

## Teenagers and Technology

(Book Review)

### **Reviewer:**

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### **Textbook Details:**

Teenagers and Technology  
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“Teenagers and Technology” is the seventeenth volume in the Adolescence and Society series, edited by John C. Coleman. The book examines the various ways, and the extent to which emergent technologies have impacted the lives of teenagers in the UK. Extensive research has shown that not only does technology have significance for teenagers, but it is during these teenage years that technology enabled practices are established. The authors indicate that technology may provide a context which enables young people to transition from the care and protection of family life to the autonomous and self-determinant world of adulthood.

The primary focus of the book is to determine the extent to which young people are engaging the two key characteristics of technological devices identified as “convergence and multi-functionality.” The authors postulate that the capacity and ability to transition to and from activities on multiple devices and platforms constitutes a sub-culture available to young people and increasing accessible to most. The authors stipulate that the book tries to answer three central questions: “what does the normality of teenagers’ technology use involve; is that normality common to most young people; and what are the implications for the significant numbers of young people who remain excluded from it.”

The book is successful in identifying key aspects of what is deemed as the complex nature of teenagers’ technology experiences. The authors identify social networking, online engagement in an ever expanding social world, and the importance of the metacognitive processes necessary for the development of an online sense of self-identity and group membership; the significance of game/role playing, the development of ICT skills and using these skills to enhance individual learning; acquiring the skills to deal with the risk factors of online environments; and utilizing technology resources to assist in the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

The authors identify the need for a shift away from traditional thinking about technology which tends to be rather simplistic and which focuses on the impacts or effects of technology, what it does to us; rather than focusing on the influences or experiences we encounter, the complexity of the interaction between and amongst people, the technology, and the context of the interaction. The perspective of the authors is one that views technology within a political, economic, social and cultural context. In so doing they focus not on the impact that technology has on the lives of teenagers, but rather on the ways in which technology is being experienced, discovered and understood, within a framework that must also accommodate, physiological and psychological change, social significance, multiple changing expectations and choices.

The authors achieved the stated aim of the book, ‘to build up a fair and balanced picture of how digital technologies figure in the lives of teenagers in the technology-rich parts of the world’, in Great Britain. They also made the important point that many so-called technology related issues are becoming increasingly global issues as mobile technology becomes more affordable and accessible worldwide.

The book consists of eight sections or chapters, each with a specific purpose, central to the theme of the content, teenagers and technology. Chapter one introduces the reader to the digital world of the teenager in Great Britain in the twenty-first century. Chapter two, entitled “Uses,” provides an overview of the degree of utility that teenagers have for technology, the range of activities and engagement, and the subsequent sub groups of users that emerge from this profile. Chapter three, “Contexts,” is a review of how technology may be affecting and possibly changing the context of the home and the school, and whether the digital world has now become a third context in the life of a

teenager. Chapter four, "Identity," explores the significance of networked technologies in the development of individual and group identities. Chapter five, "Learning," presents an historical overview of the significance of technology and technology use in formal education, and the emergence of new forms of constructivist pedagogies and student learning which promote 'self-directed independent learning. Chapter six looks at equity of access to technology, and the significance that this disparity may have on student success and on society as a whole in the near future, if access to technology is not universal. Chapter seven presents an overview of adolescent perspectives on technology and technology use, and the degree to which this may influence or promote the development of individual autonomy and dependency. The book concludes with a speculative glance at the future and the significance that technology and access to technology will have on teenagers worldwide.

"Teenagers and Technology" is an important book for several reasons. It challenges convention by acknowledging the significance of the relationship between teenager and technology. It provides evidence of seminal research in this area, based on extensive qualitative data collection. The findings of the research have significance for teaching and learning right now, and as foundational data for future research. The authors summarize their findings as follows:

1. "Teenagers choose from much the same range of technologies as adults, but are strongly influenced in what they do with these by the shared and distributed practices of the peer group; to that extent it is reasonable to contend that there is such a thing as a specifically teenage technology subculture."
2. "Teenagers align themselves to these technology practices and this subculture in widely varying ways: some embracing them wholesale, others engaging in them rather more selectively, and a small number frustrated by their lack of opportunity to use them at all."
3. We believe that the technology practices and subculture of teenagers can play a valuable role in helping them cope with the experiences of adolescence and the transition towards adult hood. We recognize also, though, that a case can be made for seeing them also as a worrying distraction from the serious demands of education, and as unmediated access to the worst aspects of the adult world" (p. 135).