

Lauren Galbraith
Dr. Van Zoost
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Snaps for You!

It is much too easy to be swallowed by the current of current times. Every aspect of modern society seems fast and furious. Everything demands immediate attention. With our handheld devices, we are trapped within a swirling vortex of distractions from sources that span the entire globe. The world outside of our screens fades from view as our eyes fixate upon the tantalizing lights and colours of Social Media. But what does this mean? What are the consequences? What are we missing?

These are the questions we pondered while brainstorming ideas for how we, as a small Advanced English 12 class, could make a lasting impact upon the youth in our community. In this digital age of constant social networking and an oversaturated consumption of media, it is easy to forget about what happens in the “real world” in favour of the enticing distractions one may find online. Without a doubt, this mentality has the potential to harm the real, face-to-face connections one has with those around them, especially in young, developing minds. This is a pressing issue that we, as high school students, have been made aware of, and we chose to take action to prevent this mentality from possessing the younger generation.

Childhood is the most crucial time for the development of the human brain. Young minds are like sponges for information, behaviour, habits, and cultural values. It is for this reason the prevalence of technology in modern times is so frightening. Many children are given personal devices from an alarmingly early age, and spend exceeding amounts of time using them. We are forced to think about what children learn, or rather, what they cannot learn, by keeping their faces glued to their phones for hours of the day. The ability to speak and connect with others does not come from surfing Instagram, nor does it come from exchanging selfies on Snapchat. There is no Youtube tutorial for developing meaningful interpersonal connections.

Together, with this thought in our minds, our English class developed the short presentation titled “Snaps for You,” and presented it to a class of fifth grade students at Falmouth Elementary School. We asked the students, “How many of you have cell phones, or some kind of device?” and the majority of the class raised their hands. This validated our cause, reassuring us that this message would be applicable to their lives as we had intended.

The skit followed a protagonist, Tinia Texter, who had become obsessed with her cellphone, and was neglecting her friends and family. She was visited by three ghosts who informed her about the danger

of her ways, and the impact they would have on her life if she did not stop and think about her habits. She witnessed her closest friends stop inviting her to play, and her parents begin to ignore her in favour of their own cell phones. After the deterioration of her connections with these people became apparent to her, Tina became distraught, and it became the audience's decision as to what her next actions should be.

With this presentation, we intended to use theatrical hyperbole to bring attention to the real world consequences of allowing oneself to become entranced by the digital world. Real friendships will begin to dissolve without contact, and relationships with parent can grow distant and disconnected without communication. This is especially dangerous for the youth, as these are elements of life that bring fulfillment and substance to everyday life in ways that digital distractions simply cannot. Without exposure or familiarization with these relationships from an early age, children's lives will undoubtedly be affected in a long term fashion.

Fortunately, there exists a growing resistance to this notion. The students in our English class are far from the first to notice the dangers of our cultural acceptance of the constant use of personal devices and social networking sites. We were not the first to point out the harm that this may cause, nor shall we be the last. As this technology becomes more and more pervasive, so too grow the voices of those who preach the importance of stepping back from the flashing lights and colours to appreciate and connect with the people near and dear to us. When in the midst of the thrashing current of the modern lifestyle, it is important to keep one's head above the water. I am proud to have been a part of this project, as I feel it is a step in the right direction: away from our phones.

Youth-Driven Projects: Projects Driving Youth

What better way is there to ensure a bright future than to allow today's youth to take charge and be involved in their own education? Student-designed projects are important in today's education system because they empower youth in a world that is often governed by adult-made decisions. Students are seldom involved in the decisions of what they learn about in school. Creating a project that is founded on a concept or vision created by the students themselves makes for a more meaningful experience for all who are involved. The skills developed by choosing an issue and being proactive in tackling it is one that will serve youth well as they mature.

In today's education system, it is not often that students are given a choice of what to learn about within a course, and where they want to put their focus. Work is usually created by the teacher, who is conforming to a curriculum that requires everyone to focus their learning in the same areas. Students rarely get the opportunity to pick an area of study within a course that appeals to them, and learn about something that fulfills them. This can result in a lack of interest and engagement in what they are learning. The feeling of having to work on something that does not reflect our interests, passions or curiosities is often tiring, and rarely produces a high quality finished product. In our class's project, "Snaps for You!", I felt very engaged in the process because I had some say in the decisions that were made. This feeling of engagement is one that made the project that was very meaningful to me, and will stay with me as I continue to grow and learn.

The meaning and influence of a project can be greatly increased by having it be created entirely by students, right down to the concept of it. The feeling of having created something that one can genuinely take responsibility for is one that conjures great amounts of pride and satisfaction. In addition, the audience for the work will be more moved knowing that it was a youth-driven initiative. To witness the manifestation of someone's passion in their work is something that leaves a lasting impression on audiences. When I walk through the corridors at school, I am often greeted by student's work hanging up on the walls. While I can see the amount of work that goes into creating these poems, or comic strips, I can't help but think about how everyone had to create something that fit into a mold created by the teacher. I am keen to

see something that has been created as a result of someone's desire to show their passion or make a change, and therefore I am inclined to absorb the creator's message more deeply. The opportunity to identify a problem in the world and to take action to find a solution is a liberating one. It restores a sense of autonomy in youth that can be lost to the endless conformation to adult's priorities.

As youth mature, they will be able to call on their skills and experience in being dedicated to making the world a better place. There are many skills that can be developed by being part of a youth-driven project. Students learn how to solve problems as they arise, both internal and external to their group. They will learn to take on leadership roles, how to be accepting and open to the ideas of others, and how to work within different group dynamics. They will also develop as they solve problems together in the process of creating their project, and as they experience the organization, communication and coordination required. Another very important lesson that can be learned from projects like these is how to decide what is important to youth in today's world and what can be changed for the better. To hone in on a specific issue and practice being motivated and driven to improve it is an invaluable skill that will be essential for youth as they become the leaders of the world in the future.

As time moves forward, we are approaching a time where today's youth will take power of the world and what goes on in it. It is crucial that young people today be given a forum to exercise and develop their interests and passions in a way that is meaningful to them and others. Student-led projects are what we need to teach students to think for themselves, to put their best foot forward with what they put out into the world, and to develop into adults that will exercise care, compassion, and consideration in a world that so desperately needs it.