



Using Technology to Promote Mental health and Wellbeing in Children and Young People

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Editorial

At the beginning of the 1990s, “going on the web” or “searching the internet” or “going online” were unheard of expressions, yet by today’s standards these phrases are almost naive in their simplicity and what they imply. Since then however, we have witnessed and are party to, one of the great communication revolutions of recent times: the rise of the Internet; the advent of social media and the digitalising of everything.

We have seen and experienced the shift from using basic emails and static web pages to fully engaging with interactive, user-centred and user-created digital media which is largely visual in content and design, and can be live-streamed any time of the day or night, to and from anywhere. The transfer, sharing and exchange of photos and videos are contemporary, cultural conversations: an image speaks a thousand words. We are living in big-data-driven economies; seeing the rise of driverless cars and artificial intelligences; we play with augmented realities; have phones which can employ facial recognition technologies; and we can be tracked anywhere. We have crowd funding to support whims and causes; shopping is increasingly cashless and online shopping has become a mega-industry, complete with “influencers” who through their online followers, have the power to significantly influence trends and brands. Hashtags spread ideas globally and virally and the media gives us ‘fake news’. We are surrounded by digital ecosystems which offer various levels of service provision; and we can be “socially engineered”: a form of

psychological manipulation in the context of information security, through which fraud occurs or information is mined.

As technology increasingly becomes embedded in all aspects of contemporary lives, through the ease and convenience of the ubiquitous communication channel which digital media offers, there is a counter view, however, which concerns the safety and wellbeing of young people as they operate in and across the seemingly boundary-less and timeless space of technology and social media. Technology then, can be considered both a panacea to an issue, either as a tool or intervention, or the problem in and of itself, thus creating a tension which needs to be explored (Spears, 2016).

Through the advent of social media, society is having to reconsider how social relationships are formed and positioned (Costabile and Spears, 2012). All relationships now must navigate not only an additional dimension: the online aspects of their lives, but also one which is now never off, and which intersects all dimensions of their community, family and interpersonal social, relational and educational experiences. Knowing how young people are responding to technology as it traverses their relationships and impacts on social, cultural, academic and technological notions of connectedness, is critical to contemporary understandings of wellbeing.

This special edition brings together five papers which explore diverse aspects of technology and human connections, with a focus on understanding how mental health and wellbeing might be supported. They contribute new and through provoking perspectives from their unique fields: cyberbullying (McLoughlin et al.); help-seeking (Stretton et al.); emotional intelligence (D'Amico); media literacy and social emotional learning (Kosic); and cognitive emotions and facial expression recognition (D'Errico et al.).

Paper 1 (McLoughlin et al) explores cyberbullying, a negative use of technology and how young people cope with cybervictimisation, finding that young people who were more socially connected, were more likely to cope actively in response to frequent cybervictimisation. Importantly, they were more likely to seek help and have positive mental health as a consequence. *Stretton et al.*

Paper 2 (Stretton et al) explored young people's attitudes toward help seeking, including online and offline, formal and informal sources of help, and how receptive young people are to the influence of others with regard to their intent to seek help. The influence of others and attitudes toward help sources was found to have little bearing on *online* help-seeking intentions, in contrast to help-seeking intentions from traditional

modes of help-seeking, suggesting that even though young people are engaging online, they still seek out parents and friends for help, in preference to going online.

Paper 3 (D'Amico) examined a multimedia tool to support and promote children's emotional intelligence, finding improved performance in emotional tasks, and academic achievement following training. Perhaps most importantly, this study demonstrated that for younger students, human-computer interactions have to be integrated with more traditional methods in order to be effective.

Paper 4 (Kosic) utilized qualitative data as part of an action research component of a larger study, to explore the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) related to the success of a Life Skills program. It was found to be an example of good interdisciplinary practice which through the use of media literacy training and explicit socio-emotional teaching, empowered young people to engage actively in their own learning to develop their life skills and competencies.

Finally D'Errico et al (Paper 5) take us to the realm of cognitive emotions and the use of facial expression recognition technology to detect emotions in real time when students are engaged in eLearning. This study successfully used observational methods in the detection of cognitive emotions in real time (automatic detection and classification of facial expression), presenting an innovative starting point for exploring both perceived and expressed psychological dimensions of e-learning.

Together these papers touch on the immense diversity of issues, problems and approaches required to explore the use of technology in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing. They highlight the need for a variety of methodological and theoretical perspectives, and for innovation and for pilot work to explore how constantly changing technology is impacting on the developmental, social and emotional aspects of their field/domain.

References

- Spears, B.A. (2016) Technology and Wellbeing. In F.McCallum & D. Price (Eds). *Nurturing wellbeing in education* (pp 98-125) London: Routledge.
- Spears, B.A. & Costabile, A. (2012) Introduction. In A.Costabile & B.A. Spears. (Eds). *The Impact of Technology on Relationships in Educational Settings*. (pp 1-4) London: Routledge.

Barbara A Spears, April 2018

Note from the Journal's Editors

In this edition, we are also publishing another research paper, two discussion papers and a short research report. The sixth paper by Pamela Portelli presents a RCT study evaluating the effectiveness of brief Alcohol Expectancy Challenge (AEC) to reduce the prevalence of alcohol consumption amongst young people. Though AEC was not found effective to curb alcohol misuse, it may help to prevent the increase of alcohol consumption amongst young people. In the first discussion paper (Paper 7), John Portelli and Patricia Koneeny, argue on the need for a careful philosophical clarification of the concept of inclusion by teachers, policy makers, and theorists of education, in order for the concept to continue to remain not only useful but essential to creating a robust democratic community in the classroom. In the second discussion paper (Paper 8), Paul Downes challenges the objections to emotional wellbeing in education, arguing that an emotional well-being agenda in education is a conceptually coherent one, once different levels of prevention and intervention are clarified and we move beyond flat, undifferentiated conceptions of 'therapeutic culture'. Paper 9 is a short research report on academic optimism and organizational citizenship behaviour amongst secondary school teachers by Abdollah Makvandia and his colleagues.

We are also publishing a call for papers for a special edition in April 2019 on *Qualitative Research on Children's Wellbeing Across National and Cultural Contexts*, guest edited by Christine Hunner-Kreisel (University of Vechta), Susann Fegter (Technical University Berlin) and Tobia Fattore (Macquarie University).

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Paul Cooper and Carmel Cefai, April 2018