**The Use of Technology in High School by Students and Teachers**

Technology is no doubt an integral part of today’s society all around the world, but it is especially significant among the younger generation. Technology and social media has come to define the image of my generation, and in many cases defines the identity of individuals.

As I explained my topic to students I met in France, many showed interest in answering my questions and asking questions about the United States. Students eagerly told me about how their classes work, what music is popular, and what their favorite websites are. One website that several French students told me about was a music sharing website named Deezer. Many of my French friends loved using this website because it combined their passion for music with their love of social networking. Deezer is a French online radio, similar to Pandora in the United States, which allows users to stream millions of songs, create playlists, follow artists, comment on songs, and share music with friends. A few years ago Deezer teamed up with Facebook to allow users to see what songs their friends like and find songs via Facebook. Another feature that Facebook added to Deezer was making the music that users listen to visible on Facebook. Similar to other applications such as SocialCam, this posts every video a person has watched onto his or her Facebook wall, this link between Deezer and Facebook makes your music visible to others on Facebook.

Facebook has been criticized many times for its privacy policy, but the goal of Facebook has always been to “connect people.” When do we cross the line between connecting with friends and old acquaintances, and begin to start shaping an image of ourselves? Facebook allows users to share personal information with friends and strangers alike, but each times someone “likes” a page or uploads a picture, he or she is creating an image of himself or herself. This image is shared with the world and can shape the identity of someone. For example, people can “like” a dozen pages of athletes, sports teams, and athletic brands, and create an image for themselves, yet in reality they may have never set foot on an athletic field. Simply based on the fact that they have created a profile for themselves, they define themselves by the identity that they created for themselves. Too often we blur the line of sharing information about ourselves, and presenting an image of ourselves to others. Deezer is just a small piece that makes Facebook as personal as it is.

Facebook’s immense popularity is not limited by borders or languages. When I conducted a survey at the school I stayed at in Senlis to see if students preferred Facebook over Twitter, 90% of students at Hugues Capet said they preferred Facebook, while 10% said they preferred Twitter. I also asked students at my school in Oklahoma City which one they preferred, and 43% said they preferred Facebook, while 57% said they preferred Twitter. While in France, I noticed that the students at Hugues Capet used Facebook more than people do at my own school. Whenever something big would happen, it would always end up on Facebook. The French students loved to write on each other’s walls about anything and everything, even just a simple heart. They loved commenting on almost every picture of friends, new and old, and posting statuses and their locations. Like teenagers in the States, many of the French kids used their phones to access Facebook. Teenagers here use Facebook frequently as well, but I noticed they used it much more actively there.

Cell phone use was very similar to how teenagers here in the States use phones. They were all texting constantly, and while normally I would not notice, without being able to use my own phone, I was very conscious to how frequently my French friends would check their phone, text other people, or get on Facebook. Seeing all of this made me realize how much we use our phones, and also how much it can bother other people. I also realized how much drama cell phones can create. My friends and I have had many instances where drama is inescapable because we have cell phones that allow people to communicate with us all the time. I was reminded of how bothersome it can be when my host sister was dealing with drama and she was forced to resolve an issue during a car ride to Paris with the whole family. Having cell phones forces us to deal with an issue right away and often our message can be misinterpreted. Several times my host sister would be texting during dinner or family time and her parents would get mad and tell her to get off her phone, an incident that has happened to me many times at home. No matter what the reason, being attached to a cell phone upsets other people and can even cause problems for ourselves.

Cell phone use was no different at school, despite the fact that Hugues Capet had a strict no cell phone policy. Signs were posted around the school reminding students that cell phones were never allowed out of backpacks in the school building. Students always had their phones out in the open outside, but inside they continued to use their phones but would hide them if a teacher was around. The punishment for having a phone out is severe and a hassle. The teacher would confiscate the cell phone, turn it in to the office, and a parent would have to drive up to school to reclaim the cell phone. This punishment was enough to make the students use their phones in secrecy, but not to stop them using their phones altogether. Many students knew that as long as they kept their phone silent and hidden, the teachers would not go through the entire process that is the school’s policy. One teacher explained to me that it is simply too much of a hassle to confiscate a phone and turn it in every time they see a phone. She explained that the students whine and complain, and when parents are called to pick up the phone from the office, they complain too. As I sat in class I noticed that despite the risk using a cell phone creates, many students had their cell phones in their laps under the desk. The students would text one another, pay games, and check Facebook on their phones during class. As I talked with other students, several even admitted to cheating on tests by using their cell phones.

