficulty with setting a boundary between work and private life[29].

'Digital immigrants' and 'digital natives'. Aside from the gaps that exist in the accessibility and availability of technology between groups

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[28] G. Kortz, *Uses of new media: Collection of data from interested parties – Teachers and parents: A review of the literature,* National Academy of Sciences, 2014.

[29] G. Kortz, *Uses of new media: Collhection of data from interested parties – Teachers and parents: A review of the literature,* National Academy of Sciences, 2014.

in the population, there is a significant intergenerational gap in the attitude of parents and adolescents to technology. The name 'digital natives' is the name given to the generation of people born in the middle of the 1980s and later, who grew up in a world of information and digital communication. The name 'digital immigrants' is the name given to the generation born before the year 1964, who grew up in a world before the personal computer[30]. The practical meaning is the perception that 'digital natives' live the language and culture of the Internet, alongside which they grew up. The terms express essential differences between the generations in the understanding and use of technology, with the recognition that beyond the regular generation gap there are also many other differences between the generations, both in the technological ability and in the interest and desire to understand and use the technology.

This generational gap in relation to the technology is perceived as influencing the adolescent's system of relations with his parents and with his teachers. The main argument on the matter of the intergenerational differentiation is that the generation of 'digital natives' addresses learning in a manner different from the previous generation. They are accustomed to learn through the simultaneous use of many channels of information (such as photographs, films, and digital information search using a search engine) and can hold social relations through the simultaneous use of a large number of channels. This may constitute a focus of conflict between teachers and students and between parents and adolescents[31]. In addition, parents find it difficult to achieve mastery of the channels of communication that the youths prefer and therefore problems in communication frequently arise between parents and children. The reason is that the communication of youths is based primarily on sparse channels of communication and on the young people's use of

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[30] M. Prensky, 2001. Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon*, 9.

[31] L. M. Padilla-Walker, S. M. Coyne, A. M. Fraser, Getting a high-speed family connection: Associations between family media use and family connection, *Family Relations,* 61, 2012, pp. 426–440.

the language of abbreviations typical of their peer group, a language that frequently is not understood by their parents[32]. In contrast to the parents and the teachers, the youths are less troubled by the need to maintain privacy, a situation that weakens the borders of privacy, both of the school and of the family. Moreover, in the scholastic realm the children frequently prepare homework during conversations on new channels of communication with peers, while watching clips and writing on Twitter. These facts awaken concerns in the parents about their children's ability to focus on the scholastic tasks and the feeling that the children are becoming addicted to technology. It is possible that the intergenerational gap will disappear over time, but at this stage the awareness of it is very important to the understanding of the communication between parents and children. Hence, this understanding is also important to the understanding of the implications of the new means of communication on the beneficial relations between parents and teachers.

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[32] L. Rosen, 2010. *Rewired: Understanding the iGeneration and the way they learn*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

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