



PARENT & FACULTY EDUCATION CONFERENCE

Cyber-life at Menlo: Get the Scoop **Matt Richtel**

Attendee Notes for Menlo School Workshop: Feb. 9, 2013

Matt Richtel is an American writer and journalist for the New York Times. He was awarded the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting for a series on distracted driving. Matt writes about technology, its impact on society, how we relate to each other, and how we work and play. His 2010 series, "[Our Brain on Computers](#)," focuses on how constant use of our devices impacts not only our behavior, but also our thought processes and even our neurology. His 2009 series about [the dangers of multitasking while driving](#) won the [Pulitzer Award for National Reporting](#). His latest fiction novel *The Cloud* is the second in his Nat Idle series. More information about Matt Richtel can be found at mattrichtel.wordpress.com.

Opening:

Matt Richtel moderated a panel of 6 Menlo students (3 boys and 3 girls, sophomores-seniors). The students' interests included sports, music, engineering, school newspaper, orchestra, video games and mock trial. Matt asked the students the following questions:

How much texting per day do you do?

The average person sends 60 texts per day. The Menlo student panel seemed to text less than average, spending about 20 minutes per day. Most often texts are checked on the way to school each morning. Students did not feel that texting was compromising their ability to speak and interact with others. They are often required to give in-class presentations and participate in classroom discussions so they have plenty of opportunities to interact with others in person. Overall, students also discussed the value of their "in person" time with friends on and off campus. Texting and social media are often used as another form of communication to build the relationships or keep them functioning well, rather than as an alternative form that is replacing their direct person-to-person time with peers.

What do you use for social media?

Facebook was the vehicle the students preferred. Some almost always have Facebook open while they are doing their homework. Some students shared that 50% of the time spent on homework is social and 50% is academic work. Students said they often collaborate with other students and friends during homework time on projects and for studying. For some students, when they hear a "ping" they focus on Facebook; however they may not respond to the post

immediately. Others stay “invisible,” turning off Facebook Chat while they have it opened, simply as a management tool. For those students, if it looks to others (their peers) that they are not actively visible, they give themselves a break in feeling obligated to join in on ongoing social media conversations. From there, they find time to re-engage at a later date. Within the panel, differing ways of managing current and pressing social media in the lives of adolescent students were clearly represented. There were some that found what works best for them is to actively manage their time and responsibilities with the turning off of Facebook Chat, only allowing themselves time to re-enter when various workloads are complete. Other responses from different panelists mentioned there are no guilty feelings felt for the interruptions or use of social media during school time. They often check who messages are from and then decide whether to respond or engage. Those particular students felt in control of how they are managing the multitude of their perpetual responsibilities.

For many of the panelists, they mentioned the grade in each class being the final goal for them. Each, in various ways, periodically evaluates their productivity and success within each class. If they are happy with the end result, they seem to be convinced they are managing the social media pieces of their world in good ways. If not, they described using their own initiative, altering social media over-use to improve upon their final results related to the classroom. One of the Juniors remarked that she has learned to be more self-regulating with on-line distractions. Very little time is spent watching television. Collectively, the panel seems to watch TV only after all of their homework was complete, and usually that is later in the evening. From there, their desire is to get to bed and enjoy the opportunity to sleep.

What messages do you get from your parents about technology? Are they hypocrites?

- “Don’t procrastinate and plan ahead” when in reality, certain parents are seen working late at night.
- “Cut down on your use of media” while a parent can be driven to respond to each text immediately, while another seems to be “hooked” on Facebook and competes with the student for friends and messages.
- Others discussed their circumstances with favorable accolades of the positive role-modeling from their parents.
- Final message were related to parents needing to follow-up their verbal communication and wishes of their children with actively modeling those same messages for themselves.

Q&A - questions from parents, student panel answers:

How do you communicate with your Menlo teachers?

The students communicate via Moodle. There is some texting to/from coaches, but it is not frequent. There is minimal Facebook interaction with teachers and it only relates to some Clubs. Photos and items related to the Club are placed on the Club’s Facebook page. “Friend-ing” of teachers was not discussed as common, a concern, or an issue.

Do you video chat?

Skype is used more for long distance friends. Video chatting is rarely used and when it is used it is for sharing study activities that require visual sharing i.e.: biology drawings. A few students like to study using Facebook video to quiz each other.

What do you think of the use of iPads in the classroom?

The panel agreed that the iPads are great for note-taking. They concurred that they can also be distracting in the classroom; that some students create opportunities for social networking and games during class time. These comments go back to the need for parents and teachers to keep implementing iPad etiquette, as well as improving self-monitoring for students.

Are you happy to have less weight in your backpack, now that your books are downloaded on the iPad?

The panel seemed collective in that they like their hard bound books: “textbooks are more useful,” “I write notes in the margins of my math book pages,” “reading for history or literature, I comprehend better with my books.”