Schools in the States are no stranger to problems being caused by cell phones. At my school teachers are also told to confiscate phones when they see them, however they may either turn them into the office or return them to the students after class. Like Hugues Capet teachers, teachers at my school do not usually follow this protocol simply because they know that no matter how many phones they confiscate, there will still be students who bring their phones out during class. Students have been caught cheating on tests before, they have been told to put their phones away, they have been yelled at for texting and not paying attention, but the phones continue to be brought out every day.

Not all technology was frowned upon at Hugues Capet however. In each classroom there was a project mounted on the wall, a computer, a TV with a DVD and VCR player, and a slide projector. It was up to the teacher to decide how much they wanted to use these resources. One history teacher never used anything more than the slide projector, preferring to write his notes on the chalkboard or whiteboard. Instead of using a computer to google maps of countries, he entered the classroom every day with several maps. The students informed me that he never used computers or the TV and preferred to teach in a more traditional manner. One of the English teacher on the other hand, used technology every chance she could. She would bring in handouts for each student almost every day, and she brought her personal MacBook to class every day to type up notes or share things with the class. The projector usually worked, but one time it refused to turn on and the teacher was forced to spend about ten minutes trying to fix it, but eventually she gave up and had to change her lesson for the day. At my school if something breaks on the teachers’ projectors, the school’s tech guy will stop by that day to fix it. This was not the case at Hugues Capet. The teachers who did use computers and projectors enjoyed having those resources, but ran the risk of having something not work during class.

During my time at the school, I noticed that the classes that used the most technology were English, Spanish, and Physics. During a Physics class, the teacher used the TV to show the class a video about energy and how it is produced. Normally when students see a TV in class, they assume that class will be a day off of sorts. In this class, no one was putting their head down for a nap or turning around to talk to friends. Each student was attentive and took notes during the entire movie. In one of the English classes, the students behaved similarly when they watched Wuthering Heights in class. Before watching the movie, they read an excerpt from the famous book, and then watched the full movie. They took a test that was based off the movie they watched in class, so again the students were very attentive. These classes were similar to my own in Oklahoma City, and my teachers like to play movies or documentaries periodically to add some fun to the class and break the routine. Students in my classes are not always as attentive as the French students were though.

The school’s main center of student accessible technology was the CDI which is a library and research center. The CDI had ten computers lining the wall and a copy machine and printer available to students. For students printing things for classes, they could use the machines for free, but if it was outside material, students had to pay €2 per 20 copies. While the printer or copier can be used for other material, the computers are strictly for school work only as the woman in charge of the CDI explained, “Every social networking site is blocked. There is a filter for other websites as well.” This policy is strictly enforced and students said they do not use the CDI computers much unless they are in a class.

Like my own school, Hugues Capet has a website that allows teachers to post grades online. Many students expressed that they find this very beneficial because they can follow their grades closely and see what progress they are making. If students’ grades are slipping, they will arrange to meet with the teacher in person, not email them like many students do in the States. This forces students, in a good way, to talk to their teachers face to face in a mature way, rather than just emailing a teacher to avoid having a real conversation.

The experience I had while in France is no doubt unforgettable and taught me so much about the French culture. I learned about an entirely new society, but this trip also made me reflect upon life in the United States. While I saw some distinct differences in how our two countries use technology, many things were essentially the same. Many issues we face are no different in France: students using phones in class, teenagers never leaving their cell phones for more than a few minutes, and teachers struggling to hold the attention of a class with all the distractions around. Taking a step back to observe how positive and destructive technology can be was eye-opening. There are so many benefits to modern technology such as the internet for example. We have the ability to connect with people around the world, to access information on the go, to look up any question we have, but we can also abuse this power. Students who use the internet to cheat on homework or tests, or who use Wikipedia and trust that the information is 100% correct are abusing the internet rather than using it in an effective way. We are all guilty of misusing technology in some way whether it’s having a cell phone glued to your ear or using the internet as an easy way out of a hard assignment. Technology can be used in very positive ways, as long as we are cautious and do not overuse it. I hope that my findings were useful and interesting. This experience was amazing and taught me so much about my research topic and about France. The Alliance Francaise is giving students the opportunity of a lifetime and I hope it continues to support Franco-American Fellows in sending them abroad.