

Mixing up the Benefits and the Hazards

Regarding the Judgment of Information

“You can access to Internet from a cell phone. A lot of information is now available from such a small screen. It is unbelievable!”

This is a summary of a so-called cell phone hymn. And we initiate and name the children who easily manipulated this high technological cell phone as “IT kids” or “the IT generation”. But is that all we need to be concerned about? It seems such a simple question and one that has just begun to be asked.

When one of my friends participated in an American scholars’ meeting, he was asked “why do Japanese give machine guns to monkeys?” In this case, a machine gun means a cell phone but who are the monkeys?

Do they make fun of Japanese children, who have less social ability to make value judgments about information itself or who have no great social responsibilities, as monkeys? Or do they mean that Japanese adult who let their children be free to use a dangerous device without considering the consequence?

I would respond that even Americans have many stories of teenager’s miserable gun crimes, more than information problems, so how could they negatively judge the Japanese environment? However it is not so easy to answer their question. We need to say that “the importance is not to own and manipulate this powerful device but to know the proper way of its usage.” More specifically, we must consider what kinds of information should children be allowed to send and receive as very important to their safety.

It is already known that information carries possibilities to kill or save human lives, and it also has power to disorder and destroy a society. In today’s information society, to judge this “right and wrong use of the power of information” is more and more important. And the Internet is the one medium that most powerfully moves today’s society forward towards becoming more information oriented.

Especially what we have to consider among growing children in this respect is that information environment on the Internet. It is sometimes said that “the information environment on the Internet is like mixing up the wheat and chaff”. Rich sauces and useless information are served in confusion on the Internet. Especially to consider from the respect of child care and education, the Internet has as much harmful as beneficial information.

With the view of child usage, I explain the Internet environment as 3 separate sections. The first is an environment of beneficial information and the second is an

environment of harmful information. Then the third is an environment of both useless and harmless information.

If we judge the value of information from an adult point of view, it is easy to settle a specific question as either valuable or useless, but value judgments of information from the viewpoint of protecting children or for the social and public good require a category for harmful information. Then parents and adults must make an effort to protect children against harmful information as they grow up. We need to support and teach children to develop knowledge of how to define and avoid such harmful information.

The most important element in making such an effort is communication with children. Look at “the information” together on the cell phone or computer screen that children will be watching and discuss the information to develop a sense of whether it is right or wrong.

At that moment, is it really possible that this “super small monitor” can help to share information between parents and their children? Such a question sometimes comes up. If such a fear does not arise, it may be that the parents do not understand the point of the power of the Internet as an information media, or may be they do not realize how dangerous access to this harmful information environment can be.

From the example of “monkeys’ machine guns” I began to realize that we need to deeply consider and prepare defenses for children using the Internet via cell phones.